

# INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS ALONG THE BAIKAL- AMUR MAINLINE, EAST SIBERIA

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# INFRASTRUCTURE

- Infrastructure – the basic equipment and structures that are needed for a country, region, or organization to function properly (M. Webster)
- Types: social (housing, amenities, power lines), engineering (constructions), transportation (air, roads, sea ports), military, etc.
- Anthropology of infrastructure: STS + material agency + ethnography of social change and political transformation (Harvey & Knox 2015)

# WHY INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE ARCTIC?

- Harsh climatic conditions, paucity of tracks, low population density and accessibility, remoteness define the Arctic and the Soviet term “Far North” (70% of Russia)
- Environmental similarities vs. diverse political and historical contexts and roles of the state
- Arctic as a laboratory for modernization/industrialization creating infrastructures
- (Transportation) infrastructures have tremendous impacts on humans in the “arctic” conditions
- Traditional research focus on human-environmental relations shifting to human-(environmental)-infrastructural entanglements



## OUTLINE

**Focus:** railroad infrastructure as a modernization project and agent of social change (case study of the BAM)

**Structure:**

*Soviet modernity:*

“Mastering the North” and making of industrial regions

“Civilizing” indigenous peoples and changing land use

Infrastructure in identity building

*(Post)modern agency of infrastructure:*

BAM reconstructed: new modernization, memories and promises

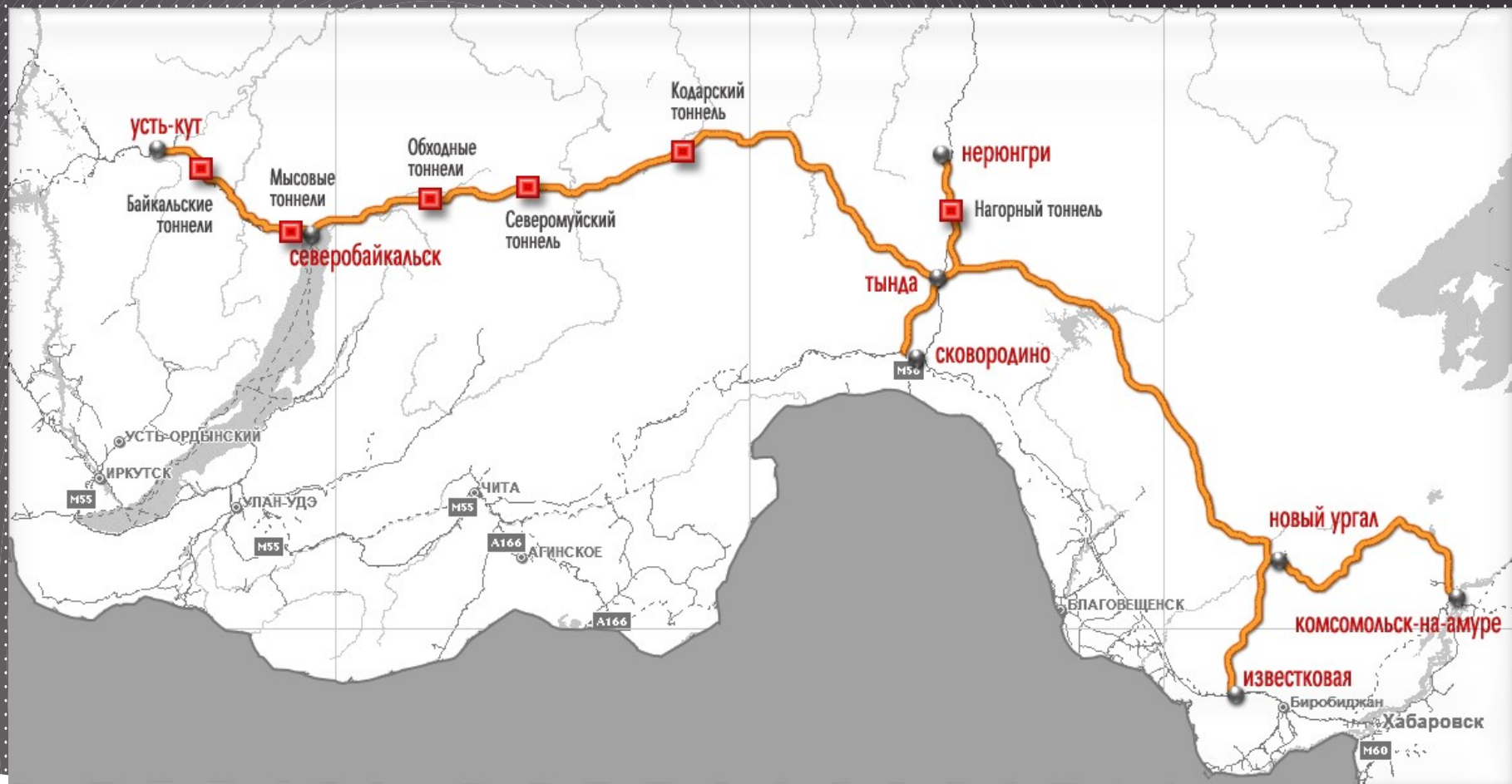
Cargo and passenger flows, technosocial meshworks

