

# Mino Goondawin: Exploring Co-Creation in the Design of the Atikameksheng Gathering Place

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## Abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action have inspired reconciliation efforts across Canada, highlighting the need to acknowledge the disrupted history of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island. Understanding the damaged relationships with the natural and built environment emphasizes our responsibility to respect Indigenous rights and sovereignty. Acknowledging Indigenous worldviews rooted in relationality, reciprocity, and connection to land and community is central to this. Indigenous methodologies such as oral histories, ceremonies, and land-based practices prioritize process over product and support co-creation grounded in trust and respect.

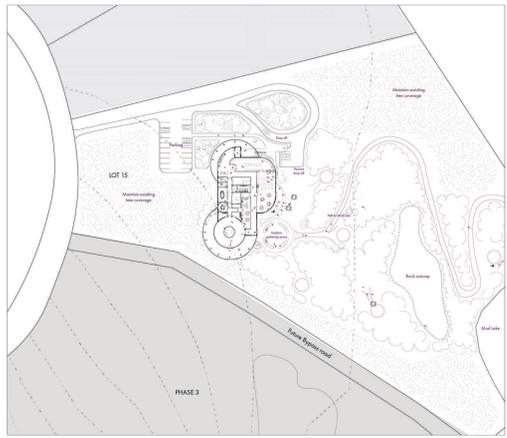
This thesis explores co-creation in design, grounded in Indigenous knowledge systems and guided by the principle of Mino Goondawin. It emphasizes the role of design and decolonization in fostering meaningful collaboration that respects and integrates Indigenous values. Applied through the Atikameksheng Gathering Place design, this work highlights how Co-Creation can strengthen cultural resurgence and placekeeping in architecture by centering reciprocal relationships.

## Keywords:

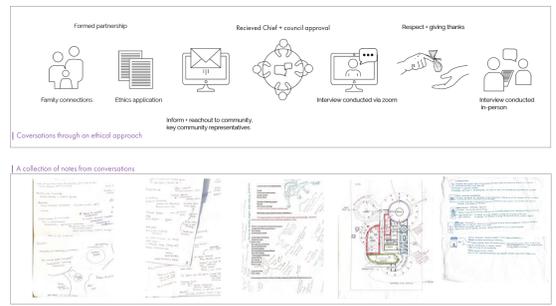
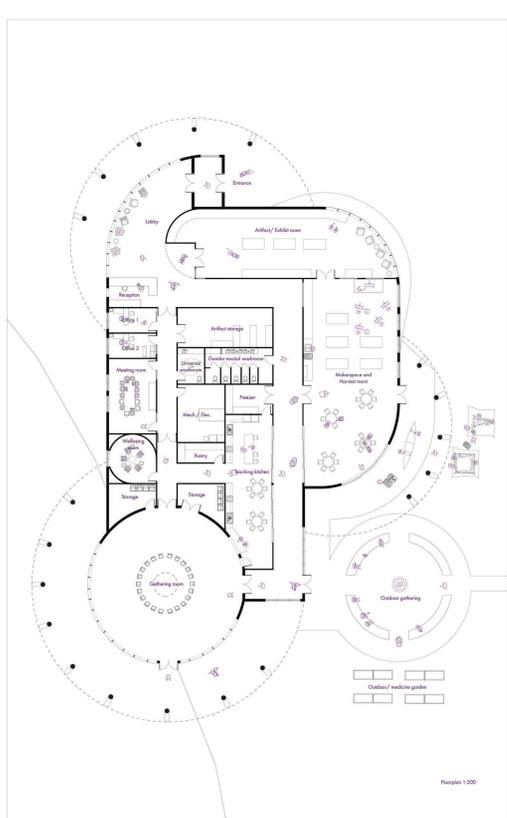
Co-Creation, Mino Goondawin, Placekeeping, Turtle Island, Collaboration, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation



These stories contribute to a collaborative and creative process of understanding our relationship with the land and how we must always remember to be sincere in our actions, character, and words. It's important to recognize that we are all connected and to express gratitude for our mother the earth. Considering these stories, we can see how the concept of co-creation can significantly enhance design processes involving land and Indigenous peoples. As stewards of the land, Indigenous communities hold values and beliefs that should be meaningfully reflected throughout all aspects of design development. Their ways of knowing, rooted in generations of lived experience and relationship with place, offer essential insights into how design can honour culture and land.

