

‘And after that we all became like brothers’: Emotions, Affectivity and Risks in a Pro-governmental Youth Movement Vse doma

Abstract

The article examines the experiences of young people involved in pro-governmental youth activism in Russia using the case of Vse doma movement. The article shows that despite a formally strong affiliation with the aims of political socialization of youth in Russia and loyalty to the state power at the core of the movement, young people’s meanings of activism are de-politicized and have loose political connectedness. Young activists describe their formally political participation through the joy of being together, communication, *dvizhuha*, bodily and risky practices that create and maintain an ‘affective solidarity’. The article offers an ethnographic endeavor in conventional youth political participation switching the lens from the political to emotional and embodied sense of engagement.

Introduction

I was in a bus with other activists going from St. Petersburg to Moscow on the 4th of March 2012. Young people were mobilized to support Putin in presidential elections. My neighbour Sasha¹ studies to become a dental technician. He kept telling me how great it was being in the bus going to Moscow for free – they called him a day before and offered a free trip to Moscow. “Of course I agreed! Otherwise, I would stay at home and watch football. Instead, what a *dvizhuha* I am having now!” I was surprised to know that in a political youth movement nobody knew about the real aim of the trip and nobody was even mentioning politics. Everyone was excited about walking in Moscow and spending time together. Why were they going there if not to support the state regime?

This is an excerpt from my field diary where I describe my observations during the pro-governmental rally which mobilized state-organized youth movements with Vse doma during presidential elections 2012 in Russia. As seen from this excerpt from my field diary, I was surprised to know that the followers of a famous pro-governmental movement were lacking political motivations in their participation in the rally supporting the president. This initial finding turned out to be a recurrent narrative among many activists of the pro-Kremlin

movement turning a naïve surprise of mine into a research question: what bonds make this political solidarity possible if young people are not politically motivated?

This ethnographic sketch should be placed in a wider context of youth activism in Russia. In the recent decade there has been an upsurge of patriotic sentiments in Russia when love and devotion to the motherland have become indispensable traits of an ideal portrait of Russian youth. Youth participation became seen as problematic with its low interest in politics, on the one hand, and the state's will to control oppositional sentiments among youth, on the other. Youth has been described as politically apathetic and, in general, has been constructed as an object in need of control, care and representation (Omelchenko, 2005; Blum, 2006). This resulted in the programs of patriotic education and emergence of controversially famous state-run youth movements with Nashi among the most famous, which were mobilized to support the state regime. In public debate many doubt if young people involved in these movement actually represent politically engaged youth or rather became a cog in the state machinery. In fact, the followers of 'Nashi' have been widely criticized both in media and academic research; in particular, for its explicit patriotic education programs and close partnership with state structures. Nashi has been compared to the 'Hitler-Jugend' in Germany (similarly, activists of Nashi were often called 'Putin Jugend') as well as with Soviet teenage and youth organizations like Octobrists, Pioneers and the Komsomol. 'Nashist' – in analogy with 'fascist' — is one of the most spread and famous stigmas of young people.

The aim of this article is to show that despite the state's encouragement of uncritical engagement in mainstream politics, young people by no means can be called as passive recipients of the state agenda. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews with activists of one of the pro-Kremlin political youth projects Vse doma, I analyze how young people conceptualize their participation in the political project, what meanings they attribute to their activities, what solidarity bonds they create and how they manage stigmatized identities of 'corrupted' youth. Thus, rather than seeing young people as the blind followers of the state agenda, my aim is to understand young people's own meanings of activism. I show that, on the one hand, a pro-governmental project Vse doma represents what can be called an active youth political participation in its conventional sense through going to the streets and participating in the political rallies. On the other hand, despite being actively involved in politics by participating in the pro-governmental rallies, young people describe their participation as apolitical, show little interest in politics and construct political sphere as an exclusively adult-dominated field. I suggest that while calling their participation as apolitical, young people create and maintain an 'affective solidarity' (Juris, 2008; Pilkington & Omelchenko, 2012) through embodied spatial

practices of mass rallies and campaigns, communication and the joy of group activities. The article offers an ethnographic endeavor in conventional youth political participation switching the lens from the political to emotional and embodied sense of engagement.

