Gender Equality and Culture (Russian Federation)

Informkultura, Russian State Library

In Russia, gender related issues, especially if taken in the aspect of women’s empowerment and overcoming discriminatory mass perceptions of lower social status of women, as well as the questions related to culture belong to the periphery of general public and political interests and awareness. However, the problems of culture and gender have happened to be inter-related in Russia; what is more, they tend to compound. In a narrower sense, the educational and professional segregation, lower female salary levels, under-representation of women in decision-making, or the overall gender asymmetry are pertinent to the cultural sector and apparent indeed.

On the one hand, among the scholars, feminist and cultural actors, there is a widespread awareness that the role and potential of gender and culture oriented policies is underestimated. On the other, in spite of the multiple research and practical approaches made to the problems of both gender and culture these topics remain unclear for public and political consciousness. Even the very notions of ‘gender,’ ‘feminism,’ ‘culture’ in contemporary interpretations lack recognition. In this situation, professional and public discussions break through neo-traditional visions and attitudes are proposed as the efficient means to meet contemporary challenges of gender equality.

1 Russian Road to Gender Parity

For Russian women, the transition to gender equality began in the second half of the 19th century due to the general social modernisation. Young women from insufficient but socially high standing families that needed to earn living were its driving force; education was the propulsion (see ill. 1). Female educational institutions were opened around Russia; some of their graduates went to European countries where university education was available for women. However, the bulk of female population was illiterate though gender historians estimate that at the beginning of the 20th century Russia disposed of a legion of highly educated women which was almost the most numerous in Europe.

The gender parity and equal rights of women for creativity were recognised and respected within the educated and creative strata of Russian society; the latter constituted a “supremely conjugal world” as many of artists were married couples. The extremely creative epoch known as the Silver Age (from the 1890s to the 1910s) together with the Russian Modernism had also a ‘female visage’. The worldwide recognition of Russian 20th century poetry is linked to works of Marina Tsvetaeva and Anna Akhmatova; the "women of genius" Natalia Goncharova, Olga Rosanova, Lyudmila Popova are known as 'Amazons of Avant-Garde.' The World War I made a break in Russian modernisation but also mobilised women for medical professions where they are still keeping the strongest position (see 3.1).

The Russian revolution that followed the war had totally changed the social system in Russia giving impetus to the new developments in the field of gender equality [see 10]. The ‘liberation of women of labour’, abolition of ‘domestic slavery’ and improvements in their educational level and living standards were proclaimed as political, social and cultural goals of the state. In fact, that was establishment of state control over gender related issues and imposition of political constraints. Those belonging to the former ‘educated classes’ were overshadowed by representatives of the
working class or merged into the background to escape suppression. The status of liberal arts education and related professions (including wages received) degraded.

In the 1920s, the gender equality of rights in economic, social, juridical and political spheres was officially stated; positive discrimination norms were adopted providing for women’s welfare and their reproductive rights. However, within the establishing etacratic system gender regulations were ideologised: women’s rights were linked to class struggle and construction of socialism; political and labour involvement in socialist construction was a warranty for enjoying full rights. The Soviet state set a policy that supported general struggle against illiteracy and labour involvement of women to provide for their economic independence. However, many of them when entering the labour market were unskilled and had to practice heavy manual low-paid labour; jobs concerned with paper work were also gradually feminised.

The state had also promised to provide for childcare, dining services and other facilities that might reduce the burden of routine homework or ‘byt’; inspired by this rhetoric and the utopia of human beings remaking, modernist architects and planners proposed new forms of communal dwelling. Yet by the beginning of the 1930s, it became clear that this state project failed and yielded to assumption that problems of byt and care for children were woman’s business. Since then double labour burden was officially imposed on working women. The former ideas of women’s sacrifice were brought back and generally accepted by Soviet society. Thus, traditionalist worldviews and understanding of gender roles though shadowed by official rhetoric were not only preserved but also given a new lease of life.

