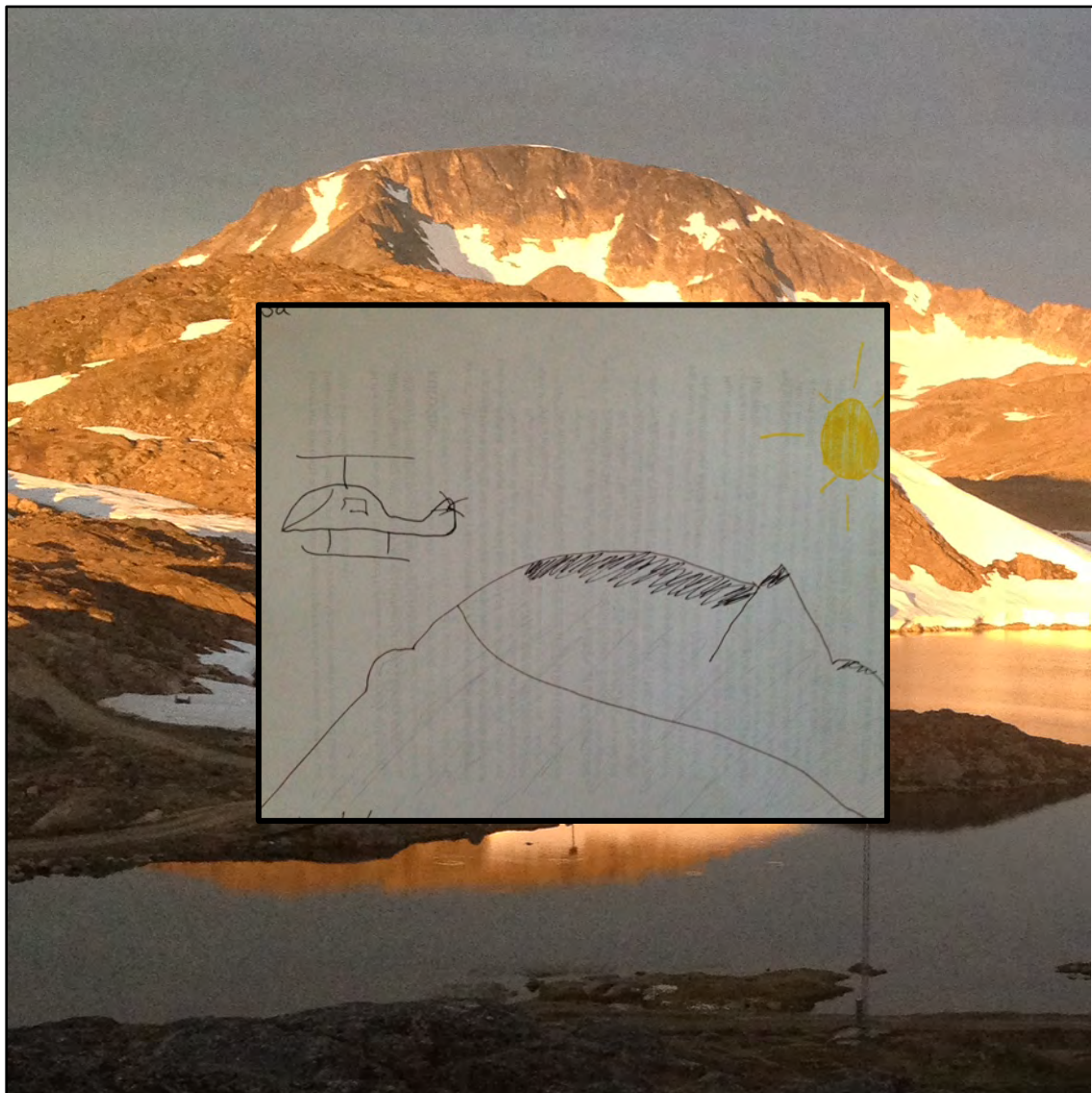


## **Underneath the Shieldshaped Mountain, the Helicopter, and the Sun: A Visual Ethnography with the Children in Kulusuk, East Greenland**

*Jóhanna Björk Sveinbjörnsdóttir*



*Figure 1 Drawing : Mt. Kulusuk, the helicopter and the sun. Rosa Kuitse, 12 years old. 2014. Photograph of Mt. Kulusuk. by author. July 2015.*

## INTRODUCTION

I want to tell you stories—stories from under the shieldshaped mountain, the helicopter and the sun. The *shieldshaped mountain* is Mt. Kulusuk, the *helicopter* is the Air Greenland's daily passenger shuttle (as well as cargo, ambulance, police and rescue) between Kulusuk Airport and the capital of the area, Tasiilaq. The *sun* is the sun. For the children who live there, this is Kulusuk, in Tunu<sup>1</sup>, East Greenland.

**VIDEO NO. 1** - I want to tell you stories.

<https://vimeo.com/141791258> [password: thesis1]

If you give a child in Kulusuk a piece of paper and a pencil, chances are that they will draw a shieldshaped mountain, then a helicopter and a sun. [figure 1] My friends in their 30s did the same, and they do not remember who taught them, it has just always been the motive to draw. Mt. Kulusuk, or Qalorujoorneq as it is called in Tunumiit, the local language, is omnipresent on the small island and a good place to go for hikes and a swim, a landmark that not so surprisingly finds its way to the children's paper. Children draw suns, so this did not surprise me as much, especially when it shines almost all summer. I wondered: was there ever a storm in the drawings, which are so frequent over the winter? The helicopter however, was what sparked the most interest. Why a helicopter, rather than... a boat for example, and why is it on all the pictures? Where is it going?

"*Tsumu?*" I asked the children in the school and youth club when they came to my storytelling workshop, "Where should we go?"<sup>2</sup> In the smartphone, as young as 6 years old have all the audio-visual tools needed to find, record and share stories, leading them to be a pertinent tool for experimental visual ethnography. The accessibility of this new media tool, the smartphone, offers possibilities to create knowledge about what it is to be a child in Kulusuk from the viewpoint of the children. The workshop was offered in cooperation with the local school and youth club, first in September 2014 and then again in May and July of 2015. The timing of my research project is pivotal because simultaneously national politics are advocating for urbanisation and budget cuts for services to the settlements, yet there is a continuing urgency to better the children's welfare, especially the children of the settlements. This contradiction drove my fieldwork forward.

The workshop framed my ethnography and participant observation as a gateway to learn more about the community in which I had been working as a tour guide over the last two summers. Now, as an anthropologist, I came with a research-question: *How can a popular media-equipment such as the smartphone be best utilized to find, record and share stories and worldviews of the children in Kulusuk, East Greenland?* The other side of the question is: *What can we learn from such practice?*

The goal of the project is five-fold:

- [1] The project serves as a way to find the children's interests and concerns, through their eyes. What it is like to be a child in Kulusuk?
- [2] The project aims to find a productive way to use the smartphones to reach these goals by conducting a workshop for the children at the local youth club and school.
- [3] The material collected will form a body of visual records from a contemporary East Greenlandic village from the perspective of East Greenlandic children, at times when emigration is increasing and social infrastructure faces severe financial cuts.
- [4] The project adds a point of view to the incomplete external image of East

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<sup>1</sup> Tunu is what East Greenland is called in the local language, Tunumiit. I will use the two names interchangeably. The third name for the region is Ammassalik.

<sup>2</sup> For the workshop in September, which I thought as a pilot run for my research, I teamed up with a friend of mine from Denmark, Sara Kracht.

Greenland.

[5] The workshop is an answer to a demand for support and attention for children, by offering a fun and worthwhile afterschool and summer activity.

The end product will be a multimedia map,<sup>3</sup> with the children's map as a background with hyperlinks with the relevant media for each location, this written report based on the ethnographic study, and a multi-media exhibition.

In chapter 1, I attempt to introduce the world the children live in by contextualizing Kulusuk as a field, geographically, socially, and historically. In chapter 2, I give a brief overview of the theories and methods that guided me through the landscapes of Kulusuk. In chapter 3, I use examples from the workshop to answer my research questions: how I used the smartphones and what I learned – step by step. In conclusion, I speculate further what I learned from the process.

A fundamental part of the thesis is the multiple audio-visuals created during the workshop. Throughout the reading of the thesis the reader will be referred to relevant clips, accessible through hyperlinks.

My young friends and their stories from under the shieldshaped mountain, the helicopter and the sun formed my horizon of Kulusuk and taught me what it is like to be a child in the small village. Now let us tell that story.

## [1] INTRODUCING THE CHILDREN'S KULUSUK

“*Tsumu*” I asked the children using the Tunumiit-word I just learnt: “*where should we go?*” It was the second day of the workshop and I wanted them to show me places they liked. “*To the mountain - to the playground*” they all replied instantaneously. With the phones in our pockets and portable loudspeakers to play music, we headed towards an old lorry yard with old and rusty industrial metal machinery – a place they call the playground (Danish: *lejeplads* / Tunumiit: *pinnguarterfik*). As we ascended we were greeted with a beautiful view of the horizon.<sup>4</sup> We saw Kulusuk village, the [airport-]road, the ‘ocean-highway’ to the other four settlements and we almost saw Tasiilaq, which is in a fjord at the end of the horizon. They photographed Mt. Qalorjuorneq – the shieldshaped mountain – that I later found out is frequently depicted in photographs and drawings. They photographed the sunset in the horizon, a rainbow, they took pictures of each other and themselves.

### VIDEO NO. 2 – The Playground

<https://vimeo.com/141791628> [password: thesis2]

In this first chapter I will construct the field site, Kulusuk, through the viewpoint of the children. But first, I will give a short ethnography of the smartphone usage in Kulusuk.

#### 1.1 The ethnography of the smartphones

What interested me the most about smartphones in Kulusuk was the lack of Internet. Tele's employee in Kulusuk, Joel Smuk, estimates that one in four households have Internet connection and that perhaps half of the population could technically access the Internet on smart-phones, but high data-rates limit that number even more.<sup>5</sup> Thus, for many the Internet is a secondary feature, making Android phones more common than iPhones as they are not as internet-dependent. The Samsung Galaxy for example, by far the most common choice, offers an off-line Skype-alternative

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<sup>3</sup> I am still developing this part of the project.