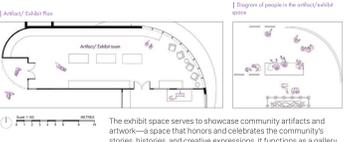
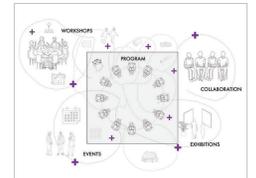
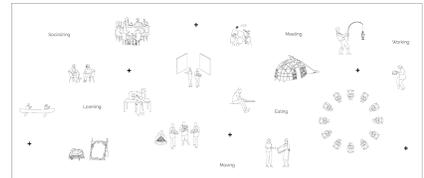


The landscape approach and land-based design strategies extend the core building, branching outward from the central gathering space and maker space. These outdoor spaces are conceived to facilitate Indigenous knowledge-sharing through experiential, land-based learning practices. The design development is guided by the processes behind each activity and the natural elements that support and shape them—reinforcing our connection to, and reliance on, the land. Proposed sites for land-based activities are carefully selected based on environmental conditions, such as proximity to water or key landscape features, that naturally support each practice.

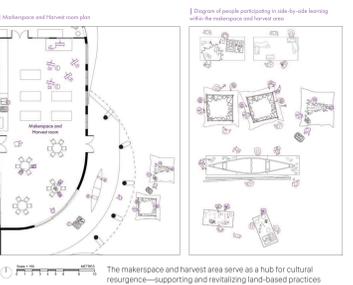
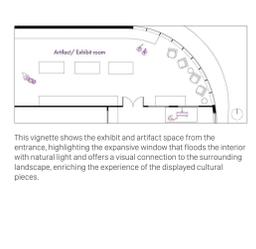


The spatial organization of the Atikameksheng Gathering Place took shape through an iterative and collaborative process guided by early conversations with the Atikameksheng Tourism Coordinator, Community Infrastructure Manager, and Director of Mino Bimadziwin. These initial discussions offered valuable insight into community priorities and helped shape the foundation for the building's program and layout.

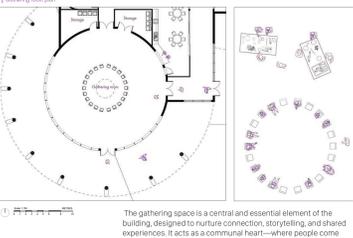
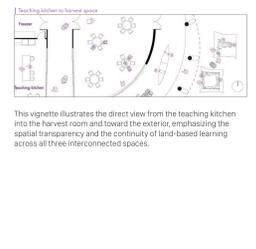
As the design evolved, in-person meetings with Darlene Shawboniqui (Director of Mino Bimadziwin) played a crucial role in refining the spatial relationships within the Gathering Place. Her guidance informed the arrangement and connections between programs. These meaningful conversations helped me better understand Atikameksheng's ongoing efforts to strengthen the relationship between land and people. Through this dialogue, I began identifying specific programs and spaces that the Gathering Place could support—programs that reflect community needs and cultural practices. This process embodied a collaborative approach, beginning with a preliminary set of spaces and refining the program through conversations, feedback, and engagement to ensure the design aligned with the community's goals. These discussions shaped the program's selection and spatial arrangement, providing the Gathering Place would serve as a meaningful and functional space rooted in connection and purpose.



