

Forms of Health and Physical Education in the Theory and Practice of Civic Education of the Women's Civic Labour Union (Selected Examples)

Mirosław Piwowarczyk / e-mail: mirosław.piwowarczyk@uwr.edu.pl
Institute of Pedagogy, University of Wrocław, Poland

Piwowarczyk, M (2025). Forms of Health and Physical Education in the Theory and Practice of Civic Education of the Women's Civic Labour Union (Selected Examples). *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, 17/2025/1, 23–36.

<https://doi.org/10.5817/cphpj-2025-002>

The Women's Civic Work Union, as one of the most influential pro-government women's organizations in interwar Poland, conducted a wide-ranging educational and instructional campaign, primarily in the field of civic and social education. Its goal was to create a "new type of Polish female citizen." In its work, the Association employed both traditional and modern means, forms, and methods of educational influence. Among the effective forms of educational activity were various types of summer camps: military-recreational, vacation, education-recreational, hiking, and those organized in permanent facilities such as hostels and boarding houses. These camps were intended to serve as a unique socio-educational space with significant pedagogical value, effectively shaping the social, civic, and national attitudes deemed desirable by the Association. As part of the camp activities, a healthy and hygienic lifestyle was also promoted, providing women with opportunities for rest and recovery of both physical and mental health.

Camps were organized in several attractive locations throughout Poland. Dozens of different types of camp centers were operated, involving a total of several thousand women.

Keywords: *The Women's Civic Work Union, women's education, physical, health and civic education, leisure camps, recreational camps, vacation camps, Second Polish Republic*

The Women's Civic Work Union (Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet, ZPOK) was one of the most influential women's organisations within the Sanation movement in Poland during the interwar period. It was established on 25th March 1928 and operated continuously until the outbreak of the Second World War. It had a clearly defined ideological and political character, which determined its goals and tasks. One of the top priorities of the Union was the activation of women and their civic and state education, the creation of a 'new

type of Polish female citizen', physically and mentally healthy, aware of her civil rights and duties, interested in state affairs, independent, distinguished by a deep sense of responsibility for the state, and participating in work "to raise ethical, cultural, economic and social standards."¹

In the image of the "new female citizen" that was propagated the strongest emphasis was placed on the importance of women's social activity in the model of feminine citizenship pursued by the organisation. It was emphasised that social work stimulating the activity and initiative of ZPOK members "in the interest of the common good of society and the state" was to be an important component of the process of civic and state education as a way of shaping the moral attitudes of the members and developing their self-esteem. The *Ideological Statement* of the ZPOK posited that the precondition for educating a good citizen was to recognise their worth, so the leaders of the organisation were tasked with instilling in their members and charges "absolute integrity; civil courage; a sense of individual and collective responsibility; respect for human dignity and a deep faith in human spiritual values."² In addition, the concept of a "new citizen" also contained the demand/purpose of caring for the physical health of women having the strength to meet the challenges and tasks ahead of them. Accordingly, the Union declared that it was the duty of its activists to promote a healthy, hygienic lifestyle, to enable women to have rest and regain their health because good health, both physical and mental, of girls and women was the prerequisite for effective educational work.

In practice, the most important educational task undertaken by the members of the Union was the implementation of a new model of civic and state education for women.

Educational, upbringing and civic work was mainly carried out by the Department of Political and Civic Education (Wydział Wychowania Polityczno-obywatelskiego, WWP-O)³ which implemented it mainly through its own day care centres where a systematic and logical programme of teaching about the state was conducted in the form of lectures, courses, discussion meetings and

¹ For more on the ZPOK see: Piwowarczyk, M. (2018). Rola Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet w kształceniu (i dokształcaniu) zawodowym kobiet na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1929-1939. In: J. Lusek (Eds.), *Oświata i nauka na Kresach Wschodnich w XIX i XX wieku*, Bytom: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań, Muzeum Górnośląskie w Bytomiu, pp. 175-192; Also: Piwowarczyk, M. (2016). Kobiety aktywne. Działalność społeczno-oświatowa liderki Wileńskiego Zrzeszenia Wojewódzkiego Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet (1929-1939). In: A. Dawid, J. Lusek (Eds.), *Kobiety na Kresach na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa-Bytom-Opole, pp. 43-60; Piwowarczyk, M. (2017). The educational role of the journals of social and educational associations in the Second Republic of Poland as exemplified by "Citizen Work" of the Women's Citizen Work Association. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal* 9/1, pp. 7-18; Piwowarczyk, M. (2014). Civil education in the theory and practice of Women's Civil Work Association in the Second Polish Republic. *Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal* 6/1, pp. 30-39.