<sup>4</sup> Before going further, I should note that my use of the word *horizon* stems from the Icelandic word *sjóndeildarhringur*, the circle of your vision. The comparative Tunumiit word has a similar idea.

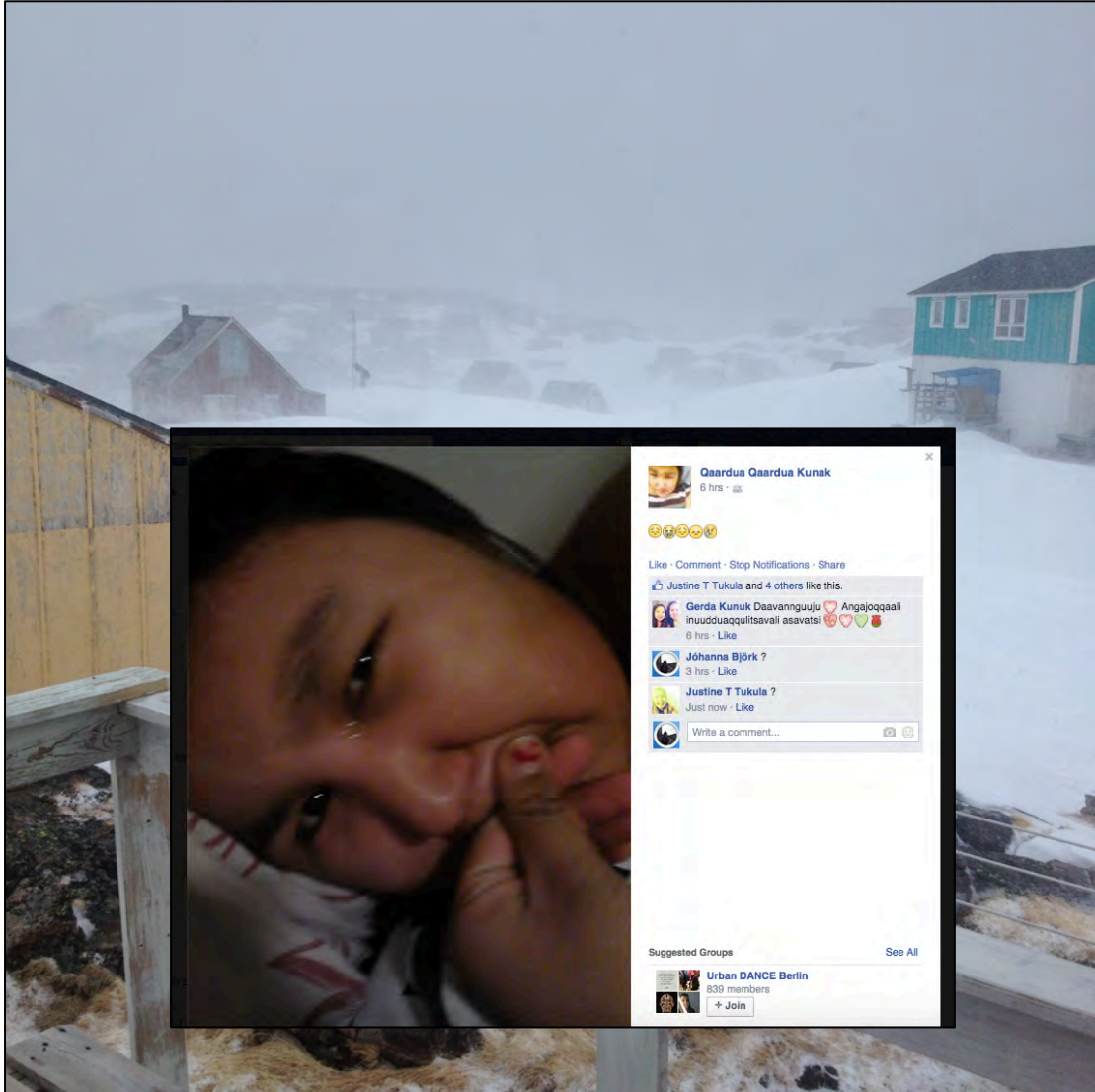
<sup>5</sup> Personal communication, 17. June 2015.

called Video Call. This feature is commonly used to connect to family in other parts of Greenland. Apart from basic mobile-phone features – calls and SMS – the music-player is an important feature for the children and as there are no record shops and Internet so limited, the number of songs is limited too with the repeat-button being frequently used. The music they do have is shared via bluetooth, various sharing-apps and exchange of micro-chips. I should also note that personal computers are not common, meaning that all data – music-videos, photos and games – are stored on the smartphones' limited memory. Once I was assisting my friend Julia to clear out some space on her phone, I came across a game I had not seen her play before so I asked her if it could be deleted. *“No, my mom plays this game, I cannot delete it although I don't like it myself,”* Julia said. For low-income families, providing the children with a smartphone is more priority than the parents getting one themselves, and is often shared amongst family members.

Recent research, as well as popular culture, demonstrate that teenagers are exploring and forming their identity through selfies. (Barker 2012) My young friends in Kulusuk take these pictures regularly, and following a global trend it is the girls more than the boys. (Erchull et al 2013) From left, from right, from the front, from above and below, at school, at home, in the mirror, hunting, with friends or alone, happy, serious, sexy ... and crying in bed. [Figure 2] The main purpose of this extensive self-photographing is to see how they look and many photos never escape the phones. The girls' faces do however frequently appear in my Facebook-feed in various forms and I try to analyse them to see how they are doing. But landscapes, babies and hunting-achievements are extensively documented as well. My aim was to trigger into this aspect of the phone-use as well as incorporating video and audio recordings. For me and others who rely on Facebook to keep in touch, pictures allow me to continue my fieldwork while I am away from Kulusuk.

Because Internet is not accessible in most homes, alternatives are found. The school-library offers computers with Internet access two days a week for two hours. Unfortunately, this is only for those 13 years and older so the only real alternative for those who are younger is curling up in front of the school to use the Wi-Fi which they often do. Whatever the time or day it is, regardless of weather, they post on Facebook, chat and watch YouTube. When the school needs to punish the students, the worst thing headmaster Justine Boassen can think of is turning it off.

Personally, I consider the lack of Internet in Kulusuk an advantage. Research shows that our attention span is getting shorter as we are constantly interrupted with all sorts of notifications. (Pietrus 2015) Our faces are constantly in our phones and therefore we interact less with people around us. We can do everything on our devices. As soon as I arrive in Kulusuk I no longer feel the need to keep up with world affairs, I communicate more with the people in my nearby environment and spend more time outside because there is less distraction on the screen. I get a lot done in Kulusuk and my mind is at ease. Having no Internet grounds me and I am more present in the moment. The result of the Internet-isolation is a smaller horizon, which can be understood either positively or negatively and I am aware that this is the luxurious standpoint of a privileged visitor.



[Figure 2 Kaamma Kunak's crying selfie. Screenshot from her Facebook profile. Photograph from Kulusuk by author. May 2015.]

In its heyday, the Internet was believed to be able to simplify knowledge-sharing and –creation. (Howe 2014) The Internet could bring the whole world closer. In Kulusuk it has that potential and could widen the children’s horizons, inspire them to set goals beyond what they are familiar with in their nearby environment, as well as find ways to reach those goals. The teachers try their best but unfortunately their knowledge of the digital world is limited and thus is their ability to teach the students. Justine’s request was that I would include IT lessons in my workshop, which I gladly did. IT however takes more than a few short lessons with me. There is clear shift between generations as the children’s knowledge of technology reaches beyond the previous generation. This gives the children agency.

They are quick learners and have experimented and appropriated the technology to their advantage. However, this applies not to computers, but rather the smartphones. But while faced with all the simpler options, the children and teenagers spend considerable time on pop culture. *One Direction* is a hit and you would often find them in front of the school watching their music-videos.

**VIDEO NO. 3i** - You and I (2013)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_kqQDCxRCzM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kqQDCxRCzM)

**VIDEO NO. 3ii** - One Direction (inspired by One Direction)

<https://vimeo.com/141791882> [password: thesis3ii]

As in other places in the world, Facebook is the social-media of choice.<sup>6</sup> Although it is easy to spend hours scrolling and clicking without giving it much thought, Facebook opens up their world to me when I am not in Kulusuk, and can open windows to the outside world for them, providing them with contacts and inspiration and show them that the world is full of friendly faces. Although Facebook’s age limitations are 13 years, my friends that are 10 years old already have an account. (“How old” 2015) Their parents, who are not exposed to the online world, are not aware of this rule and therefore not equipped to protect them from it. Many of the children, the teenage girls in particular, are very active users and I wish I could understand their often-daily status-updates, which, reading the emoji appears to be very emotional.<sup>7</sup> When I asked my friend Kunuk about these posts his reply was: “*You don’t want to know*”, implying the ridiculous and dramatic flow of emotions.<sup>8</sup> I do want to know but until I learn the language I must depend on the emoji, images and what they tell me in Danish.

## **1.2 Mapping Kulusuk with the children**

### **1.2.1 Geographical and social landscape**

**VIDEO NO. 4** – This is Kulusuk

<https://vimeo.com/141792232> [password: thesis4]

To understand their spatial and geographical understanding of Kulusuk I needed to have a map in which to place their activities. I asked the children to draw a conceptual map, rather than a geographical map. I was curious to see what places

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<sup>6</sup> Facebook-use is the social media network of choice, 44% of smartphone-users had the app on their phone making it the second most popular after google.maps . (Global web index)

<sup>7</sup> Emoji in the *Oxford Dictionary of English* : “a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication: *emoji* *liven up your text messages with tiny smiley faces*.  
ORIGIN 1990s: Japanese, from *e* ‘picture’ + *moji* ‘letter, character’.”

