

УДК 316.35

## **Identity, Community and Belonging (on the Example of Kezhemsky & Evenkiysky Municipal Districts of Krasnoyarsk Krai)**

**Anatoly M. Ablazhey<sup>a,b,\*</sup> and Craig R. Campbell<sup>c</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> *Institute of Philosophy and Law of SB RAS  
8 Nikolaev Str., Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia*

<sup>b</sup> *Novosibirsk State University  
2 Pirogova Str., Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia*

<sup>c</sup> *University of Texas in Austin  
1 University Station, Austin, Texas, 78712, USA*

Received 24.01.2018, received in revised form 04.04.2018, accepted 09.04.2018

---

*This article is devoted to the analysis of social and cultural transformation of communities in remote regions of Siberia where people have been forced to adapt to new places of residence and change their living conditions sharply. Whole communities were forced to relocate and to adapt to new conditions following the construction of hydroelectric power stations and the subsequent creation of reservoirs, flooding once inhabited territories and villages. This study makes use of sociological research conducted in two regions of Siberia: Kezhemsky and Evenkiysky Municipal Districts of Krasnoyarsk Krai. Our study shows that the elimination of stable family and friend networks accompanies displacement inevitably. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that when planning for the construction of giant hydroelectric power stations, authorities have not taken into consideration the interests of the local population – neither in the Soviet period nor in the post-Soviet period. The authors show that most of the inhabitants of the flooded villages on the Angara are now living in suburbs of major cities like Krasnoyarsk and Abakan and that they are rapidly losing their former identity. It is rare that existing modes of living are maintained through refusal to move to other regions of the country. In one case the unique local culture of descendants of Pomors, who moved to the banks of the Angara several centuries ago, has been lost due to forced displacement. In Evenkiysky District, the preservation of many cultural practices and traditions is possible only if there is no construction of proposed hydroelectric power stations.*

*Keywords: industrial development, intercultural contacts, livelihood, cultural adaptation and transformation.*

*This study was performed with the support of the Multipurpose Program of Fundamental Scientific Research of Siberian Branch of RAS “Integration and Development”, project II.2P/-XI.179-3 “«Old» and «New» Identities in the Regions of Intensive Industrial Development in Siberia (Theoretical and Methodological Analysis)”.*

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0246.

*Research area: social structure, social institutions and processes.*

---

© Siberian Federal University. All rights reserved

\* Corresponding author E-mail address: [ablazhey@academ.org](mailto:ablazhey@academ.org)

The tendency to strengthen regional identity is characteristic primarily for national-territorial autonomies and is the reaction to the power strengthening of the federal centre in modern Russia. This tendency reveals in the regional self-awareness that has developed rapidly during the last two decades and is realised in compulsory lessons on local history at school, the introduction of regional coats of arms, flags, anthems, etc. On the other hand, intensive industrial development followed by the sharp growth of migration and, as a result, the complication of intercultural and interconfessional interaction led to the emergence of a “new” regional identity as a product of transformation, rethinking and reflection on the “old” identity traditional for the region.

**The purpose of our research** was to fix and comprehend the modern trends in the identity formation in some regions of Siberia. It included the recognition of traditional and modern components in regional identity; the impact of federal and regional authorities, religious and cultural organizations on its formation and transformation; search for foci of hidden conflicts and the ways to optimize them.

From our point of view, the abundant material for considering this is provided by the analysis of history of constructing giant hydroelectric power stations (hereinafter referred to as HPS) in Siberia. The flooding of huge plains connected with the construction of giant hydroelectric power stations and constantly accompanied by mass forced resettlement has been one of the most acute problems in the socio-economic development of the region for more than half a century. Let us recall that the development of large hydroelectric power stations in Siberia “began much later than in the European part of the country. The World War II changed the situation... <...> Immediately after the end of the war, the building of large hydroelectric power plants on the Ob and the Angara Rivers was put

on the agenda” (Pervaia bol’shaia GES, 2017). However, soon Siberia advanced far ahead in terms of the scale and volume of resources, which were spent on the construction. These processes involved first and foremost the Eastern Siberia. While the construction of the hydroelectric power stations on the Ob River was finished in the late 1950s in connection with the beginning of the development of the Western Siberia oil and gas province, the Boguchany station, the last built on the Angara River, was put into action only at the beginning of the 2010s.

Intensive industrial development of a particular territory implies, as a rule, a drastic change (or at least a severe complication) of the habitual life support schemes for the population. The withdrawal of rivers, pastures, hunting grounds from the economic turnover is also accompanied by a steady increase in the number of newcomers, working, in most cases, on a rotational basis.