² *Deklaracja ideowa* (1938). Praca Obywatelska 5-6, p. 2.

³ Until 1934 Department of Civic Education (Wydział Wychowania Obywatelskiego).

practical Work Groups. Thus, the work based on day care centres became one of the most developed forms of educational, upbringing and civic work carried out by the ZPOK.⁴

According to the leaders of the Union, the day care centres were the most important and effective form of educational work, but not the only one. In addition to day care work, political and civic education clerks also used other forms of work, including various types of summer camps, such as military and recreational, or recreational and educational holiday camps, hiking camps as well as holidays stays organised in permanent facilities, i.e. hostels and guesthouses.

The ZPOK quickly recognised the importance of health and physical education in its educational activities. This issue was treated as one of the top priorities in the work plans. It was recognised that health and physical fitness were prerequisites for the proper performance of daily duties, that “practising gymnastics, apart from physical fitness, brings the factor of order, discipline and effort into the life of a citizen”,⁵ which was desirable from the point of view of the political and educational goals of the Union and was considered to be “of genuinely inestimable value.”⁶ Therefore, already in 1930, the ZPOK, together with the social committee for the Preparation of Women for National Defence (Przysposobienie Kobiet do Obrony Kraju, PKdOK), began to organise military-style summer camps for working women (the first camp was organised in Fronołowo on the River Bug). In 1932 the promotion of health and physical education and the organisation of summer camps for young females who were unemployed or day-care attendees was taken over by the Department of Physical Education (Wydział Wychowania Fizycznego, WWF) at the Main Board of the ZPOK, which cooperated with the Departments of Mother and Child Care, of Political and Civic Education and of Women’s Affairs.⁷ Detailed guidelines for organising and running camps and their programmes were developed, including a detailed instruction on “civic education at camps”, prepared in 1935 by WWP-O instructor Halinka Żółtowska.⁸

The leaders of the ZPOK (e.g. Helena Witkiewicz-Mokrzycka) maintained the position that holiday camps were an excellent opportunity to spread the slogans and ideals of the Union; an excellent opportunity to instil these ideals

⁴ *Praca świetlicowa. Instrukcja dla świetlic Z.P.O.K.* (1934), Warszawa, p. 3.

⁵ Tańska, M. (1935). *Tajemnica dobrego samopoczucia. Gimnastyka i sport*. Praca Obywatelska 13, p. 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybes Archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives) [hereinafter: LCVA], Wileńskie Zrzeszenie Wojewódzkie ZPOK (*Vilnius Provincial Association of the ZPOK*) [hereinafter: WZW ZPOK], Akta Referatu Opieki 1935, f.334, op.1, nr 71, *Okólnik nr. 1 Zrzeszenia Wojewódzkiego ZPOK. Wilno z dnia 26.II.1935*, unnumbered pages.

⁸ Jaroszewiczowa, H. (1938). *Wydział Wychowania Fizycznego*. Praca Obywatelska 5-6, p. 60; Żółtowska, H. (1935). *Wychowanie obywatelskie na koloniach i półkoloniach*. Praca Obywatelska 12, pp. 10-11.

into “young hearts and souls”; to raise well-rounded citizens. It was accepted that such camps created “exceptionally favourable conditions for the implementation of universal (and union-specific) educational tasks, i.e. to shape people into future participants in the cultural life of the nation, initially only as conscious consumers of cultural goods, and then as co-creators of these goods and implementers of ideals”.⁹ It was assumed that camps constituted a specific social and educational space, “that they created a separate environment with great educational values, effectively shaping the psyche of the female campers”.¹⁰ The camps were to serve the purpose to “raise the cultural level of girls, make them more complete, teach them to reach for the values of a wider environment, not only material but also mental”.¹¹ The camps were primarily aimed at improving the physical, health, spiritual and mental condition of their participants.¹² It was claimed that the camps provided all sorts of convenient conditions for the implementation of educational tasks, i.e. “raising the value of the individual because within the framework of a camp it is possible to develop independence, friendship, physical fitness, dexterity, senses, as well as valuable aspects of intellect, perceptiveness, initiative, independent judgement, strong will and imagination.”¹³ The union press wrote that “subordination to the group will teach young people the charm of coexistence, the desire to distinguish themselves not in a fight, but in noble sporting competition”.¹⁴