Demographic change, identity politics and community development

- FWF Project P27625-G22 “Configurations of Remoteness(CoRe): Entanglements of Humans and Transportation Infrastructure in the Baykal-Amur Mainline (BAM) Region”
- BAM Region – a 100-200 km. transportation corridor + incl. adjacent districts/communities in 6 federal subjects in the Russian North
- Field data, Jun-Aug 2016: BAM cities (Tynda, Novaia Chara, Severobaikalsk) and mixed villages in northern Amurskaia Province, Zabaikal'skii Region, and republic of Buriatia

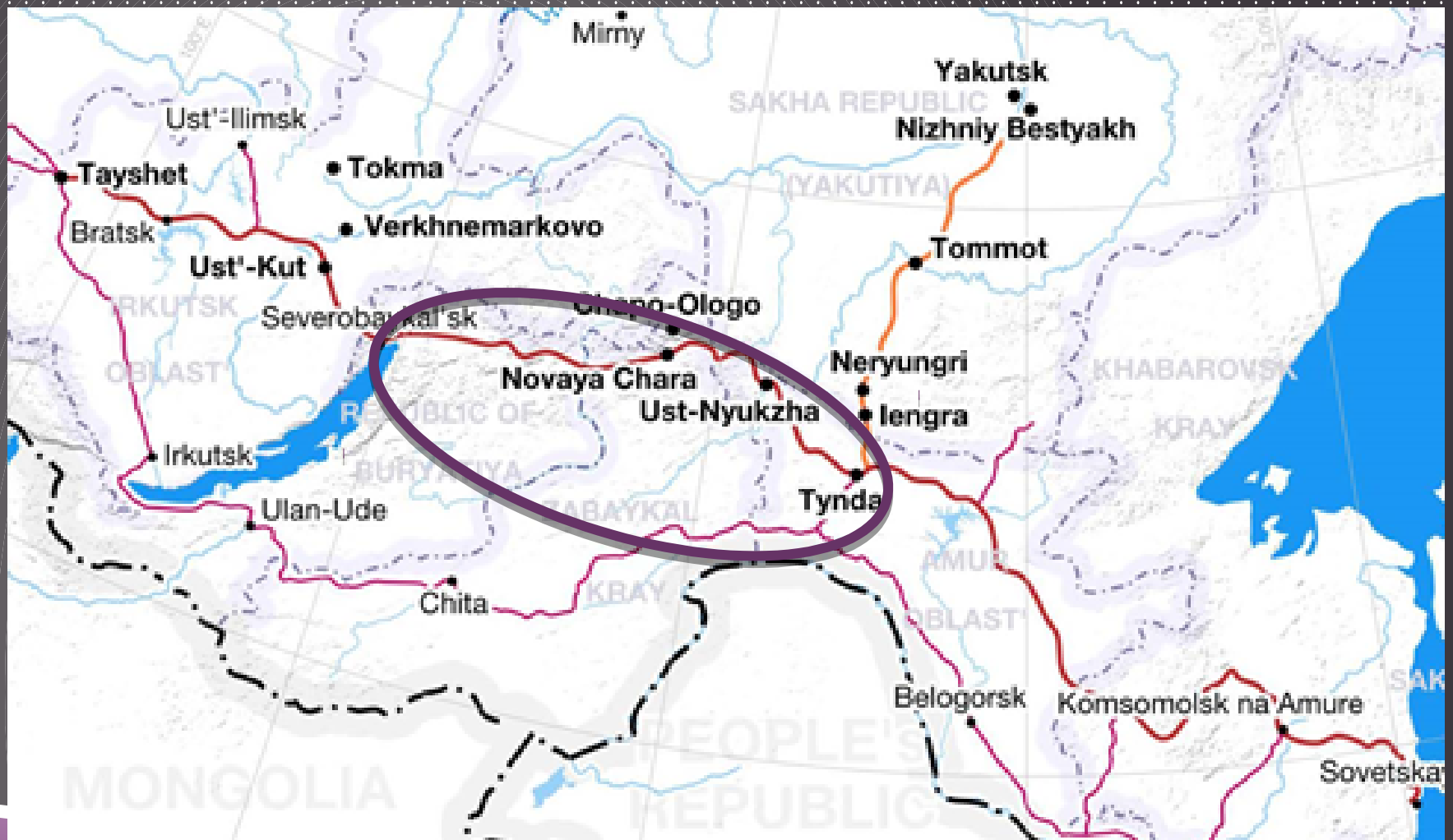


# MAP OF THE BAM WITH AYAM



[http://irkipedia.ru/content/baykalo\\_amurskaya\\_magistral](http://irkipedia.ru/content/baykalo_amurskaya_magistral)