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication. May 2015. Kunuk is 25 years old, he is born in Kulusuk and imagines living there in the future. He has a diploma in tourist-economy and works as a self-employed tour-guide. He is also a [unofficial] hunter.

would be included, the distances between them and how far from home it would reach. This exercise demanded more discussions than our common language skills allowed, so after a few unsuccessful attempts to map the village, I decided to adopt their favourite medium – stop-motion – to the project. It worked with the younger children, but I never got the older ones motivated to do theirs. A sheet of carton and colour pencils turned into Kulusuk. “*Tuuttie*” I said, “*next*”, as I held down the shutter-button and the characters moved across the sheet. One scene emerged after the other without my input. I remained behind the camera, observing the processes.

A yellow shieldshaped mountain stands high in the top right corner of the screen. Below there is a small airport building. The school is the large, red building to the other side of the screen, the small red one next to the school is the youth club (D. Fritidsklub) and Mugu’s kiosk below. Pilersuisoq supermarket is a small little house in the middle, and from there we see the harbour, the service-house<sup>9</sup>, the fire station and the Save-the-Children-House (D. Red Barnet)<sup>10</sup>, leading to the ocean. Hotel Kulusuk is rightfully placed out of town, but the house above is the Kuko/Maratse family’s home and is actually in town. I allowed myself to place my home on the map, i.e. Kulusuk Hostel. It is the small red house next door to Enos’ and Hilda’s who live in the yellow one. The three large houses in the bottom left are the houses of Kenny and Kenno, Mario and Julia. The white thing in the ocean is either a cliff or an iceberg, or both.

As the town becomes alive a seal swims by and a hunter hunts it. A boy kicks a ball into the water – and drowns – despite a rescue attempt. Life is not always fair. Others play football peacefully without major problems. The birds fly over and Jens-Ole goes skiing. Another seal is caught. Mario joins Jens-Ole on the skis but decides to go on the ice and takes his dog with him. Mario has a dog of his own, like a pet dog although it is not. It seems like a few new cars have been imported, because there are no quad-bikes and more than the one car that is there now. The sun is shining but it is winter and a snowplough makes roads through the high snow, leading way for all the imaginary cars. The helicopter flies to Tasiilaq, the airplanes to Nuuk and another one to Iceland. Mario, now on his dog sled, goes to the kiosk to buy a cola. It is however “ok to drink beer, if you drink it slow”, David – who is one year older than Mario – tells him as we watched the scene. I had often thought if there was ever a storm on children’s the drawings of the shieldshaped mountain, the helicopter and the sun, and now there was. A naqqajaq [North Eastern storm] blows through the village and birds and the grown-ups with children in their arms seek shelter. Life goes on after the storm and more seals are hunted. This is their Kulusuk.

As a resident and ethnographer of Kulusuk I can approve this portrait. They have accurately depicted the gist of life in the village. The following information was – understandably – not included in their stop-motion but is crucial to provide some context to my ethnographic research.

Kulusuk is a settlement in Tunu, East Greenland, 110 km south of the Arctic Circle. It is on a small island with the same name, 8 km from north to south and 11 km from west to east. The village is now home to 242 people,<sup>11</sup> most of who are indigenous Tunumiit Inuit. It is one of six settlements in Tunu, with a total population of 3.266 people.<sup>12</sup> (Greenland Statistics 2014) 1.938 people live in Tasiilaq, the capital of the area. The local language is Tunumiit<sup>13</sup>, a distinct dialect from Greenlandic spoken on the west side of the country. Kulusuk is frequently described as a peaceful and quiet place, a duality that not unlikely originated under the shieldshaped mountain.

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<sup>9</sup> The *service-house* is a place for bathing, do laundry, work sealskin as well as housing an art-workshop. This is a the place people socialize over coffee or tea.

<sup>10</sup> This is a house donated by Save the Children in Denmark.

<sup>11</sup> Ebba Kunak. 29.05.2015.

<sup>12</sup> The others settlements are Kummiut, Tiniteqilaq, Sermilaq, Isortoq. Ittoqqortoormiit.

<sup>13</sup> Like the region, the language is both called Tunumiit and East Greenlandic.

Because Kulusuk airport is the only airport in the area it makes the island a gateway to exploring East Greenland and thus welcomes about 50 passengers daily over the summer. Some come for a four hour day trip with me, a large number of Asians stay one night while others hike, kayak and explore Tunu for an average of seven days. The local people do not fly much because prices are high and Kulusuk is a low-income community. When the children are in the 5th class and are invited to Iceland to learn how to swim, the furthest many have gone is to Tasillaq, 22 km away.

But apart from the three good summer months, June, July and August, Kulusuk is quite isolated. The weekly flight is frequently cancelled due to strong winds, either naqqajaqs [north eastern] or peteraqs [from the inland ice], the ice is not thick enough to ride sledges or there is too much pack ice to sail anywhere. Apart from a weekly delivery of fresh and expensive dairy and vegetables from Iceland, food and other products have been shipped in over the summer and must last until the ship can sail again the next summer. Overwintering in Kulusuk means really means staying in Kulusuk.

## POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Greenland is an autonomous part of Denmark and has been so in various forms since 1721. The east coast however, was first discovered by the outside world in 1884. I will elaborate further on these historical concepts in chapter 1.2. The country's population is currently measured at 55.984, which has decreased over the years and for the first time since 1997 the population is under 56.000. ("Less than 56.000" 2015) In Kulusuk however, the population has been rapidly dropping over the last years and in fact has the highest emigration rate in the country, making many abandoned houses a distinct part of the town's landscape, a reminder of lives that could have been, but also a playground for the children.

### **VIDEO NO. 5 - Abandoned Kulusuk**

<https://vimeo.com/141792429> [password: thesis5]

As a result, services are being cut in Kulusuk, leaving only about 69 people employed in 17 different jobs, mostly low-paying. 45 are employed by the state. The jobs directly related to the children are the seven teachers and three additional staff, two playschool teachers, two who work at the youth-club and another two in the 'Save-the-Child-House'. The municipality employs five men taking care of garbage and human waste (they are called the hot-dog-men), Ebba Kunak works at the municipality office, there are two paramedics, one home-care assistant, the service-house employs one person. Nukissioffiit electricity recently went from having two employers to just one, there is a civilian police officer (D. kommunefogede) who changes his airport-jacket for a police jacket whenever necessary, a lay-preacher and a church-caretaker. Ten people are employed at the airport, of which Danes are employed in the four administrative jobs. The same goes for the Hotel where nine are employed, but the manager is Danish. Six people work for the state-run Pilersuisoq supermarket, two have a year-round tourist-operation, one as a caretaker for the Hostel, two as guides. One runs a private little kiosk, Mugu's kiosk, where one other is employed. When Ebba at the municipality made a count of the licenced hunters she was surprised to count only to six, as hunting is an important part of sustaining life in Kulusuk. "*Hunting licences are getting more difficult to attain as the government is tightening the criteria for hunting subsidies*", Kunuk later told me.





Figure 3 Map Greenland with bigger towns marked in. Note how many towns are on the West coast, vs the east.



Figure 4 Map of Kulusuk Island (to the right), in relation to Tasilaq (the red dot to the left)

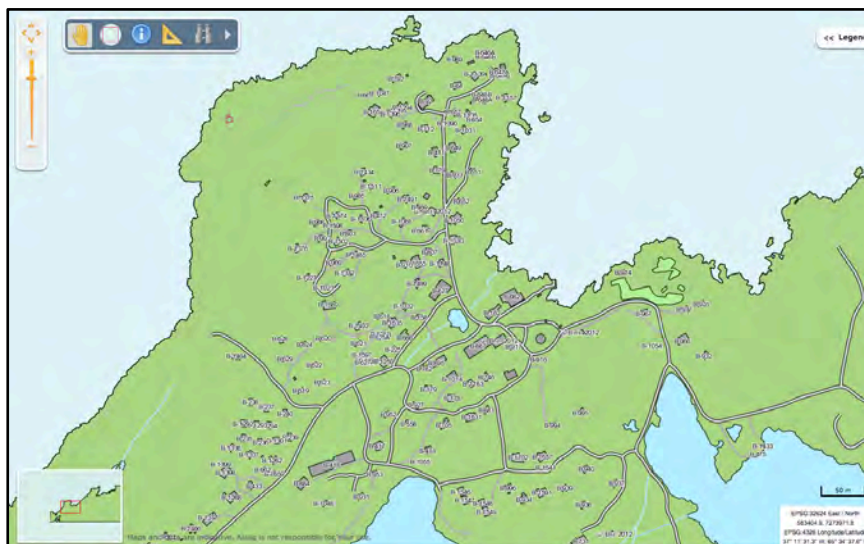


Figure 5 Map of Kulusuk settlement

Because of all the abandoned houses, Kulusuk may rightfully be called a ghost-town, and local superstitions and ghost-stories life continue to thrive.

### **VIDEO NO. 6 – Ghosts in Kulusuk School**

<https://vimeo.com/141792554> [password: thesis6]

Hopes for a job, uniting family or fulfilling a dream of an easier life in a bigger town has made Tasiilaq, along with the capital Nuuk, the fastest growing town in Greenland. Since January 1, 2009, Nuuk and East Greenland have been the same municipality, sending the central administration over the icecap. The main reason was financial but hopes to break Tunu's isolation was another important factor. For the people in Kulusuk, Nuuk is far away, geographically and mentally and they complain that the people in the office in Nuuk do not speak their language and accuse them for not knowing the Tunumii's way of life. But if you ask the younger children, non of them want to leave. At least not yet.

#### **1.2.2 The holy trinity**

On the first day of the workshop, the children drew a simple map. There are three places on this map: the school, the youth-club and Mugu's Kiosk. Without doubt, these places form a holy trinity.

### **VIDEO NO. 7 – World View**

<https://vimeo.com/141792626> [password: thesis7]

## **KULUSUMI ALIVARPI**

The first day of school is a big day for Kulusukers who are six or almost six. They wear national costumes and are given their first school-book and the Greenlandic flag, as they are formally welcomed to school. [figure 6]

From then and until they are 15 years old, from August to July, Monday to Friday, from 8am to 2pm, you will find them at school. Thankfully, the children are in good hands and they enjoy and respect their school and teachers. Most of them are eager to learn, those who are not get extra support. The school-authorities have quite an impact on the community's life and try to make sure all their students get what they need and support the parents in continuing the work at home. But like any other children my young friends appreciate their freedom, and are happy to go play when school is over.