The article is structured as follows. First, I briefly review contemporary scholarship on youth participation moving to a solidary approach to the analysis of youth groups and the roots of 'Vse doma' movement. Then I discuss my data, followed by the presentation of findings and conclusion.

Youth solidarities beyond apolitical and engaged youth

It has been extensively noticed worldwide that many young people cease to see the relevance of state-oriented activism and politics shifting to new everyday modes of political participation. Recent scholarship on youth participation has acknowledged that conventional politics often tend to marginalize youth and forms of engagement among youth are changing (Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010). The decline in voting and party membership among young people around the world have provoked theorizing on new forms of political participation among young people like 'expert citizens', 'everyday makers' and 'self-actualizing citizens' (Bennett, 2003; Bang, 2010; Vromen & Collin, 2010). This scholarship states that rather than being apolitical, young people distance themselves from formal political institutions like party membership and voting (Henn *et al.*, 2005; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003a). They criticize a narrow conceptualization of the 'political' in the research on young people's political participation, which misses alternative forms of participation (O'Toole *et al.*, 2003b). In other words, while young people are disenchanted with formal politics, they personalize political engagement through lifestyle, consumption and leisure (e.g. Michiletti & Stolle, 2008; Bennett, 2012). Similarly, researchers of post-Soviet youth participation have stated that young people are interested in politics; however, they feel exclusion from formal decision-making and distrust in 'big' politics (Omelchenko, 2005). Thus, avoiding political engagement can be seen as a conscious strategy rather than apathy. Placed in this theoretical discussion, the case of a pro-governmental youth movement Vse doma represents an interesting case since it shows young people who remain actively involved in state-oriented political participation. Yet, as will be shown further, the meanings of this participation are deeply depoliticized.

Until recently Russian youth have often been portrayed as apathetic (Blum, 2006; Wallace, 2003). However, 'Colour revolutions' in post-Soviet states – in particular, 'Orange revolution' in

Ukraine — provoked the emergence of pro-Kremlin youth projects like Nashi in order to prevent the spread of ‘orange sentiments’. This triggered considerable academic interest in Russian youth activism and civil society (Hemment, 2009; 2012; Salmenniemi, 2010; Blum, 2006; Omelchenko, 2005; Mijnsen, 2012; Lassila, 2012a; 2012b; *Schwartz, 2007; Pilkington, Omelchenki, Garifzianova, 2010*). Also political protests triggered by Russia’s parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011-2012 have moved researchers to further explore civil activism and youth political participation, in particular (e.g. Lyytikäinen, 2013; Zhelnina, 2014). Nowadays scholarship in Russian pro-governmental youth activism is rich (Atwal, 2009; Blum, 2006; Hemment, 2009, 2012; Lassila, 2012a, 2012b). However, the dominant approach to the analysis of pro-Kremlin movements has seen it as a hegemonic construct of Russian youth policy in general (Mijnsen, 2012) and has been implemented mainly through the analysis of media texts, manifestos and documents of the movement (Lassila, 2011, 2012; Mijnsen, 2012; for exceptions see Hemment, 2012).

Thus, this research offers an ethnographic endeavor in everyday activism of young people seeking to explore solidary bonds that keep the group together. At the same time, it contributes to the timely discussion around ‘apathetic’ youth and new meanings of political participation. I suggest that young people’s meanings of political participation go beyond the meanings of ‘big’ politics and are structured around affective aspects of street engagement. That is why I approach *Vse doma* project as a form of affective youth solidarity (Juris, 2008; Pilkington, Omelchenko 2013). The solidarity approach offers an alternative to the existing subcultural, postsubcultural and other approaches to analysing youth cultures and cultural practices (Pilkington, Omelchenko 2013). It “denotes affective inter-group ties that ensue from cultural innovation and practices that cut across stylistically, symbolically or ideologically oriented youth groups” (ibid, p. 216). Solidary approach captures flexibility and a dynamic nature of contemporary youth socialities, which are formed around communication and other cultural practices like consumption, risk, music, dance, bodily practices. In line with this, Juris (2008) uses the concept of ‘affective solidarity’ in his analysis of anti-corporate globalization protests. He states that political protests evoke certain emotions with the goal of motivating and sustaining action (ibid, p 65). They generate arenas for eliciting moments of freedom, liberation, and joy. Juris (2008) pays attention to the powerful affective ties of a protest movement when emotions, confrontations and risks play the main role in creating and maintaining solidarity. Thus affectivity, emotions and bodily practices of protests reinforce internal solidarity of participants. In my analysis I integrate two approaches showing that activists of ‘*Vse doma*’ movement create an affective solidarity based

on emotional and embodied sense of engagement with communication, risks and *dvizhuha* as its integral part.