The 1930s became a period of interweaving modern and traditionalist approaches to gender problems that had produced a “double bind” (Olga Vainstein). Official commitment to gender equality resulted e.g. in sharp rise of female education level and women’s involvement with ‘male’ professions and occupations – extreme sports of the time, air navigation etc. On the other hand, traditional family roles including women’s vocation to become mothers and look after family members were fostered by ‘communalisation’ of urban dwelling (‘compacting’ big apartments by lodging there several families). It turned corridors, kitchens and toilet facilities into common areas thus abolishing privacy. Communal living strongly affected all aspects of life and feminised housework.

Ilya Kabakov, a Soviet-born conceptual artist, in his installations deals with the various aspects of living in communal apartment and related mentality which he comments as follows:

“Who rules this world? Without a doubt, matriarchy rules in a communal apartment. Men feel like outsiders, they almost never go into the kitchen, and they don’t often look out into the corridor either. All contacts are established by women, and the atmosphere primarily depends on them. Sometimes, this is a wonderful world of mutual assistance – favours, treats, trusting conversations and advice. And sometimes, it is a very evil world of endless arguments, insults, animosity and revenge that lasts for years...”

A new wave of women’s labour mobilisation was produced by severe situation of the World War II (1941–1945) when women were to replace men in their workplaces; moreover, about 490 thousand women were called up for military service. During the war period, many women obtained a higher
administrative status and were admitted to leadership and decision-making; when the war ended
and men returned to civil activities women had to make way for them and found themselves
marginalised from opportunities for professional advancement. However, the educational level of
women and professionalization of their labour grew while women’s job position worsened. Most of
women kept on working as one (man’s) salary usually was not enough for material well-being of a
family. In spite of a high educational level of women which had equalled that of men by the 1980s,
many women did not hope for career; they were agreeable to lower wages as in a family their salary
was regarded as a ‘supplementary’ one. In the 1970s and the 1980s, a ‘working mother’ was formally
believed an ‘attainable ideal’ [10].

Taken at face value, gender mainstreaming was totally successful in the Soviet Union but the
transition period that followed has uncovered persisting limitations and stereotypes. In the Soviet
era, the gender discourse was officially regulated in a way which produced in public consciousness a
feeling of ‘gender’ and ‘sex’ indistinctness and even ‘absence’. These patterns became ‘cultural
obstacles’ to mainstreaming gender equality issues and thwarted progress in their public discussion
when perestroika began. Then freedom of expression and information were introduced coinciding
with IT dissemination that provided new means to express and to share ideas, values and creativity.
Numerous changes in gender related issues were also brought with it.

A wave of women’s movement emerged in the end of the 1980s as a result of ‘perestroika’ and
became a part of the general democratisation trend. The first most active representatives of
women’s movement belong to academic and creative intelligentsia who adopted feminist ideas as
those related to democracy and human rights. In 1993, the first in Russian history gender deputy
faction ‘Women of Russia’ was established in the parliament; by 1996, there were about 400 feminist
and women’s organisations the number of which continued to grow. In the 1990s that were dubbed
the “gender decade” a number of regional centres for gender studies were created and gender issues
were introduced into the higher school curricula; Russian women joined the international gender
activities.

Meanwhile, the term ‘feminism’ was rejected, the term “gender” was felt suspicious and a link
between gender issues and human rights was not clearly understood by the wider audiences. At the
beginning of the new century, the majority of population was still adjacent to paternalist model of
society with a powerful state that holds down the strong and supports the weak. Today, the
customary value system is often described as an amorphous mix of traditionalist and modernist
beliefs that includes extreme individualism, aggressive pursuit of personal success and
neoliberal ideology dominating the public sphere in which gender related values are pushed to
the far periphery. Orientations towards economic independence, career and success become
widespread among young people and reinforce gender disagreement making young women and men
less able to mitigate conflicts between convictions, cultural norms, masculinity and femininity
stereotypes and individual experience. In this situation, Russian cultural myths grounded in gender
difference provide them ideas easy to pattern on.