The sharp increase in the intensity of contacts between locals (aborigines and Russian old-timers) and newcomers (shift workers) causes the corresponding intensified interaction in the spheres of culture, language, religion, economic traditions, etc. Leaving aside the economic feasibility of building another giant hydroelectric power station on the Angara, in this article we think it necessary to focus attention on the socio-psychological and environmental problems arising in the course of the station construction and connected primarily with the inevitable inundation of a large area of the river basin.

The **empirical basis** for the analysis of the phenomenon of regional (local) identity for us are the results of studies conducted in the Evenkiysky Municipal District in 1998 and 2008, and in the Kezhemsky District of Krasnoyarsk Krai in 2010-2011 (villages Bolturino, Nedokura, Kosoy Byk, Kezhma and others), as well as in two settlements of the Ust-Ilimsk District of Irkutsk Oblast:

Nevon and Keul. In the course of our study we used methods of comparative analysis, discursive analysis of free unmotivated interviews, content analysis of the regional press, and participant observation.

The choice of the territories of the Evenkiysky and Kezhemsky Municipal Districts of Krasnoyarsk Krai as a **research object** was made by a number of reasons. Firstly, not long ago the Evenkiysky Municipal District had the status of an autonomous region and, accordingly, was a federal subject of Russia.

With an extremely small population (slightly more than 17 thousand people at the beginning of 2007), the district had the same status attributes as, for example, Moscow with its more than 10 million population. On January 1, 2007, according to the results of the referendum, the district lost its autonomy status and became only a municipal district, but the local self-consciousness and the reasons that had produced it did not disappear anywhere: it is still named after the title of the indigenous population (the Evenks), has its own pronounced ethno-cultural specificity, and claims a special role in the current administrative and territorial situation in Krasnoyarsk Krai. The ethnic specifics of the region played an important role in the discussion of the most acute for the local population problem – the possible construction of a giant hydroelectric power station on the river Nizhnyaya (Lower) Tunguska. Another important point here is that we have an opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of the dynamics of the regional self-awareness transformation over the past 30 years – from the late Soviet period to modern Russia. The fact is that the plans for the construction of the Evenkiysky HPS (then called Turukhansky) were actively discussed for the first time in 1988, when for the first time the opinion of the local population was taken into account, which is evidenced by the conducted sociological study.

As a result, perhaps, for the first time, the strong position of the local inhabitants became the most important factor in abolishing the plans for the largest hydroelectric complex construction.

Let us remember that according to the study results, most experts expressed confidence that the construction of the hydroelectric power station and the consequent formation of a reservoir would destructively influence the relevant forms and methods, leading to the collapse of the existing local life-support model for the Evenki population living in the zone of possible flooding. One of the most grave and painful problems would be the transfer of existing settlements from the flooding zone; the plans of the project developers directly contradicted the centuries-old principles of choosing a place of residence convenient for life and economy, including work, everyday life, transport convenience, especially taking into account the peculiarities of the terrain, the climate, the well-established schemes for delivering the necessary goods, etc. Public opinion expressed not only the attitude to the very idea of construction, but also reflected, in fact, the deep problems of human-nature interaction in the specific conditions of the region. These problems were viewed through the prism of the specific culture of the population living here, primarily indigenous in origin (aborigines and Russian old-timers). There was a stable concept that in case of the construction of the hydroelectric power station, the conditions for material and production activities in the most traditional for the native population forms will disappear. The authors of the study noted the existence of an overall opinion among the local population that the construction of the hydroelectric power station threatens the very existence of the Evenks as a consolidated ethnic group of the region, as well as the established models of vital activity for all groups of the population living here, including the Russians – both old-timers and recent migrants.

Boguchany HPS, the construction of which was completed on the Angara River several years ago, had been a long-delayed construction since the Soviet times. The task for drawing up the technical project of the Boguchany HPS was approved by the Ministry of Energy of the USSR in April 1969, an additional task was approved in January 1976. The technical project of the Boguchany HPS was approved on December 7, 1979, by the decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR; in accordance with this project, the capacity of the HPS was to be 3000 MW, the normal reservoir check level was to reach 208 m. The construction of the station was launched following the decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of April 30, 1980; in accordance with it, the launch of the first units of the station was scheduled for 1988, and the completion of construction – for 1992. But the construction was delayed in the early 1990s and resumed only in 2006, in connection with the implementation of “The Development Program of the Lower Angara Regions”.

The “Program” proved the necessity of building the station primarily by the interests of the development of the aluminium industry (specifically – the plant of RUSAL company, which determined its willingness to participate in the completion of the hydroelectric power station). However, after the crisis of 2008 these plans were put on hold, therefore the whole financial burden of the station’s construction was taken on by RusHydro (Boguchanskaia GES, 2017).