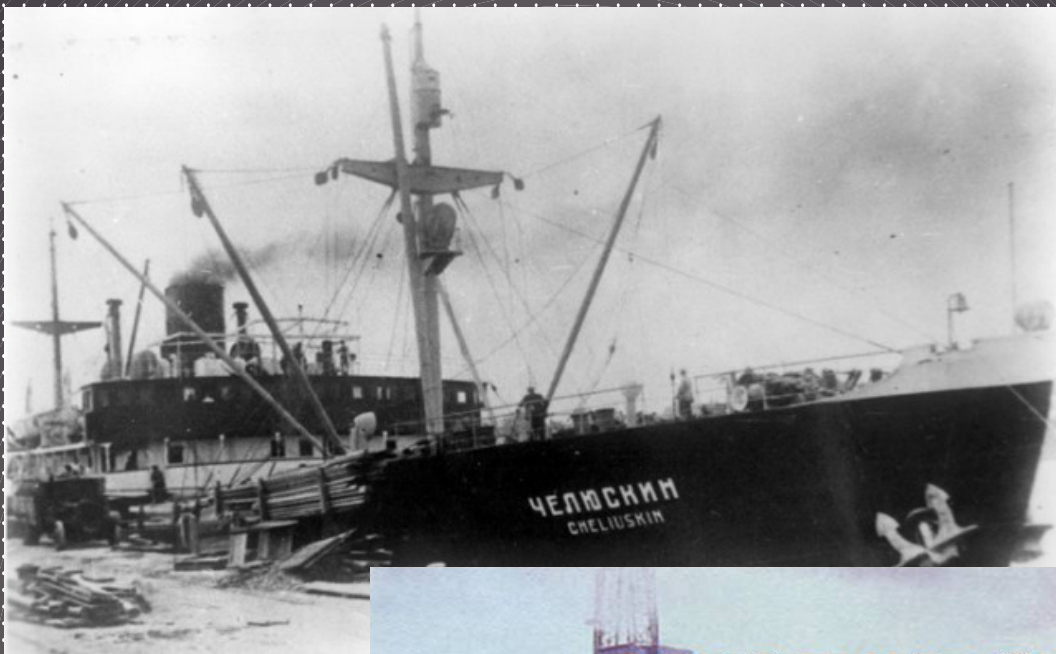
## CORE FIELD SITES, 2016





# SOVIET MODERNITY: “MASTERING THE NORTH”

- “Mastering of the North” (*osvoenie Severa*): technologies serving political and economic purposes + symbolic “conquest of the nature” (Slavin 1982)
- Industrial megaprojects as “communist construction sites” (Josephson 1995): White Sea Channel, Transpolar Railroad; Bratsk hydroelectric station, Magnitogorsk metallurgic plant, BAM and AYam
- 1930-50s: use of forced labor; late socialism: ideology+ material stimuli for mobilizing labour resources
- “Civilizing” mission re “backward” peoples of the North



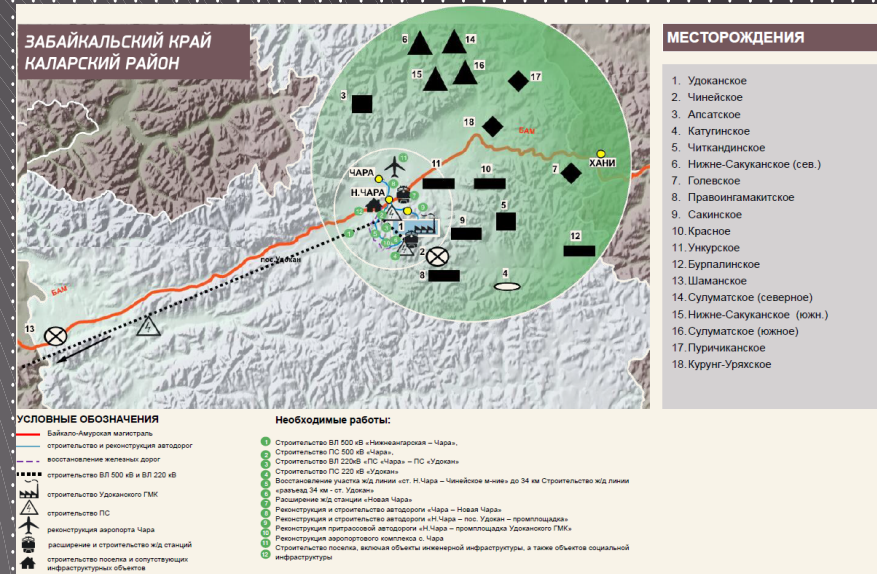
**ОСВОЕНИЕ СЕВЕРА**



# MAKING THE INDUSTRIAL REGION

State plans for establishment of “industrial clusters” (network of mines, processing plants, roads, towns) along the projected railroad (Nedeshev 1985)

Geological prospecting: Udokan expedition (1952-1994) in Zabaikalskii Region, etc.  
Formation of pre-BAM nonindigenous population: geologists and intelligentsia on the program of “distribution of specialists”



# BAM HISTORY

Since late 19th c. railroad projects for economic development and geopolitical security of North Siberia and the Far East discussed

1932-1953 – Komsomolsk-na-Amure - Sovetskaia Gavan', Khabarovskii Region constructed by GULAG inmates





# “CIVILIZING” PEOPLES OF THE NORTH

- BAM Region – home to indigenous Buriats, Yakuts, minority Tungusic groups (Evenki, Eveny, Nivkhi), reindeer herding, hunting, fishing
- “Cultural construction”, introduction of medical services, formal education, written languages and mass culture (Grant 1995)
- Collectivization, sedentarization and relocation of nomads (Tugolukov & Shubin 1969)
- “Indigenization” of power: bringing up and involving local elites in Soviet politics (Koviazin & Kuzakov 1963)
- Ethnic autonomies: Evenki Vitim-Olekma autonomous district, East Siberia (1930-1938) (Zadorozhnyi et al. 1995)





# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

- Evenki and other Tungusic peoples (*aborigeny, KMNS*),
- 500 residents in Kalarskii Region and 800 in Tyndinskii Region in 2013
- Majority live in ethnic villages; many buy housing and move to BAM towns; occupied in public sector and subsistence activities, 10% - semi-nomadic life





# INDIGENOUS BAM BUILDERS

- BAM planning and preparatory works: involved indigenous population as unskilled labor (porters, wood cutters, stone dressers)
- Construction stage: local population socially and economically excluded from the project (Anderson 1992) with few exceptions
- BAM mission: bring "civilization" to USSR's most desolate regions and "backward" populations, next modernizing project





# TRADITIONAL LAND USE



- ▣ Evenki subsistence activities: small-scale herding, hunting in individual *obschinas*
- ▣ BAM impacts: pollution and destruction of pastures and hunting grounds, depletion of game
- ▣ Changes in migration routes and traveling distances for hunting
- Traditional land use territories: laws on land allocation to protect Evenki traditional way of life and activities don't work (Zadorozhnyi et al., 1995)



# BAM OF THE LATE SOCIALISM

Last megalomaniac communist industrial project exploiting USSR's natural resources for propagandistic and economic reasons (*Ward 2009*)

Built for transportation of resources and cargo in 1972-1984; 4500 km., over 200 stations, including 65 cities and towns in 6 regions



# BAM INFRASTRUCTURE



Soviet social modernity in infrastructure as a form of total planning and intervention in every day life (i.e. urban architecture, Collier 2011)



BAM infrastructure: embodiment of nation-building ideologies in “ethnic” styles in housing and railway stations and city planning



# BUILDING BAM

- *Komsomol* labor mobilization campaign: migrants from the USSR in 20s -30s, ideological and material stimuli (Argudiaeva 1987)



**Population of the BAM Zone in 1984**



- Ground for Soviet nation-building reflected in social solidarity, interethnic marriages, art and folklore

# BUILDING IDENTITY

- BAM builders (*bamovtsy*): distinct multicultural social group, two generations
- *Bamovtsy* identity: ideology + collective experience of coping with harsh living and working conditions
- Remembering BAM: “happiest time in life” (Bogdanova 2014, field data) vs. current social (i.e. housing) problems





# BAM RECONSTRUCTED

- Failed expectations: unfinished infrastructure, unfulfilled economic plans, public criticism (Mote 1990)
- Post-Soviet de-modernization: builders' flight, de-urbanization, socio-economic and transportation collapse (i.e. Ferguson 1999)
- Since 2014 - new promises: construction of the BAM second track (Strategiia razvitiia 2008)





Documentary **“The Baikal-Amur Mainline. A road of 40 years”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1raInK0WxD0>

- What main events and periods of the BAM history can we reconstruct from interviews with officials, BAM veterans, and today's railroad workers?
- Which motivation young people had for coming to the BAM and what is the emotional charge of interviews?
- What is the message of the documentary produced by Russian Railroads Company (RZhD), which currently administers the BAM?



# TECHNOSOCIAL MESHWORKS

- BAM infrastructure: integrated into local transportation schemes
- Mobilities: railroad vs. roads and planes (connection btw. administrative centers and villages) and travel subsidies
- Ambiguous perceptions of remoteness/connectivity and shifting “centers”/“peripheries” (moving district centers to BAM cities)





# ROADS AND MOBILITIES

“Social meshworks”  
(Indold 2011) a metaphor  
standing for overlapping  
social and infrastructural  
networks



BAM cities – transportation, social  
and political hubs where  
negotiation about development  
projects occurs

Social networks extending from  
villages off the road to BAM cities  
and communities beyond the region





BAM infrastructure: railroad, stations, towns, inc. housing and social institutions built in taiga landscapes