The most appropriate forms and means of implementing the educational programme at the camps were considered to be common room activities, bonfires, trips, gymnastic exercises, reading and talks – mainly in the field of political and civic education.¹⁵ These forms were used in educational work at all types of camps run by ZPOK: (1) military-recreational camps for working women; (2) holiday camps (“improving physical fitness and providing recreation”) for working women; (3) educational and recreational camps (“improving physical education”) for poor and unemployed women; (4) educational and recreational camps (“improving physical education”) for girls from union day care centres; (5) hiking camps, (6) permanent camps in own facilities of the ZPOK.

⁹ Bagińska, T. (1938). *Praca wychowawcy na kolonii i półkolonii*. Praca Obywatelska 12, p. 8.

¹⁰ Bagińska, T. (1938). *Praca wychowawcy na kolonii...*, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

¹² *Ibid*, pp. 8-9.

¹³ Witkiewicz-Mokrzycka, H. (1938), *Letnia akcja opiekuńcza*. Praca Obywatelska 9, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ For the purpose and topics of the talks, see: Bagińska, T. (1938). *Praca wychowawcy na kolonii...*, op. cit., pp. 8-9; LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego za rok 1935, f.334, op.1, nr 86, *Program pogadank z zakresu wychowania polityczno-obywatelskiego*, unnumbered pages.

The ZPOK began to develop its camp activities intensively in 1932. In the summer of that year, educational and recreational camps were organised in five locations in Poland for over 1,000 girls, mainly from union day care centres.

In 1934, a camp campaign was carried out in Kozienice and Sulejów for a total of 500 participants. Between 1935 and 1937, a 4-week camp (in July and August 1935) in Durycze for 412 girls, a four-week camp (in July 1936) in Borkowo for members of the Warsaw-based Voluntary Work House (Dom Pracy Dobrowolnej, DPD) at the ZPOK, and four four-week camps (in July and August 1937) for 500 girls in Borkowo, Durycze and Koszewniki were organised. The largest number of camps were organised in the summer of 1938. They were located in Pierwoszyn near Gdynia (educational and recreational camp “improving physical education” for girls from day care centres between 1st and 28th August for 250 participants); Skole (an educational and recreational camp “improving physical education” for girls from day care centres between 1 and 28 August for 220 participants); Borowa near Kartuzy (a holiday camp “improving physical fitness and providing recreation” for women in blue-collar jobs, between 1st and 28th August for 180 participants); Chornohora near Vorokhta (a holiday camp “improving physical fitness and recreation” for women in white-collar jobs, between 1st July and 15th August for 100 participants, and an educational and recreational camp for girls from day care centres to improve physical education from 1st to 28th August for 330 participants); Borkowa near Żukowo (a “recreational and fitness” holiday camp for day care centre managers between 20th July and 20th August for 40 participants, organised by the WWP-O and WWF); Skala (military and recreational camp between 16th July and 1st August for 27 participants, organised by the WWP-O and the PKdOK Section of the ZPOK); Husiatyn (military and recreation camp from 1st August to 17th August for 27 participants, organised by the WWP-O and the PKdOK Section of the ZPOK); Zadrójki in the Vilnius Region (military and recreational camp from 1st August to 17th August for 15 campers, organised by the WWP-O and the PKdOK Section of the ZPOK); in the Lemko Region (a hiking camp from 1st to 22nd August for 15 women, organised by the WWP-O and the PKdOK Section of the ZPOK); in Pomerania (an academic “educational and propaganda” hiking camp from 31st July to 28th August for 60 participants, organised by the WWP-O and the PKdOK Section of the ZPOK).¹⁶

¹⁶ *Wykaz obozów i kursów organizowanych przez ZPOK w okresie letnim 1938, (1938). Prosta Droga 23, p. 2.*