The “Soviet” history of the Boguchany HPS played a fatal role for the local population: since the project of the station was approved back in 1979, all procedures related to the assessment of environmental and socio-economic damage for the residents of the area were also considered to have been carried out. Due to this fact the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) procedure, stipulated by the modern Russian

legislation, was also not carried out at the time of the construction’s resumption. According to hydropower engineers, “there is a section devoted to environmental protection as part of the project documentation for Boguchany HPS, which... was approved by the chief state inspection in 1979.... the repetition of state expertise would be excessive” (Boguchanskaia GES, 2017). As a result, all attempts to somehow change the project, for example, to reduce the estimated height of the dam of 208 meters and thereby diminish the flooding area, were unsuccessful.

During the construction of the Boguchany HPS almost 1.5 thousand km<sup>2</sup> of land were flooded, including almost 300 km<sup>2</sup> of farmland (arable land, hayfields and pastures) and more than 1100 km<sup>2</sup> of forest. The total amount of tree and shrub vegetation in the flooded area was estimated at almost 10 million m<sup>3</sup> (the same amount was cut down during the preparation of the reservoir lodge in the 1980s). Since, according to the Water Code, the Boguchany reservoir is a federal property, the preparation of its flooding zone (population resettlement, archaeological work, disforestation, etc.) was financed mainly from the federal budget. The following important circumstances should be noted: full forest clearance, based on a scientific forecast of water quality in the reservoir, was deemed impractical by the decision of the governmental commission; the forest clearance was carried out in the special areas that fell into the following categories: the secured zone of the hydroelectric complex; sanitary zone of settlements; the course of the ships’ passage; booming ground.

As a result, environmental problems went hand in hand with the astounding mismanagement. Instead of earning money on logging, in a number of cases, the taiga was simply burned.

At the same time, they often tried to burn the newly logged-off forest, which led to quite expected consequences. Felled as early as in the

1980s forest areas have again overgrown with trees in two decades. No one was going to cut over these trees (because of low value of such timber), which means that the forest went under the water in the bud and would rot, poisoning it for many years. Scattered in the taiga numerous remains of harvesting and other equipment, which are unlikely to be removed too, would also end up in the water. Had the forest been exported, it was done in the most costly way: it was floated down the Angara, not far from the HPS it was loaded on trucks and then was transported by land through the station. No channel or gate was provided for in the body of the HPS (it is a common feature of the most Angara's hydroelectric structures – there are no inlet gates both at Bratsk and Ust-Ilimsk stations). After forest clearance about 8.5 million m<sup>3</sup> of tree and shrub vegetation went under water, when the reservoir was being filled with water. It is forecast that the gradual floating up of peat will continue during next 20 years, which will require taking measures for towing and securing the peat islands.

Flooding and waterlogging areas of the Boguchany reservoir cover 29 population centers (25 of them were in Krasnoyarsk Krai and 4 – in Irkutsk Oblast), the population of which was completely or partially relocated. The overall number of resettled people by the project was estimated at 12,200 people, most of whom (about 8,000) were relocated in the 1980s and early 1990s. The migration of another part of inhabitants because of vague opportunities, connected with HPS building, was stopped then and resumed only in 2008. During 2008-2012, more than 5,100 people (over 1,700 families) were resettled from the flood zone in Krasnoyarsk Krai.

In the Soviet period, the population moved both to cities and nearby settlements (types of inhabited localities in Russia) and to new villages created along the banks of the future reservoir: Novaya Kezhma, Novoe Bolturino, and so on.

Nowadays they are depressing places to live in. With the resumption of the station's construction in 2008, it was decided to move people only to the south cities of Krasnoyarsk Krai and Khakassia: to Kodinsk, Abakan and Achinsk. In Irkutsk Oblast, where about 1,700 people should have been relocated from the settlements Keul and Nevon, resettlement was conducted in 2012-2015. People mostly migrated to Bratsk and Ust-Ilimsk

When discussing the issues of forced immigration of a large number of people, on the one hand we must take into consideration both special economic aspects such as providing immigrants with new housing, jobs, kindergartens and schools for children. On the other hand, lest we forget that affected population is rural, having well-established traditions and forms of life-support, so when these people move to the city they experience well understandable problems, both economic and daily, for example, they do not know how to build relationships with people, how to use unusual amenities, how to behave on the street, etc., how to provide livelihood in the absence of a garden, etc. The need to change routine way of life in no time made local population of Kezhma think up of some adaptation strategies.