Youth movement ‘Vse doma’: controversial background and new civil identities

The story of Vse doma starts in 2005 with Nashi movement. Nashi— the Youth Democratic Anti-Fascist movement — is a state-managed youth project, which appeared in the Russian political scene in 2005. Having started with a mass rally ‘Our Victory’ in May 2005, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Victory in the Second World War, it became a brand of pro-governmental youth political activism. Mass demonstrations of young people from all over Russia supporting the government have become recognizable traits of Nashi; among the most famous are those dedicated to the Victory Day, Russian March and election campaigns. Such a debut gave Nashi a sense of identity based on the exploitation of cultural memory, construction of foreign and domestic enemies, and commemoration of the Great Patriotic War (Mijnssen, 2012). The political engagement of young people in Nashi was expressed in their mobilized participation in the political life of the country, namely, pro-governmental large-scale rallies in Moscow. After several scandals, in which Nashi were involved, in 2009 the movement was divided into several projects attempting to distance from the controversial past and create new civil identities of youth — with Vse doma as one of them. The ideology of these new political projects differed from the previous doctrine of Nashi when a new focus on state-run youth activism emerged: healthy lifestyles (‘Run with me’, ‘Begi za mnoy’), housing and communal services (‘Vse doma’, ‘All houses’), control of the sale of expired products in food stores (‘Piggy’s Against’ ‘Khryushi protiv’), the fight against illegal car parking (‘StopHam’) and art projects (‘Art parade’) among them. These new political projects emphasized their autonomy and independence from the state and state run sponsors. Nashi’s political activities became conceptualized as negative and the new projects distance themselves from Nashi. A new identity of a civil activist was constructed within the new movements targeting to solve daily problems like housing or wrong car parking. However, despite an attempt to focus on civil rather than political issues, young people were still mobilized in cases of the state’s political needs – like campaigning during Presidential and Parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2012.

An official aim of one of the followers of ‘Nashi’ — ‘Vse doma’ is improving housing and communal services in the cities of Russia. It was one of the most well-funded and active projects. The main activity of the project took place during 2011-2012 elections and later came

to an end when young activists of the movement found themselves needless after elections. Vse doma represents an interesting case of interaction between young people and state agenda. On the one hand, young people from Vse doma are actively involved in the political participation through taking part in manifestations and political rallies supporting the government. On the other, as my research shows, the ideological core of the movement is deeply depoliticized and young people actively resist political meanings of the project, as I show below.

Data and methods

The study is based on ethnographic fieldwork of Vse doma political activism, which was conducted by me and a colleague of mine during 10 months in 2012. Ethnographic insights help demystify the state-managed youth movement and show young people's own meanings of participation rather than approve a dominant marginalized image of the state-managed movement (Hemment, 2012). The fieldwork included visiting regular meetings as well as political campaigns and rallies where the movement was mobilized like during presidential elections in 2012. I also visited an annual educational camp Seliger. Ethnographic fieldwork was followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews (N=22) with activists involved in Vse doma who were recruited during political campaigns. The composition of these interviewees was young men and women aged 16-35 mainly living in St. Petersburg, who were involved in the movement for different periods of time: from a couple of months to several years. Some activists experienced all the changes and transformations in the project since the first years of Nashi up to pro-presidential campaigns in 2012. The interviews lasted from one hour to two hours and a half, and covered such topics as recruitment to the movement, practices of political activism, relationships in the group, citizenship, historical memory, attitude to the politics and the state. In the recruitment process, we endeavored to maintain a gender balance, but in general young women outnumbered men in the movement. We recruited our research participants mainly through 'snowballing'. It turned out to be a successful strategy since there is a strong informal social network among participants.