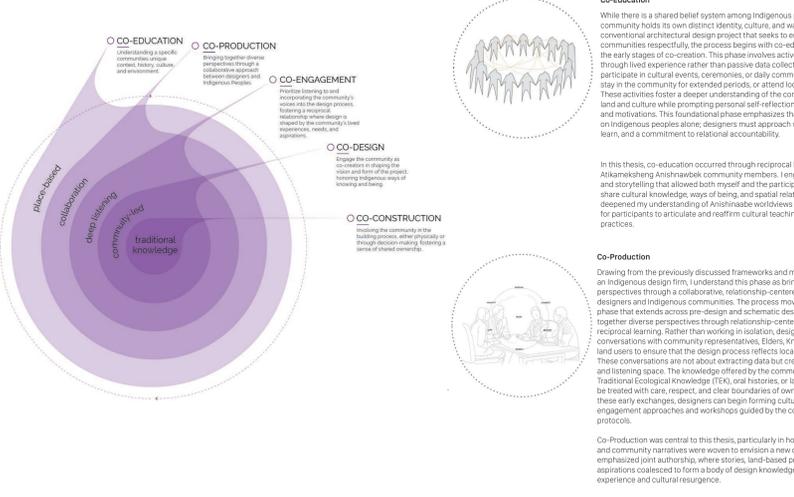
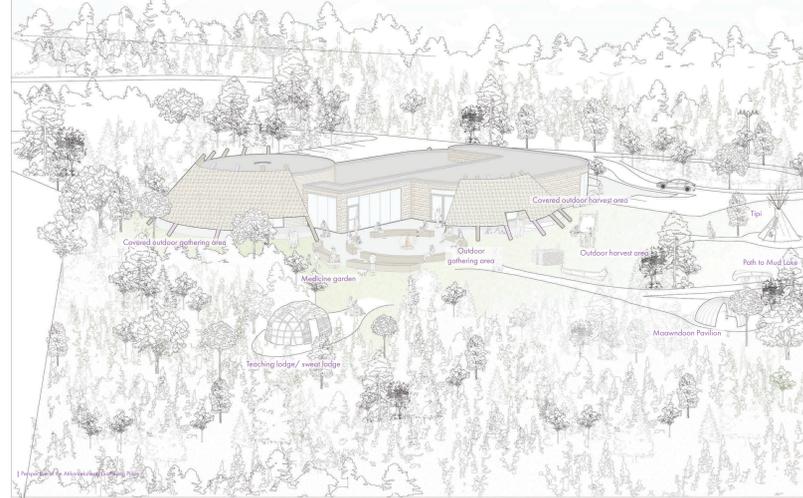
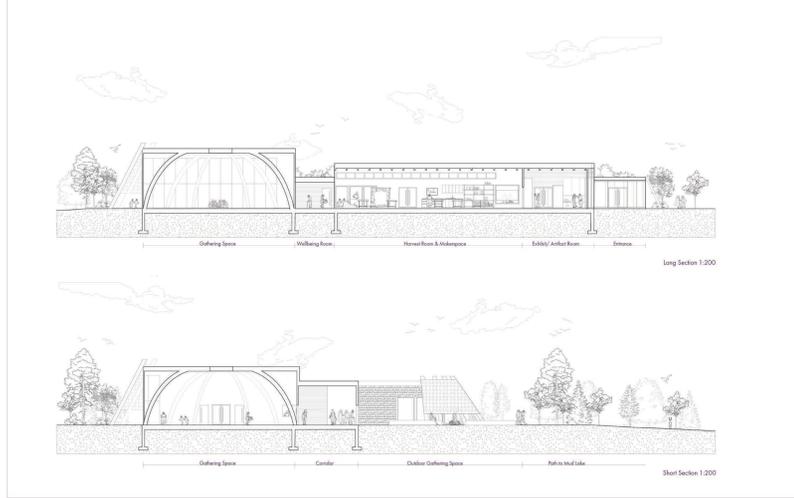
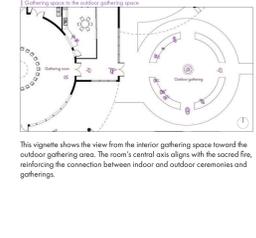
The exhibit space serves to showcase community artifacts and artwork—a space that honors and celebrates the community's stories, histories, and creative expressions. It functions as a gallery and as a living archive, where cultural memory is preserved, shared, and continually reinterpreted through the lens of community voices.