1. It was stated necessary to maintain the habitual forms of life support as much as possible, which implied moving to Kodinsk whose population has grown much in recent years due to its proximity to the station under construction. It is borne in mind that the migrant family will be able to get a new hunting area and practice new methods of fishing in the near future, etc. Such people are relatively few in number but they appear and behave most actively, realizing that the inevitable breakdown of life support schemes is not far off.

2. People tend to move to a completely new place of residence (Krasnoyarsk, the southern regions of Krasnoyarsk Krai, Khakassia, other

regions of Siberia) due to dramatic change of life goals. Such a move is perceived by people as a chance to start a “new life”, improve living conditions, give children significantly greater opportunities to implement life plans, etc. Such a strategy is mainly characteristic of women.

3. The desire to forget about problems turns into alcohol deprivation very quickly. This is typical of the male part of the population in the very Kodinsk and so-called new settlements built on high, non-flooded areas of the future reservoir instead of demolished villages Novaya Nedokura, Novoe Bolturino. People perfectly understand that flooding is on the horizon and nothing can be changed, but they try to overcome the feeling of despair and fear in the usual way. It should not be forgotten that for almost two decades many local residents have had their things packed and have been ready to go. The planned resettlement was first put off, then postponed (but not canceled) for an indefinite period due to the conservation of construction.

As a consequence, the villagers did not repair houses or paint fences, etc. thinking like “sooner or later they will force us to move”. On the other hand, there were also phenomena of endless waiting and conviction of themselves and others that inundation and the inevitable relocation will happen sometime, but not today or tomorrow. A hard return to real problems was also one of the key factors causing depression.

A separate pressing problem is the transfer of cemeteries (a dramatic scene immediately reminding of V. Rasputin’s story “Farewell to Matyora”). All who wanted to transfer the graves of their relatives were invited to submit applications, but it is unlikely that everyone will make such a decision; in addition, there are many abandoned graves which are not looked after. After the strong protests of the Lithuanian embassy there appeared a chance to transport the remains of Lithuanian exiles back to their homeland, but this procedure

is unlikely to affect single graves. The problem of cemeteries in general became one of the most painful, since it entails not only sanitary aspects, but the tragedy of people who could lose all contacts with their ancestors.

All the described processes had the most radical impact on the local identity: moving to a new place is unavoidably accompanied by the weakening of established family, friendly and neighbourhood ties. Former dwellers of Kezhma now inhabit the suburbs of Krasnoyarsk and Abakan, and even for the adult population, not to mention children, it is hard to maintain their former identity. We might hardly get relatively homogeneous answers to the question “Who do you think you are now?” asked to these people. In fact, there was a cultural catastrophe of a local scale. Territories which have been inhabited since the Paleolithic era could no longer be lived on. This is one of the first cases in Russian post-Soviet history of such a large-scale resettlement. And again it went according to the notorious “budget (cost-neutral) variant”. This tragic situation is aggravated by the fact that the unique local culture of the descendants of the Pomors, who moved to the banks of the Angara a few centuries ago, has been lost; scattered across the different parts of Siberia their descendants will lose specific, characteristic for Kezhma dwellers cultural skills in one or two generations.

In this situation, it is not at all surprising that when the authorities asked an opinion of the local population on the expediency of building another large station – Evenkiysky HPS, the overwhelming majority of local residents spoke out against it. The study of the dynamics of the socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres, conducted in Evenkia in 2008, shows that little has changed in the socio-economic sphere during the previous twenty years (Ablazhey, 2010).

The specific life-support model continues to operate. Its main components are the



appropriating forms (hunting, fishing, gathering of wild plants, to a lesser extent reindeer husbandry) on the one hand, and state subsidising (earlier from the federal budget and now – from the regional centre) in various forms – pensions, allowances, compensation for the high cost of both imported and manufactured goods, etc. The possible construction and subsequent operation of hydroelectric power station can affect this model negatively – at least from the point of view of the majority of the local population. An analysis of their interviews shows that the planners did not set themselves the task of bringing any weighty arguments that would make the program of social and economic development of the territory (associated with the HPS construction) attractive for the local population. It is now obvious that the local population, due primarily to purely economic reasons, such as the high cost of building transmission lines in regional climatic conditions, will not be able to use electricity from the HPS, whereas let the imperfect and expensive, but habitual and familiar scheme of northern delivery (first and foremost of the energy carriers (fuel oil, coal, kerosene)) will inevitably be transformed with inherent losses for the region in case of creating the HPS and a reservoir. All the objections formulated in the 1988 study results and related to the preservation of the Evenks as a consolidated ethnic group within the boundaries of modern Evenkia remain topical as well.

