Gendered Institutions and Women’s Leadership: Analyzing Russian public, private and civil society sectors

**Summary:**

Women are underrepresented in Russian leadership positions. This article examines what factors influence women’s leadership within the profession in the Russian public, private, and civil society sectors. To address this question, the research draws on feminist institutionalism to examine both the recognition of how institutions replicate unequal power distributions and how they can presumably be modified from a gender perspective. The study relies on empirical data obtained through in-depth interviews with representatives of the Russian public, private, and civil society sectors.

**Abstract:**

Currently, Russian women largely contribute to the public sector but hardly participate in important decision-making. The proportion of female employees involved in the preparation of information, documentation, accounting, and maintenance in the public sphere is 88%. However, there is a low representation of women at high levels of government. The Russian Federation ranks 137th in the ranking of countries in terms of women’s representation in national parliaments (16.4%) (IPU 2021). According to the Global Gender Gap Report (2021), Russia ranks 133rd of countries in terms of political empowerment. The situation is similar in the Russian private sector, although indicators on women’s participation are relatively high. Currently, 31.9% of business owners in Russia are women and Russia is 6th in the Ranking for Women Business Ownership (Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2020).  However, women managers are common in firms with less than 100–200 employees (Vedomosti 2017). The situation is completely opposite in the civil society sector in Russia. Many experts recorded an increased share of women among NGO activists (some referred to it as 70% or 80%, or even more): “Russian NGOs have a female face”.

Therefore, **the research problem** is that there is low women’s presence in leading positions whereas female representatives are overrepresented in other ones. This raises the issue of whether and how public policy should react. To resolve the problem, it is required to find out to what extent Russian institutions and organizations are gendered from the feminist institutionalism perspective. The main **research question** is whether the high and low level of female leaders and employees in the Russian NGOs leads to the process of their gendering?

The **theoretical basis** of the research is feminist institutionalism which examines both the replication of unequal power distributions and their presumable modification from a gender perspective. Based on the idea of regendering organizations, the study presents a practical approach to emphasizing the importance of gender equality with consideration of women’s empowerment. The **empirical data** is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with representatives of the Russian public, private, and civil society sectors. The main method of data analysis is a qualitative content analysis combined with an analysis of categories’ frequencies. The qualitative approach seems appropriate when it comes to gender research, as such method allows to include women’s opinions into the area of study.

From the feminist institutionalist perspective, **the results** show that the private sector has an aspiration of becoming less gendered while civil society sector in Russia is a completely gendered sphere with public sector in the middle. Civil society sector, despite being the most gendered, provide more opportunities for women’s professional activity. The private sector is less gendered cause it demonstrates the tendency of eliminating biases towards female leadership and employment by business representatives. Institutional development in the public sphere is limited by state elites that are currently more interested in women-mothers than women-leaders. Thereby, the process of female empowerment in the public sphere is slowing down or even coming to a halt due to many existing barriers for women there.