Military-style and Recreational Summer Camps for Working Women

In June 1931, a second camp of this type was organised in Skole (Eastern Lesser Poland), co-financed by the military authorities. Nearly 300 women participated in it (in four two-week slots).¹⁷ Candidates aged between 18 and 35 were accepted into the camp.¹⁸ The majority of the camp participants were manual workers (factory workers) from state-owned factories, including the tobacco monopoly and military factories (from Warsaw, Lodz, Bialystok, Krakow, Radom, Brest, Vilnius, Grodno, Poznan, Katowice and Bytom). On the first day of the camp, the participants underwent thorough medical examinations to determine their state of health. A large number of women were found to be severely anaemic, exhausted and often with lung disease (these women were not allowed to participate in physical exercise).¹⁹ The health, physical and mental condition of the camp participants was vividly described in a report: "...they arrived from hard, laborious work, physically and mentally exhausted, filled with grey worries about everyday life and petty longings for a holiday".²⁰ Out of concern for the health status of the young women, their ("military") diet was adjusted to their health and needs, i.e. larger amounts of milk, vegetables and fruit were introduced in addition to bread and meat. The health/physical result of the stay in Skole was such that "despite constant exercise and motor games, despite trips and walks, an average weight gain of 2.5 to 4 kilograms, ... deeper changes, which the beneficial effects of mountain air and sun brought to the girls' bodies, could be recognised by changes in their disposition, skin colour, increased sparkle in their eyes, and increasing joy of life."²¹

The organisers wanted to make the two-week holidays, which female manual workers received each year, more attractive, and they assumed "that during the camp it would be possible to awaken in the women's souls a sense of civic rights and human duties, a desire for a fuller, more multifaceted life and a longing for beauty, and above all to bathe them in air and sunshine, the only remedies for the soul and body."²² Ultimately, due to the "poor physical condition of the girls, the stay in Skole was given the character of a holiday camp rather than a military camp."²³ The programme only included a small number of classes in military subjects, with the main emphasis on physical education and complete rest.

¹⁷ Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obóz letni w Skolem*. Prosta Droga 27, pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obozy letnie dla robotnic*. Praca Obywatelska 14-15, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obozy letnie dla robotnic...*, op. cit., p. 3.

²⁰ Hajkiewiczowa, S. (1932). „Ciężkie czasy” a obozy robotnicze. Praca Obywatelska 11-12, p. 7.

²¹ Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obozy letnie dla robotnic...*, op. cit., p. 3.

²² *Ibid*, p.2.

²³ *Ibid*.

However, the military organisation was retained – the daily schedule, discipline and forms.²⁴

A similar camp to the one in Skole was organised in 1934 by the WWP-O in Kozienice. The camp was intended for women from Upper Silesia, the Krakow and Kielce provinces, from factory and mining centres, with 204 participants.²⁵

In the second half of the 1930s, the ZPOK, through WWF, WWP-O and the PKdOK Section, more and more often organised camps of this type (military and recreational). This was a response to the deteriorating international situation and the need to prepare women (“new Polish citizens”) to defend the country in the event of a war threat.

Holiday Camps (“Improving Physical Fitness and Providing Recreation”) for Working Women

Camps of this type were recreational and leisure-oriented in nature. They were paid – “for those who could afford the appropriate fee”²⁶ – and mainly intended for women doing physical work. The fees were not high so the “holiday” offer of the ZPOK was attractive to many women, both financially and in terms of the programme. Through these camps, the Union pursued its political and educational goals – it promoted the model of a healthy, physically fit, strong woman, worker and citizen. In this way, it gained supporters for its ideas and organisation.

The model facilities of this type were the camps in Verkiai (Werki) near Vilnius where the Vilnius Provincial Branch of the ZPOK organised a holiday camp in 1937 (“improving physical fitness and providing recreation”)

²⁴ Daily schedule: ‘Wake up at 7 am, prayer at 7.05 am, gymnastics from 7.10 to 7.35 am from 7.35 to 8.15 am, washing in the stream and tidying up the tents, breakfast at 8.15 am, morning report at 8.45 am. From 9 am to 11.30 am lectures/talks and physical exercises.’ The programme of lectures, or rather talks included subjects such as Polish history, contemporary Poland, civic education, hygiene and rescue skills; and within military science: army organisation and gas defence. Physical exercises involved javelin and discus throwing, shot put, motor and sports games, jumping and running. ‘Occasionally, instead of physical exercises, there was swimming in the river or a walk. At 11.45 am there was a service report, and at 12.00 pm was lunch. From 12.30 to 1.30 pm there was an hour of silence, and from 1.30 to 3.00 pm was free time, during which the girls read, ran errands in town, or, in the case of the weaker girls, slept. From 3.00 to 3.45 pm, more physical exercise, from 3.45 to 4.15 pm, afternoon tea, from 4.15 to 7.00 pm, physical activities interspersed with talks or walks and trips to the surrounding forests and mountains. At 7.15 pm was dinner, from 8.00 to 9.00 pm, a bonfire or (on rainy days) common room activities, at 9.30 pm, lights out – from that moment on, talking was no longer allowed.’ Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obóz letni w Skolem...*, op. cit., pp.8-9; Ceysingerówna, H. (1931). *Obozy letnie dla robotnic...*, op. cit., p. 2.