## **FRITIDSKLUB**

During the week, there are two places for children in the 1st to 7th class to hang out, 'Save the Children's-house' and the youth club. On Saturdays they hang out and get slush-ice at the airport. Justus Poulsen, who is in charge at the youth club – as well as being head of the village committee and a homeworking husband – says that the children come more frequently to the club in the winter when it is cold and dark, than when the weather is nicer in the spring and summer. They play outside whenever they can. When it is cold they meet there, and more often than not they just hang out, might get a snacks and a soda, but playing ball games is also popular. Once in a while there are arranged trips and while there is enough ice they can go cross-country-skiing. The skis were a donation from the municipality last year and this new option is very popular. Apart from this, there is no schedule at the club, except that Tuesdays are art-days and Justus brings out the pearls and paper and colour-pencils and plays a movie. The same applies to the 'Save-the-Children-House' and the children play freely, although on the day I visited the children were sent off with a fresh baked bread-roll. This warm bun warmed my heart because for most part of it the staff's job is keeping an eye on the children, not to take care of them, guide them

nor stimulate them. Unfortunately this kind of un-guided children's storage (D. opbevaring) is too common in Kulusuk.



Figure 6 Emma, Luis, Asger and Tobias on their first day of school. Photograph by author. August 2015] Background from their old playschool-class. Photograph by author. July 2015

## MUGU'S KIOSK

Greenlanders have a sweet-tooth and therefore it is not surprising that the kiosk plays such an important role in the children's geography. Mugu's Kiosk is open when the Pilersuisoq supermarket is closed and is right next door to the club, where everyone who has reached 13 years hangs out in the evening. A teenage-girl works there and the shop is often filled with her teenage-friends. The shop is a small shed and its selection isn't much but seems to satisfy children wanting lolly-pops, soda thirsty teenagers and microwave noodles and potato-chips for those who are hungry.

### 1.2 historical context and Postcolonialism

One afternoon, when the older girls, Laila, Rosa, Debo and Qivi, were not feeling very creative, we started playing a map-game. The game involved one of us looking at a map in the classroom, naming a random location and asking the others to find it. This went on for about 30 minutes. Despite my suggestions of changing maps, the only one they wanted to look at was Denmark. Their game confirmed my ideas that the outside world for them is Denmark, and that Denmark is truly the promised-land. This also manifested how limited their horizon really is.

Since summer-solstice, June 21<sup>st</sup> 2009, Greenland has been an autonomous part of the Danish state and has self-rule (D. selfstyre). The Danes established missionary and trade stations in 1721 and publicly denied – and in fact some still do – that Greenland was a colony. (Leine 2015) Given the fact it was, the Danes ended Greenland's colonial status officially in 1953 when the country became a part of Denmark and Greenlanders were granted Danish citizenship. Since then, Greenlanders have been encouraged to assimilate to their Danish citizenship, and there were extensive plans in place to de-Greenlandicize them. Children were for example taken from their families and sent to live with Danish families for at least a year. My friends who have experienced this still talk about their experience with a trembling voice. The Home-rule in 1979 was a step towards the full autonomy which was then granted in 2009. This means that they are their own people, Greenlanders, but hold a Danish passport. The head of state is the Queen of Denmark but they have their own parliament and government. The premier of Greenland is the head of government. The government is decisional and Greenlanders are independent from Denmark with all domestic matters, but cooperate with Danish authorities: <http://www.gieff.de/calendar.htm> Ities when it comes to international affairs for which they vote two representatives to sit in the Danish parliament in Copenhagen.

I feel that Greenland's autonomy is a word game on behalf of the Danes, because the Greenlandic community still bears many characteristics of being a colony and relies on financial subsidies of about 651 billion USD annually.<sup>14</sup> (The World Fact Book 2015) The reality is that the Danish and their ways dominate most aspect of Greenlandic society. Aviâja Egede Lynge phrases it well:<sup>15</sup>

*"We have always been taught that we were one of the best colonies in the world. No slavery, no killings. We learned it through Danish history books and from Danish teachers. With the books telling us how fantastic a colony we were – books about the primitive Eskimos, books written from Eurocentric, economic or self-justifying angles – we have not looked beyond this historical oppression."* (Egede Lynge 2006:1)

It is true, no military actions were ever used against the native Inuit, however Pia Arke, Greenlandic-Danish artist, has revealed that the story of colonization was perhaps less glorious than the official account depicts. One clear example is that the Inuit in Scoresby Sound, Ittoqqortoormiit, were not allowed to drink coffee like their

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<sup>14</sup> Although those are meant get smaller as Greenlandic recourses start to cash in.

<sup>15</sup> Aviâja Egede Lynge is an anthropologist, human rights advocate at Columbia University, New York, and children's spokesperson in Greenland.

colonial masters. (Arke 2010:106) I do not agree with the Danish ways, but they can hardly be described as being military.

Tunu, where Kulusuk is, was only discovered by Danes in 1884. Up until then the people here were alone in the world living nomadically as hunters until the 1950s. Hence, people in Tunu are not only dealing with the colonial situation, but also catching up with western lifestyles faster than the rest of the country. These large steps are a challenge for the community. Despite not having been subjects of war and violence, colonialism and the assimilation to the Danish culture and mentality has had deep psychological effect on Greenlanders. In numerous aspects of daily life one witnesses the Greenlanders trying to live up to the Danish identity, bureaucracy, language, education, and even also food and fashion. The two people, the Greenlanders and the Danes, are formed by two radically different environments, making it unrealistic to assimilate, which results in circumstances I would not wish upon anyone, especially young children in their formative years.

Robert Petersen, also a Greenlandic anthropologist, has analysed the power-structure and behaviour of his fellow citizens in relation to colonialism. He claims that too many Greenlanders have adopted the Danish mentality leading to an *internal colonialism* between the West and the East, towns and settlements. He also fears that Greenlanders will not overcome the colonial state because,

*“...if the idea is adopted by the colonized people themselves, both civil servants and others, it would then justify the colonization itself and also the presence of a colonial civil service. It would create a people who had lost belief in their own capacity. It would create a people who were thankful to be colonized.”* (Petersen 1995:7)

People in Kulusuk fall under Petersen’s analysis and look fondly towards Denmark, at least most of the time, and it is their most popular holiday-destination while many have dreams of moving to Denmark, at least temporarily. The game I played with the girls that afternoon is one manifestation of this. Sure, there were incidents when I was blamed for taking the local’s jobs, regardless of the fact that I am Icelandic not Danish, but this anger was short-lived. In fact, Danes I met in Kulusuk all agree that it is easier being a Dane here than on the West Coast.

To date, English-language skill is close to none, but some children (and adults) have some Danish-skills, which is their third language after Tunumiit and Greenlandic, which I depended on for my communications. This limits what they can read and what is written in Greenlandic (not much is written in their native language Tunumiit) and Danish, hence leaving little change for external ideologies and maintaining the status quo Egade Lyngé and Petersen describe. Their world is considerably Danish-centric.<sup>16</sup> This has severe consequences for the children’s horizon and future. Again citing Egade Lyngé, 62% of the children that finish elementary school in Greenland do *not* meet the Danish-language requirements for high school or other comparable education, and 50% of those who do, drop out. (Egade Lyngé 2015) Many of the students need to attend *efterskole*<sup>17</sup> to improve their Danish. Boarding school in Denmark is the best option, not only to improve their Danish language skills but also so that they can become more extroverted – like the Danes.<sup>18</sup> The assimilation process from the 50s is still thriving.

### 1.3 At the edge of the horizon

A new ruling from the municipality was made public while I was there, stating that all settlement schools shall teach only from 1st to 7th grade. I immediately sense the importance of this issue, not only for the community but for my ethnographic

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<sup>16</sup> The term is my own invention, derived from the term euro-centric and ethno-centric.

<sup>17</sup> Efterskole (E.after-school) is a danish concept for students that just finished elementary school. For danish students it is often for fun, but also to improve in a field they wish to master.

<sup>18</sup> In an information borchure for Greenlandic students and their families about efterskole.

research. From now on the students will finish school in the nearest large town. For the students in Kulusuk, this means going to Tasiilaq when they are 13 years old, instead of finishing all ten years of elementary school in Kulusuk, as they have done with better results than many other schools in Greenland over the last decades. This does not prove that the results are great, but that the percentage of graduates is higher and, what is most important for the community, more students in Kulusuk continue their education after finishing elementary-school, and go to collage in Nuuk, or other towns in Greenland or Denmark. The reason for this success is that there are more educated teachers here than in other settlements schools, where there are very few, if any at all, and hence many schools operate with less than desirable results. Many settlement students have had to go to boarding school before. Throughout time, such situations have resulted in worse test results, high percentage of drop-outs, teen-pregnancies, mental disorders and suicide. (Multiple informants, Personal communication, June 2013 to August 2015) This is the image that comes to the minds of people in Kulusuk when they were told the news. Everybody in town is concerned, not only the parents of the young individuals, but the community as a whole. For a considerable time the school has been Kulusuk's pride. (Justine Boassen, multiple personal communications June 2013 to August 2015) This might be a deciding factor in the development and future of Kulusuk as a settlement.

Moving around is not new to Greenlanders. Traditionally they are nomads, living in winter houses/turf-houses over the winter and camping in the summer – settling as they follow their prey. With the colonizing of Greenland in the 1700's, the colonisers ordered them to live in settlements year round, in order to be able to offer services to their people. There is also a history of replacing and displacing people in order to claim power and resources: Qullissat was established in 1924 to mine the area and workers were needed. In 1925 Ejnar Mikkelsen relocated around a thousand people from Tunu approximately 1000 km up north to Ittoqqortoormiit, which was an important whaling location. This led the way for Denmark to claim land over the Norwegian and Dutch. Ittoqqortoormiit is now one of the most isolated villages in Greenland – and even the world - and in 1972 mines in Qullissat were closed and the settlement abandoned. The current decision to centralize the school-system and collect the oldest students in one school in the largest town is a part of a contemporary policy to urbanize Greenland and cut some of the high costs in running the settlements.

