IMPACTS OF TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE: SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND SUSTAINABILITY ALONG THE BAM

Olga Povoroznyuk and Peter Schweitzer
Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology
University of Vienna

Arctic Science Summit Week
Prague, April 5, 2017
MAP OF THE BAM WITH AYAM

Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) – longest northern railroad, over 200 stations, incl. 65 cities and towns in 6 regions in East Siberia and Far East, Russia
Amur-Yakut Mainline (AYaM) – the main side branch of the BAM

http://irkipedia.ru/content/baykalo_amurskaya_magistral
Focus: impacts of the BAM on demography, intergroup relations and community development in a historical perspective

Field data: cities Tynda, Novaia Chara, Severobaikalsk and indigenous villages in Amurskaia Province, Zabaikal’skii Region, republic of Buriatia in 2013 and 2016
BAM HISTORY

- Late 19th c. – railroad conceptualized
- 1932-1953 – first segment constructed by GULAG inmates
- 1972-1984 – last communist mega-project; constructed for resource exploitation; relied on Soviet propaganda and mass labour mobilization
MAKING THE INDUSTRIAL REGION

- Since 1950s - geological prospecting and planning “industrial clusters” along the projected railroad (Nedeshev 1985)

POPULATION OF THE REGION

Main groups: indigenous and mixed people (aborigeny), pre-BAM migrants, BAM builders (bamovtsy), postsoviet migrants (shift and seasonal workers)

Settlement structure: BAM builders – majority in BAM towns, indigenous Evenki people - 4-5% in the region and 50-80% in ethnic villages
DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

1970-80s: BAM as a population magnet, mass inflow
1990s: population flight, 2/3 of BAM builders left
Since 2000s:
Continuous population loss
Indigenous urbanization
Shift workers and temporary migrants

2015: cities Tynda – 33819, Severobaikal’sk – 24110,
Novaya Chara - 4113
Tyndinskii District – 14441, Kalarskii District – 8306
Origins of the Immigrants to the BAM region, 1981

1:40 000 000
Population Dynamics, Severobaikalskii District, Buryatiia1939-2016

Data: Бурстат, 2016.
POPULATION DYNAMICS, KALARSKII DISTRICT
GROUPS AND IDENTITIES

- Indigenous Evenki people (*aborigeny*); public sector and subsistence, 10% -nomadic
- Pre-BAM specialists sent to the region by state
- BAM builders (*bamovtsy*): distinct multicultural group, product of Soviet ethnic policy and ideology + collective experience of the BAM construction (“happiest time in life”)
- Post-Soviet temporary migrants (i.e. shift-workers)
INTEGROUP RELATIONS

- BAM construction: indigenous people (damage to traditional lands) and pre-BAM locals (excluded from the project) vs. builders (*bamovtsy*) (higher salaries, benefits)
- Extraction industry: local population (*mestnye*) claiming for more benefits vs. incoming temporary population (*priezzhie*) employed by companies
- Solidarity -> tensions and competition for recourses (lands, jobs, financial state and companies’ support)
SUSTAINABILITY?

- BAM communities: single industry towns dependent on the railroad and mining
- Changing flows and composition of population
- Intergroup relations: (non)participation in large-scale projects, access to benefits and resources
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- FWF Fund, P27625-G22 “Configurations of Remoteness: Entanglements of Humans and Transportation Infrastructure in the Baykal-Amur Mainline (BAM) Region”
- Colleagues, informants, local partners
- More information: http://core.univie.ac.at