2 Gender Issues in Contemporary Research and Public Discourse

In Russia, the gender research was launched in 1989 in a form of re-addressing the “women’s
question” [14]; it was started by women belonging to the academic community (ethnologists,
economists, sociologists, historians or political scientists and lesser by specialists in the humanities, culture or the arts) who understood it as a part of theoretical work underpinning the general movement towards democratisation. They criticised both the Soviet gender system as the “patriarchate” and the on-going archaisation of the gender roles vision. Their interaction with western partners developed a better awareness of how gender equality issues are linked to protection of human rights. However, the interrelations between gender equality and culture has not been addressed; what is more, a wider understanding of culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society” is only gaining ground in Russia.

At the beginning of the 2000s, gender studies were centred on ‘female problems’ and stimulated by adoption of the National Plans of Action towards Improvement of the Status of Women in the Russian Federation and Increase of their Role in Society by 2000 and 2001–2005. In 2005, the report on Gender Equality and Extension of Women Rights in Russia in the Context of the UN Millennium Development Goals was published [4]. It stated that “the most acute problems” relate to latent gender discrimination and equality issues should be also considered in terms of overcoming gender disparities aggravating the status of men. The key problems of gender equality were linked to women’s economic status and to securing equal returns from economic activities. The report also mentioned that current measures proposed by the international community and partially implemented in Soviet times were not successful, and the new approaches are needed to design related policies [4, 7–8]. The cultural issues were not addressed in the report though cultural traditions, which “cannot change overnight”, were named among the impediments to gender parity [4, 38].

The second half of the 2000s saw a decline in governmental effort to support gender equality and gender sensitive policies. Since then a trend of blurring issues related to gender identification and awareness became quite common in public discourse. Nonetheless, sociological surveys reveal both the latent gender conflict and inaptitude/unwillingness to discuss related problems. So-called “female problems” are legitimised only as those of demography, family and children. Since 1990s, the gender-focused approaches are criticised as those contradicting Russian "universal values" while feminism is often negatively linked to postmodernism that impinges on traditional hierarchies and life styles.

In social sciences, gender researchers remain the most active adherents of fostering public discussions on gender related problems and of using the Internet for presentation of gender research results [14]. The adaptation of gender theories and ideas of feminist criticism for analysing creativity develops in spite of non-acceptance of feminism and "feminist theoretical discourse" by general public and mass consciousness. In a similar vein, e.g. in literary criticism the terms ‘feminism,’ ‘gender patriarchality,’ ‘women's literature’ came into use since the end of the 1990s together with ‘classical’ methods of gender suppression of women's writing. The latter were openly employed in 2001 when Russian Booker Prize was for the first time received by a woman novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya for the work ‘Kukotsky Case’. As Mikhail Zolotonosov wrote, “decline of the men's literature means the decay of the literature on the whole”; moreover, the women's prose was argued being a symptom of crisis and disruption and manifestation of social and national identity problems.

3 Gender Issues in the Field of Culture and Creativity

In Russia, the gender related problems have an obvious demographic dimension.
It is often stated that the age and gender structure of the Russian population has been severely deformed by the social, political and economic factors of the past, which still influence its reproduction and will do so in the future. This situation is currently supported by the “extremely low life expectancy among men” that is partly rooted in ‘male’ behavioural stereotypes and its difference in favour of women; another ‘male’ demographic issue is the high level of involvement in activities producing health and safety risks. Though it is not publicly articulated, the disproportionateness in gender composition of population supports the "gender asymmetry of everyday life" [1, 100]; gender misbalance and inequality problems influence both women and men and the public cultural sector perfectly demonstrates that.

3.1 Professional Education in Culture and Arts

During the 20th century, education was gradually included into female life strategies. At the beginning of the 21st century, women prevail among the higher school students in Russia.
As was stated in the NHD report of 2010, “trends in gender composition of students in professional education institutions suggest that imbalances will not be overcome by 2015” and “the gender gap in education levels of men and women will increase” [9, 50].

