

THE SIBERIAN WORLD



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Chapter 25

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES A RAILROAD MAKE?

Transportation and settlement in the BAM
region in historical perspective



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INTRODUCTION

Tynda is like a transit point now. People are passing it by on their way to shift work. My sister came the other day: she works in Mirnyi building a bridge across the Lena there...People also commute from Tynda. They look for jobs, find them and work there. Jobs are lacking. Still, the region will be developing...which means there will be jobs...We would not be living here, if there would not have been the BAM.

(Interview, NK, BAM builder and local resident, Tynda, 2016)

The place Tynda was transformed into a settlement by the end of the 1930s within Dzheltulaskii District...The construction of the Baikal-Amur Mainline marked the beginning of a new life in this taiga region. Dzheltulaskii District found itself in the middle of the nation-wide construction site. Tynda, lying at the crossroads of the “little” and “the big” BAM and linked directly to the Trans-Siberian Railroad, was immediately recognised as “the capital of the BAM.” In December 1975 the settlement Tynda was transformed into a regionally governed city. Since 1972 the district has been experiencing rapid economic development.

(Kratkaia kharakteristika Tyndinskogo raiona, 2016)

The two statements above refer to the same town, Tynda, a place in East Siberia that has been called the capital of the BAM, or the Baikal-Amur Mainline, a railroad line running parallel to the Trans-Siberian Railroad and north of Lake Baikal. While these statements indicate that big changes have happened over a few decades, the question remains how sustainable the social, economic, and demographic changes triggered by the BAM are and have been in the past. With reference to the title of this volume, we want to demonstrate how one particular railroad line created new Siberian worlds by reconfiguring the built, natural, and social environments of the region, thereby deconstructing any lingering romantic images of Siberia as untouched wilderness. At the same time, in the light of post-Soviet transformations in the region,

we want to question how sustained—and sustainable—these reconfigurations are. Our title question—what difference does a railroad make—will be broken down into three research questions. Which ecological, economic, demographic, and sociocultural impacts have the construction and functioning of the BAM had on the region and its local population since the 1970s? How do the Soviet material, economic, and ideological legacies preconfigure the current and future developments along the BAM? Finally, what is the “agency” of transport infrastructures in remote regions, based on the example of the BAM?

In order to answer these questions, we will make use of a multitude of data obtained through a variety of methods. We are making use of our own field materials (primarily biographic and expert interviews, as well as focus groups), archival materials collected by us in local depositories, as well as data from published sources. While this chapter makes relatively extensive use of information collected by others, our main method throughout the project has been fieldwork based on conversations with a variety of people living and/or working in the BAM region, from railway workers to Indigenous reindeer herders, and from BAM builders to recent migrants.¹ In other words, it is only through these interactions and traveling with the BAM (see Figure 25.1) that we began to understand the role of the railroad for the people along its course.

Our work is situated within the anthropology of infrastructure, a field that has recently seen a lot of exciting contributions. While some branches of the social sciences and humanities, especially science and technology studies, have a long track record of engaging with infrastructure (see, for example, Edwards, 2003; Hughes, 1983; Mrázek, 2002; Star, 1999; Star & Ruhleder, 1996), anthropology has been a



Figure 25.1 Passenger train at a BAM station, 2016. Photo by Peter Schweitzer.

latecomer in that respect. More recently, however, there has been a veritable explosion of anthropological literature on the subject (e.g., Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018; Carse, 2012, 2017; Harvey & Knox, 2012; Harvey et al., 2017; Howe et al., 2016; Larkin, 2013). A main thrust of anthropological infrastructure studies has been to show how infrastructures become terrains for political engagement (e.g., Anand, 2017; Venkatesan et al., 2018; von Schnitzler, 2013, 2016). Further to this, several authors have investigated the nexus between infrastructures and modernization policies (see Çelik, 2016; Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012; Masquelier, 2002). Our understanding of infrastructure includes its non-physical elements, such as infrastructure standards (Carse & Lewis 2017) or the “promise of infrastructure” (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018). Our topic falls within the domain of transport infrastructure, where the “road” has been at the center of social science attention (Beck, Klaeger & Stasik, 2017; Dalakoglou, 2010, 2017; Harvey & Knox, 2015). The “railroad,” on the other hand, has often been relegated to historical accounts of modernization and industrialization (Aguar, 2011; Bear 2007; Monson, 2011; White, 2011) and only more recently was understood as a study object that brings together human and non-human actors (Fisch, 2018; Minn, 2016; Swanson, 2015).