Depoliticization and resistance to the political meanings of Vse doma

When talking about the goals of the project, Vse doma activists actively distanced from the political ideology of the movement. Despite their frequent involvement in political rallies, the activists strongly deny possessing any of Vse Doma's political objectives and distance themselves from any relation to Nashi. Young people consider Vse doma to be an autonomous

professional project aimed at solving specific problems in the housing sector and carrying out public control in this area. Being actively involved in the formal definition of political participation - that is political rallies and campaigns - young people's self-understanding as activists is based on distancing from describing their participation in the project as political. Most of the participants described the movement as civic or societal (*obschestvennyj*) and resisted political definitions of the movement's objectives:

Int.: Do you think that some people can join the project to benefit for their political career in the future?

Olga: Political career? I don't think so. Because *Vse doma* is an apolitical project.

Int.: But your website says that it is a political project.

Olga: Really? That's weird because we have no connection with politics. We are a societal (*obschestvennyj*) project. If they ask us whom we support – communists or United Russia, we will answer: 'Who cares? We just want housing services to work well!'

As the interview excerpt shows, Olga disagrees with interviewee's vision of the movement as political and sees it as targeted exclusively on solving problems in housing. It is also interesting how Olga immediately reacted on what she considers as political by referring to political parties. In general, activists' personal attitude to politics is indifferent or negative: the political sphere is often associated with dishonesty, personal gain, 'dirt' and 'showing off'. By articulating the civic nature of the project, activists distanced from such negative definitions of the political and legitimized their low interest in the political life of the country. Political questions are seen as distant and an 'adult' field, entrance to which requires significant cultural and social resources, competencies and capitals. Many young people mentioned that the agenda of youth participation is state-managed and dominated by adults, which has led to disappointment and self-exclusion from the political life. In the following excerpt Olga demonstrates her alienation from the political process because of the lack of trust in the political system in general.

I got disappointed in some methods of the political struggle. The fact that there is a lot of showing off, for example. For example, while election campaigns are ongoing, Gazprom is actively building sports centers for children, playgrounds etc. Once elections are over - back to reality again. Nothing works, nothing is built. Then the next elections come - again they start active work. Just it seems to me that somehow it's all so rotten. (Olga)

Despite such an active resistance to the political meanings of the project and disenchantment with the political sphere in general, young people still participate in the political rallies and campaigns, sometimes reporting misunderstanding and discomfort from such activities: “Even though we are not political, we mobilize our resources, when it is necessary to support the government. Although now, thanks God, they said that we will not do it anymore” (Marina). As seen from the quote, Marina expresses a dubious reasoning about the role of politics in the movement: on the one hand, she shows irrelevance of the political ideas for the group, on the other hand, she accepts involvement of the youth project in the support of the government and has a negative attitude towards it.

As the interviews with the research participants show, political participation in the form of rallies supporting the government is not regarded as an expression of political views nor as a significant sphere of their lives. From the perspective of the conventional approach to political activism, youth participation in the social movements is connected with the questions of social justice and seen as a reflexive act, an expression of active citizenship and struggle for own political rights (Della Porta, 2006). The case of Vse doma shows that while actively participating in the pro-governmental rallies, young people’s meanings of their activism are deprived of political meanings. Young people talk about their disinterest and exclusion from the political life. Similar meanings of depoliticization have been found in an oppositional youth movement in Russia as well (Lyytikäinen, 2014). Young people tend to focus on developing alternative meanings of activism, personalize politics through own behavior and leisure, and develop personal professional careers, rather than invest in formal political activism, which is supported by other research on youth activism (e.g. Harris, Wyn & Younes, 2010; Pfaff, 2009).

Thus, young people actively participate in the political life of the country in a conventional sense – being involved in public rallies and demonstrations in the squares of Moscow, while expressing disappointment, mistrust and a sense of exclusion from the ‘big’ political life of the country. Since the movement is constructed as deeply depoliticized, the movement’s solidarity should be constructed through other vectors. I suggest that emotional and embodied senses such as risks, ‘dvizhuha’ and communication become the main attributes, through which the movement’s sense of solidarity is constructed.

‘Dvizhuha’: the joy of hanging out together

While having little interest in discussing political goals of the movement, Vse doma activists talk about their group with affection and a sense of belonging: the movement’s active base relies on

individual friendship solidarities and moral obligation towards the group. What is so common for most of participants' narratives is reference to the feeling of groupness, togetherness and inspiration from joining the project:

Int.: Why did you decide to join the movement? What did you like the most?

Olga: Because people from the movement are so interesting. When I first came here and looked at the people who worked in the project, I just caught this fire! (zazhglas'). I wanted to work with them because these people were so inspiring and interesting. I could feel all this energy coming from them.