In other words, the regional specificity of Evenkia recognized at all levels of government, from the federal to the regional ones, exacerbated by the problem of ethnic identity keeping, remains a powerful means of exerting pressure on these very authorities; nevertheless, the possible construction of the hydroelectric power station will lead to a rapid and almost fatal liquidation of the regional specificity. Regional patriotism is like smouldering coals: when a strong wind starts blowing, the bonfire can burn again; the logical transition of the discussion to the predictable confrontation between Moscow and regions may also extremely escalate the matter.

### Conclusion

The entire course of debate about the construction projects for giant hydroelectric power stations in the part that concerns the interests of the local population forced to move to new places of residence proves that these interests have never been taken seriously – neither in the Soviet, nor in the post-Soviet period. The troubles of several thousand people seemingly concede to the multi-billion dollar budget, the “strategic interests of the country”, “national security”, etc. And if the project for the construction of the station on the Nizhnyaya (Lower) Tunguska becomes urgent again, one should at least try to set a new trend not only in the corresponding discussions, but also in the solution of the problems described above.

### References

Ablazhey, A.M., Ablazhey, N.N. (2010). Evenkiiskaia GES 20 let spustia: opyt sotsial'noi otsenki mega-proekta [Evenk HPS 20 years later: experience in social evaluation of a mega-project], *In Stanovlenie industrial'no-urbanisticheskogo obshchestva v Uralo-Sibirskom regione. Podkhody, issledovaniia, rezul'taty. Materialy mezhhregional'noi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii. [Formation of industrial-urban society in the Ural-Siberian region. Approaches, studies, results. Materials of interregional scientific-practical conference]*. Novosibirsk, 99–109.

*Boguchanskaia GES [HPS in Boguchany]*, available at <http://www.boges.ru/gidrostantsiya/istoriya-stroitelstva/> (accessed 25 May 2017).

*Pervaia bol'shaia GES v Sibiri [First Great HPS in Siberia]*, available at: <http://blog.rushydro.ru/?p=9449> (accessed 15 August 2017).

## **Феномен локальной идентичности в условиях интенсивного промышленного освоения территории (на примере населения Кежемского и Эвенкийского муниципальных районов Красноярского края)**

**А.М. Аблажей<sup>а,б</sup>, К. Кэмпбелл<sup>с</sup>**

<sup>а</sup> *Институт философии и права СО РАН  
Россия, 630090, Новосибирск, ул. Николаева, 8*

<sup>б</sup> *Новосибирский государственный университет  
Россия, 630090, Новосибирск, ул. Пирогова, 2*

<sup>с</sup> *Университет Техаса в Остине  
США, 78712, Техас, Остин, University Station, 1*

---

*Статья посвящена анализу трансформации локальной идентичности населения удаленных регионов Сибири в ходе адаптации к новым местам проживания и резко изменившимся условиям жизнедеятельности. Необходимость подобной адаптации обусловлена строительством ГЭС и затоплением территории традиционного проживания. В качестве эмпирической базы использованы материалы социологических исследований, проведенных в двух регионах Сибири: Эвенкии и Кежемском районе Красноярского края. Показано, что вынужденный переезд на новое место неизбежно сопровождается размыванием сложившихся семейных, дружеских, соседских связей. Ситуацию усугубляет то обстоятельство, что при обсуждении проектов строительства гигантских ГЭС всерьез никто не учитывал интересы местного населения – ни в советский, ни в постсоветский периоды. Авторы доказывают, что жители затопленных деревень на Ангаре, теперь населяющие пригороды Красноярска и Абакана, стремительно теряют прежнюю идентичность. Стратегия адаптации, предусматривающая максимально полное следование сложившейся модели жизнеобеспечения и отказ от переезда в другие регионы страны, встречается редко. По сути, налицо процесс утраты уникальной локальной культуры потомков поморов, переселившихся на берега Ангары несколько столетий назад. В Эвенкии сохранение специфической модели жизнеобеспечения (традиционные отрасли хозяйства и дотационная помощь со стороны государства), а значит, и сохранение советской по своей природе локальной идентичности возможны только при отказе от строительства ГЭС.*

*Ключевые слова: промышленное освоение, межкультурные контакты, модель жизнеобеспечения, трансформация.*

*Данное исследование выполнено при поддержке Комплексной программы фундаментальных научных исследований Сибирского отделения РАН «Интеграция и развитие», проект II.2П/-XI.179-3 «“Старая” и “новая” идентичности в регионах интенсивного промышленного освоения Сибири (теоретико-методологический анализ)».*

*Научная специальность: 22.00.04 – социальная структура, социальные институты и процессы.*

---