At a parents-meeting at the Kulusuk School on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2015, headmaster Justine Boassen said: *“The decision has been made, the children are going to Tasiilaq”*. The first step in adjusting to this new reality is to prepare the students and their families for the move. There was a general concern amongst the people in the room. *“How can we prevent them from coming back?”*, was the most debated question at the end of Justine's presentation. Parents thought of homesickness and worse test results but Justine's main concern was that they would be kicked out of the dormitories for not respecting rules. The reason is that children are not raised to understand rules or domestic obligations, thus making this transition even more difficult than it already is. Teachers in the group echoed her concern. Justine Utuaq, who teaches the youngest kids, shared her experiences: *“I was telling the small ones about my upbringing and the house-chores I used to have as a kid. They looked at me with surprise. They truly thought this was something very strange!”*. Justine's [Boassen] advice to the parents in the room was to begin adjusting their children to a dorm-life by giving them rules and obligations.

*“There are not many bright spots in this issue”*, Jakobine, the science teacher, said to me on the way home. (Jakobine Lundblad, personal communication, May 21<sup>st</sup> 2015) It is a serious matter when children at the age of 13 have to move away from home, not forgetting that coming home for the weekend is not easy. Kulusuk is in the arctic and nature prevents any travel for large parts of the year.

The parents concerns trickle down to their children. “*We will miss home.*” “*The kids in Tasiilaq will tease us.*” “*We will miss our friends and our grades will get worse.*” (Conversation with students in 6th and 7th grade, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2015) This is a dreadful thought for them and I see them making this shift as an unmanageable experience. There must be something good about going to Tasiilaq, after all it is the promised-land in their eyes and the helicopter is going there on all their drawings. One should remember that the situation is not as it was when their parents were sent away to become more Danish. There are smartphones and Facebook and video-call-options. They must find at least some bright spots, or create them, in order for everyone to deal with the change.

As time passed, the possibility for the school to postpone the decision became more likely. But they still have to cut costs by merging classes even more than before. Now the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> are one class, another is 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> and then 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>. The teachers are taking the challenge imperturbably, but the children nag about it on Facebook. The school-administration now has permission to apply for temporary funding to run the higher classes one year at a time. These are small steps but they might win them time to convince the municipality to cancel their decision and give the students a chance to stay at home until they are 15. Knowing that the municipality puts high amounts of money in the school-system every year, I wonder if there is a reason to fight their decision. Would going to Tasiilaq expand their horizon enough to make it worth it? Tasiilaq is still a small town, but there are more inspirations, a richer social landscape with further grounds to explore. It is still close enough to home and many familiar faces to be able to adapt to the idea of being away. At any rate, there is time to find the bright side of the situation and learn to help with the chores and obey curfews.

In retrospect the event can be seen as a metaphor for the future of Kulusuk, one milestone in the village’s development. Statistics prove that the village is becoming smaller – fast – and migration and brain-drain of the young and promising people is a social fact. Just as the people must face this new reality of sending the teenagers to boarding-school, they must accept this development and take full advantage of the potentials it brings. This first step can be seen as a trial period for further urbanization.

Simultaneously, there are serious discussions nationwide on the depraved living standards of too many Greenlandic children and hence national campaigns are organized to tackle those issues. (“Bygdebørne ønsker” 2015) Although the reality I have explained in this chapter is only the tip of the iceberg, I believe it gives me a solid ground on which to base my theory. It is now time for me to introduce the tools I used to help make sense of the processes of my fieldwork.

## [2] METHODOLOGY & THEORIES

My research is an experimental visual ethnography. In this chapter I will list my approaches to the research, the hows and the whys, tools and theories, places and people.

### VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY & THE WORKSHOP

**VIDEO NO. 8** – Interview on a Trampoline  
<https://vimeo.com/141792693> [password: thesis8]

My research centred around a participatory workshop I offered to the local children in cooperation with the local school and youth-club. I had however full freedom to conduct the workshops after my own needs, while the headmaster Justine Boassen and leader of the youth-club Justus Poulsen, as well as other teachers and staff were always within arms reach for consultation and advice or any help when needed. I

split the workshop into two groups, following Justine's advice, 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The young students came to the club between 15.00 and 17.00 Monday through Thursday.<sup>19</sup> The older kids met at the school between 18.00 and 20.00, Mondays to through Fridays. With the children I experimented with storytelling, using smartphones as our primary tool, theirs as well as mine, taking photographs, recording videos and audio. The younger children's stories came alive through playing in different locations in Kulusuk. I would ask them "tsumu?" (E. Where are we going?), and then we would go there and explore different mediums in the smartphones, thus documenting our play and environment. We also played with stop-motion. Sometimes the older children were asked the same question, "tsumu?", but moreover they made a stop-motion ghost-story and were offered an introduction to interviewing. The workshop was voluntary, and commitment not required. Out of the 37 children in Kulusuk School, around 25 children participated at some point but a core of about five children in each group came daily.

I had a one month trial-period in September 2014, and returned in May 2015 to stay for 4 months. Because of my other obligations, namely running Kulusuk Hostel and guiding a day-tour, I offered the workshop in May and July. Fieldwork and observations, interviewing and analysing continued throughout regardless.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

### VIDEO NO. 9 – Hanging out

<https://vimeo.com/141792735> [password: thesis9]

I became friends with the children during my first summer in Kulusuk. They came for visits on a daily basis, often to see if they could help me build something for the hostel. I would make them hot chocolate and find something to do, such as drawing, play a game or make a sign for the hostel. They were thirsty for activities and attention and I was more than happy to fulfil those needs. When I first offered the workshop in September 2014 I built on these friendships. Additionally, the staff at the school and youth club, the children's parents and those who in any way touch the lives of my young friends, informed my research.

I believe anthropologist and filmmaker David MacDougall has a point; like his project, *Delhi at Eleven* (MacDougall 2013), my workshop was not meant to be therapeutic, but "to see what children can teach us about Indian society from their unique position as children". (MacDougall 2014:453) My ethnographic participant observation was not only a way to learn about the lives of children, but also to learn with them – and through them – about the society in which they are a part of. Additionally, while being firmly placed within academia, meeting the needs for attention and activities for the children and youth in Kulusuk by offering the workshop adds an applied visual anthropology layer to my ethnography.

"Nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans to write about them", anthropologist Ruth Behar wrote. (Behar 1996:5) By offering the workshop my research felt less intrusive as it gave me a purpose beyond looking over their shoulders and gave it an immediate purpose, that to offer a worthwhile activity for the children. The workshop undoubtedly opened doors to previously and otherwise hidden aspects of the society in Kulusuk. It pulled me deeper into the social reality in which the children live. This purpose was important to me but my work was far from being limited to the workshop, the smartphone as a tool, or the material my young friends produced.

## MY TOOLS

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<sup>19</sup> The youth-club is closed on Fridays. 7<sup>th</sup> grade students do not have permission to be at the club after 19.00.



In my work I emphasize the importance of incorporating locally available tools. Thus, when I noticed how widespread smartphone usage was in the village, despite people's nominal financial capacities, the phones' high prices and limited and expensive Internet, I believed I found the perfect tool.<sup>20</sup> I am indeed critical of the smartphones' invasion into almost every aspect of our lives, but believe that they can be productively utilized. In their smartphones, children as young as 6 years old have all the audio-visual tools necessary to share their stories. These tools allow us to – or at least attempt to – overcome language barriers.

Apart from the smartphones I incorporated my DSL camera for photography and video-recordings along with a ZOOM audio recorder. I introduced these more professional tools to the children so that they had better understanding from where the tools in their phones developed.

## STORY TELLING

### VIDEO NO. 10 - Drum Dancing

<https://vimeo.com/141793249> [password: thesis10]

Storytelling through drum-dancing is a prominent part of history and culture in East Greenland. People would gather and entertain each other by telling stories, use it to call on the spirits (G. angakoq) and make fun of one another in the rap-battle of the time. Today its main purpose is to entertain tourists but unfortunately, and despite being a good source of income over the summer, there is a lack of interest and know-how. The schools and tourist-board try to maintain the tradition but with limited capacities and results. In an attempt to address that void, I turn to more contemporary approaches to storytelling, utilizing the possibilities that new media and smartphones have to offer.

To guide my experiment using storytelling as a way to learn about the children's lives, I use urban planning scholar, Leonie Sandercock's theories, as she lobbies for the use of storytelling in urban planning. She uses film and visual tools to get people talking about their environments, often in situations where big changes are planned. She wants to find how people experience their landscapes beyond the official statements and rapports. Throughout her writings (Sandercock 2000a, 2000b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) she emphasizes how storytelling can successfully be incorporated in urban planning "*as a way of bringing people together to learn about each other*" (2010b:20) and her wish is to democratize the planning process (2010b: 318) making space for local voices. Sandercock reminds us to think of "*how power shapes which stories get told, get heard, carry weight.*" (2010b: xxii-xxiii) The children's' stories are my main data-source, later to be analysed, coded and questioned beyond their immediate content.

## GROUNDED THEORY & FIELD NOTES

When deciding on a theoretical approach fitting for the experimental nature of my project, *grounded theory* methods worked best, i.e. a systematic collection and analysis of qualitative data with the aim of generating theory, to explain my findings. (Glaser & Strauss 1967) "*My point is that knowing, like the perception of the environment in general, proceeds along paths of observation,*" environmental anthropologist Tim Ingold writes, comparing knowledge building to travelling in physical space. (Ingold 2000:229) I was creating my own landscape of knowledge and as the workshop and fieldwork proceeded, each storytelling-experiment that failed required me to rethink my approach, and each one that worked called for a

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<sup>20</sup> In fact, last time I checked the availability there was one non-smartphone available in the Tele-shop and Pilersuisoq in Tasiilaq (a supermarket with an additional department-store). Simpler phones are available through the online catalogue.

continuation or development. For this reason, perhaps more than other methods, grounded theory relies on keeping the field notes up to date. (Charmaz 2000:510). Besides my daily traditional notes, I used a Tumblr-website (blog) [<http://johanna-fieldnotes.tumblr.com/>] Facebook and Instagram. I urged my followers to take part in a dialogue, which often succeeded as I received reading-suggestions, connections and corrections, and at times new stories expanded my knowledge.