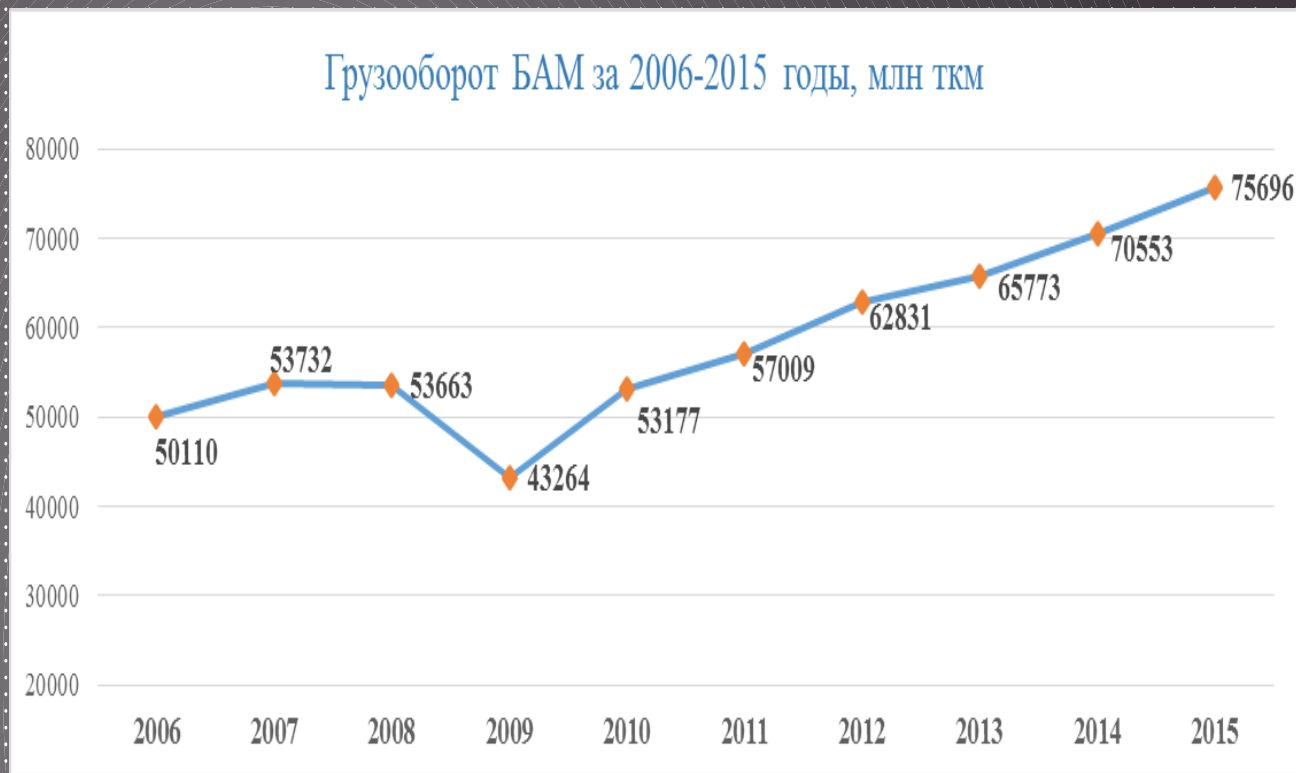


Infrastructure raison d'être: deliver services vs. sustainability (Hanley 2004)  
BAM: transporting cargo vs. passengers; social phenomenon vs. means of transportation



- Cargo: growing, 50% increase since the 1990s, coal and other raw materials
- Passengers: declining, 1-3 (east section), 1-8 pairs (west section) trains per day, cancellation of commuter trains
- Transporting resources, supply of food products, alcohol and drugs, ambiguous social impacts
- Cancellation of passenger trains as infrastructure violence (Rogers & O'Neill 2012)