After a short introduction of the main actor of our story, namely the BAM railway line, we will discuss the known impacts of the BAM, divided into distinct domains, such as environmental changes, economic changes, as well as demographic and socio-cultural impacts. After that we will provide a brief overview of the changing role of—and attitudes toward—the BAM as a socialist megaproject under post-Soviet conditions. Finally, in the conclusion, we will return to our initial question—what difference does a railroad make—and explore the role of transport infrastructures in remote regions as evidenced by the BAM and other systems.

BAM: A SHORT POLITICAL HISTORY OF A RAILROAD

The BAM is among the longest of the northern railroads that crosses six vast regions in Siberia and the Far East of Russia. The history of the BAM starts with early construction projects dating back to the 19th century and continues with the first sections of railroad built under the Stalinist regime in the 1950s, though the majority of the mainline was built between 1974 and 1984 during the Brezhnev era. The mainline became the last socialist “project of the century” (Josephson, 1995) that involved extreme forms of technological and social engineering. Designed to boost regional development through the exploitation of untapped natural resources and to strengthen collective faith in the administrative command system (Ward, 2009), the late socialist BAM became a large-scale project of transformation of natural landscapes and internal colonization (Kotkin, 1997). While earlier Soviet megaprojects (Graham, 1996) as well as the BAM predecessors, used forced labor and military personnel, it was mostly ideological propaganda combined with material benefits that drove labor migrants to the railroad construction in the 1970 and 1980s.

Local pre-BAM population groups included earlier Soviet migrants, as well as Indigenous Evenki and other Tungusic speaking people (*aborigeny*). While reindeer herders and hunters lived nomadically in the taiga, the majority of local residents led sedentary lives in the villages that emerged during the process of collectivization and exploration of natural resources. A number of so-called “national villages”

(*natsional'nye poselki*) where Evenki and other Indigenous minority groups were concentrated existed prior to the arrival of the megaproject. While the local population hardly participated in the construction process, it was nevertheless affected by the railroad infrastructure in multiple different ways.

Young migrants, the builders of the BAM, were primarily recruited to the construction through Komsomol¹ organizations. Building brigades and organizations from a particular Soviet republic or a Russian region or a city were ceremonially assigned to design and/or to build a particular town, settlement or station along the BAM. The multicultural composition of the migrants was supposed to represent the ethnic diversity of the Soviet Union and to be managed according to the Soviet national politics with its ideologies of “friendship between peoples” and practices of hidden racial and ethnic discrimination (Brubaker, 2014). Nevertheless, the joint experience of the railroad construction and communal living shaped the migrants into a solid particular group of population with their own socio-professional identity. Currently, the former “builders of the BAM” (*bamovtsy*) constitute the majority population concentrating in the communities that emerged during the BAM construction, including the biggest cities of Tynda and Severobaikal'sk, as well as in numerous smaller railroad towns and settlements. Thus, the BAM project was instrumental in creating a new built and social environment in remote regions of the Soviet Union that were previously deemed remote, uncivilized and barely inhabited.