The makerspace and harvest area serve as a hub for cultural resurgence—supporting and revitalizing land-based practices deeply rooted in the community. It provides space and resources for harvesting, hunting, and tanning while fostering the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, skills, and traditions.



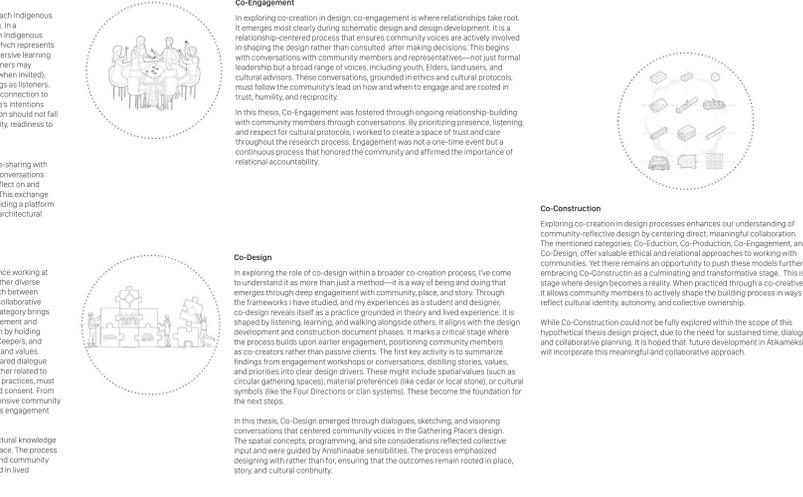
The gathering space is a central and essential element of the building, designed to nurture connection, storytelling, and shared experiences. It acts as a communal heart—where people come together to listen, speak, and be present with one another.



Co-Education: While there is a shared belief system among Indigenous peoples, each Indigenous community holds its own distinct identity, culture, and way of being. In a conventional architectural design project that seeks to engage with Indigenous communities respectfully, the process begins with co-education, which represents the early stages of co-creation. This phase involves active and immersive learning through lived experience rather than passive data collection. Designers may participate in cultural events, ceremonies, or attend local meetings as listeners, stay in the community for extended periods, or attend local meetings as listeners. These activities foster a deeper understanding of the community's connection to land and culture while promoting personal self-reflection about one's intentions and motivations. This foundational phase emphasizes that education should not fall on Indigenous peoples alone; designers must approach with humility, readiness to learn, and a commitment to relational accountability.

Co-Production: Drawing from the previously discussed frameworks and my experience working at an Indigenous design firm, I understand this phase as bringing together diverse perspectives through a collaborative, relationship-centered approach between designers and Indigenous communities. The process moves into a collaborative phase that extends across pre-design and schematic design. This category brings together diverse perspectives through relationship-centered engagement and reciprocal learning. Rather than working in isolation, designers begin by holding conversations with community representatives, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and land users to ensure that the design process reflects local priorities and values. These conversations are not about extracting data but creating a shared dialogue and listening space. The knowledge offered by the community, whether related to traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), oral histories, or land-based practices, must be treated with care, respect, and clear boundaries of ownership and consent. From these early exchanges, designers can begin formulating culturally responsive community engagement approaches and workshops guided by the community's engagement protocols.

Co-Construction: Co-Production was central to this thesis, particularly in how architectural knowledge and community narratives were woven to envision a new cultural space. The process emphasized joint authorship, where stories, land-based practices, and community aspirations coalesced to form a body of design knowledge grounded in lived experience and cultural resurgence.



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