The general trend of declining level in male education especially if compared to the level among women is accentuated by a gender asymmetry of the student body in professional education institutions for the humanities, culture and arts, etc. This area of study segregation is quite traditional and remains rigid as the humanities, social sciences, education, healthcare are considered to be female specialisation.


As researchers mention, Russian women more often plan to follow their intellectual inclinations in choosing educational area or favour learning for its own sake. The education in Liberal Arts is to reach beyond the goals of vocational education or specialisation and to stimulate personal
development and adaptivity in contemporary society. On the other hand, education in the arts opens professional prospects within the cultural of creative sectors which are relatively new and promising in Russia. As the Federal State Statistics Service indicates, the level of unemployment among those with higher professional education in culture and arts is lower than the average.

The report cited above concludes that education “is a critical factor in reproducing the current sectoral and occupational segregation in employment and, accordingly, is a principal cause of salary gaps between the genders” [9, 51]. So, if the vocational education is supposed to function as a ‘social lift’ then one may ask in which direction it goes.

3.2 Cultural Sector and Gender Misbalance in the Workplace

The low paid sectors – education, culture etc. – are the traditional sphere of female employment. First of all, the gender segregation is characteristic of the public cultural sector that mainly consists of the state-funded institutions.

| The Share of Working Women (%) |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| National economy     | 51   | 51   | 48   | 49   | 49.6 |
| Culture and arts     | 70   | 71   | 69   | 73   | 74   |


The cultural sector institution – culture houses, libraries, museums – are understaffed and lack qualified personnel. The highest female concentration is seen in regional and rural cultural institutions many workers of which are also elderly. Men’s gender role of ‘breadwinner’ that is still supported by mass consciousness put male workforce off the sector. The younger employees with higher professional education tend to escape working in the state-funded cultural institutions and there is a permanent sector brain drain.

The problem is that culture in Russia has always been financed on leftovers while cultural sector employees receive the lowest salaries compared to all other professions in the public sector. At the regional level, this situation is uneven as federal and regional institutions' average salaries differ a lot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minimum level of subsistence for working population</th>
<th>National average</th>
<th>Institutions under the Ministry of Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>3 656</td>
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</table>
The gender segregation in the sphere of culture based activities negatively influences both administrative and mass attitudes towards culture as such and produces its wider underestimation. Destitution of resources in the cultural sector discourages the young and gives following vocational adherence a touch of self-sacrifice.

3.3 Women of Art

From the beginning of the 20th century, women’s creativity became an apparent phenomenon in Russian art. It was also a form of gender (self)reflection greatly influenced by both contemporary social and political situation and cultural patterns inherited from the past. Freedom of creativity and cultural expression together with the liberty of movement that were among the results of transition processes, new technologies of communication and establishment of the Internet opened new spaces for presentation of Russian women’s art. Today there are foremost women in fiction, poetry and drama, widely acknowledged women film directors and journalists, etc. As Helen Goscillo states, “while women’s social, political, and economic status has steadily deteriorated during the glasnost’ and post-glasnost’ era, in the realm of cultural creativity women undisputedly have come into their own” [6, xix].

3.3.1 Visual Arts

After the Revolution of 1917, Russian visual arts were gradually bound to ideology while the Avant-Garde movement was replaced by the Socialist Realism system that i.a. prescribed a narrow vision of femininity and gender related issues. Male artists who assumed to preserve a freedom of creativity and artistic vision found themselves in a risky position while their wives were supposed to bare family responsibilities. It appeared that traditional vision of gender roles prevailed among this social group and women of arts, as the female part of the population overall, were sunk in the routine of everyday life. To support families they were to secure jobs and a number of women artists ‘migrated’ to ‘decorative applied arts’ or artistic education and training.