IMPACTS

Environmental changes

We begin with the impacts the construction of the BAM had on the natural environment of the region. While any large construction project obviously has enormous ecological effects, building a railroad line extending several thousand kilometers, mostly on mountainous permafrost soil, could not but severely impact the environment around it. Interestingly, there is very little documentation of these environmental challenges and possible critical voices against them. On the one hand, this is not very surprising as the BAM was built during Soviet times when open (scholarly or other kinds of) criticism was still rare and politically dangerous. There are a few Western summary publications that were written during these years and are based on Soviet sources (see, among others, Precoda, 1978; Rich, 1979; Rosencranz & Scott, 1991). Still, even these non-Soviet publications seem to have been more fascinated by the modernizing promises of the railroad than by its potential ecological problems. Rich is most uncritical and states, “BAM was planned with considerable respect for the environment” (Rich, 1979, p. 203), while Precoda conveys some problematic issues such as forest clear cutting and removal of moss from slopes (Precoda, 1978) Rosencranz and Scott, who published their review during the heydays of *perestroika* and the final year of the Soviet Union, are most critical, which is no surprise as they had more publications to work with that defied censorship. Still, even their account has more to say about social problems along the BAM (such as high worker turn-over and the housing shortage) than about ecological ones. More recently, the collective volume *An Environmental History of* speaks of “significant environmental impact” (Josephson et al., 2013, p. 78), “environmental degradation” (Josephson et al., 2013,

p. 101), and “endangering local forests and the Baikal basin” (Josephson et al., 2013, p. 235) when discussing the ecological impacts of the BAM. Still, the sources for these statements remain unclear or are the same ones mentioned above.

The historian Christopher Ward has made the interesting argument that the construction of the BAM was not just dominated by an ideology of development and modernization—or, as Ward calls it, “prometheanism”—but also contained an element of environmentalism, championed by local scientists, Komsomol functionaries, and local media (Ward, 2009, pp. 12–41). This reminds us that the process of building the BAM was not the smooth process of “mastering the North” as it seems in hindsight. As construction started in the 1970s, certain forms of environmental consciousness (especially around the issue of the pollution of Lake Baikal) had begun to develop (obviously, construction during the 1950s would have been very different in that respect, with or without Stalinism). Still, notwithstanding these critical ecological voices, in the end “prometheanism” prevailed and the main parts of the BAM were built within ten years. Historian Johannes Grützmacher, on the other hand, seems to accuse Ward of constructing ecological opposition in the context of the BAM without sufficient evidence (Grützmacher, 2012, p. 400). Likewise, Andreas Röhr sees the BAM project primarily as a foil for the projection of Soviet images of society’s struggle against nature and criticizes Soviet environmentalists in that context for not having been able to develop ecological counter models (Röhr, 2012, pp. 98–99). Weiner’s famous compendium of Russian and Soviet nature protection, however, mentions Komsomol’s skepticism and criticism toward the railroad megaproject during its early phases (Weiner, 1999, p. 405). While the political system of the Soviet Union left little room for any form of protest, one of the few well-documented cases of ecological protest during Soviet times was directed against pollution and environmental degradation at Lake Baikal (Rainey, 1991; Zaharchenko, 1990). The BAM passes Lake Baikal, which is a unique biological resource and has sacred significance for some of the area’s residents, in close proximity to its northern end. Interestingly, most of our local interlocutors during the 2010s did not highlight ecological issues when talking about the BAM and its consequences, with the exception of Evenki reindeer herders, whose movements and reindeer pastures had been severely impacted by the railroad.

Economic changes

While the level of environmental opposition to the BAM project remains somewhat unresolved, its ecological impact is undeniable. Even if people we talked to did not foreground ecology, it is clear that the indirect consequences of the BAM, such as enabling huge non-renewable resource extraction operations, have been tremendous. But what have been the economic impacts of building a railroad north of Lake Baikal?

