



WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

Building Tomorrow: Exploring Infrastructures and Futurities

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Abstract: Infrastructures have become prominent research fields in anthropology and in the humanities and social sciences more generally (e.g., Buier, 2023; Harvey & Knox 2015; Star 1999). Questions that link infrastructures to development, sustainability, and transformation point to the importance of temporalities - not only the (ethnographic) present, but also the (historical) past and the (sociotechnical) future - as a key analytical lens. Infrastructures are planned, approved, built, operationalized, or renovated with the anticipation that they will, for example, create economic growth and improve the socioeconomic well-being of local populations. Consequently, one way to explore infrastructure development is to look at the broad range of desires, hopes, and fears toward the future of these “sociotechnical spaces” (Mason, 2004). Such sentiments or feelings are particularly strong towards infrastructural “mega-projects” which are very cost intensive, involve a variety of stakeholders, and affect millions of people (Flyvbjerg, 2017). Among such projects are motorways, airports, seaports, spaceports, rail lines, submarine cable systems, dams, wind farms, offshore oil and gas facilities. This workshop invites contributors to discuss the relationships between specifically large-scale infrastructures and futurities - affective and ideologically loaded desires or fears of being in the future - by reflecting on the following two questions: (1) What role do futurities play in the imagining, conceiving, and making of infrastructures and their futures? (2) How do infrastructural futurities shape the relationship between infrastructure development and sociocultural lifeworlds? The workshop will be structured by these two questions and participants will be asked to discuss them in at least two “tour the table” rounds, which are then followed by open discussions.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 25, 2024 | Slot 2 & 3 | Room 1

Giuseppe Amatulli: Defining modernity through infrastructures: when the narrative is used to shape a specific vision of the future

Philipp Budka: Notes on the Transformation of a Railway in Northern Manitoba, Canada

Manggala Ismanto: Navigating the future of Nusantara: Negotiation around Infrastructure(s) Development in Indonesia's New Capital City

Yakov Lurie: The Margins of Development: roadside trade and uncertain futures in

contemporary Russia

Olga Povoroznyuk, Peter Schweitzer, Alexandra Meyer: Reconfiguring Infrastructures, Revisioning Futures: The InfraNorth Scenario Workshops in Kirkenes

Katrin Schmid: Building Forever: How Mining Infrastructure Moulds Nunavut Futures

SESSION PAPERS

Defining modernity through infrastructures: when the narrative is used to shape a specific vision of the future

Giuseppe Amatulli

It has been argued that the main question when it comes to infrastructure development is not what an infrastructure is, but when. A myriad of things can be classified as infrastructures, but some of them become infrastructure as they embed relationships in the context of a particular activity. Infrastructures are not just artefacts related to the transport of goods, energy, people, to the extraction of resources and their usage; infrastructures are instrumental in making and maintaining relationships while allowing people to find their place in the world (Carse and Kneas 2019, 13). The very idea that an infrastructure will be finished and ready to be used shapes how people think, act, and talk about in relation to projects and the surrounding environment.

In the context of British Columbia, infrastructures may well be perceived in this way. Besides their role in transporting goods, resources, and people; they are instrumental tools to shaping specific relationships and a vision for the future. From economic to political relationships, encompassing the achievement of Reconciliation and self-Governance for First Nations, infrastructures are tools to be used to advance specific claims while transmitting a precise socio-economic and political idea of how a certain society should look like. In this contribution, I want to reflect on the idea that infrastructures are always unfinished and can never be completed, as the very idea that they transmit, their mission, and role in society is linked to a continuous development of society itself, its needs and vision for the future

Notes on the Transformation of a Railway in Northern Manitoba, Canada

Philipp Budka

Questions linking infrastructure to development, sustainability, and transformation point to the importance of temporality – not only the present and the past, but also the future – as a crucial analytical lens. This paper discusses the role of the Hudson Bay Railway (HBRY) as a key transport infrastructure in Northern Manitoba, Canada, by addressing the two workshop questions on futurities. The case of the HBRY, which begins in The Pas and terminates in Churchill, illustrates the entanglement and interdependency of transportation infrastructures. This is particularly evident when infrastructure is disrupted or fails. As in 2017, when spring floods washed out several sections of the railway, destroying the only land connection for many communities in Northern Manitoba. As a result, people and goods had to be flown in, locals lost their jobs and relocated

elsewhere.

Eventually, the railway was repaired and sold to a new consortium – the Arctic Gateway Group – that includes 41 local communities along the route. Thus, the HBRY transformed into the Arctic Gateway Railway, which is now fully under local ownership. In 2022, the governments of Canada and Manitoba announced that they would invest up to Can\$147 million to renovate and upgrade the railway and the port of Churchill to develop a “new trade corridor”. Such investments would facilitate not only the export of grain but also the shipping of energy and minerals. During my three visits to Churchill in 2022 and 2023, I observed that some individuals expressed concern that the community might become an energy shipping hub, which could have significant implications for other sectors, such as tourism. Others are excited about this opportunity, as it should bring new jobs to a shrinking community. This paper draws on ethnographic data, including results of future scenario workshops, collected for the ERC project InfraNorth.