²⁵ *Obóz dla dziewcząt w Kozienicach*. (1934). Prosta Droga 29, pp. 4-5.

²⁶ Mianowska, S. (1938). *Jak pracowaliśmy w lecie*. Praca Obywatelska 20, p. 6.

for female manual workers of the Vilnius City Council (two 2-week slots; 1st slot: 1th-14th July; 2nd slot: 13th-28th July.²⁷ In 1938, camps were organised in Borów near Kartuzy and in Chornohora near Vorokhta (for the working intelligentsia).²⁸ The camp in Borów brought together 180 women aged between 21 and 50 years. Most of them were manual workers for whom efforts were made to create conditions at the camp to replenish their exhausted physical and moral strength by adapting the camp programme to its objectives, which was active rest, and to the mental and physical capabilities of the participants ("gymnastics and sports were practised, and all camp tasks were carried out diligently and willingly"). In her summary of the holiday campaign, the camp manager wrote: "The campers rested, gained weight and their faces brightened up. They became enthusiastic about the idea of camping and holidays, made plans to build their own holiday campsite and almost unanimously emphasised the need to widely promote the idea of holidays within the ZPOK."²⁹

Educational and Recreational Camps ("Improving Physical Education") for Poor and Unemployed Women

Educational and recreational camps for poor (low-income) and unemployed women were organised by the Women's Affairs Departments (Referaty Spraw Kobietych, RSK). For example, in 1932, the RSK of the Lviv Branch of the ZPOK organised a holiday camp in Ustrzyki Dolne from 5th July to 5th August for 46 participants aged 15 to 30 "from low-income backgrounds, who, for a small fee, could enjoy the best conditions for a whole month, with fresh air, sunshine, carefree freedom, good food and a pleasant social atmosphere."³⁰

The centre (camp) was located in a large, comfortable, bright and airy house on the border between Ustrzyki and Jasień, near a mountain with a coniferous forest and the River Strwiąż, which provided an opportunity for swimming. The excellent mountain air, good and plentiful food, consisting of five meals a day, as well as the exemplary organisation of camp life brought the best results for the physical and moral health of the residents. Here, they found not only refreshment and respite after work, but also an atmosphere of benevolent cordiality, intellectual and moral stimulation, encouraging them to work on developing their character and to better understand their duties towards themselves, their families and the state.³¹ The good organisation was evident in the timetable of the camp day's activities. In addition to ensuring exemplary order and tidiness and satisfying physical and intellectual needs, the

²⁷ *Obóz wypoczynkowy dla pracowników fizycznych*, (1937). Samorządowiec Wileński 5, p. 8.

²⁸ Mianowska, S. (1938). *Jak pracowaliśmy w lecie...*, op. cit., p. 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Pereńska, J. (1932). *Te, które nie znalazły dotąd wypoczynku*. Praca Obywatelska 20, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

camp command gave the residents freedom, allowing them to function according to their “individual inclinations and preferences”. The daily programme included gymnastics, sports games, walks, sunbathing and river bathing. After dinner at 7 pm there were talks on current affairs, social issues and literature, recitations, choral singing and reading aloud. In addition to these group activities and entertainment, the campers were given three hours in the morning for so-called free activities (e.g. reading books, handicrafts, writing letters, and spending time outdoors). Some attractive activities included lessons in art and rhythmic gymnastics and outings around the area. The daily routine, its organisation, medical care and good nutrition had a significant impact on the health, physical and mental condition of the participants. “The satisfactory health results were evidenced by the fact that all the campers gained between 1.5 and 6 kilograms. During the month they spent together, there was extraordinary harmony among the girls, who bonded as if they were one big family. No wonder, then, that they were very sorry to bid farewell to their holiday destination.”³²