The available literature on the relationship between railway construction and economic development remains somewhat ambiguous. While the “father” of modernization theory, W. W. Rostow, had declared that “the introduction of the railroad has been historically the most powerful single initiator of take-offs” (Rostow, 1960, pp. 302–303), a number of other economic historians during the 1960s (e.g., Fogel, 1964; Kellett, 1969; Mitchell, 1964) countered that the economic impacts of railroads were more modest by stimulating construction or reducing transportation costs. As John Kellett had expressed it in his classical work *The Impact of Railways on Victorian*

Cities, “if the steam locomotive by some chance had not been invented, economic progress would not have halted” (Kellett, 1969, p. 423). Kellett and Mitchell had based their analyses, however, on conditions in the UK (and Fogel in the USA), an area where rapid economic development and modernization were long under-way before railroads entered the scene. For our purposes—that is, to understand what difference the BAM made in the remote areas north of Lake Baikal—comparative examples from the north might be more fitting. Recently, a team of Swedish and Spanish economists and geographers attempted to assess the impact of railways on economic development in the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden between 1860 and 1960 (Enflo et al., 2018). They argue that the phenomenal transition of the Nordic countries from being part of Europe’s poor periphery to being among the most prosperous countries in the world during the century under consideration can to a certain degree be explained through improvements in the transport system, primarily through state planned and financed railroad expansion (Enflo et al., 2018, pp. 63–64).

In 1990, after the main stretches of the BAM had been completed and just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a group of US-American and Canadian geographers published an assessment of the regional development of the Soviet Far East (Rodgers, 1990). Robert North’s (1990) assessment of the transport system of the region is particularly relevant here. He argues that, in general, Soviet transport policies in remote areas were not built on the assumption that the expansion of transport would lead to economic development, but that the BAM was an exception to that rule by providing heavy investment ahead of demand (North, 1990, p. 215). While such a strong state initiative is reminiscent of railroad policies of Nordic countries, the economic impacts along the BAM seem to have been very different from Fennoscandia.

The economic and transport expectations of the BAM were high, namely to carry 35 million tons of cargo, including 25 million tons of crude oil, per year (Kin, 2015, p. 316). By 1987, the cargo seemed to be less than one million per year (North, 1990, p. 213). At the same time, the BAM seemed not only to be the most expensive Soviet railroad to build but also to be the costliest one to operate; in 1985, its ton-kilometer costs were the highest in the country (North, 1990, p. 214). In the end, the BAM has not yet fulfilled its exaggerated economic expectations, while at the same time it does act as economic engine of the region. This railroad might have been too expensive to build from a monetary perspective but it has changed the economic (and employment) landscape of the region significantly.

Demographic changes

As with the economic impacts of railroads, the case of the demographic efficacy of railway development is less straightforward than it seems at first glance. As John Kellett reminds us, London had become a metropolis with a population of two million during the pre-railway era (Kellett, 1969, p. 424). In the case of the BAM, however, things were clearly different. As mentioned above, Brezhnev’s prestige project did not just include the construction of a railroad line but the creation of new settlements along the way. This had two major demographic consequences: on the one hand, it increased the population of the region significantly, and, on the other hand, it shaped a new group of people who called themselves (and were called by others)

