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*À la recherche de vêtements de sport pour les enfants soviétiques : la création
des années 1920, entre utopie et conjoncture*

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EKATERINA KULINICHEVA

SEARCHING FOR SPORTSWEAR FOR THE NEW SOVIET CHILDREN

1920s Soviet design between the utopian and the situational

Rosenberg called Soviet society during the NEP era “a society in the making,”¹ emphasizing the ongoing negotiation between the imperial past and the post-revolutionary present, and between competing visions of the socialist future. This definition might be applied to the whole period of the first decade and a half of the Soviet regime, with these years being very variegated and witnessing extremely intense intellectual pursuits in various fields. The idea of negotiation is especially productive for analyzing cultural production, for example, new Soviet clothing design and *fizkul'tura* as a Soviet mass physical training and education program.

Grant observes that, “the ‘correct socialist way’ was of course a much contested territory in the 1920s.”² Debates on how children should practice *fizkul'tura* in the proper Soviet way serves as an example of such contestation, with discussions on this topic emerging in 1917-1918³ and continuing throughout the 1920s. Among those who contributed were doctors such as Lidiia Chulitskaia and Evgenii Radin, sports enthusiasts and theorists previously involved with pre-revolutionary sports movements such as former International Olympic Committee member Georgii Diuperron,⁴ and politicians like Bolshevik revolutionary and Soviet statesman Nikolai Podvoisky. This heterogeneous cohort of experts with different backgrounds

1. William G. Rosenberg, “Introduction: NEP Russia as a ‘transitional’ society,” in Sheila Fitzpatrick, et al., eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 4.

2. Susan Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society: Propaganda, Acculturation, and Transformation in the 1920s and 1930s* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 202.

3. V.V. Kukushkin, *Vse o sporte: spravochnik* [All about sports: a handbook], *Tom 2* (M.: Fizkul'tura i sport, 1978), 29.

4. His name is sometimes transliterated as Georges Duperron.

developed competing school curricula for physical education and fought over whether competitions should be allowed for children.⁵ Many of them saw education, using Kelly's wording, as preparation for "future citizenship" in "a Communist society,"⁶ and invented new games⁷ to educate Soviet children within the correct ideological framework and develop "the qualities most valuable for communism" in them.⁸ These experts also tried to provide children and young people with the "correct" clothes, equipment, and other material environment.

The case of physical education for children and youth also illustrates the ambitions of the Soviet *fizkul'tura* project. The new Soviet state aimed to involve many new categories of participants in physical training and healthier lifestyle from elder people and women, to low income workers, peasants, and so-called national minorities, making almost everybody a *fizkul'turnik* or *fizkul'turnitsa* (a man or woman practicing *fizkul'tura*). Education programs were meant to include not only secondary and tertiary students as in most similar programs in Europe or North America but also younger children. As I show, in the early Soviet context children and youth as an object of care for the state and state-supported institutions included people from birth to those over 20.

The tasks which early Soviet policymakers and promoters of *fizkul'tura* faced, went far beyond developing an ideological framework. There was no chance to launch and sustain such an ambitious large-scale long-term project without having sport halls and playgrounds, mass produced equipment and sportswear, and the programs to provide these things. Developing such a new material environment became one of the most essential tasks, which was accompanied by many additional challenges. The Soviet republics recovered very slowly from the First World War and the Civil War. In the 1920s, different regions of the country were tormented by famine and epidemics. Among other issues, it significantly increased the number of families who lost their breadwinners and homeless children in need of care by state-sponsored institutions whose resources were limited.⁹ One might say that against such a background, discussions about sportswear and equipment could be perceived as a "feast during the plague," but in fact, it was quite the opposite. The broader dissemination of *fizkul'tura* was supposed to improve the population's health and reduce the burden on the underdeveloped mass healthcare system. Under such circumstances, and when many adults and children faced the absence of any clothes and shoes, it was perceived as an urgent need for experts to adopt a proactive role and

5. L.V. Gerkan, "Nuzhny li sorenovaniia v shkole [Should we have competitions at school?]," *Vestnik fizicheskoi kul'tury*, no. 1 (1927): 4-6.