As they often belonged to artistic families or were ‘wives’ of artists first of all they had to care about their family members. As such, they lacked “a sense of female group identification” while age-old cultural “relegation of women to eternal secondness” marked their own sense of self and made marginalisation and distortion of women’s experience and artistic expression “extreme” as Alison Hilton estimates [see 3, 8]. All that mirrored national and cultural peculiarities in attitudes to gender roles in the household.

Since the 1980s, some artists, both women and men (sometimes ‘wives and husbands’) started addressing gender related problems and themes as well as participating in wider feminist actions and activities. On the one hand, artists were among those openly speaking out on ‘women’s question’; on the other, many of women artists tended to distance from ‘gender-centred’ or ‘feminist’ attitudes and prefer to discuss artistic aptitude, creative potential, professionalism, independence etc. as they considered (and many still consider) the gender imperative approach as a marginalising one and
leading them as creators to ‘female ghetto.’ Among the features that characterise the women’s art of the 1990s and the 2000s they often name ironic distancing from conventional gender roles and attacking related (visual) stereotypes, prominence of a self-portrait genre, creative use of domestic objects and other gender-tinted symbols.

In 2002, the ‘Famme Art’ exhibition of the Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow) became the first and unique representation of women’s art in historic perspective of the national level; the exhibition catalogue included both works of art and a collection of articles devoted to the history and the present state of women’s creativity in Russia [2]. The success of these events was repeated in 2010 when the ‘History of Gender and Art in Post-Soviet Space’ was published by the Moscow Museum of Modern Art that has a gender division [8]. In the introductory word to this illustrated edition the executive director of the Vasili Tsereteli stated that in Russia “one still runs across considering an attitude toward women’s creative work” mentioning that e.g. to this day it was not decided whether to call a creative woman an artist or an 'artistess' [8, 8]. However, ‘a-sexual’ attitudes like “we can only speak of the self-expression of the genius and not of the ‘gender’ (or ‘sex’) approach” that were represented in the catalogue of 2002 gave way to more balanced and gender sensitive visions.

3.3.2 Music

In music arts, there are still some professions that remain dominated by men. These include composition and conducting where women are few; however, their self-representations characterise the general situation.

**Sofia Gubaidulina**, a Russian composer, along with Alfred Schnittke and Edison Denisov belongs to the Moscow avant-garde trio. In her music she used alternative tuning and unusual instrumental combinations and in 1979, her modernism was deemed "irresponsible." She was put on the ‘black list’ of Soviet composers but continued to work for film (as many of those excluded from official approval). During the early 1980s, Gubaidulina became well known abroad and since 1992, she lives in Germany; her worldwide recognition is exceptional. Her answers to the question on woman’s creative potential in music demonstrate her personal interest in this topic.

“If compared to other arts, in music this contrast [between male and female creativity] exists. Yet, in the 20th century, there were already many women composers, and one cannot complain that their music is inferior to male one. Though, women architects, artistess, poetess are more numerous. As I guess, now a certain experiment is performed to understand if a woman can compose music of the same quality as men do. In principle, composer is a very difficult profession and perhaps it is really male. A music critic or a psychologist may give the answer to this question in two or three hundred years…

Me personally, when I look through the music scores I cannot differ man’s hand and woman’s hand. As regards masculinity and femininity, an experiment was carried out in the 19th century… Fanny, Felix Mendelssohn’s sister showed him her compositions, he praised them but doubted if she could go on composing in common life. In the 20th century everything has changed, young girls play tuba or bass clarinet. We shall see what happens next… We may look at music scores by
Czech Ivana Loudová – she is a very good composer and by Marek Kopelent. If I do not know which where, I shall not be able to say what is written by woman and what is written by man. I highly appreciate them both, that means this opposition does not exist – there is good music or bad music. On the other hand, I would like a music critic or a scholar to explore this problem very much – may be some essential distinction still exists” [13].