# CARGO TRANSPORTATION BY BAM, 2006-2015

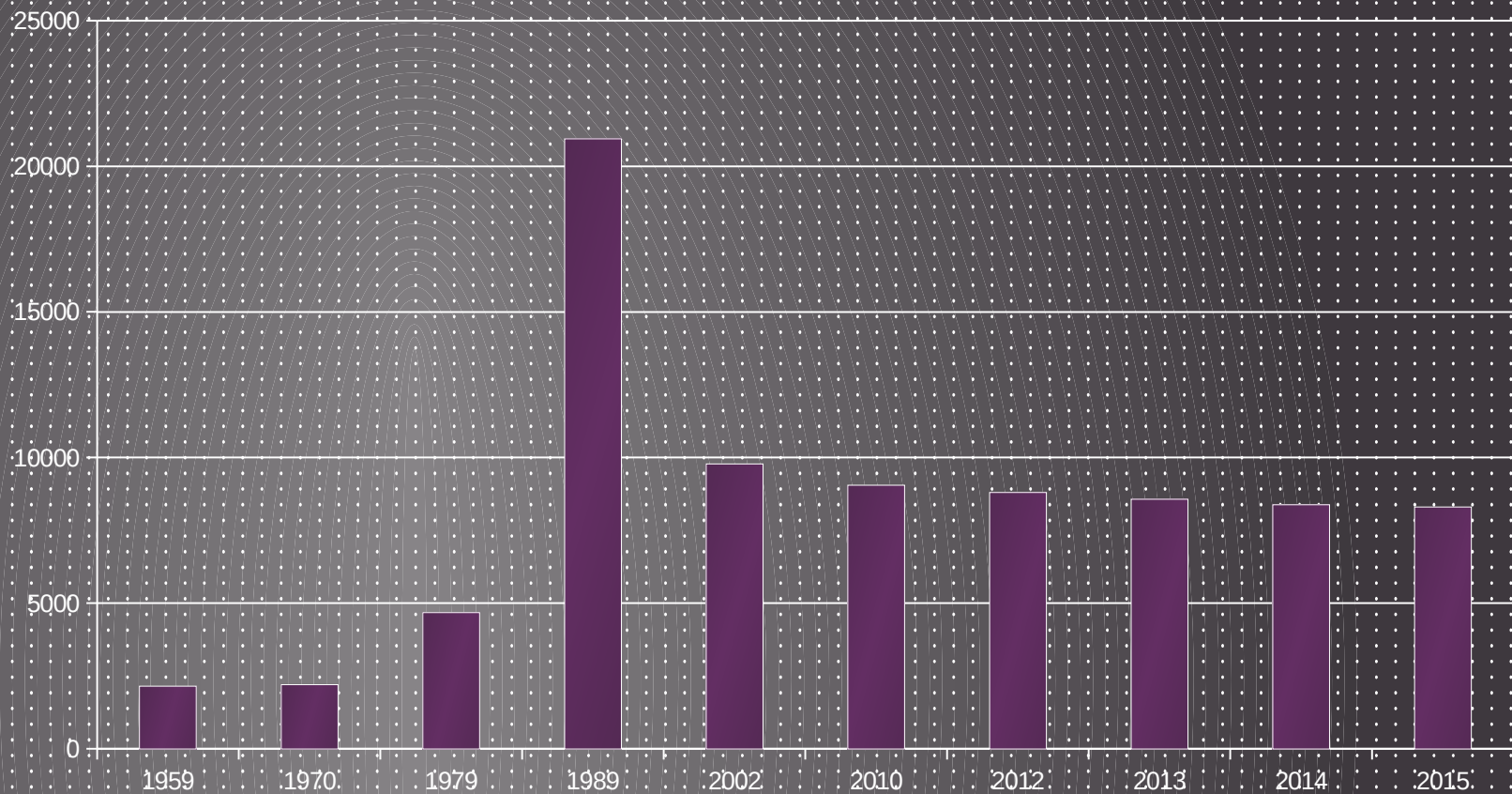




# DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

- BAM as a magnet: population influx and urbanization during the construction in 1970-80s
- “Flight from the North” in the 1990s and ongoing population loss
- Growing temporary population (shift and seasonal workers) since the 2000s
- 2015: Tynda – 33819, Tyndinskii District – 14441, Novaia Chara – 4113, Kalarskii District – 8306