6. Catriona Kelly, *Children's World: Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2007), 67.

7. M.A. Radina-Kornil'eva, E.P. Radin, *Novym detiam – novye igry* [New games for new children] (M.: Izdatel'stvo Narkomzdrava RSFSR, 1927).

8. I took this formula from: "Fizkul'tura i kommunizm [Physical culture and communism]," *Izvestiia sporta*, September (ekstrennyi vypusk) (1923): 3.

9. Kelly, *Children's World*, 193-202.

develop practical casual clothing and sportswear that would be affordable and in line with the most advanced medical views. Thus, both *fizkul'tura* as a project related to public health and a new approach to sportswear and clothing can be considered an element of Soviet cultural and social policies of the 1920s.

In comparison to Western materials, Soviet *fizkul'tura* and sport as a material practice remains under-researched. Regarding the 1920s and 1930s, Grant briefly mentioned “the poor state of premises” and the lack of equipment,¹⁰ including that targeting children, among many obstacles that prevented *fizkul'tura* from being more widespread and successful in schools and other educational institutions. However, providing a more detailed analysis on the matter was out of her scope, the same can be said regarding other scholars.¹¹

This paper offers such an analysis regarding the 1920s with a focus on the development of sportswear for the new Soviet children as a case study. Besides being interested in the transitional and negotiational nature of the decade, I choose the 1920s to deepen the understanding of early Soviet *fizkul'tura* and sport between the 1917 Revolution and the Second World War. Beyond the institutional history and struggle for power between stakeholders, and when speaking of cultural issues such as age or gender, or visual representations, existing scholarship focuses mostly on the cases and artifacts from the period after 1928 and shows more interest in *fizkul'tura* and sport under Stalin than in *fizkul'tura* in the making of the earlier 1920s. This paper also presents *fizkul'tura* theorists and policymakers, as well as professionals involved in sportswear and clothing development, as important actors in child welfare since they are mostly absent from the scholarship on early Soviet childhood.

In what follows, I explore the competing discourses on children's and youth's sportswear design and production in the Soviet 1920s. How did ideas on the new society, the new people, and the new way of life (*novyi byt*) inform sportswear design? How did policymakers attempt to cope with the extremely unfavorable conditions of the decade? How were ideas on “correct” clothing transmitted to the public?

More precisely, I focus on sportswear for summer and indoor *fizkul'tura*, due to space considerations. In the 1920s, the summer *fizkul'tura* season officially lasted four months, from May 1 to the beginning of September. In the 1920s, the calendar year of Soviet *fizkul'turniki* was divided into three seasons: summer, winter and *bessazon'e*, “the off-season” or in-between season, when it was no longer possible to exercise outdoors in light summer clothing, but it was still impossible to ski and skate.¹² This was due to the poor state of the material environment, including shortages of indoor facilities, especially heated ones. Summer was also qualified by

10. Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society*, 64-65.

11. James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* (New York: Cambridge University, 1977), 42-119; A.B. Sunik, *Ocherki otechestvennoi istoriografii fizicheskoi kul'tury i sporta* [Essays on national historiography of national physical culture and sport] (M.: Sovetskii sport, 2010).

12. “Nachalo letnego sezona [Beginning of the summer season],” *Fizkul'tura i sport*, no. 18 (1928):10.

theorists of *fizkul'tura* as the most important season due to popular medical theories on the healing properties of sun, water, and fresh air, which were widely promoted through the 1920s.¹³ Accordingly, all sports equipment, including clothing, was divided by trade and sales people into summer and winter.¹⁴ Summer equipment and sportswear was also sold and used for indoor *fizkul'tura* during cold seasons.

The use of the terms “*trusiki*” or “*trusy*” throughout this paper reflects the accepted way of referring to sport shorts well above the knee, which in the 1920s were a relatively new form of sportswear for the former Russian empire. In contemporary Russian, both terms are used primarily to refer to underwear, as equivalent to panties in English. As 1920s primary sources suggest, they did not refer to underwear until much later, even if such forms of sportswear might be listed in the underwear sections of sewing manuals. Soviet explanatory dictionaries suggest these terms might have acquired this new meaning only in the late 1930s or even after WWII.¹⁵ In most cases, 1920s advice literature did not specify what underwear Soviet people were expected to have under their sportswear. But neither did it say that they should not wear any.