Such 'energy' from being together is a common narrative in activists' stories of participation and becomes an emotionally transformative experience. In particular, one of the key categories, through which young people describe their participation in the project, is *dvizhuha*, which can be roughly translated as 'hanging out', 'action', 'moving'. The word is a slang term that suggests movement, activeness and energetic activity. In context of *Vse doma*, *dvizhuha* is understood as an active and interesting pastime in the company of other young people, and is often defined through the involvement in a group activity. Appealing to *dvizhuha* in their talk about activities in the movement, young people depicted their participation in the rallies through the sense of togetherness, as a vigorous pastime in a company of friends. As seen from the following excerpt, young people may find it difficult to articulate political ideologies of the project and *dvizhuha* becomes the key attribute of the youth solidarity:

Int.: What did you like most of all in the activism?

Spiridon: *Dvizhuha*. It is just interesting. I'm for any kind of *dvizhuha* except for a hunger strike, as I said .

Int.: And what is *dvizhuha* for you?

Spiridon: It's something that keeps you busy, something interesting to do, to be engaged in something, to help someone. Do something interesting, something to get seen (*raskrutit'sya*), to show myself. I am already on Youtube (*zasvetit'sya*), on the photographs in the newspapers, I remember seeing myself in a few of them.

As Spiridon shows, representation of certain political or civic views is not the dominant meaning in his activism. Instead, *dvizhuha* is what attracts him. The term does not have a clear definition and is described broadly as involvement in an interesting group activity. *Dvizhuha* is not a site for a goal-oriented activity but rather a way of getting and being together as a group. Activism in

the movement defined through *dvizhuha* also provides young people with social capital like being pictured in newspapers or filmed in Youtube. The importance of *dvizhuha* for young people can be also explained as a strategy of getting access to social networks in a new city as most of *Vse doma* activists in St.Petersburg come from other smaller cities of Russia. The discourse of *dvizhuha* as a form of social inclusion in a new city and a joy of being in a group is also found in Luba's story of joining the movement:

In May 2008 I decided to move to St.Petersburg, I just packed my stuff and went away from my home town. There is something adventurous in me, again, I need *dvizhuha*. This is how we call all these movements – the followers of Nashi – this is all *dvizhuha*. And there were moments when, for example, a war with Georgia in 2008, they phoned me and said: “Luba, we are going to the Embassy to Moscow”. I asked: “What?!” At that time I was only 17 or 18, my mum was very worried for me at that time. (...) But now it is fine, when I go somewhere, she knows that I am with friends, that people from *dvizhuha* will never betray me. They are good people. So it was OK for me to join such events so easily.

Luba sees her moving to St.Petersburg as something spontaneous, and, similarly, participation in *Vse doma* - as involvement in risky and adventurous activity. As seen from the quote, Luba's talk about her participation in a picket near the embassy of Georgia in 2008 is also lacking political or ideological motivations. For her, participation in this event is constructed as an adventurous chance to get involved in a group activity and is not driven by political ideologies. Instead, the feeling of trust and belonging to the group become the key drive for joining the political event. Her political participation is constructed as *dvizhuha* – an adventurous participation through togetherness, than the motivation to represent Russia's interests in the Georgian conflict in 2008. Thus friendship network, group solidarity and trust are the key drives for Luba's participation in a political event.

Similarly, belonging to the group and even a moral duty towards fellow-participants in the organization of political rallies is dominant in Spiridon's story of participation in *Vse doma*:

Usually when I do not like something or I disagree, I do not do such things. But sometimes they invited me to some actions, in which I was just unable to participate because I had to do other things. But I knew that people were relying on me, I just could not betray them. And then when I was there in a rally, I had a weird feeling, I was

thinking: “What am I doing here? Why am I here if I have to be in another place?” I try to forget about such moments, of course. (Spiridon)