Svetlana Bezrodnaya is a violin player and conductor. She married young and for a long period remained within the professional milieu as musician’s wife and a teacher of the Central Music School (Moscow). In 1989, with the support of the Ministry of Culture she organised and headed the unique women’s chamber Vivaldi Orchestra. The idea of organising the orchestra remounted to the renowned Antonio Vivaldi’s orchestra and choir at the Ospedale della Pietà.

“When the idea to establish women’s orchestra came to my mind many men musicians called me crazy. I do not know what guided me then as I had already an experience of working with many musicians including the international laureates. Apparently, a desire to change something in my life was always there.”

Establishing the women’s chamber orchestra Svetlana Bezrodnaya also explains by desire to introduce gender justice into the practice of organising orchestras:

“Previously, women’s faces were few in the orchestras and I had first noticed this fact when I was a child. I remember that once when I was only learning to reckon I began to count women musicians in the orchestra during the concert. In the famous State Symphony Orchestra there were only five of them... In the course of time, the situation changed because our country had changed and many male musicians had left to work or to live abroad. No less talented women replaced them. Now it is not a problem for a woman to be hired to individual position in an orchestra. However, whilst the Vivaldi Orchestra was established, it was still very difficult for a woman musician to gain admittance to a good ensemble. For example, there were fifteen persons competing for each job in the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra of whom ten were women, but they would rather employ men” [15].

In 1994, the Vivaldi Orchestra was given the ‘Academic’ title of honour and in 1996, Svetlana Bezrodnaya won the national artistic honour. The Orchestra is very popular and famous for a broad repertoire that incudes music of various styles and epochs. Some of performances by Svetlana Bezrodnaya may be called theatricals as they also involve ballet dancers, jazzmen and actors. She says:

“I want the audience to perceive poetry, choreography and everything that happens on the stage through the music. What matters most, I want to get the audience involved in the world that I create on the stage. We love those who come to our performances and concerts; for them we play and act.”

On the whole, the ‘feminist flame of perestroika’ had its effect in the arts producing a wider sociocultural dialog and activating interaction between women artists and their audiences. It both promotes gender self-consciousness and diversity of cultural expression, empowers women in arts
and enriches vision of women’s role in society thus promoting gender changes in culture. A higher degree of visibility of women’s art and art of women and public support provided heighten the social effects produced and counterbalance stereotyped representations.

4 Women and Media: Representations and Practices

In the 1990s, in mass representations and media in particular, an image of Soviet woman made way for a variety of new ones which were both diverse and contradictory. As it happens in transition period, these changes also included regress into archaisation. On the one hand, traditional and even ‘folklorised’ gender stereotypes perpetuated, on the other, new labels appeared – woman politician, business woman, woman socialite and other related to the new gender roles.

Association of Women Journalists became the first Russian organisation that have undertaken a systematic research of women’s representations in printed mass media in the 1990s in order to reveal most significant trends. They analysed the content of influential all-Russian periodicals and showed that gender equality issues were almost absent in public discourse both at the national and regional levels. The most representative of women related topics were columns dedicated to pop culture celebrities, crime and social life. The TV advertising contributed a lot to visualising new gender stereotypes and linking them to particular consumer goods; some advertising even took a sexist attitude. The ambivalence towards media and their effect on gender mainstreaming was deeply felt by gender sensitive audiences producing criticism though not very effective.

4.1 Women’s Literature and Reading

In contemporary Russia, as never before, one can witness a process of merging elitist (avant-garde, postmodernist) and mass cultures that may be illustrated by evolving reading practices and preferences.