Besides contributing to the scholarship on Soviet sport history, this paper aims to bridge disciplines and historiographies that mostly have remained separate: sports history; the history of Soviet childhood; Soviet art and design histories, and the history of early Soviet experimental fashion in particular. Contemporary scholarship on Soviet social policy towards children¹⁶ rarely covers the development of the new

13. See as examples: N.I. Podvoisky, *Smychka s solntsem* [A union with the sun] (M.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925); I.M. Sarkizov-Serazini, *Zakalivanie organizma solntsem, vozdukhom i vodoi* [Body hardening with sun, air, and water] (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927).

14. V.N. Satinskii, *Sportivnyi inventar'* [Sports equipment] (M.: Izdanie Tsentrosoyuza, 1926), 12.

15. The 1928 thematic dictionary defines “*trusy*” and “*trusiki*” as “special kind of short pants [...] that do not restrict leg movements during exercise” (B.M. Chesnokov, *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' po fizicheskoi kul'ture* [Encyclopedic dictionary of physical culture] (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1928), 834). The last pre-WWII dictionary edited by Dmitrii Ushakov and published in 1940 still defined “*trusiki*” or “*trusy*” as (1) sports pants for swimming and sports competitions and (2) as children's pants made of light fabric (“*Trusiki*,” in D.N. Ushakov, ed., *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language], Tom 4 “S – Iashchurnyi” (M.: Gosudarstvennyi institut “Sovetskaya entsiklopediia”, 1940), available at: <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ushakov/1059506>). Only *Slovar' russkogo iazyka* edited by Sergei Ozhegov, the first edition of which came out of print in 1949, defines them as short pants to be worn as swimwear, sportswear, or underwear (“*Trusy*,” in S.I. Ozhegov, ed., *Slovar' russkogo iazyka* [Dictionary of the Russian language] (M.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo inostrannykh i natsional'nykh slovarei, not before 1949), available at: <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ogegova/246014>).

16. On the pre-Second World War period see: T.M. Smirnova, *Deti strany Sovetov: Ot gosudarstvennoi politiki k realiiam povsednevnoi zhizni. 1917–1940* [Children of the land of the Soviets: From state policy to the realities of everyday life. 1917-1940] (M.: Institut rossiiskoi istorii RAN, 2015); Catriona Kelly, “Shaping the “Future Race”: Regulating the Daily Life of Children in Early Soviet Russia,” in Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds, *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside* (Bloomington – Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 256-281; Kelly, *Children's World*, chapters “Pioneers and Pet-Keepers, 1917-1935” and “Orphan Heroes, 1917-1935.”

material environment, with exception of toys or books.¹⁷ Sartorial projects targeted at children are absent from the historiography on 1920s Soviet fashion and textiles. The extensive body of research devoted to early Soviet experimental fashion¹⁸ and to Western history of utopian and anti-fashion sartorial experiments¹⁹ focuses on well-known artists and designers such as Vladimir Tatlin, Varvara Stepanova, Alexandra Ekster, Nadezhda Lamanova, Vera Mukhina, and Liubov' Popova and their contributions aimed at adults. Many aspects of cultural production in this field remain outside its scope. Anonymous projects and less known contributors, contributions made by “non-creative” professionals such as doctors are among them. Although many 1920s theorists, like Podvoisky,²⁰ Stepanova²¹ or the first People's Commissar of Education Anatolii Lunacharskii²² saw sportswear as an essential part of the new “correct” Soviet wardrobe and lifestyle, scholarship does not reflect the whole range of 1920s experiments in this sub-field and touches on sports clothing only briefly, if at all, with very few examples aimed at adults and mostly descriptively. I fill these gaps with a focus on clothing and sportswear and from the perspective of design studies.

Methodology and sources

Although in 1920s Soviet Russia and other Soviet republics, a significant part of clothing and sportswear was sewn not by the factory method but independently at home or by individual seamstresses at small workshops, it was supposed to be done per the guidance provided by experts via advice literature which in turn was approved by state-supported institutions and organizations. In the Soviet 1920s, parents or educational institutions who wanted to equip their children for *fizkul'tura* could draw information from three main types of printed sources. I define the first

17. On Soviet childrens' books see: Marina Balina and Serguei Alex. Oushakine, eds., *Pedagogy of Images: Depicting Communism for Children* (University of Toronto Press, 2021); Frances Saddington, “Modelling the Socialist Kindergarten in the Early Soviet Picture Book,” *History*, 104, 361 (2019): 425-458. On Soviet toys and surrounding discussions see: Kelly, “Shaping the “Future Race,” 268-272.

