

Children's Fashion or Clothes for Kids? A Description of Children's Clothes in the Interwar Period

Summary

This paper describes clothes for children of up to twelve years of age at the time of the Second Polish Republic in the south of Poland, in particular the former Krakow and Lwów provinces. The subject of the analysis is the National Museum in Krakow's collection of children's clothes as well as iconographic material including the collections of old photographs belonging to the National Museum in Krakow, the Historical Museum of the City of Krakow and the Walery Rzewuski Museum of the History of Photography in Krakow as well as photographs printed in *Płomyk* – a Polish national weekly for children and teenagers.

Children's fashion in the interwar period had to be practical. It was hardly inspired by adults' fashion. Its transformations concerned mainly accessories, in particular girls' hats and underwear. The style of clothes was formed already in the 1920s, and today it is very difficult to date precisely children's clothes if their provenance is unknown. Because garments for kids were often made at home, their style could not be complex. Their simplicity and modesty was in accordance with the canons of bringing up children in the interwar period. Due to the latter, children's fashion understood as an attempt at following new trends was unacceptable. It must be remembered that when using the term "fashion" in the context of clothes for kids, it concerns a phenomenon of a more statistical character than the present-day fashion for adults. One of the most characteristic elements of attire for small children and slightly older girls was a pinafore. The style and character of garments for one- and several-year-old girls and even twelve-year-olds did not differ much. Slightly greater differences could be observed in the case of clothes for small boys, who often wore playsuits, and older boys, who most often had clothes reminiscent of men's sportswear. In the interwar period small boys no longer wore dresses and their sex was emphasized from their earliest years. The principle of designing clothes based on the most basic geometric forms followed the principles of the art deco style, which was not an intentional reference to the trends prevailing in art and ornamentation, but most probably resulted from practical reasons. One of the most interesting aspects of kids' fashion during the period of the Second Polish Republic was the influence of the fascination with folk culture, which could be seen in the use of motifs typical of folk ornamentation. The *Płomyk* weekly propagated the beauty of folk costumes and children were encouraged to decorate their clothes with folk embroidery.