For Spiridon participation in political events organized by the project is also driven by the solidarity and moral obligations towards the group, even, as stated, he disagrees with the political meanings behind the rally. Informal networks increase his sense of belonging to the group while political ideologies are hardly mentioned as a sense of groupness. This finding is supported by other research that shows that political goals are not always the main foundation for youth solidarities (Lyytikäinen, 2014). Dvizhuha as a key attribute of groupness is also found in other youth movements and solidarities in Russia. In these cases dvizhuha or ‘hustling’ implies the feeling of fulfillment from communication (obschenie) or consumption of money, sex and drugs like in case of skinheads (Pilkington & Sharifullina, 2009). In other youth movements similar meanings of togetherness are referred to as tusovka – sociability and communication with like-minded people (Lyytikäinen, 2014; Pilkington, 1994). Thus dvizhuha implies a constant involvement in some activity through the feeling of togetherness and groupness, which creates one of the main solidary bonds. In what follows I explore what other attributes constitute the sense of solidarity and relationships young people forge pursuing for dvizhuha.

Creating an affective solidarity: communication, risks and embodiment

In young people’s narratives communication, discussions and development of interpersonal skills are described as the most rewarding benefit from participation in ‘Vse doma’. Communication becomes a central component of dvizhuha. Communication (obschenie), however, doesn’t mean just talking, information exchange or spending time together – it is rather understood through the feeling of trust and intimate commonality (Yurchak, 2006). In fact, by partaking in obschenie one becomes one of ‘us’. Truly, the root of the word - ‘obsch’- presupposes something general, common. Hilary Pilkington (1994) states that obschenie among young people is constructed both through embodied and mindful practices. Indeed, one of the rituals in Seliger camp was gathering around the bonfire, when each member of the group was to say about his or her impressions of the day, followed by a group discussion. Such practices of obschenie understood as spiritual closeness, intimacy and trust create a feeling of togetherness and groupness in the movement. Also young people were often brought to the squares of Moscow on the buses from nearby regions promising a free trip to the capital city. During these night trips on the buses young people would chat and play games. These trips created rich descriptions in young people’s narratives showing how obschenie became an important component of participation in the rallies.

The development of communicative skills while enjoying interaction with people from the same milieu is a repetitive narrative of young people, as illustrated, for example, by Oleg:

I am so grateful to this movement for *obschenie* and communicative skills I have now. I proved to myself I can hang out and communicate with different people. They would ask me: 'Hey, Oleg, would you go to this campaign with us?' First, I would answer: 'I don't know anyone there, I am embarrassed' but now this expression doesn't exist for me anymore. Now I just sit in the bus and go.

Obschenie during participation in the rallies is often constituted through risks, sensual and bodily aspects. Such practices can be described as what Hilary Pilkington (1994, p. 172) called an 'embodied communication'. These practices of embodied communication become particularly salient in young people's participation in street rallies and campaigns, which sometimes involve unexpected risks. And if most of research addressing risky behavior in youth groups analyze it in context of alcohol or drug consumption (for ex., Hunt, Evans, Kares 2007), the case of *Vse doma* shows normalization and routinization of risks as part of the sense of solidarity. In the next excerpt Polina is describing one of the rallies, in which she participated during presidential elections in 2012. Her group had to spend a few days in Moscow during their campaign supporting Putin as a candidate for presidency when they stayed over a night in a place with poor living conditions. Instead of addressing the critique about bad attitude towards young people, Polina describes her impressions as following:

We suffered really physically there, we had difficult living conditions, we were sleeping on the floor, and someone also added phenolphthalein to our food, it was terrible and we were suffering greatly. It was hard but we all understood that we had to do it, we were all motivated, we became stronger and for other people it was a personal challenge. I even made up a poem after this event for the first time in my life; it was simply born in me at that moment. And after that we all became like brothers. (Polina)

In the interview excerpt Polina describes her participation in the campaign as an emotionally empowering experience. She shows her sensory and bodily sensations in participation in the campaign that have facilitated long-lasting commitment to the group. Polina doesn't seem to mention the political motivation of her action nor the feeling of injustice to get no reward for their political support. What is more, despite voluntary grounds of joining the event, she constructs it as a duty: 'we had to do it'. What matters to her is the feeling of belonging to the

group, which is structured around embodied and emotional sense of engagement. For Polina the movement becomes a source for a risky activity, through which she challenges herself and ‘becomes stronger’. Through here-and-now embodied togetherness activists of Vse doma make sense of their participation and celebrate community and sociality. Body becomes a key lived subject and agent of the political campaign. The risk and physical discomfort are compensated by the emotional pleasure of belonging to the collective body. The feeling of solidarity is also based on idealization of confrontation against the opponents, as Polina continues:

When the elections were over, we all understood that we will never have such a great time in our lives again. It was a great great time despite all the difficulties. I mean the danger and risks we were exposed to, when you confront some Nazi guys or opposition who used to throw stones and coins into us.