Generally, the share of reading population dropped and in the media consumption, shares of time spent on reading books and magazines equalled respectively 1.8 % and 1.2 % (2012). However, women have preserved stronger positions in book-related spheres: the bulk of the workforce in book publishing, retail (including bouquiniste shops) and libraries is female; women still buy and read books by some estimations more than twice as much as men; the most active female readers have higher education. The wider audience has proceeded from solid reading to light fiction: since the 1990s, ironic detective novels and romances are most popular among women. In the table below, all the Russian best-seller authors are detective writers; only one of them is male.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Best-Selling Fiction Writers</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Darya Dontsova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Yulia Shilova</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Arthur Conan Doyle</td>
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Mass circulation magazines for women and glossies have substituted ‘thick’ literary journals which corresponds to the general shift of reading practices from highbrow entertainment to more practical time spending (e.g. educational or professional activities). A female profile can be also identified in mass non-fiction concerning health, cooking, household arts etc. Generally, Russian women are quite satisfied with mass fiction and glossies; they share the information received and transfer reading habits to younger generations thus introducing them to gender representations in mass media.

In the flow of mass literary production addressed to women, Russian literary critics identify ‘glam lit’ and ‘chick lit’ which are built on certain gender stereotypes and may resonate with mass female delusions. Of these two genre fictions the ‘glam lit’ is mainstreamed as a story of Cinderella who finally marries a prince thus representing a certain type of female life strategy. The ‘chick lit’ is estimated as a peripheral one though it more adequately addresses modern gender issues and may be regarded as a woman’s narrative of personal development, social self-realisation, professional growth, etc. As Svetlana Pogodina notes, “the feminist rhetoric of chick lit does not fit into conservative gender ideology of contemporary Russian society and because of that lose out to ‘glam prose’ when it goes about readers’ interest. Sociologists account for this fact by preservation of ‘double gender standard and gender polarisation’ in Russia.”

A situation of lasting social stress, gender asymmetry, latent sexism and open ageism in the workplace make women more vulnerable to unemployment than men. Female images in mass media support these attitudes often and successfully representing women as easy objects or comfortable milieu for men who are represented as endowed with absolute value. A number of broadcasting programs, especially on federal TV channels which remain the most influential and truly ‘mass’ media in Russia, represent woman as a housewife providing for wellbeing of men. These translations are not balanced by any gender sensitive or feminist discourse and deeply influence mass consciousness. One may state that in Russia, along with the ‘glam lit’ there exist ‘glam media’ which also address the issues of interest for independent and comfortably off women though under glossy cover. Examples of ‘chick media’ are fewer and less visible.

In the 1990s, the feminist journalism was hoped to be a means of women’s empowerment and dissemination of gender parity ideas that meet challenges of time. However since the 1990s, the institute of expertise and professionalism at large gradually erode. Social influence of professional opinion decreases in all public spheres while reading, listening and watching TV constitute no exception. Mass attitudes, views and images shared by general public gain in power and underpin regressive split-up into humans and women.
4.2 Virtual Russia: A Chance to Achieve Gender Parity

Gender mainstreaming is more successful within the new formats of cultural production and consumption based on information and communicative technologies. New opportunities for Russian women were offered by dissemination of new technologies, especially by development of the Runet (the Russian part of the Internet) which provides for new opportunities for educational and professional upgrading and encourages achieving higher social and cultural status by women. It also serves as the efficient means to eliminate gender asymmetry in getting access to information and jobs, social support and cultural goods. The high educational level achieved by Russian women during the Soviet period is a prerequisite.

![Share of Those Practicing Most Popular Internet Activities (%)](chart)

Source: Results of MASMI Russia survey (2010), see Zhenskaya auditoriya Runeta prevyshaet muzhskuyu from [http://www.sunrise-tula.ru/software/25400.html](http://www.sunrise-tula.ru/software/25400.html)

In spite of delayed joining the global communicative process, Russia has reached a high level of Internet usage. In the beginning of 2013, Russian was used on 5.9% of all websites thus surpassing German and becoming the second language on the web; the Russian Internet audience equaled 76.5 million (53% of population) and was the most numerous in Europe and No 6 in the world. A rapid growth of the Internet audience that took place from the beginning of the 21st century was exceeded by a quicker increase in female Internet population. In 2002, the female share of the Internet audience was less than 40% (8.8 million) and in 2010, MASMI Russia estimated it at 50.2% for the first time.

