

## **Child and childhood in post-war Poland (1944-1956)**

### **Description for the general public (English)**

The photographs and excerpts from film chronicles from the first post-war years show children: gloomy, smiling, dressed better or worse, playing in class on the ruins, going to school, leaving church, collecting potato beetles. Children's images tell a lot, but they don't say everything about their childhood.

The aim of the presented project is to investigate the situation of children in Poland immediately after the Second World War. It will be described in two important stages of research. The first phase will involve a systematic analysis of public authorities' activities with regard to children, as well as how childcare facilities worked. Their analysis will be possible thanks to the documentation of the activities of state institutions, as well as the press and literature devoted to the issues of care and upbringing. Apart from the process of the activities themselves, their social and cultural context will be important, the knowledge of which will make it possible to develop a definition of "childhood". The second stage, the most important from the point of view of innovative methods of conducting research, will be to get to know the perspective of the child, the examination of which will be possible thanks to the materials produced by children during the studied period, i.e. in the 1940s and 1950s. These materials include, but are not limited to, children's drawings, diaries, correspondence and school books, as well as other more incidental children's products such as rhymes on the back of the book cover. As cultural historians occasionally use this type of source, my aim will be not only to collect and use the collected sources, but also to develop methodological tools that are useful when studying this type of source. Only by applying a child's filter to the developed definition of childhood will it be possible to see the situation of the child in post-war Poland in a comprehensive way, which can say more not only about the catalogue of children's games and everyday activities, but also about the physical, material and emotional experience of childhood. A perspective mediated by child-manufactured materials may allow access to the past which is not otherwise available.

The period from 1944 to 1956 seems special because of the smooth transition from war to peace, as it is difficult to indicate unequivocally the moment when the war ended. This period is also interesting from the perspective of political history, as during this period the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), and later the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), strengthened its power in Poland. In my opinion, this time is also extremely interesting for research into the history of childhood, which is part of a broader picture of social and cultural changes. The research carried out so far has mainly pointed to children as victims of war, who soon afterwards became victims of new totalitarianism, either as direct victims or victims of arrests of their relatives or indoctrination. Without questioning the validity of such a diagnosis, I believe that it is worth drawing attention to the changes taking place in this period, the origins of which should not be seen solely or directly in the ideology of the ruling party. The necessity of women's paid work was a result of both shortages caused by the war and the plan of dynamic industrialization of the country. Therefore, it became necessary to build new kindergartens, nurseries and schools, but also extra-school care institutions, such as kindergartens, community centres, Jordanian gardens. The establishment of these institutions resulted in the necessity to employ teachers and educators who had daily contact with children. In these everyday contacts, in narrow flats and in the backyards of post-war Poland, childhood was performed, about which today little is known, because this period, like the phenomenon hidden under the banner of "PRL", was reduced to a few stereotypical slogans. This project aims to try to bring out the voice of children from the past. A voice that will not only describe the situation and the way of perceiving childhood, but will perhaps allow you to learn something new about the post-war reality. Also the reality "for adults", from the poem of Adam Wazyk.