## LANGUAGE & TRANSLATIONS

Not only does not speaking the local language limit the researcher's epistemological quest but can also lead to life-threatening mishaps and jeopardize the researcher's status within a community.<sup>21</sup>

### VIDEO NO. 11 – The kayak incident

<https://vimeo.com/141793293> [password: thesis11]

Although my language-barrier led to many creative solutions and translations to valuable information, I felt I was tied in a straight-jacket of language and came to envy those who spoke the local language of their research subjects. I do not speak their language, Tunumiit. I speak Danish, their third language, after their mother tongue and Greenlandic. The youngest children speak limited Danish, while some of the older ones can communicate a bit more and function as translators between us who need it. This meant that fruitful conversations with the children were few and limited. To reach beyond this limit I started incorporating translations into my work. On a day-to-day basis, my friend and the hostel's house-keeper Vittus Sanimuinaq helped translating workshop-assignments from Danish to Tunumiit. Translating the children's material from Tunumiit to Danish was in Bolette Bosold's hands. Bolette is in her late 50s and describes herself as being slightly different from other Kulusokers, as she has travelled and seen the world. My sessions with Bolette went beyond translations and developed into dear moments with insightful and emotional conversations about what she translated.

## MAPPING THE STORIES

Generally, maps are based on scientific measurements of land and its physical features, i.e. it is quantitative. Participatory mapping is an answer to a lack of socially relevant aspects of maps, allowing the people using the land to visually represent their own perception of their physical environment based on culturally distinct ideas, concepts and norms. (Chrisitan Riel: Space and Place, VMA class, 2015) The stories told in the workshop will eventually be framed in a digitalized version of a map of the village we collectively created. This merging of the physical features and social life is what Ingold calls 'a dwelling perspective'

*"...according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves."* (Ingold 2000: 189)

Ingold defines a *taskscape* as "an array of related activities", just as the landscape is an array of related features", i.e. the landscape of activities. (Ingold 1993:158) They are social constructs - qualitative, rather than quantitative, (ibid. p.158-159) measured in social time that is always *now*, in constant flow rather than being chunks of time in the line of history. (Ingold 2000:196) The taskscapes, moreover, are interconnected, so that each person's task affects the next, both in time and space. (ibid. p.195) Both the landscape and the taskscape are never final, ever changing. (ibid. p.196) I use this definition of the taskscape as a term to explain the children's

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<sup>21</sup> Link: <http://johanna-fieldnotes.tumblr.com/post/123398177864/there-was-a-dangerous-misunderstanding-today> Date: 23.09.2015

gathered actions, as a part of the community they are a part of. Nothing exists in a void. The culture is not separate from the landscape, just as nature and culture are not a dichotomy. The meeting of the two is what Ingold calls the *temporality* of the landscape.

In our map I connect the children's taskscape – their understanding of place according to activities and social life – to the geographical landscape. As nature is so omnipresent in Kulusuk, it is always the backdrop to their activities. I therefore raise the question of how limited geographical landscape affects the children's understanding of what Ingold terms the "*temporality of the landscape*", that is, the way in which social life is embedded in geographical landscape. How do the children imagine their futures? Where are the children's physical and conceptual boundaries?

## ETHICS & SELF-REFLEXIVITY

I knew I would meet ethical challenges during my fieldwork with the children, as power-relations are naturally uneven between me as a teacher/researcher and my young friends. To make sure everything would be legal, consent-papers were sent home with the children at the beginning of the workshop. I questioned these papers' reliability and purpose, because they were difficult to claim back. Ultimately, the headmaster signed a form on behalf of the students. I felt that the things that had worried me before I started my research became insignificant when actual situation and actual people are concerned. Because this business of looking over other people's shoulders, is in itself uncomfortable. As an attempt to balance this out, I gave my young friends the option to give me assignments as well.

### VIDEO NO. 12 – My homework

<https://vimeo.com/141794249> [password: thesis12]

As time passes and relations form, one becomes fully immersed in the so-called field as the boundaries between life and research start to blur. There was no escape from the field. The children came for visits and as we drank hot chocolate there was talking, drawing or hairdressing. A dinner-invitation ultimately became an informal interview. One of the most emotionally draining incidents was when a drunk father asked me to come home with him after a *dansemiik* (E. ball) while his children – my friends - were outside, begging him to go home.<sup>22</sup> My personal life and friendships are an inherit part of my project. Or vice versa, my project is simply a part of my life in Kulusuk.

"*How it can it be that you are from Iceland?*", my friend Geo asked my parents who came for a visit, "*because she over here*" he said and pointed to me, "*she is from Kulusuk.*" This must be the best compliment an anthropologist can get when struggling to find their place within the community. I experienced the benefits to such inclusion when other researchers came to the village. As pretentious as it sounds, Malinowski's *imponderabilia of actual life* echoed in my head, and that the ethnographer cannot ask even the most intelligent native to verbalize their social construction, "*[for] the integral picture does not exist in his mind; he is in it, and cannot see the whole from the outside*". (Malinowski 1922:83) I had come to realize what I had for so long read about, i.e. the power of participant observations, friendship and the importance of being true to who you are. I do not want to become a helicopter specialist, as Carl Erik the director of the folk museum in Tasiilaq calls people like me; foreigners who bring expert knowledge to the area to fix a problem... and leave. Inevitably however, I have taken a seat in the helicopter and can leave when I have had enough.

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<sup>22</sup> *Dansemik* is the Greenlandic word for a ball. In Tunu people dance swing [five steps - repeated to certain local swing-songs] and disco [free stile dancing]. Everyone dances, also the hunters and children and sometimes dance-happy visitors like me.

I believe empathy, equality and honesty, can eliminate such connotations. But this raises other perplexing questions such as deciding whether I should go dancing or not however much I enjoyed it, or challenging yet, when to intervene when the law is broken. My place in the community had to be in harmony with the children's world. I am not sure if I always did the right thing and will admit, this became emotional and draining at times. Eventually my personality is a filter through which I filter the world around me (i.e. the field). (Behar 1996:13) "[The] exposure of the self who is also a spectator [can] take us somewhere we couldn't otherwise go [...]". (ibid. p.14) I would not have wanted my fieldwork to have been any different (and will not do) because it led me to the Kulusuk I now know.

Now that I have listed my methodology and theory we will address how the workshop led to knowledge about life under the shieldshaped mountain.

### [3] TSUMU [WHERE SHOULD WE GO] ?

My visual ethnography was directed toward finding out what it was to be a child in Kulusuk whilst experimenting with how to use their smartphones as a means to learn. There were playful moments, sad ones, there was simple hanging-out and hard work filming and interviewing and storytelling. Each day taught me something new, either about the children and their world, or about the methodological approach to our smartphone experiments. Guided by the children, I will now construct a temporality of the children's landscape, where a selection of the children's recordings form a visual account of our experiment and their taskscape, in the beautiful East Greenlandic landscape.

When I came to the club I would ask "tsumu?", (Where should we go?) Here is where they took me.

#### **VIDEO NO. 13 – Hunting Life**

<https://vimeo.com/141794293> [password: thesis13]

Although this is a cute little stop-motion film, it can tell us some important things about the society in which the children live. The children are a part of a society with a long hunting tradition, as the lands and waters around Kulusuk are rich hunting-grounds, and the reason for settlement in the area. It is made in the same way as their stop motion map of Kulusuk, with me passive behind the camera while one ocean animal after the other appeared – sometimes caught by a local hunter, sometimes not. Not only are some of the animals very detailed, and the boats as well, but they also know how to hunt each one of them. A narwhal gets past a motorboat and one wonders why it was not caught, because the tooth has prestige value. In the next scene a kayak paddles by and the narwhal is killed. Narwhal hunting is one of the few hunting that is more often than not done in kayaks. Men go hunting in groups because the narwhales are sensitive to the sounds of the motors. Although only a shockingly low number of six men are hunters most families rely on hunting for their sustainability. The children are used to being around hunters and are therefore familiar with life in the water around them and how to make use of it. Most of the boys had shot their first seal when they were 5 years old and go hunting regularly with their fathers, uncles or grandfathers. Regardless of Kulusukers distancing themselves from their traditions and adapting fast to new ways of life, the number one summer-activity for the children is to go fishing. The girls seem to quit when they reach 12 years of age, where as the boys keep getting better and start providing for the family. The girls' job is to take care of the smaller children.

#### **VIDEO NO. 14 – Tsumu? Where do we go?**

<https://vimeo.com/141794655> [password: thesis14]

Most days they answer to the question “*tsumu?*” was to go fishing by the river. In the river the children are fishing in streams down from the drinking-water-reserve for the village and in early fall it is full of fish. My house is right above the river and so I could watch fish-catchers of all ages fish from my window. Sometimes it looked more like they were *getting* the fish, than having to fish *catch* it – it appeared so easy. The isolation of the area, culturally and geographically, meant that the Tunumii Inuit relied on the harsh landscapes for their tools, clothing and methods. What was there, was what could be used. The simpler the better. Fishing poles were not even necessary. Bare hands and a good eye are all you need. Boots are not necessary either. Still they got excited about using Sara’s boots despite (or because of) the hole in them. These boots were fun to play with and became the centre of attention. Often on these first trips, Sara and I initiated a recording process by using our phones. But the children are curious and fast learners and they would soon ask if they could borrow the phones and film themselves. However, the fishing was a priority and sometimes the phone was again handed over to me or Sara. Using our phones meant that we had direct access to the material and saved us the time-consuming blue-tooth data transfers between their phones and our computers.