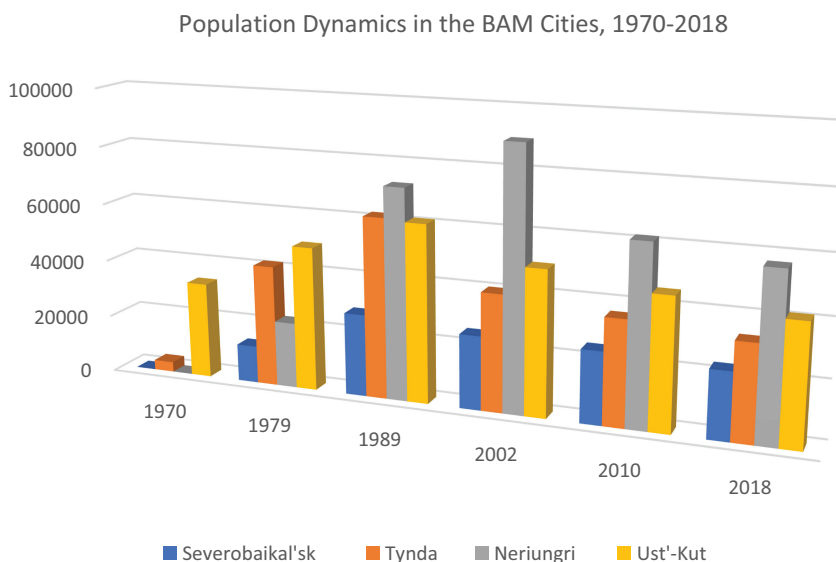


Figure 25.2 Population dynamics in the cities along the BAM, 1970–2018. By Vera Kuklina. Sources: Census and municipal data bases of the Russian Federal Service for Statistics.

“BAM builders” (Rus. *bamovtsy*). According to some estimates, over 500,000 labor migrants in their 20s and 30s arrived at construction sites from across different parts of the USSR (Ward, 2009).

Here is not the place to go into detailed demographic analysis. Instead, Figure 25.1 provides a glimpse into the demographic dynamics of the region, including its heterogeneity. For example, in Tynda, the “capital” of the BAM, we see enormous gains during the construction period and enormous losses ever since. Between 1970 and 1979, Tynda saw a twelvefold increase in population, another 50% increase between 1979 and 1989, and a steady decrease ever since (the numbers in 2018 were slightly more than half of the 1989 figures). While the general tendency of growth between 1970 and 1989, and losses ever since, holds more or less true for the entire region, there are significant differences. For example, the logistics hub of Ust'-Kut that marked the end of the railway line before the construction of the BAM, showed small increases and subsequent smaller decreases. The town of Severobaikal'sk, located at the northern end of Lake Baikal, is a prominent tourist destination and trading center. Thus, the decrease after 1989 was not very sharp and the population numbers for 2018 are still almost double from 1979. Finally, the South Yakutian gold mining town of Neriungri, the starting point of the Amur-Yakutsk Mainline (AYaM), grew between 1989 and 2002 and has since fallen to a level that is still 2.5 higher than in 1979 (also see Figure 25.2).

Sociocultural changes

The BAM project brought not only new population and railroad culture into the region, but also became an important social and cultural icon of the 1970s and 1980s (Ward, 2001). Migrants arriving at the railroad construction eventually formed a multicultural

socio-professional group with their own identity of *bamovtsy* in the process of ideological propaganda, communal labor, everyday life, and social practices. While socio-cultural characteristics of this group deserve a special analysis, in this section we will focus primarily on the impacts of the BAM on the society and culture of the population that had been living in the study region before the arrival of the megaproject.

The pre-BAM population of the present Tyndinskii, Kalarskii, and Severobaikal'skii districts includes Indigenous Evenki and Buryat, as well as earlier Soviet (primarily Russian) migrants to the North, including geologists, education and healthcare specialists, and other professionals. The BAM had ambiguous impacts on these local communities. On the one hand, Soviet ideology and popular culture transmitted with the BAM proliferated in this region in a short period of time and turned from a remote corner of the country into a center of attention for national mass media with a wide audience. On the other hand, the labor recruitment and remuneration practices at the BAM created social segregation and differentiation of living standards between the local population that was employed at low paying jobs in kolkhozes, and the migrant BAM builders (*bamovtsy*) who enjoyed significantly higher salaries and a number of other benefits (Ward, 2009).

