ABSTRACT

"GO ON AND SAVE THE HUMANKIND!"
THE SYMBOLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL FEMINISATION OF CIVIC
ACTIVISM IN RUSSIA

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In the paper I will discuss the gendered aspects of civic activism in contemporary Russia. Through the case
of civic activism, I will explore the gendered implications and manifestations of the social transformation
process in Russia, and the continuities and discontinuities in the Russian gender system. The paper is based
on an ethnographic fieldwork in civic organisations in a provincial town in Central Russia.

In the paper I argue that post-socialist civic activism is a feminised sphere of activity, and this feminisation
manifests itself both at the discursive/symbolic and at the institutional level. I examine this feminisation
process from three perspectives.

Firstly, I analyse through my interview material what kind of gendered meanings actors in civic
organisations attribute to civic activism. I present how actors through different discursive frameworks
produce civic activism as feminine, as "women's work". I ponder upon what kind of frictions and tensions
emerge within and between the discourses and examine the functions and implications of these discourses.

Secondly, I probe into the feminisation of civic activism at the institutional level. I hypothesise that unlike
during perestroika and in the beginning of the 1990s, Russian civic activism today is female-dominated,
women forming the majority of the membership in civic organisations. I present some explanations what
might have contributed to this feminisation process.

Thirdly, I explore the link and interaction between the discursive and the institutional level, i.e. I analyse
how the discourses materialise and facilitate or hinder collective action.