

Interwar Tarnów, a typical Polish-Jewish town and rapidly developing city (population: 35.3 thousand in 1921, 55.6 thousand in 1938), appears to be especially intriguing as a research site. It seems that the ethnic and social diversity of Tarnów promoted a multitude of attitudes and opened up opportunities for personal development and/or social advancement for female youth between the ages of 14 and 21. Girls lived in families of many and one person, in single or multi-family households. They differed in their religious background and came from different social strata. They attended public or non-public, co-educational and diversified schools.

The main task of this project will be a reasonably complete and multi-faceted reconstruction of the social and cultural functioning of various classes, groups and social environments of the female youth in interwar Tarnów. The project will also answer these questions: Who were the representatives of the “female youth”? How, as a specific and diverse social group, were they perceived in public space? What were their opportunities for social and individual fulfilment? What were they aspiring to?

Most of the known studies are related to the female youth community in general. Within the field of social history, Tarnów is a virtually unrecognised space. Perspective proposed in this project would encourage a more detailed observation of certain socialisation processes. The research in relation to the female youth in Tarnów may not only enrich our knowledge about the pace and scope of modernisation and emancipation processes and their conditions in interwar Tarnów, but also deepen our insight into the social history of Poland between 1918 and 1939 in general.

The additional objective is to develop a method of interpretation and historical analysis which would be adequate for the research on the social role of gender. Although the term “female youth” is well known, it is important to carefully consider whether this type of research can open up new perspectives and fit in with the current of so-called “girlhood studies”. Such a reinterpretation of the term “female youth” would allow us to draw on the traditional currents of Polish historiography, as well as on the achievements and works of educational history researchers.

The knowledge obtained from this project may also prove useful for future comparative studies, for example on the impact of emancipatory patterns disseminated via mass culture, especially cinema, in the 1920s and 1930s.

The research will be conducted through the use of press, visual materials, school and organisational documents, statistics and egodocuments of various authorship, both Polish and Jewish. From them we can obtain information about everyday life in a family and community; its interests, attitudes towards the body, clothing, etc. We can also obtain information about attitudes and behaviours of the preceptors and fosterlings, as well as interrelationships between them and various issues that motivated them.