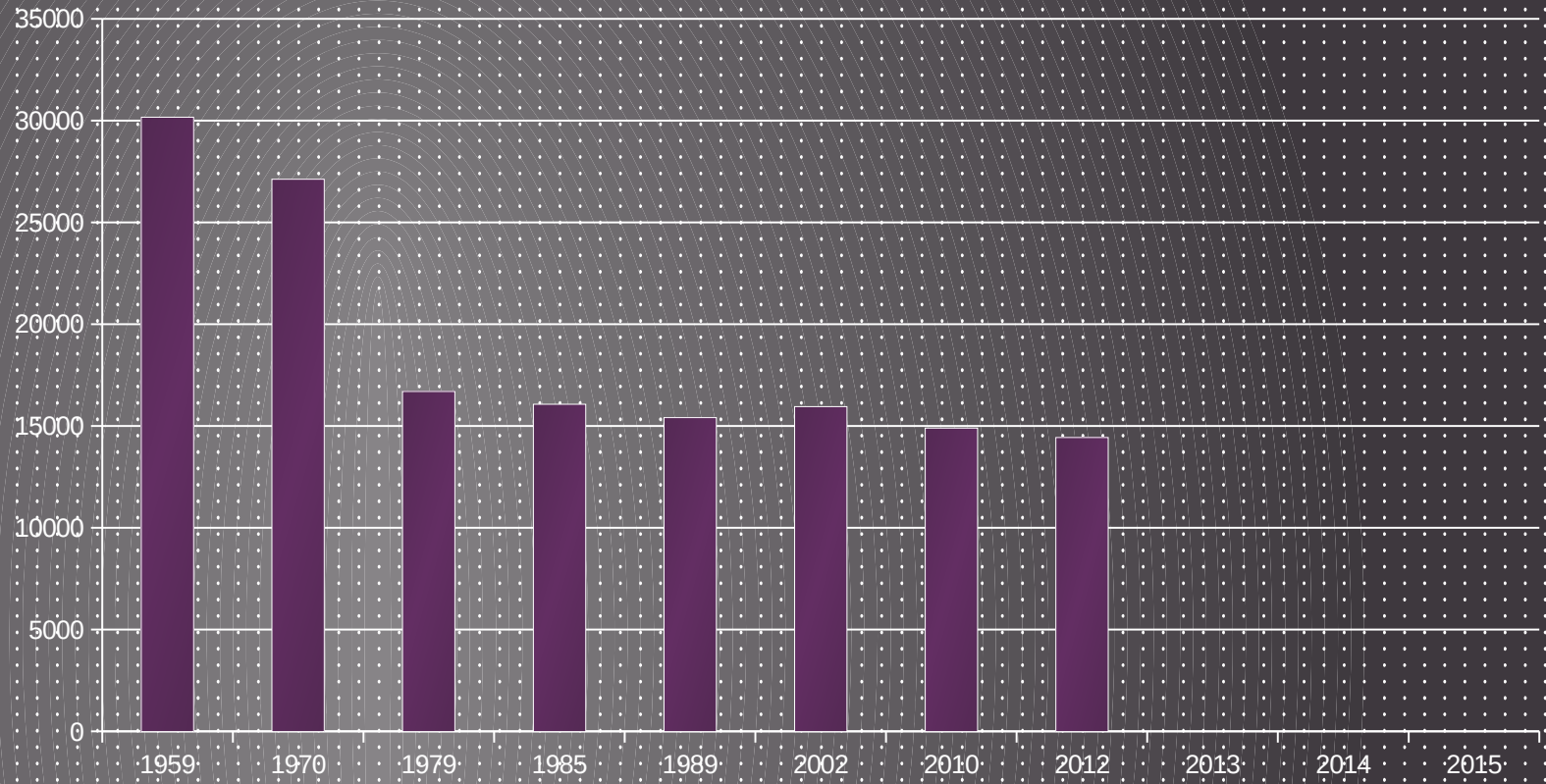
# POPULATION DYNAMICS, KALARSKII DISTRICT



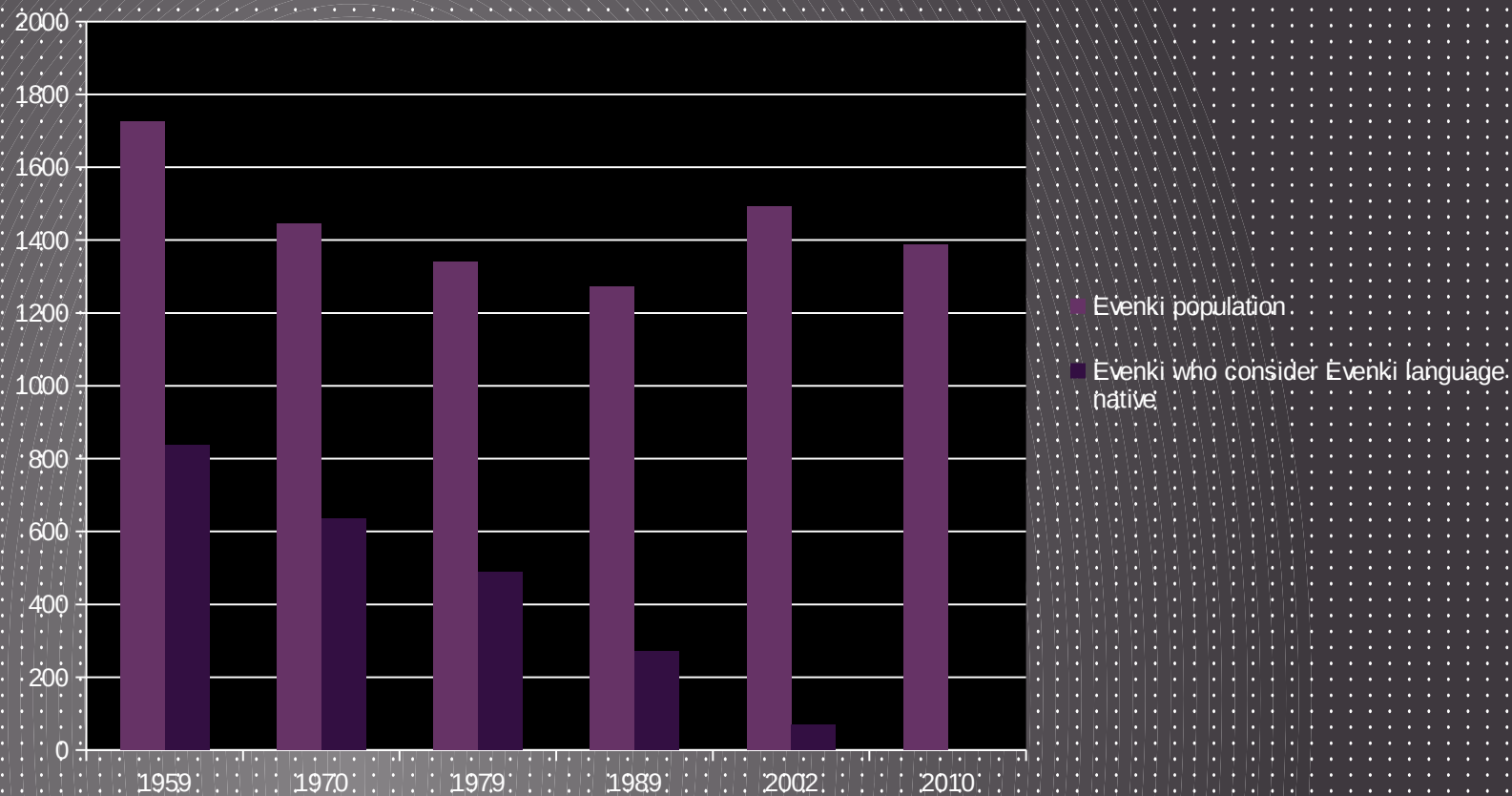


# POPULATION DYNAMICS, TYNDINSKII DISTRICT

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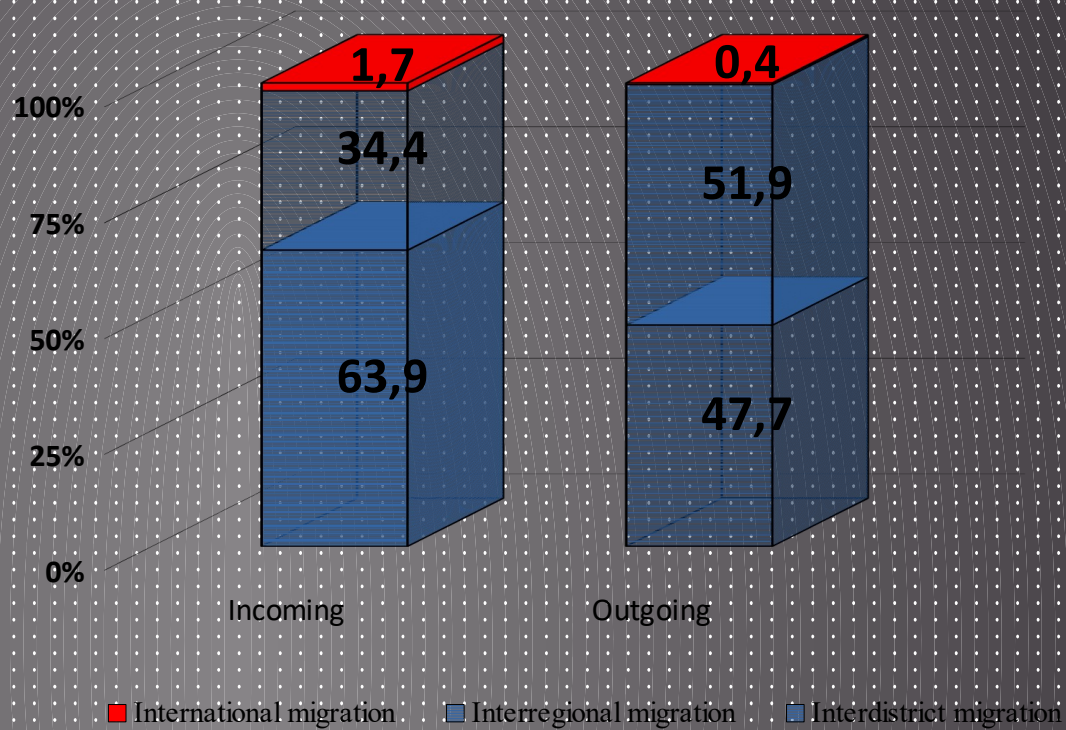


# EVENKI POPULATION IN ZABAIKAL'SKII REGION





# MIGRATION, ZABAIKAL'SKII REGION



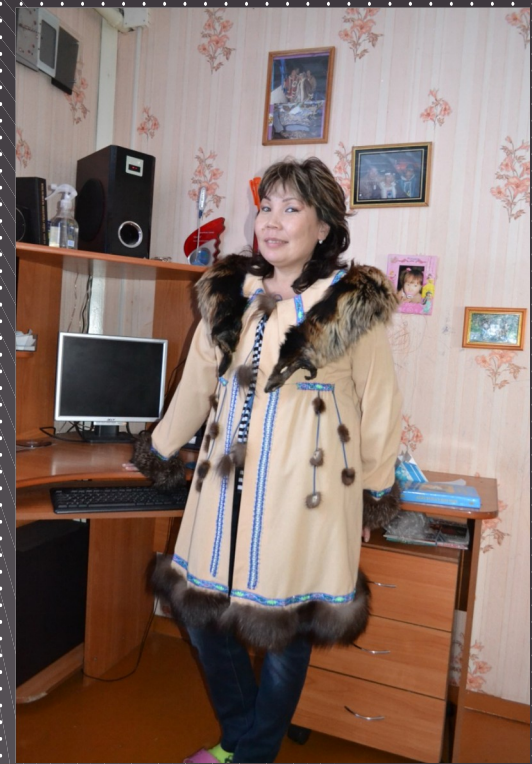
## LOCAL IDENTITY POLITICS

- What is a local community: who belongs and has entitlements?
- Indigeneity: list of 40 “numerically small” peoples of the North in the 1990 (Sokolovskiy 2015), from victims of capitalist exploitation to “endangered species” (Ssorin-Chaikov 2000), “traditionalizing” legislation (Novikova 2008)
- Aborigeny* (indigenous) vs. *bamovtsy* (BAM builders) - indigenous Evenki people, incl. cases of transecting identities, indigenous *bamovtsy*, “children of the BAM” born in mixed families, Evenki youth working at the railroad
- Mestnye* (locals) vs. *priezzhie* (newcomers) – indigenous people + pre-BAM migrants + BAM builders who made home in the region vs. recent migrants and shift workers





- Nation-building politics and local identity construction: “melting pot”, excluded local population and minorities in practice



- Stakeholders manipulate identities and (re)draw group boundaries in contest for resources (lands, game, benefits from resource extraction) (i.e. Sokolovskii 2012)



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

BAM Region as a resource frontier: investments in infrastructure for mineral extraction vs. social capital, “resource curse” (Behrends et al. 2011)

BAM communities: single industry towns dependent on the railroad and mining

Alternative development: tourism, protected areas, commercial herding?





# SOME CONCLUSIONS

- BAM (Baikal-Amur Mainline) - an illustration of Arctic modernization projects and infrastructure social agency with long-term consequences and promises
- Universal modernization agenda in the circumpolar, but different modernities depending on socio-political contexts
- Soviet modernity: “civilizing mission” re nature and indigenous peoples, forced labour, strong ideology and planned economy in labor mobilization and identity construction
- Infrastructure reconstructed: unfulfilled expectations vs. new promises
- Documentary “Communist railroad celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWCoao-UOh0>