During this year I was faced with challenges as connection-options between Android and Apple products are limited. It has forced me to rethink my iPhone-use in harmony with the children’s Android phones. Memory-space is another issue with the young children’s smartphones. Their phones’ limited storage space was full of music, games, photographs and videos. I came to realize that the phones are the only storage space they had because there is in general not a computer at home. I included data-transfers in an IT lesson in the school’s computer lab. Although singularly, this was successful it did not yield the results I had wished for, i.e. more space on the phones. The ‘bare essentials’ still filled considerable parts of the memory and soon the phones were full again. Instead of banging my head against the wall and spend more time on the issue, I started to incorporate my own phone more in the workshop. I was stuck in a dilemma as I was distancing from the original plan: should I continue focusing on the available tools so that I could provide them with the knowledge and ideas of recording and sharing, or focus on the ethnography and get to know their reality? The latter won at this stage in the research. Thankfully, the older children have more expensive phones with more storage capacity than the younger, so with them this was less of a problem.

By having enough space, and them using their own smartphones, I had been hoping they would take initiative beyond our time at the workshop. One of the few times that the children shared their recordings with me, was this next video from Biba. Towards the end of my first workshop in September 2014, Biba came to me after a day in the mountain.

#### **VIDEO NO. 15 – Up in the Kulusuk Mountain**

<https://vimeo.com/141795177> [password: thesis15]

The teens and pre-teens – girls and boys - had taken a walk up to Kulusuk mountain. Biba filmed the boys bathing in the water. It is one long take and she hardly takes her camera off the boys. I did not expect this forwardness from her as she is a quiet girl and stays in the shadow of her older sister Mikkalina. There are three aspects of this recording that I find captivating. First, what I find most interesting about her recording is that we get to witness the children in the mountain they so frequently draw and photograph, the mountain called Kulusuk, Qalorujorneq. This mountain is the backdrop to their reality and here it almost feels as if we were there. Second, and more generally, we see how the children take full advantage of the nature in which they are surrounded. Nature is omnipresent in the children’s lives and their taskscape is closely knit to it. Walks in the mountains, out

fishing, berry-picking, skiing on the ice, waiting off a storm inside or eating the seal their father caught. The landscapes around are inviting, and when there are not many other activities or places to choose from, it is not surprising that out-door activities are as common as they are. Last but not least, I know that they are not allowed to bathe in this water but I find it fascinating because it was building a bridge between generations. Bolette once told me that when was a kid she used to sneak away with her friends and do something that also was not allowed, such as taking her father's sledge and go to the mountain. I had to remind her of this when she became big-eyed and accusative towards them when we were translating the video. The grown-ups don't think the children like playing outside and insist on a great difference between generations. Seeing this video showed them that it was less so, that they aren't that different. This also gave me a reason to believe that many parents are not aware of what the children are doing and where they go. The children are very free to do what they please, when they please.

**VIDEO NO. 16** Play catch<sup>23</sup>

<https://vimeo.com/141796264> [password: thesis16]

This dark recording is filmed during a game of catch down by the harbour one night, on the way home after a workshop with the older children. Many children of all ages were already there. The video was recorded on my phone and Sara's as the phones were passed between those interested in filming. The freedom I mentioned above is visible in the way the children play out at night. They stay out as long as they want, or until they are cold, hungry or tired. "Where are their parents?" I used to ask myself. Only very few children have curfews and coming to school tired and hungry is not uncommon. This might be reminiscent of the times when children were believed to be reincarnated old souls of relatives or family-friends. They would be given the deceased person's name, take their name-soul, or *atsiiddar* in Tunumiit. (Tróndheim 2012) This name-soul is one part of the traditional Inuit identity, namely an old and vice person and so children do not need to be controlled to the same extent as we believe in the West. Children are likely to have five names, one for each important person in the family. The name-giving tradition is still practiced today and the five different names taken full advantage of. If one does not feel like obeying one name, they just decide they go by another name that day. And if they regret something they did on Facebook, they just create a new account with a different name. However, not many I spoke to (but still some) actually believe in the soul being reborn, but see it as paying respect to a loved one. (Vittus Sanimuinaq and Gidion Kunak, personal communication, August 2015)

This leads us back to the subject of hunting. Traditionally – and until the 1960s and 70s, hunting was such an integral part of life, and really the only possibility to survive. Hence, it was important to learn these skills and children did so by observing their elders and taking part in the process. Here, using Ingold's words, they have received "*education of attention.*" (Ingold 2000:22) When other and easier possibilities came along, parents became protective of their children and did not want them to suffer or labour as they had. Justus, the youth club leader, thinks that is still true and hence the children are not accustomed to having to help. They do not have rules, and do not have to come home at any set time. Unfortunately, there was nothing that filled the gap. Children were left to their own devices with little or no role-models or guidance. Although hunting is not as important as it was before, it still plays a role. The often limited selection in the shop, high prices and low income, necessarily calls for a freezer full of seal meat, fish and whale throughout the winter. Hunting has become a necessary past-time activity, but also just a way to enjoy the beautiful nature. It makes it an important common ground to build upon, respect and develop, while it is still vivid to the young generation.

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<sup>23</sup> Playing catch in Danish is fange-lej (hunting-game). Just a fun fact.

**VIDEO NO. 17-** How do you shoot from a rifle?

<https://vimeo.com/141796302> [password: thesis17]

When it comes to the children's hunting, unlike with fishing, there is a gap between girls and boys already at young age. The girls may have had a single lesson in how to aim and shoot, but it ends there. This interview-series was a practice we did with the older group – unintentionally it was only the girls who were there at the club that day. We began by thinking about good questions and who to ask. Brainstorming was often a challenge leading to restlessness, and to simplify the assignment we found one question we would ask several people. We had a large piece of paper and together we came up with several good ideas, but the one that sparked their interest and got them off their chairs was this one: *"How do you shoot from a rifle?"* Kaamma and Biba, both 14, were the ones that were most inspired. We turned on the microphones on our phones and asked passers-by *"How do you shoot from a rifle?"* It was teamwork, one recorded video and the other audio. They asked four people, three men and one woman. However Orpa, the lady who works at the airport was asked a different question:<sup>24</sup> *"What do you do at work?"* *"Why a different question?"*, I asked but hit our language-barrier answer: *"I don't know!"* This was the answer the children often give when they cannot formulate their thoughts to me in Danish.

The hunting traditions and therefore the Tunumii Inuit's lives were distinctly gender divided. Men went out hunting while the women took care of the children and elders, and made and maintained the good state of clothing and skin-products such as the kayak. This divide in the genders' taskscapes is still visible today. Although I may not have gotten a direct answer to my question there, I realized that I had found that interviewing and audio-work inspired the children.

Audio and interviewing stimulated the children in a way I had not seen since we started the stop-motion. I was relieved to finally experience some dynamic energy because I felt I was reaching a limit in what I could learn about their material world and wanted to get closer to their inner worlds. I wanted to know what filled the gap hunting had occupied before, and this demanded more verbal approaches.

**VIDEO NO. 18 -** Skiing

<https://vimeo.com/141797462> [password: thesis18]

Although the skis are new and the children are still practicing the technique, they have no fear and slide down smiling. There is no space for fear in a harsh nature like the one that forms these children. After skiing one Sunday afternoon, Rosa, Haldora and David asked the frequently asked question in broken Danish *"Can visit?"* (D. Kan vi besøge?) Despite me having had a long and eventful day of helicopter-carving and polar bear eating and had planned an evening of writing field notes, I agreed. I made hot chocolate for everyone and created an audio studio using the mattresses in the sleeping loft – it now came in handy to live in a hostel. I asked the children to write a short text about our ski-day, in Tunumii, then used my recorder and headphones to record their stories, one by one. After a few attempts everyone was satisfied with their recordings, and we edited them to the videos we had recorded while skiing. I would have been less thrilled if I knew they were making fun of me, but in my ignorance, I was amazed. When I later found out that the fact that I fell on the skis stood out that day, I found it weirdly paradoxical because, quite contrary, I believed I had found a way to stand firmly in my two feet and reach beyond the observational approach and get to know them better.

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<sup>24</sup> Orpa was on her way home after a long day at the airport and did not want to be recorded.

As a result, I asked my friend Vittus to translate a few basic questions to Tunumiit, wrote them down and took with me to the club. I also brought my audio recorder and headphones.

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where do you live?
4. What do you want to work with when you grow up?
5. Where do you want to live when you grow up?
6. What is the most fun thing you do? In the summer? In the winter?

It was a beautiful day in July and, as Justus had predicted, not many kids came to the club. Hansine and Julia were listening to music on the sofa, each in their phone and new headphones. I joined them, first listening to music before trying to convince them to come out with me. One needs considerable effort to motivate these two 10 year olds who can sit lazily for hours upon end. I got Julia excited by offering the zoom-recorder and eventually Hansine followed. We went out looking for friends to interview, but as we walked they also asked each other - and me. We got six interviews that day, with children 6 years old to 14. Translating the interviews was at first a disappointment, the answer to many questions was "*Nelivernga!*", "*I don't know!*".

As they were asking in Tunumiit this could not be the common language-barrier-answer that they gave when they could not formulate their thoughts in Danish. It had to be something else. I soon overcame this feeling, realizing that this simple answer is not as un-thoughtful and boring as I thought, but suggests that they actually do not know. The world they live in offers too few and not very exciting options. They know they want something else, but their imagination has not found it – yet. There is sometimes a standard answer to the question "*What do you want to do when you grow up?*". For the girls it is to work at the counter in the shop and the boys want to be policemen or fire fighters. But I believe that the true answer is simply too distant. As I said before, there are only 17 professions in Kulusuk and unfortunately there is too little stimulation at home to think beyond that. *They simply don't know what they want to become.* And this translates into their body language. Many others are like Julia and Hansine, sitting for hours on the couch and stare at their smartphones and need constant motivations.

Was there a way to get beyond *I don't know*? Were my questions too future oriented? I tried changing my questions to more "now" questions, because thinking ahead and in an abstract way is challenging for them. Next time, but less formal, I tried asking "*Where would you go if you had two free plain tickets?*", "*If you had 10.000 DKK how would you spend it?*". Setting goals has beneficial results on children's life-skills. (Forneris et al 2007) We all need goals, but dreams just as much. Then they need tools to reach their goals. There is a branch for the study-and work counselling in Tasiilaq but this is too far. Kulusuk school has offered the service but I am told that this, like other projects, stands and falls with a single person. Right now there is nobody.