18. On early Soviet experiments in new clothing development, see: John Bowlt, “Constructivism and Early Soviet Fashion Design”, in A. Gleason, P. Kenez and R. Stites, eds., *Bolshevik Culture* (Bloomington, 1985); Djurdja Bartlett, *Fashion East: The Spectre that Haunted Socialism* (Cambridge: MIT press, 2010), 13-62; T.K. Strizhenova, *Iz istorii sovetskogo kostiama* [From the history of Soviet clothing] (M.: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1972); Christina Kiaer, “The Russian constructivist flapper dress,” *Critical Inquiry*, 2001, 28(1): 185-243; Olga Vainshtein, “Designing the future: Constructivist laboratory of fashion,” in Louise Wallenberg and Andrea Kollnitz, eds., *Fashion and Modernism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 101-124.

19. Radu Stern, *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: MIT press, 2004).

20. N.I. Podvoisky, “Nasha odezhda [Our clothing],” *30 dnei*, no. 8 (1925): 45-50.

21. V.F. Stepanova (Varst), “Kostium segodniashnego dnia – prozodezhda [Present day dress is workwear],” *Lef: Zhurnal levogo fronta iskusstv*, no. 2 (1923): 65–68.

22. A.V. Lunacharskii, “Kul'turnaia revoliutsiia i iskusstvo [Cultural revolution and art]”, *Sovetskoe iskusstvo*, no. 4 (1928): 8.

group as magazines and books on physical culture. The second group are women's sources: fashion magazines, and manuals on sewing, which at that time were targeted primarily at women. Despite the new gender policy, which formally proclaimed women's equality and emancipation, at the practical level, in the 1920s, children and their everyday needs remained women's responsibility. The third group is medical and educational sources, such as books by hygienists, doctors or theorists on education, as well as regulations developed by state institutions. I base my analysis on all three types of sources.

Archival work for this project was undertaken in Moscow and St-Petersburg. Besides printed sources published in these cities, I also worked with *Vestnik fizicheskoi kul'tury* magazine published in Kharkiv, Ukraine, as an example of mass media from beyond the two imperial capitals.

I combine visual and discourse analysis, drawing from the disciplinary methods and questions of fashion history, the history of childhood, and the cultural history of sport. For the purpose of this project I pay particular attention to inconsistencies and contradictions within different didactical discourses on clothing and sportswear and how images, photos in particular, differ from didactical descriptions. Such evidence helps see how the ideas on building the new society, design practice and mass production are related to each other. I offer an addition to the visual and discourse analysis of didactical materials and images, that is to consider an industrial dimension, the production environment and the economic context from the perspective of design history and policy making: how sportswear was supposed to be produced in factories or at home; how much it would cost; and what it says about opportunities designers had to put their ideas into production. This allows us, if not to feel the material aspects of the non-surviving historical materiality, but at least to broaden our understanding of how the economic and industrial issues structured cultural production in clothing design and sporting goods production.

Before moving to early Soviet sportswear design and experimental developments targeted at the youngest *fizkul'turniki*, I give the general ideological and industrial contexts of sportswear development in the USSR in the 1920s.

Early Soviet sportswear as an element of social and cultural policy

Fizkul'tura as a concept was understood more broadly in the 1920s compared to later periods of Soviet history and included not only physical exercise, sports and games, but also the promotion of hygiene, a healthier daily regime and lifestyle, including the promotion of a new approach to clothing.²³ Unsurprisingly, discourses on *fizkul'tura* and new clothing became intertwined and the propaganda of new developments in both fields often overlapped.

23. B.A. Ivanovskii, "Fizkul'tura v dele okhrany zdorov'ia detei i podrostkov [Physical education in protecting the health of children and adolescents]," in E.P. Radin, ed., *Spravochnik vracha okhrany zdorov'ia detei i podrostkov* [Physician's handbook on children's and adolescents' health] (L.: Gosudarstvennoe meditsinskoe izdatel'stvo, 1929), 204.