Furthermore, the organisation of holiday camps for unemployed women was handled by the Department of Mother and Child Care, often in cooperation with the Women’s Physical Education Departments of the State Physical Education Office. The activities (programme) in the field of civic education for girls at such camps were conducted by the WWP-O.³³ In 1933, a total of 953 women aged between 14 and 20 years spent their leisure time at five camps (Kozienice, Kielce Province; Grandzicze near Grodno; Nowy Sącz; Sulejów near Piotrków; and Sieraków in the Poznań Province). “With few exceptions, they were girls in the most difficult economic situation: unemployed girls, orphans or children of unemployed parents, recruited from industrial and factory centres (including Warsaw, Łódź, Poznań and Upper Silesia).”³⁴ The holiday camps were intended to “restore their strength, give them health and moral benefits; the moral ones by bringing a moment of joy and relaxation into their gloomy, desperate lives, as well as by strengthening their faith in their own abilities and in the care of society and the state by directing their thoughts towards general social and state goals.”³⁵ The educational programme included the following activities: talks, common room activities, evening bonfires, gymnastics, trips and reading.

Subsequent camps of this type were organised in Grandzicze near Grodno (in August 1937, for 300 girls from Silesia, Warsaw and the provinces

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Śliwińska, L. (1933). *Obozy wypoczynkowe dla dziewcząt bezrobotnych*. Praca Obywatelska 19, p. 2. The State Office for Physical Education issued detailed instructions on educational work at summer camps implemented in the educational practice by the WWP ZPOK.

³⁴ Archiwum Akt Nowych (*Archives of Modern Records*) [hereinafter: AAN], sygn. 63, Akta Z. i J. Moraczewskich. Komitet Demokratyczny Wyborczy i Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej [w l. 1928-33] (Pamiętnik po roku 1933), p. 341 (345).

³⁵ AAN, sygn. 63, Akta Z. i J. Moraczewskich. Komitet Demokratyczny Wyborczy i Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej [w l. 1928-33] (Pamiętnik po roku 1933), p. 341 (345); Brzostkówna, H. (1933). *Na kolonji w Grodzicach pod Grodnem*. Prosta Droga 28, p. 2.

of Lodz, Vilnius, Novogradok and Bialystok) and in Durycze near Brest (in late July and early August of 1937, for 300 women from the provinces of Kielce, Krakow, Lublin, Volhynia, Tarnopol, Stanisławów and Lviv).³⁶

The effectiveness of the educational impact of such centres (camps) was repeatedly discussed among the members of the Union. A representative assessment of these forms of educational work was provided by Leokadia Śliwińska in the pages of *Praca Obywatelska (Civic Work)*: “As far as increasing physical strength is concerned, serious results were generally achieved, such as weight gain, lower temperature, improved well-being. As for the visible educational effect, the matter is not so obvious (due to the period being too short, only four weeks, and the exceptionally difficult scum that turned up at the camps).”³⁷

Educational and Recreational Camps (“Improving Physical Education”) for Girls from the ZPOK Day Care Centres

Every year from 1932, the union, through its departments, organised several summer camps for girls who participated in the activities of the union’s day care centres outside the summer period. During the holiday months, they were sent to camps where “physical exercise, games, fun and excursions, as well as prolonged exposure to fresh air and good nutrition had an excellent effect on their physical condition”.³⁸ It was assumed that the camps would also “shape ‘the girls’ souls under the influence of their leaders, in an atmosphere of harmony and order, in voluntary submission to the rules of discipline necessary for life in a larger group.”³⁹

In the summer of 1935, the WWF organised a central camp (educational and recreational) for girls from the ZPOK day care centres in Durycze near Brest-on-the-Bug between 15th July and 15th August. The camp was attended by 412 “day care centre girls” (divided into 3 sub-camps) and 32 instructors. The girls were aged between 14 and 20 years and they were sent to the camp from all over Poland, from the Provinces of Vilnius (24), Polesie (18), Volhynia (23); Krakow (2); Warsaw (94), Lublin (16), Lodz (68), Novogradok (6), Kielce (108) and Silesia (53).⁴⁰

The educational programme for the camp included physical education, trips, swimming, sunbathing, civic education, handicraft, singing and common room

³⁶ LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego od 1.IV.37 r. do 1.I.38 r., f.334, op.1, nr. 250, *Pismo do Zarządów Zrzeszeń Wojewódzkich ZPOK z dnia 22.VI.1937*, p. 211.