I started discussing the move to Tasiilaq with the older group one day. David, Debo, Laila, Rosa, Qivi and I had a good talk - a very good talk considering our very basic language we share. This resulted in a beautiful project where the discussion inspired them to write a description about who they are. Each of them spent about an hour thinking and writing and rewriting in their own language, Tunumi, what then became a minute long recording. We then merged this with video portraits they had recorded the day before.

#### **VIDEOS NO. 19 [i-v] Portraits**

Laila - <https://vimeo.com/141797507> [thesis19i]



Quivi - <https://vimeo.com/141797828> [thesis19ii]  
Rosa - <https://vimeo.com/141797911> [thesis19iii]  
David - <https://vimeo.com/141797963> [thesis19iv]  
Debo - <https://vimeo.com/141798242> [thesis19v]

Although the stories were not necessarily about going to Tasiilaq nor about the landscapes, these short accounts are the best work that came out of the workshop. Rather than connecting them to a physical landscape, I see them as emerging from the virtual landscapes of social media, i.e. the selfie-culture and Facebook. I wanted to work my way into this pre-teen's virtual landscapes of self-exploration and selfie-culture, extending it to a video-representation of it. The results are insightful and interesting and coincidentally, anthropological. Classic ethnographic measures come to mind in the scenes where Laila and Qivi show close-ups of each part of the body – including their teeth. Qivi did the same for Rosa as she did for Laila, but then deleted it from her phone before we could finish the project. I regretted this more than Rosa who did not want to re-do hers. But because Rosa is an active selfie-taker, I assembled a portrait of her myself. Debo shows a 360° view of David, who puts on a serious face for the occasion. After a while, the serious face falls, and his true self shines through in a smile. David does the same for Debo, walks around her, exploring her like a doctor. There is a hint of shyness, normal for 11 year olds of the opposite sex. Their videos are very beautifully sensorial.

The context took my epistemological quest to a new level. Family is centre of their accounts. Friends are important as well. Rosa states that she was “*baptised in Kulusuk. Will go to boarding school in Tasiilaq in 2016. [She] will be confirmed in the month of July 2016 but doesn't not know the date yet.*” Greenlanders are Evangelic Lutheran. For the people in Kulusuk, religion is important and the confirmation to the church when they are 14 is one of the most important events of their lives, bringing considerable amounts of money in their pockets for the first time.

What strikes me now, 4 months later, is that some basic facts are no longer true: Qivi does not have just one sibling, David. They found out that their father is the father to one of their friends, Haldora. They might also not be living with their parents for much longer, because their drinking is out of control and the children might have to go to foster-parents. It introduced me to the culture of foster-care in Greenland. This also led to my understanding of why David was so often at Bolette's house during the weekends, seeking refuge while his parents were drunk, and what has made Qivi such a tough girl. Moreover, this showed me how unstable the children's reality can be. My project was taking a sharp turn towards the realities of the parents.

Debo's story however, was by far the most revealing and in many ways disturbing. Because the audio was lost, I used her recording of the story, *Pilu*. *Pilu* was a Greenlandic assignment where they had to write a story about a girl based on their own experiences. The story is almost identical to her own portrait, which I include her:

*“My name is Debo. I am 11 years old. I am not with my parents. I am a foster child. My mother lives in Tasiilaq. My father is dead. Before, it was my father who took care of us. When he died we became fosterchildren immediately. My mother could not take care of us. Life has been tough since my father died. I was being bullied and bad words were said to me. My mother has become an alcoholic. When we were forced to move to Tasiilaq, I lost a lot of weight. I was totally confused. But after we came back to Kulusuk I felt much better.”*

*“Why does a little girl like her have to go through these emotions? She needs someone to talk to, or else she will end up like me and so many others, finding refuge in alcohol,”* Bolette said with tears in her eyes, when we translated her story. We both know Debo's foster-family and know that she is in good hands, but we were not sure if Debo is able to talk about her feelings to anyone. Emotional expression is

not common. (Briggs 1970) Bolette was aware of her situation as my translator, but also knew that she needed to address Debo's feelings to her foster-family.

When recording these portraits, I believe they felt I would never understand what they were telling me, although I was clear about getting translations. A part of me feels like the children were telling me secrets and that I am violating their privacy by publishing these videos. I feel strongly that they should be included, because, like MacDougall points out, they reflect a reality of Kulusuk far beyond the children themselves. (MacDougall 2014:453) This is what I hoped that my visual ethnography experiment would lead to.

#### [4] CONCLUSION: LOOKING BEYOND THE HORIZON

I stood under the shieldshaped mountain, on my last day in Kulusuk. Like most days that summer, the sun was shining and the helicopter was on its usual 8 minute hop between there and Tasiilaq. I took a 360° look at this beautiful landscape one last time. I saw the colourful houses in the village, and the road leading to the airport where I would drive tomorrow, the "ocean-highway" to the other four settlements I didn't get a chance to visit this summer. Sharp granite mountains reaching out from the ocean, in which icebergs are floating and whales blowing on frequent intervals. There were little boats on their way to hunting-grounds to try to get the whales or go visit family in Tasiilaq. It was a sunny and clear day so I could see all the way to Tasiilaq. Then, as I sit by my desk far away from this landscape, I attempt to take a different kind of 360° look around, a look over of my ethnographic data and the knowledge I gained. I try connecting the taskscapes of recordings to form a temporality of the landscape, trying to understand the possibilities and limits the two 'scapes' have to offer my young friends. The children jump on trampolines. They smile. The slightly older ones, the pre-teens, are taking selfies outside the school, checking how they look and posting the good ones on Facebook. As teenagers do, they are realizing that they are a part of a larger picture and have to find their place within it. The girls are not smiling. There is not so much to smile about any more. The trampoline has lost its charm. My teen friends are restless. One of the reasons is that the geographical and the social landscapes creates limits to what they can do.

In taskscapes, all activities of all those who are present are connected and one action affects the next persons' actions. (Ingold 2000: 203) The parent's lives form the children's taskscape. There is a split in the community, between past and present, and present and future. It is the natural landscape and a limited social landscape that forms the base for the children's taskscape. It provides and limits their scale. The temporality of the landscape might be well suited for a hunting community, and Justus is in some ways surprised that so many people want to leave the island, "because it lies so well to hunting grounds". But this does not seem to be enough for my young friends. They need something else to mature and develop as citizen of the globalized world in which we live. They have outgrown both the landscapes and the taskscapes. There is little the community can provide for the children's future. The children know that to build a future, they must leave Kulusuk, leave their friends and family and the peace and quiet they have grown up with. This is a challenge for those who undertake it, and it scares them. (Waage 2006)

I feel confident saying that I reached my goals. My visual ethnography - the smartphone-workshop - provided access into other wise closed aspects of life in Kulusuk. The smartphones can be effectively utilized as a research tool. Its mundane position in our lives make the users more relaxed than with other tools, the accessibility is encouraging to constantly produce, and the diversity of tools offer a wide range of different data-production. As the workshop proceeded and my young friends and I explored the possibilities of the smartphones and their taskscapes, their

stories started to shine light on what it is to be a child in Kulusuk, but also beyond. "Telling a story" Tim Ingold says

*"...is not like unfurling a tapestry to cover up the world, it is rather a way of guiding the attention of listeners or readers into it. A person who can 'tell' is one who is perceptually attuned to picking up information in the environment that others, less skilled in the tasks of perception, might miss, and the teller, in rendering his knowledge explicit, conducts the attention of his audience along the same paths as his own."* (Ingold 2000:190)

During my honey-moon time in Kulusuk, when I saw mostly the glittery image of beautiful landscapes and smiling children, I was a bit frustrated hearing Anne-Mette telling me that she emphasized speaking to the children in Danish. I was even more frustrated when she told me that their only hope was to escape Kulusuk... for good. Anne-Mette has worked as a teacher there for 8 years, and knows the community well. Now, although I hate admitting it, I agree. Children are formed by their communities and neighbourhoods. (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993 and Jencks & Mayer 1990) Research shows that integration of children of various socio-economic background benefits those from lower class without lowering the results of those from higher classes. (Brittain 2015) The children in Kulusuk are strong and intelligent but to mature and develop their qualities they need strong role-models, and unfortunately there are not enough of them at home.

Kulusuk's isolation reaches beyond the cancellations of flights, limited availabilities in the shop and lack of Internet. It is even more challenging to stay in a community of 242 people from September to May, with limited places to go and things to do when they already know about the world through their phones. These geographical and social limitations are connected and affect the inner lives of the inhabitants. Combined, these aspects of the life under the shieldshaped mountain form the temporality of the children's landscape. But landscapes are never fully formed and as my young friends continue to explore the landscapes of the Internet their social landscapes and taskscapes can keep developing alongside it and form a wider landscape; a wider horizon. (Ingold 2000:196) Kulusuk is a good place, but even better if you have a comparison to the rest of the noisy world beyond. People keep returning. Anda Kuitse is a professional drum-dancer and has travelled the world, but he always ends up in Kulusuk. He misses the peace and quiet. (Anda Kuitse, personal communication, June 2015)

*"My phone play music?"* Rosa asks in broken Danish. "Yes", I say, and hand her my portable speakers. She connects it and once more we listen to Aannguaq Jørgensen's *Uddoriar* (e: Star).

**AUDIO NO. 1** Uddoriar (2014) by Aannguaq Jørgensen  
<https://soundcloud.com/aannguaq-johannes-j-r Jensen/uddoriar>

It is a love song in Greenlandic. Rosa sings along, and so do the others who are with us. We hear the song again, and yet again. Day after day. Week after week. This song is the soundtrack to my life in Kulusuk. My connection to Kulusuk is comparable to a love-story: intense emotion and admiration but challenging and never simple, and I can not live without it. I guess I will be hitting the repeat button a few more times.

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