Navigating the future of Nusantara: Negotiation around infrastructure(s) Development in Indonesia’s New Capital City

Ismanto Manggala

In 2019, the Indonesian government announced the relocation of the capital city from Jakarta to East Kalimantan. The new capital, "Nusantara," aims to be a "smart, green, beautiful, and sustainable" city to solve Jakarta's sinking, overcrowding, and Java-centric focus. Currently, the capital development focuses on an area of 6,671 hectares called the Central Government Core Area (CGCA). Web of Infrastructure such as roads, clean water pipelines, and river normalization are still under construction to support this area. Through the development of the infrastructures, we might understand how this technical pattern interacts with socio-cultural complexity.

Like many national strategic projects, building infrastructure will result in the need for land allocation. This process will interact with the interests of local people when their land is needed for the project. Different valuations of land in this land release process occur through different temporality. When villagers envision the future of how they live after receiving land compensation, on the other side, the state values land based on past and present conditions. Some villagers tried to resist by protesting the land acquisition, which might relocate the settlement, resulting in the negotiation of the design. At the same time, other villagers encounter a “blocked future” while everything is uncertain about information on land compensation and the timeline of the built infrastructure. That condition is characterized by being trapped in temporality when the capacity to anticipate (envision or plan) the future is to abstain.

The Margins of Development: roadside trade and uncertain futures in contemporary Russia

Yakov Lurie

The paper examines how road development and expectations of thereof induce anxiety among small roadside entrepreneurs in Russia. It presents three cases of different scales: 1) the development of a new high-speed expressway alongside the ‘old’ one, 2) plans to build a bypass road to circumvent specific towns, 3) the construction of road

fences. The three cases exemplify ‘the difficulty of differentiating where (and for whom) function ends and malfunction begins’ (Joniak-Lüthi, 2019, p. 146), shedding light on the social ramifications of state projects of the future manifested through ‘improvements’ in mobility infrastructure.

The advent of the expressway, while alleviating congestion and ostensibly enhancing safety, introduces unforeseen uncertainties for entrepreneurs. Previously buoyed by thriving trade, they now grapple with economic unpredictability and angst. Similarly, promises of a bypass road create anxiety among vendors long before the physical road's arrival. Apart from the large-scale changes, traders are also highly sensitive to small infrastructure adjustments, like the installation of fences separating the road and the roadsides, which many see not as a ‘safety measure’ but a scheme by local authorities and road services to eliminate their informal workplaces.

In each case, both physical and merely promised repair, development, and infrastructural modernization, lauded in public discourse as symbols of the ‘the future’/‘progress’, improved connectivity, and enhanced efficiency and safety, disrupt the familiar social fabric and temporality for roadside entrepreneurs. These changes pose tangible risks: economic instability, a loss of meaning in their work, fractured social relations with peers and drivers, and fears about the future.

* This paper is based on fieldwork conducted in 2020–2022 in two sites situated on federal highways in various regions of Russia where petty trade along roadsides is still a common way to make a living for a lot of people since the deindustrialization in the 1990s.

Reconfiguring Infrastructures, Revisioning Futures: The InfraNorth Scenario Workshops in Kirkenes

Olga Povoroznyuk, Peter Schweitzer, Alexandra Meyer

Kirkenes, a borderland town, also known as the capital of the Barents Region, played an important role in Arctic cooperation after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It was an iconic example of how good neighborly relations with Russia could lead to promising future opportunities. Those included business and tourism projects, cultural events, and joint infrastructural initiatives facilitating mobility and exchange between the countries. The seaport of Kirkenes was expected to turn into an international hub for the transport of minerals and other resources from West Siberia to Europe via the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The planned Arctic Railway should have linked Kirkenes with Rovaniemi and, therefore, with the Finnish railway system and European markets. Although both projects were put on hold because of the lack of economic prospects (and because of Sami protests in the case of the railroad), they continued to be publicly debated up to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Since the beginning of our fieldwork in Kirkenes, many of our interlocutors have been expressing their feelings of frustration, lost opportunities, and uncertainty. Therefore, in September 2023, InfraNorth teamed up with the Barents Institute and other local institutions to organize two scenario workshops. This paper discusses the results of these workshops, including visions of possible and desirable futures expressed there.

They include scenarios for infrastructural development in the context of environmental, socio-economic, and geopolitical changes faced by local residents Kirkenes and the Sør-Varanger Municipality.

Building Forever: How Mining Infrastructure Moulds Nunavut Futures

Katrin Schmid

A diamond is forever, or so people say. In Nunavut, Canada, mining currently offers the greatest economic potential for the territory, whether the products are uranium, iron ore, or kimberlites which later become diamonds. Mines are built and their infrastructures sink into the tundra or jut out into the Arctic Ocean. Residents of the territory must then engage with these infrastructures – either from afar, through their employment, or for personal use beyond the mine’s activities. While the diamond may be forever, what of the infrastructure necessary to procure the diamond, the employment opportunities and regional benefits offered by mining companies? Mining is not uncontested in Nunavut, but the economic potential of the industry carries weight in decision-making processes. The Nunavut Land Use Plan and the process of Nunavut’s devolution from the federal government provide new opportunities for the territory to define its economy and direct its future, where mining will certainly play an important role. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the Qikiqtani region of Nunavut from May 2022 to December 2023, I examine how Nunavut residents attach ideas of the future to mining projects in their territory, focussing specifically on the Baffinland Mary River iron ore mine near Pond Inlet and the planned DeBeers Chidliak diamond mine project near Iqaluit. I ask how previous and current mining projects influence perceptions of residents, businesses, and politicians, and engage with their ideas of what the mining infrastructure may take away from, or contribute to, in their own lives and desires for the future.