The most dramatic sociocultural changes of the BAM concerned Indigenous minorities, primarily the Evenki. In contrast to other Indigenous groups (for example, Buryat, Sakha, and Russian Old Settler groups), this originally nomadic people has been least represented in terms of both population numbers and political and social empowerment and, thus, suffered most concerning the costs of the infrastructure project. First of all, the inflow of migrants due to the BAM construction has further demographically, socially, and culturally marginalized the Indigenous Evenki minority (Anderson, 1991). While BAM builders primarily settled in railroad towns and cities, they often visited Evenki villages and taiga camps for the exchange of products and joint cultural events. The interactions between *aborigeny* and *bamovtsy* ranged from fights to cooperation, friendships, and mixed marriages. The latter typically involved *bamovtsy* men and Indigenous women, which could be explained, unsurprisingly, by the predominance of men among the migrants at the BAM frontier (Grützmacher, 2005). The phenomenon of “the children of the BAM” (*deti BAMa*)—the next generation of local residents with mixed ethnic and cultural backgrounds and multiple or shifting linguistic and cultural competences and identities (Turaev 2004)—became one of the results of the interactions between the local and migrant populations during the BAM project.

Secondly, the BAM changed the traditional way of life associated with nomadism. While many Evenki, who traditionally practiced reindeer herding and hunting in taiga, were sedentarized already during the collectivization and so-called “cultural construction” that were unfolding in the Soviet North in the 1930s–1950s (Grant, 1995), the BAM project accelerated and, in some cases, completed the sedentarization of nomads in these remote parts of Siberia. The railroad construction and exploitation causing environmental pollution, forest fires, and destruction of pastures and hunting grounds have been pushing Evenki out of their traditional cultural domain of subsistence activities. The resource extraction projects associated with the BAM lead to further alienation of people from their traditional lands and, thus, reduce opportunities for continuing their traditional nomadic ways of life (Fondahl, 1998, Povoroznyuk, 2011).

Finally, the proliferation of Soviet popular culture and of the Russian language, the changes in the socio-demographic structure, and traditional land use and nomadic practices described above, led to an overall cultural assimilation and Russification of Indigenous Evenki people during and after the BAM construction. While Evenki communities residing off the railroad used and continue to use their relative remoteness from the railroad to strengthen local ways of life, as well as their language and culture (Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk, 2019), Indigenous villages in close proximity to the BAM were most effected by the changes that came with the BAM. The words of an Evenki resident from the village Pervomaiskoe connected to Tynda by an all-year road express the situation best:

The Baikal-Amur Mainline significantly impacted traditional industries and the way of life of the population that lives in this area traversed by the BAM. The [Indigenous] population decreased, life changed drastically...Now we can travel to Moscow or to anywhere by train or by plane, but there are no more reindeer. (Focus group with local administration, Evenki intelligentsia and reindeer herders, Pervomaiskoe, 2016)

THE BAM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The political, ideological, and socio-economic transformations following the dissolution of the Soviet Union opened the way for public criticism of the BAM project. In the 1990s, the negative environmental and social impacts of the railroad, as well as its high construction and maintenance costs were for the first time officially recognized. During this decade of political and economic liberalization, local and Indigenous activists were able to raise the issues of pollution and alienation of traditional lands, cultural assimilation, language loss, and transformation of traditional nomadic way of life under the pressure of infrastructure project. However, this relatively short period of critical reassessment of the BAM was followed by old discourses and images reaffirming the importance of the railroad at national, regional and local levels.

In the post-Soviet period, the BAM continued to be the main transportation artery and the centerpiece of regional development closely associated with further resource extraction plans. Although its role as a booster of infrastructural development and provider of social services to local communities changed, the monopolist national railroads company *RZbD* that currently administers the BAM, remains an important or, in some cases, the only employer for several monoindustrial towns (Kuklina et al., 2019). Railroad communities, in many cases, can use it for medium- and long-distance passenger travel supported with state subsidies. However, at a larger economic scale, the BAM serves primarily as a conduit for the transportation of resources and other cargo out of the region to international markets, as Figure 25.3 shows.

