

Childhood and youth in socialist Czechoslovakia

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“A basic requirement for the successful development of a school-age child age is that the educational activities of the family and the school should be in harmony and, furthermore, that there should be compliance with our new social order; in other words, all of these factors should bring up the socialist man.” In one sentence of the publication *O výchově dětí v rodině a ve škole se zřetelem ke spolupráci rodiny a školy (On the Education of Children in the Family and at School with Regard to Family-School Cooperation; 1954)*, Ludvík Šulc set forth the demands and expectations of post-February educational activities aimed at forming, in the ideal case, obedient, diligent children/youths identified with the system of government – future citizens of the socialist homeland. By referring to the family, he also touched on the extracurricular space and the family background of children, which could not be thought of in unideological terms. The interest in young people on the part of post-February regime was understandable – adequately formed youths represented the proverbial future of people’s democratic (later socialist) Czechoslovakia.

However, the history of childhood in socialist Czechoslovakia is more complex. It is necessary to avoid the normative idea of some sort of ideal childhood making it possible to assess the state and morals of socialist society. Conversely, it is appropriate to historicise childhood, i.e. to ask what ideas about childhood existed, what political, cultural and social measures these ideas were intended to enforce and how children ultimately lived in this society. It is important to include children of *various kinds* in the research, i.e. to take an interest in various ethnic groups, social classes, gender, religion and, certainly, categories of difference (disabilities, social deviance, etc.).

Possible thematic areas:

- Laws, norms and expectations shaping and limiting the lives and activities of youths
- Academic instruction and education of (not only) children and youths: forms, objectives, strategies, contexts
- Extracurricular and free-time activities of children and youths
- (Ab)normality and ideals in relation to childhood and youth
- Corporeality and visuality