

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group

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Informative Activism and the Blogosphere in Japan after 311

In Japan nuclear power has long been associated with technocratic knowledge of male experts. The accident of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant on March 11, 2011 dealt a major blow to this understanding. The events of 311 also led many ordinary citizens to train themselves in science as more and more people became aware that measurements of Sieverts and Becquerel could indicate a tangible risk to their health and lives. Already in the early days of the crisis a new movement emerged that included many female members, particularly mothers. Mothers challenged their societal roles as reproductive nurturers within the family and began to reach out to society by measuring radiation levels, calling for decontamination and for appropriate measures to ensure that food is safe. To these mothers the blogosphere offered spaces where they could obtain and share information, build up networks and communicate their worries.

In this talk, I will present a case study of the Tokatsu region in Chiba prefecture. The study addresses how women activists tried to use their experience as parents to legitimize political demands and thus affect policy making and public discourse after 311. Drawing on McCormick's (2009) research about democratizing science movements, my analysis of eight weblogs by activists from the Tokatsu region explores how the blogosphere enabled them to form a collective identity online, to further their political identities, and to mobilize and develop a social movement. In the presentation, I will show how activists take on new identities in course of their activities and challenge allegedly objective expert knowledge. Moreover, I illustrate how activists become involved in knowledge production through developing new areas of research that would address their concerns, thus drawing attention to previously neglected issues such as health risks of low-dose radiation exposure. The study is based on content analysis of more than 1000 blog entries as well as network analysis, and aims at broadening the theoretical and empirical horizons of identity and social movement studies.

Natalia Novikova is currently Ph.D. student at the University of Tsukuba, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences. She holds a Master's degree in Linguistics and Communication Studies from Saint Petersburg University, Russia.

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is organized by Steffen Heinrich, Phoebe Holdgrün and Daniel Kremers.

All are welcome to attend, but registration (holdgruen@dijtokyo.org) is appreciated.

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