³⁷ Śliwińska, L. (1933). *Obozy wypoczynkowe dla dziewcząt...*, op. cit., p. 2.

³⁸ *Obóz w Borkowie*, (1937). Prosta Droga 38, p. 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Sekretariat 1936-37, f.334, op.1, nr 199, *Sprawozdanie Wydziału Wychowania Fizycznego za okres od 2 lutego 1935 r. do 15 listopada 1936 r.*, unnumbered pages; Miszewska, Z. (1935). *Hallo ! Tu obóz w Duryczach*. *Praca Obywatelska* 18, pp. 5-7.

activities. During the camp, a group of 85 people earned the State Sports Badge (the camp was co-organised by the Women's Physical Education Department of the State Physical Education Office).⁴¹

The camp was well organised and located in an attractive place and area. The daily programme included morning exercises, swimming in the River Bug, meals served four times a day in open-air dining spaces (final medical examinations showed that the participants had gained between 1.85 and 5 kilograms in weight), lots of sports activities and talks around campfires, participation in local and special events organised jointly with the local population as part of civic education.⁴²

Another four-week central camp in Durycze took place in August 1936 for 500 participants.

In 1937, another camp was held in Borkowo near Kartuzy, located in the beautiful surroundings of Kashubian Switzerland. It was attended by 140 women. During the camp, two trips were organised – to Kartuzy and Gdynia.⁴³ Bonfires were often organised, to which the local population was invited and participated in large numbers (a year earlier, in July 1936, a camp for members of the Warsaw-based Voluntary Work House (DPD) at the ZPOK was held in Borkowo and was attended by 70 people of whom 30 were from the DPD while the remaining participants were female manual workers).⁴⁴

In 1938, the WWF organised a camp for 500 members of the ZPOK, grouping them into three camp areas in Pierwoszyn near Gdynia, Borowo near Kartuzy by the lakes of the Kashubian Switzerland, and in Gadżyna in the Chornohora Valley.⁴⁵ The camp in Pierwoszyn (1st-28th August) was attended by 250 girls from the ZPOK day care centres (from Silesia, Vilnius, Volhynia and Pomerania). The programme of activities, although primarily aimed at 'making girls fall in love with sports and physical education, basking in the sun and eating well', was not limited to improving their health and physical fitness.⁴⁶ It also included educational and cultural activities and providing women with national defence training, familiarising participants with the general principles of national defence, the objectives and content of civic education, and in practical terms, with preparing food for large groups, known as 'mass cooking.'

⁴¹ LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego za rok 1935, f.334, op.1, nr 86, *Sprawozdanie Wydziału Fizycznego ZPOK za czas od 24.VI. do 1.X.1935 r.*, unnumbered pages.

⁴² Ankiewiczowa, M. (1935). *Echa obozu ZPOK w Duryczach*. Prosta Droga 30, p. 4.

⁴³ *Obóz w Borkowie...*, op. cit., p. 5.

⁴⁴ LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Sekretariat 1936-37, f.334, op.1, nr 199, *Sprawozdanie Wydziału Wychowania Fizycznego za okres od 2 lutego 1935 r. do 15 listopada 1936 r.*, unnumbered pages.

⁴⁵ Mianowska, S. (1938). *Jak pracowaliśmy w lecie*. Praca Obywatelska 20, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Hiking and Permanent Camps

Other types of camps organised by the ZPOK included hiking camps, intended e.g. for trade union activists (in August 1937 in the Tarnopol Province)⁴⁷ the purpose of which was to train and integrate a team of future instructors,⁴⁸ and so-called academic hiking camps for university students (organised in Eastern Lesser Poland (Małopolska) and Pomerania at the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938).⁴⁹ The union also organised recreational and educational stays in its own permanent facilities. From 1932, over 300 women spent their summer holidays each year at the Narocz hostel and boarding house in Postawy.⁵⁰ Similar (but smaller) hostels and boarding houses were operated by the ZPOK in Braslav (Vilnius Province) and Druskininkai (Białystok Province). The Union had their own model permanent holiday resorts, camps and summer camps in locations such as Klevan (Volhynia Province), Chociszewo (Łódź Province) and Ościśłowo (Warsaw Province).

