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Impacts of Transportation Infrastructure:

Social Dynamics and Sustainability along the BAM

Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) is the main northern transportation route that connects Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East. Conceptualized for geopolitical reasons, the railroad has had unprecedented social and economic impacts. The BAM, similar to other large-scale infrastructure projects labeled "projects of the century", was an embodiment of Soviet nation-building policies and of communist ideology. In the 1970a and 1980s, the railroad construction process attracted a culturally diverse population from all across the Soviet Union to the region. As a result, not only the railroad was built, but also new communities, identities and a novel social environment were forged.

The economic crisis of the 1990s lead to a massive population outflow, public criticism of the BAM, as well as degradation of the railroad and its social infrastructure. While some objects (e.g., tunnels) were completed as late as 2003, others (such as factories, apartment houses, or side-tracks) were left unfinished due to a lack of investments.

Today, typical BAM communities include medium-scale cities and towns, that had been founded as train stations or temporary settlements, and a few indigenous and mixed villages in relative proximity to the railroad. Despite the fact that many BAM builders (*bamovtsy*) left the North, they still constitute the majority population along the railroad. New migrants have come to the region as a result of the reactivation of resource extraction and the launch of railroad modernization (to increase cargo and resource transportation capacities). Yet, these promises of infrastructure modernization are challenged by the growing competition for resources and the dependence of BAM communities on extractive industries and the railroad.

This paper uses the concepts of resource curse and sustainable development to analyze far-reaching social and economic impacts of industrial and transportation infrastructures on local communities.