As Polina shows, despite the fact the participants of the actions are protected by the police, young people still mention a variety of unexpected risks of the street actions. Although she mentions lots of difficulties in her activism, Polina presents her experience as emotionally transformative and satisfying, in which certain levels of risk and confrontation lie at the centre of her experience. Omelchenko & Zhelnina (2014) refer to ‘heroic risks’ to describe aggressive and open confrontation with competitive youth groups to maintain key values of the youth solidarity. They argue that through partaking in heroic risk activities young people fulfill the need for self-realization and the feeling of being useful to the society. The physical embodiment of support for the state power is also mentioned by Valerie Sperling (2013) in her analysis of Putin’s Army and ‘Rip it for Putin’ campaign. This research and my analysis of Vse doma show that one of the key attributes of solidarity in a youth group is constituted through embodied engagement in political activities. Thus, bodily and risk practices establish the emotional group identity and become solidarity’s capital.

Risky practices are not only normalized and routinized but may also take a form of a performance:

We made a campaign in the municipal court when people had a lawsuit about their terrible living conditions: there was neither water, nor electricity in the house. The city didn’t do anything to help them. So we went to the court and started washing dirty clothes in a washbasin just in court room! It is like since people don’t have a chance to do that in their houses, let us do that in the court. We were taken by police for one night and we had

to pay a fine, but we had so much fun!

In this case Anna is describing a campaign that involves the risk of imprisonment; however, an open confrontation in the court in this case takes a form of a performance and, in the end, is presented as “fun”. The activists’ identities and goals are literally performed in the campaign. Laura Lyytikäinen (2014) in her study of ‘Oborona’ movement shows how young people’s forms of action are constructed as a social performance with the audience, background symbols and means of symbolic production. Following Alexander (2006), she argues that young activists use the means of symbolic production to make vivid the motives and morals they are presenting. In case of Vse doma, the performative actions and practices are inherited from ‘Nashi’, whose performances often included colourful and matching clothings or portraits of the country’s leaders.

By participating in risky street activities young people create what can be called an ‘affective solidarity’ (Juris, 2008). Emotions, risks and embodiment produce powerful affective solidary bonds that turn to be more important than political ideologies. Diverse embodied spatial and often risky practices like being together in a bus, going to the streets during the rallies, making a performance in the court or confronting opponents serve as the key axes of Vse doma’s feeling of belonging and groupness.

Conclusions

In this article I have investigated the experiences of young people taking part in pro-governmental political activism. Despite the growing amount of literature, examining the shift from the institutional forms of participation to new social movements, politics of choice in everyday life as well as irrelevance of state-based politics for young people, state-managed youth activism has yet remained an easily mobilized resource at the hand of Russian government. The case of Vse doma shows that young people may take part in conventional political activities; however, the meanings of these activities for young people can go beyond the oppositional matrix of apolitical youth or ‘everyday makers’ searching for alternative ways to express political views. Despite participating in the pro-governmental political rallies, young people from Vse doma don’t articulate convincing political grounds of their solidarity. The meanings of young people’s activism are deeply depoliticized and the movement rather becomes a space for communication (*obschenie*) and *dvizhuha*. What makes them take to the streets, instead, are solidary bonds based on embodied and sensory collective experiences, the feeling of trust and intimacy, intra-group moral obligations and the joy of risk-taking. Young people’s solidarity

includes the dimensions of affective, embodied and even performative experiences. Thus it is fruitful to look at the 'affective' (Juris, 2008) rather than exclusively political side of youth solidarities.

These meanings of youth participation are hidden from the outside observer, who sees exclusively an image of state-controlled pro-governmental youth project. The stories of Vse doma activists are another convincing case showing that youth activism cannot be understood by merely looking at fixed political participation indicators. Thus methodologically, the article puts forward the case for conducting ethnographic fieldwork when researching young people's political activism. Through the practice of 'being there' a researcher arrives to the understanding of other people's understandings through embodied experiences while attending other people's practices. My fieldwork has shown that my own participation in the political campaigns and rallies together with Vse doma participants worked as a 'revelatory moment' (Trigger, Forsey & Meurk, 2012) when experiencing political activism helped me better understand young people's meanings of a youth solidarity.