The role of sportswear, according to the 1920s theorists of the new way of life, was supposed to go beyond purely functional and practical clothing used for exercise.²⁴ The new Soviet sportswear which was more revealing compared to pre-revolutionary sportswear was often advertised as an antithesis to the “old bourgeois” fashion and embodiment of “scientific approach” to the management of everyday life. On a practical level, a “scientific approach” to clothing meant that didactical materials regarding sanitary and hygienic requirements expressed the views of doctors and hygienists or referred to their opinions, not the opinions of artists, professional clothes makers, or, in the case of children’s clothing, mothers. The hygiene of sportswear was understood as being lightweight and offering freedom of movement, the maximum exposure of the body in suitable weather conditions, good breathability of the fabric, and its ability to withstand frequent washing.²⁵ During the 1920s, these views dominated among those who promoted *fizkul’ tura*, putting clothing and sportswear at the center of the political and medical and public health discourses.

It was assumed that the rational principles of sportswear design would help to reform the “old” cultural conventions regarding clothing inherited from the pre-revolutionary past. In order to speed up that cultural transformation, Soviet people were even encouraged to wear summer sport clothing as everyday casual clothing during warmer months. The most radical suggestions from around the mid-1920s sought to replace all old forms of urban clothing with a combination of *trusiki* and t-shirts for warmer months or even to wear the *trusiki* only. *Oktiabr’ mysli* [October of thoughts] magazine expressed approval of the fact that “some people were already walking around the city wearing *trusiki* not only as part of organized processions, but also as private individuals” and stated: “The first [positive] onslaught on the old clothing has been made. Everything else will follow.”²⁶ Podvoisky suggested wearing *trusiki* for work and expressed the belief that in time women could also abandon tops and bare their chests.²⁷ Other theorists and policy-makers, albeit being less radical in their sartorial advice, still craved a wider range of use for sportswear in a new socialist society. For example, in 1928, Lunacharskii stated: “There is no doubt that workwear (*prozodezhda*), sportswear (*sportodezhda*) and special festive clothes (*prazdnichnaya odezhda*) will be three types that would eliminate the neutral and unsuitable clothes developed during the 19th century.”²⁸ Sportswear

24. Podvoisky, “Nasha odezhda;” E. Eikhengolts, “Problema massovoi odezhdy [The problem of mass-produced clothing],” in P.I. Novitsky, ed., *Izofront. Klassovaia borba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv. Sbornik statei obedineniia “Oktiabr’”* [The Art front. The class struggle on the spatial arts front. A collection of essays from the October group] (M. – L.: OGIZ IZOGIZ, 1931), 55-66; “My za gigienicheski kostium. Puti sovremennoi mody [We are for a hygienic outfit. The directions of modern fashion],” *Chetyre sezona*, no. 2 (1928): 8-9.

25. V.V. Gorinevskii, “Kak odevat’ sia letom? [How to dress in summer?]” *Iskusstvo odevat’ sia*, no. 6 (1928): 14; “K kurortnomu sezonu [For the resort season],” *Iskusstvo odevat’ sia*, no. 5 (1928).

26. T. Hoks, “Organizatsiia tela [Organization of a body],” *Oktiabr’ mysli*, no. 2 (1924): 60-61.

27. Podvoisky, “Nasha odezhda,” 49.

28. Lunacharskii, “Kul’turnaia revoliutsiia i iskusstvo,” 8.

was also widely used by propaganda theater as a uniform of new politically engaged Soviet citizens, especially youth. Many groups of the *Sinyaya bluza* [Blue Blouse] movement performed in summer sportswear.

The 1920s didactical prescriptions on children's clothing, authored by doctors and hygienists, followed the trend to merge sportswear, recreational clothes, and everyday clothing. Many of them promoted the same approaches and even the same items for *fizkul'tura* and everyday wear, especially for younger children. For example, Chulitskaia advocated a one-piece suit called *kombinatsiia* [combination of top and *trusiki* sewn together] as the best *fizkul'tura* wear and the best everyday wear for preschoolers and also advised removing long stockings in both cases.²⁹ Such theorists of new education and new rational parenthood also hoped to use new sportswear to convert "backward" mothers, who tend to "wrap" their children in too many clothes or bind children with restrictive clothing in an attempt to follow "old" conventions.³⁰

Besides ideological indoctrination, practical considerations also contributed to developing this discourse and blurring the line between sportswear and everyday wear since many forms of sportswear promoted in the 1920s were easier to make, required less fabric and thus were more affordable than more conventional examples of urban or peasant clothing. It is fair to say that besides the scientific approach to clothing, the media also promoted the economic rationality which required clothing to fit the working class's lifestyle not only in terms of functionality but also in terms of expense. As I show, many of these projects simultaneously reflected utopian ideas of building a new society and addressed the real-world situation of the Soviet 1920s.