### Internet Monthly Reach in Sociodemographic Groups (12+), million

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>43.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>age groups</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>male</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-17</td>
<td>1.8</td>
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<td>18-24</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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</table>

Source: based on January Web Indexes by TNS Russia from [www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/index/](http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/index/)

The sociodemographic trends in shaping the Runet audience correlate with global postmodern tendencies including a gradual removal of previously meaningful symbolic and cultural oppositions (of male and female, adult and juvenile, central and peripheral etc.). Women obtain a chance not only to achieve parity within new cultural practices but also to take over the leadership while gender (and age) distinctions blur out because of expanding global e-civilisation.

Russia’s social networking revolution proves that a new level of merging cyberspace and everyday life of millions of people is achieved and a new continent for social and cultural activities is discovered and colonized by women. According to the TNS Russia estimations (February 2013), the Runet audience demonstrates the high level of involvement in blogging and social networks: 80% of day audience address social networks and spend there 30–41% of time on the Web. A female attitude to the Web is estimated as more reasonable and socially oriented than the male one. The gender composition analysis of the Runet social networks shows that in the largest ones women are becoming more numerous than men while the most active are those of 25 and younger.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rating</th>
<th>social network</th>
<th>female audience, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>VKontakte</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Odnoklassniki</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Moi mir</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the field of computer games, which may be regarded as a new form of leisure activity related to simulation, elaboration of new anthropological strategies, interactivity and establishment of multiple identity, women gradually gain ground against men. According to the Mail.Ru Group estimations (2012), 54% of gamers are female; women make up 60% of those playing social games (and only 35% of client games’ players) while the market share of social games grows on [7].

The data stated above are indicative of gender equality achievements in Russian cyberspace and development of new social, cultural and leisure practices. One may also estimate on-line cultural activities as a sort of reaction to social anomy, which has become a mass phenomenon after disintegration of the ‘large social space’ providing for the feelings of security and care. It may be also treated as a response to bureaucratic calcification of public life that blocks out social creativity using different types of administrative barriers or to the lack of seed funding and infrastructures required for social and cultural projecting. The leading position of women in a number of social web practices...
may also be regarded as a circumstantial evidence of the mass removal of female self-identification ‘loci’ to Runet.

5 Observations and Challenges

In contemporary Russia, multiple cultural patterns including traditional (pre-modern), modern and post-modern ones coexist and determine its sociocultural specificity. They also manifest themselves in co-existence of many types of gender behaviour, patriarchal domination of male stereotypes that are widely treated as a norm, gender based labour division and segregation in the workplace. On the other hand, perceptions of culture are also very traditionist or age old. Expanding general awareness of the issues concerned with gender and culture and their interrelation seems to be the key approach to related problems solving. As has stated Pier Luigi Sacco in his keynote lecture at the recent Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Culture (Moscow, 2013), culture is not simply an important economy sector; it is a “social software” needed to manage the complexity of contemporary societies in all of its manifold implications.

The gender mainstreaming needs special efforts to organise public discussion on the part of both state governed (that is particularly important in Russia) and public institutions. There is a need of data including accurate gender statistics and sociological surveys. Better contacts are needed between mass media and representatives of women’s organisations or movements to make their discourse known to wider audiences. The use of IT in promoting importance of the gender related issues are to be supplemented by the efforts to reach public beyond the Internet. Cultural dimension is to be better introduces in both public and academic discussions of gender equality issues.

There is a strong need of gender sensitive policies at all levels to overcome latent gender imparity and occupational gender segregation. Provisions for cultural access and participation are not enough if they are not gender balanced. Cultural policies are to contribute to re-establishing gender symmetry in the cultural field and preventing its ‘female ghettoisation’. The establishment of a link between gender and cultural issues both in policies and in public consciousness is to empower all the stakeholders.

References


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Illustrations

Nikolai Jaroschenko. The Young Girl Student (1880) from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bd/Nikolaj_Alexandrowitsch_Jaroschenko_-_Girl_student.jpg