The increased utilization of the BAM in the context of economic growth and extraction of mineral resources, coal and oil has resulted in the launch of a program of technological modernization of the railroad in 2014. The program, which is called symbolically BAM-2, relies on Soviet ideologies, images and discourses of the BAM, as well as on some old regional development plans (Slavin, 1982). Nevertheless, it is being implemented under new economic conditions involving private investments and the utilization of shift labor from distant regions and post-Soviet countries. While the



Figure 25.3 Trains with cargo at the BAM station in Severobaikal'sk, 2018. Photo by Olga Povoroznyuk.

rhetoric and imagery of the BAM-2 initially raised public hopes and expectations of new development, its implementation practices and its limited or non-existent positive effects for local communities have triggered disenchantment with the new project and nostalgia for the Soviet BAM project (Povoroznyuk, 2020).

CONCLUSION

If we try to answer our slightly provocative title question, we cannot but state that the specific railroad in question—the BAM—made a tremendous difference in the parts of Eastern Siberia it now traverses. First of all, it has drastically transformed the taiga landscapes that had been previously mostly untouched by industrial development. Originally designed to boost regional development based on resource exploitation, it launched a large-scale construction of new settlements, roads, and resource extraction infrastructures. It is clear that different groups have been affected differently by the BAM. We have repeatedly pointed to the differences between Indigenous groups and railroad builders who settled there. Likewise, different segments of the Indigenous population (e.g., nomadic vs. settled) of the region have been affected differently. Among non-Indigenous people, the (Russian) settlers who had lived there before the BAM and the arrival of *bamovtsy* are often forgotten in this context. Our data confirm that the local (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) residents were pushed away from the railroad and its employment opportunities, leading to a spatial and social marginalization, which in some cases enabled them to lead lives affected to a lesser degree by the railroad than some of the other groups.

The effects of the BAM do not only vary among different groups of people but are also noticeably different among different settlements. Not surprisingly, settlements directly located at the BAM (and having a train station) feel the impacts of the railroad most. Communities located off the railroad and difficult to reach from there are obviously less impacted. The Indigenous villages that we included in our case study are well connected to the BAM by roads and, thus, have experienced its various impacts to a significant extent. Opportunities for enjoying the benefits of the BAM are thus not equally distributed within the region, creating a hierarchical politics of mobility (Schweitzer, 2020).

So, has the BAM been “good” or “bad” for the region? While it is not our aim to pass any value judgments, this question might be ultimately unanswerable. While the majority of our interlocutors would see the BAM in a more or less positive light, this shows first and foremost that the region under consideration here—the area north of Lake Baikal between Ust’-Kut and Tynda—is unimaginable today without the railroad that gives the region its name. The world inhabited by the residents of this region today would not exist—or rather, would be a radically different one—if Brezhnev would not have pushed through his prestige project. No matter whether one thinks that this project was economically, socially, or culturally wise, it created a new set of conditions that heavily preconfigure the present and future of the BAM region. While path dependence is a contested concept within development studies (Hetherington, 2017; Mahoney, 2000), it seems quite appropriate to speak of “track dependence” in our case. Still, notwithstanding all this “agency” of railroad infrastructure, we must not forget that political decisions and economic developments strongly influence “what infrastructure can do.” If nothing else, the similarities and differences between the Soviet BAM project and its post-Soviet modernization program remind us of that. This also means that “track dependence” should be understood as a process of continuity and change of political and economic regimes materialized in particular infrastructural forms such as railroad tracks.

NOTES

- 1 This article is based on research conducted within the framework of the project *Configurations of Remoteness: Entanglements of Humans and Infrastructure in the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) Region* (CoRe) supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [P 27625 Einzelprojekte]. During the final months of work on the article, the support came from “Building Arctic Futures: Transport Infrastructures and Sustainable Northern Communities” (InfraNorth), a research project funded by the European Research Council (Project ID 885646). Finally, we would like to acknowledge our local research partners, including local administration and archives for their hospitality and logistical support.
- 2 Komsomol is a syllabic abbreviation of the Russian name which is translated as “Communist Youth’s Union” or “Young Communists’ League.” It was largely a political youth organization that served the interests of the Communist Party and propagated socialist values among the young citizens of the Soviet Union.

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