The 1920s production environment and policymaking in sportswear

Besides political statements some practical moves to develop new clothing and sports equipment were undertaken. In 1920-1921, a department of *Soviet Truda i Oborony* RSFSR [The Council for Labor and Defense of RSFSR or STO] focusing on textile and clothing industry initiated series of meetings with representatives of *Vseovobuch*,³¹ the organization in charge of physical education and sport in the USSR at the time, to discuss what sportswear Soviet people needed.³² They also met

29. L.I. Chulitskaia, *Fizicheskaia kul'tura rebenka doshkol'nogo vozrasta* [Physical education for children of pre-school age] (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1925), 131.

30. M.M. Grinberg, M.A. Finn, *Odezhda rebenka-doshkol'nika* [Clothing for children of pre-school age] (M. – L.: Narkompros RSFSR, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1929), 16.

31. Short for *Vseobshchee voennoe obuchenie* – Universal military training or All-population military training. *Vseovobuch* was dissolved in 1923.

32. RGAE (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki), f. 362, Komissiiia ispol'zovaniia material'nykh resursov pri Sovete truda i oborony (Komissiiia ispol'zovaniia pri STO) [Commission on utilization of material resources under the Council for labor and defense (the Commission on utilization under STO)], op. 1, d. 381, Zhurnaly soveshchaniia i zasedaniiia tekstil'noi i khimicheskoi sektsii normalizatsionnogo otdela Komissii ispol'zovaniia pri STO za 1920-1921 gg. (kopii) i perepiska s Glavnymi upravleniiami Vysshego Soveta Narodnogo

representatives of *Narkompros* on the matter of children's and student's clothing.³³ The immediate practical outcome of these meetings remains unclear. Still, archival sources reveal an enormous shortage of materials and expressed demand for prototypes for new clothing developed with these conditions in mind.

The promoters of *fizkul'tura* and enthusiasts of the new Soviet clothing faced very unfavorable industrial and economic conditions even during NEP. Many enterprises of the 1920s, for example, VTOPAS³⁴ factories were short-lived due to economic instability and organizational difficulties. By the mid-1920s, some bigger factories with wider specialization in clothing production, such as *Krasnoe znamia* in Leningrad and *Mostrikotazh* in Moscow, entered the sporting goods market, but their range of offerings, to judge from price-lists, remained limited. During NEP, privately owned workshops run by so called *kustari* or individual craftsmen, were opened or reopened all over the country. However, such workshops were relatively small and could not meet the growing demand. They received little support from the state, faced an unfriendly tax policy,³⁵ and were often subject to ideological criticism from the press and policymakers of early Soviet *fizkul'tura*, who promoted the idea of large-scale factory-made mass production as the most suitable for the Soviet regime.

Against this background, *fizkul'turniki* were advised to make balls from stones and rags,³⁶ or use empty cans for training instead of ready-made sports equipment.³⁷ Guides on shoemaking, published in a book on school *fizkul'tura*, exemplifies the same trend. The author complained that many schoolchildren did not have footwear fit for exercise and mentioned that their most popular excuses to miss classes were: "there is no one at home who could make shoes" and "mother does not know how to

Khoziaistva i drugimi uchrezhdeniiami o normalizatsii produktsii tekstil'noi i khimicheskoi promyshlennosti [Minutes meetings of the textile and chemical divisions of the department of standards and templates of the Commission on utilization under STO, 1920-1921, (copies) and correspondence with the Main Directorates of the Supreme Council of the National Economy and other institutions on the development of standards and templates for products of the textile and chemical industries], l. 177 (+oborot).