Conclusion

Did the camp-based physical, health and civic education programmes organised and run by the ZPOK achieve their goals and objectives? It seems that they did. This is documented in the camp activity reports submitted each time by the organisers and instructors of these facilities. The effectiveness of this form of education in improving the physical and health condition of camp participants should not be questioned. However, the effectiveness of this work and its forms in terms of civic education may be and is the subject of discussion, in which, however, the unambiguous position of the ZPOK leaders must be taken into account. In their reports, the camp instructors wrote, among other things: “We implemented ... this civic education during every hour of the 30 days of living together at the camp. A day filled with hard work, strict discipline, frequent and well-planned trips to familiarise the campers with the image of contemporary Poland – these were the educational methods through which we transformed the girls, who were often unruly and rebellious towards the whole world, into disciplined citizens, aware of their duties, and it must be said that these methods did not fail.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Bezegowa, H. (1937). *Obóz wędrowny ZPOK*. Praca Obywatelska 20, p. 8.

⁴⁸ LCVA, WZW ZPOK, Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego od 1.IV.37 r. do 1.I.38 r., f.334, op.1, nr 250, *Pismo do Zarządów Zrzeszeń Wojewódzkich ZPOK z dnia 21 maja 1937 r.*, pp. 283-284.

⁴⁹ Żółtowska, H. (1938). *Wydział Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego*. Praca Obywatelska 5-6, p. 25; Kowalczykówna, S. (1939). *Akademicki obóz wędrowny*. Praca Obywatelska 5, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Sadowska, H. (1932). *Schronisko nad jeziorem Narocz (woj. Wileńskie)*. Prosta Droga 12, p. 6; Domanusowa, A. (1933). *Nad jeziorem Narocz*. Prosta Droga 27, p. 12.

⁵¹ Mianowska, S. (1938). *Jak pracowaliśmy w lecie...*, op. cit., p. 6.

The effectiveness of the educational measures was also confirmed by letters written to the civic education instructors by the camp participants. One of the “initially most rebellious girls” wrote: “...from the moment I left the camp, I cannot recognise myself, I have completely changed.” “At the camp, we learned how much can be done in a single day”, wrote another. “Now I will try to do things differently at home, I will introduce camp order”, assured a third.⁵²

References:

Archives

Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie (Archives of Modern Records):
Akta Z. i J. Moraczewskich. Komitet Demokratyczny Wyborczy i Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej [w l. 1928-33] (Pamiętnik po roku 1933)
Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybes Archyvas (Lithuanian Central State Archives):
Wileńskie Zrzeszenie Wojewódzkie ZPOK
Akta Referatu Opieki 1935
Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego 1935
Akta Referatu Wychowania Polityczno-Obywatelskiego od 1.IV.37 do 1.I.38 r.
Sekretariat 1936-37

Source materials

Praca świetlicowa. Instrukcja dla świetlic Z.P.O.K., Warszawa 1934

Press

„Praca Obywatelska”: 1931, 1932, 1933, 1935, 1937, 1938, 1939
„Prosta Droga”: 1931, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1937, 1938
„Samorządowiec Wileński”: 1937

Article / Studies

Piwowarczyk, M. (2014). Civil education in the theory and practice of Women’s Civil Work Association in the Second Polish Republic. In Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal Vol.6, no.1, Brno 2014.
Piwowarczyk, M. (2016). Kobiety aktywne. Działalność społeczno - oświatowa liderek Wileńskiego Zrzeszenia Wojewódzkiego Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet (1929-1939). In A.Dawid, J.Lusek (Eds.) *Kobiety na Kresach na przełomie XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa-Bytom-Opole: Wydawnictwo DiG.
Piwowarczyk, M. (2017). The educational role of the journals of social and educational associations in the Second Republic of Poland

⁵² AAN, sygn.63, Akta Z. i J. Moraczewskich. Komitet Demokratyczny Wyborczy i Związek Pracy Obywatelskiej [w l. 1928-33] (Pamiętnik po roku 1933), p. 342 (346).

as exemplified by "Citizen Work" of the Women's Citizen Work Associatio.
In Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal Vol.9, no.1, Brno 2017.

Piwowarczyk, M. (2018). Rola Związku Pracy Obywatelskiej Kobiet w kształceniu (i doksztalcaniu) zawodowym kobiet na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1929-1939. In J.Lusek (Eds.) *Oświata i nauka na Kresach Wschodnich w XIX i XX wieku*, Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Bytom: Muzeum Górnośląskie w Bytomiu.