Inclusion in youth solidarities and a sense of belonging to a political group is not always rational that invites further research on youth activism focus on emotional and embodied sense of engagement.

References

- Atwal, M., (2009), 'Evaluating Nashi's sustainability: autonomy, agency and activism', *Europe-Asia Studies*, **61** (5): 743–745.
- Bennett W. L. (2012) *The Personalization of Politics Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Vol. 644. No. 1. P. 20 – 39.*
- Blum (2006) *Russian Youth Policy: Shaping the Nation's State Future. SAIS Review. Vol. XXVI no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2006)*
- Harris, Wyn, Younes (2010) 'Beyond apathetic or activist youth. 'Ordinary' young people and contemporary forms of participation'. *Young* 18 (1): 9-32
- Hemment, J., (2009), 'Soviet-style neoliberalism? Nashi, youth voluntarism, and the restructuring of social welfare in Russia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, **56** (6): 36–50.
- Hemment, Julie (2012a) *Nashi, Youth Voluntarism, and Potemkin NGOs: Making Sense of Civil Society in Post-Soviet Russia. Slavic Review*, 71(2)
- Juris, J.S. (2008) *Performing politics. Image, embodiment, and affective solidarity during anti-corporate globalization protests. Ethnography Vol 9(1): 61–97*
- Lassila, J., (2012b), 'Making sense of Nashi's political style: the bronze soldier and the counter-orange community', *Demokratizatsiya*, **19** (3): 253–276.
- Lassila, Jussi (2012) *The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia II. The search for Distinctive Conformism in the Political Communication of Nashi, 2005-2009. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2012*
- Lyytikäinen, L. 2013: *Gendered and Classed Activist Identity in the Russian Youth Movement, the Sociological Review*, 61 (3): 499-524.
- Lyytikäinen, L. 2014: *Performing Political Opposition in Russia. The Case of the Russian Youth Movement Oborona. Publications of the Department of Social Research 2014:8, University of Helsinki*
- Mijnssen, I. (2012) *The Quest for an Ideal Youth in Putin's Russia I. Back to Our Future! History, Modernity and Patriotism according to Nashi, 2005-2012. Stuttgart/Hannover: ibidem-Verlag*
- O'Toole, D. Marsh and S. Jones, 'Political Literacy Cuts Both Ways: The Politics of Non-Participation Among Young People', *Political Quarterly*, 74 (2003), 349–60.
- Omelchenko, E., (2005), 'Molodezhnii aktivizm v Rossii i global'nie transformatsii ego smysla', *Zhurnal issledovaniia sotsial'noi politiki*, 3 (1): 59–86.
- Pfaff, Nicolle (2009) 'Youth Culture as a Context of Political Learning: How Young People Politics amongst Each Other', *Young* 17(2): 167–89.
- Pilkington, H. (1994) *Russia's Youth and its Culture: A nations constructors and constructed. Routledge*
- Pilkington, H., Omel'chenko, E. and Garifzianova, A., (2010), *Russia's Skinheads: Exploring and Rethinking Subcultural Lives, London: Routledge.*
- Schwartz, M., (2007), 'Russia's political youths', *Demokratizatsiya*, **15** (1): 73–85.
- Sue Scott, J Holland, and C Ramazanoglu. "Managing Risk and Experiencing Danger: Tensions between Government AIDS Education Policy and Young Women's Sexuality" *Gender and Education* 1.4 (1990)

Trigger, D., Forsey, M. & Maurk, C. (2012) Revelatory moments in fieldwork. Qualitative Research, 12 (5): 513-527

Zhelkina, A. (2014) "Hanging Out," Creativity, and the Right to the City: Urban Public Space in Russia before and after the Protest Wave of 2011-2012. Statis, 2(1), pp. 228-259

Acknowledgement

- This work/article is an output of a research project implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE).
- The study was implemented in the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2014.
- The results of the project " Youth Solidarities and Generations of XXI Century: Meaning of Labor and Consumption", carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2014, are presented in this work.
- The research leading to these results has received funding from the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics
- Support from the Basic Research Program of the National Research University Higher School of Economics is gratefully acknowledged

¹ All the names are pseudonyms