33. RGAE, f. 362, op. 1, d. 381, l. 175 (+oborot).

34. All-Russian partnership of educational and production associations of pre-conscripted people. VTOPAS worked from 1921 to 1925 with factories in Moscow, Kiev and a few other cities, as well as a sports shop in Moscow. They aimed to develop factory-made mass produced sports equipment in the USSR.

35. V. Belostotskii, "Pravovoe polozhenie chastnogo kapitala [Legal status of private capital in the USSR]," in A.M. Ginzburg, ed., *Chastnyi kapital v narodnom khoziaistve SSSR: materialy komissii VSNKh SSSR* [Private capital in the national economy of the USSR: Materials of the commission of the Supreme Council of the National Economy of the USSR] (M. – L.: Promizdat, 1927), 293-298.

36. GARF (Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossisskoi Federatsii), F.P-7576, Komitet fizicheskoi kul'tury i sporta SSSR [the Committee for Physical Culture and Sports of the USSR], op. 28, d. 34, Stat'ia N.I. Podvoiskogo "Kakaia fizicheskaia kul'tura nuzhna proletariatu SSSR i kem ona dolzhna sozdat' sia" (granki i verstka s pravkoi avtora) i materialy k stat'e [Article by N.I. Podvoisky "What kind of physical culture the proletariat of the USSR needs and who should develop it" (proofs with corrections by the author) and materials for this article], l. 167.

37. V.G. Iakovlev, *Opyt prakticheskoi raboty po fizkul'ture v shkole* [Practical experience in teaching physical education at school] (M.: Novaia Moskva, 1927), 12.

sew *chuni*.³⁸ This term refers to the simplest homemade footwear widely used in the 1920s in Soviet Russia and other republics. The author asked children to bring two pieces of fabric and some string from home, cut an oval-shaped pieces slightly larger than the foot, make holes along the edge, thread the string into them so that it could be tighten at the heel, and then wrap each foot with the fabric and fix it with the string. The same approach was introduced by other books of the 1920s and early 1930s for making the simplest “sports shoes” for adults.³⁹ To my knowledge, no ready-made rubber-soled sports footwear was mass produced in the USSR till the early 1930s.⁴⁰

Advice to exercise in regular clothing if people did not possess specialized sportswear was also quite popular for children and adults. An example of such a recommendation is in “The handbook for a doctor on the health of children and adolescents”: “If there are no *fizkul'tura* outfits, then you need to make sure regular clothes and shoes to not constrain the children’s bodies (loose dresses and an unbuttoned collar are required), [ask children to] remove the belts, and exercise in home-made shoes or barefoot.”⁴¹ As photos from private archives and printed press witness, in the 1920s, children and teens sometimes did practice *fizkul'tura* in their regular clothes (Fig. 1). Such examples clearly show the state of the market and the scale of the material crisis in the field. The situation had not improved by the end of the 1920s.

Fig. 1: Warm-up exercises or *fizkul'tura* class. Late 1920s (dated by Ekaterina Kulinicheva). Photo from the collection of E. Kulinicheva



38. Iakovlev, *Opyt prakticheskoi raboty*, 16.

39. A.I. Vishnevskii, *Fizkul'turnye ploshchadki i sportinventar': Oborudovanie mest dlia provedeniia zaniatii po fizkul'ture i izgotovlenie sportivnogo inventaria i kostimov* [Sports grounds and sports equipment: Creating places for *fizkul'tura* classes and manufacturing sports equipment and sportswear] (M.: Gosudarstvennoe uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1931), 58.

40. I am grateful to my colleague, fashion historian Mariia Terekhova, for discussing the topic with me.

41. Ivanovskii, “*Fizkul'tura v dele okhrany*,” 208.

Apparently the shortage of ready-made sportswear and equipment not targeted at adult males was even bigger. I could not find any workshops which specialized in children's or women's sporting goods and sportswear. Only two price lists among all I found mention specialized children's sports items with the range being limited to *trusiki* and swim suits.⁴² Parents and other legal guardians had to order children's sportswear from private tailors or workshops, if they could afford it, or to make it at home. The whole situation fed the demand for patterns, creative ideas, and practical advice on making sportswear.

Although specialized sports magazines published a lot of photos, including babies, children, and teens involved in one or another *fizkul'tura* activities, they, for some reason, failed to satisfy this demand for more practical guidance. One notable example is the specialized magazine "*Fizkul'tura v shkole* [Physical culture at school]" published in 1930–1931, which did not offer any detailed guide on making children's sportswear or patterns. It was publications for women and books on hygiene and new education which mostly provided consumers with such practical guidance on how to make sportswear and recreational wear for women and children.

Fragile children and design for children's *fizkul'tura*

In the 1920s, it was mostly advised to avoid physical exercise for children under the age of three.⁴³ However other elements of *fizkul'tura*, such as hygiene, sunbathing, and body hardening (*zakalivanie*), were recommended to be introduced into a child's life at an earlier age.⁴⁴ Scientific theories of the time pictured children as very mobile, but extremely fragile and sensitive, with constantly changing bodies and minds, in need of constant protection. For example, it was the idea of the fragility and "excessive mobility" of the children's and adolescents' psyche that justified attempts to prohibit schoolchildren under a certain age from competitions, and even from playing football.

Such views directly informed what doctors offered as the correct approach to clothing design targeted at children, particularly preschoolers and those of younger school age. Among the doctors and theorists on education who contributed to children's clothing development and advocated such an approach were Lidiia Chulitskaia, Minna Grinberg, Faina Khalevskaia, and Mariia Finn. The general principles were 1) clothes should be light and must rest on the shoulders only and not touch or bind any other parts of the child's body; 2) abolish belts, garters, ties as restricting blood and lymph circulation; 3) a minimum of layers, with no more than one recommended for warm seasons; 4) the maximum of body exposure during warm

42. *Katalog sportinventaria na letnii sezon 1927 g.* [Catalog of sports equipment for the summer season of 1927] (L.: Redaktsionno-izdatel'skii otdel Leningradskogo Gubprofsoвета, 1927), 28.

43. In the 1920s, this included games, sports, dance, tourism and short trips to the countryside (ekskursii): Ivanovskii, *Fizkul'tura v dele okhrany*, 204.

44. Ivanovskii, "Fizkul'tura v dele okhrany," 204.

seasons; 5) significantly more attention to the choice of fabric and cut and shape of the garment than to the decoration (color, prints, embroidery, etc).

These ideas were embodied in two types of garments—*trusiki* and *kombinatsiia*. Regarding children's clothing the term *trusiki* or *trusy* was also used to refer to short pants covering only the upper thighs.⁴⁵ Combinations were one-piece suits mostly short-sleeved or sleeveless and with short pants of the same length as *trusiki*⁴⁶ (e.g. Fig. 2). These garments were also recommended as street clothing and recreational suits for preschoolers; for older children and teens such garments were recommended as *fizkul'tura* suits. To judge from remarks in didactical texts and visual sources, both garment types were relatively new to the children's clothing market, at least as items not worn under other clothing.

Fig. 2: A 1-year-old boy wearing *kombinatsiia*. Leningrad, the 1920s (dated by Ekaterina Kulinicheva). Photo from the collection of E. Kulinicheva



45. See the definition given in M.M. Grinbeng, *Odevaite rebenka pravil'no* [Dress your child in the right way] (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1926), 26.

46. Similar garment is also called sunsuit in the Western context.

According to doctors, children, especially younger ones, were supposed to wear an updated variation of *trusiki* and *kombinatsiia*. They were supposed to be beltless and more loose and elastic belts and other ties at the waist should be avoided to free the child's body from any binding or pressure. For fastening, *kombinatsiia* had buttons at the shoulders, at the lower abdominal area, or at the back of the waist. *Trusiki* were also supposed to be oversized with a waistband wider than the child's body. To keep *trusiki* on, straps were advised: they were criss-crossed at the back or put together in front with another horizontal strap. One typical example of how to make such garments is given in *Rabotnitsa* magazine from 1925 where an image for *trusiki* with criss-crossed straps was published.⁴⁷ The representation is indicative: the picture is more a simple sketch rather than a proper pattern with carefully calculated measurements. The accompanying text refers to the popular theory on self-healing by fresh air and sun and advocates for dressing children in *trusiki* alone during summer and keeping them barefoot.

Another way to keep *trusiki* on the body was to button them onto a garment called *lifchik*.⁴⁸ At the time for children this term meant a sleeveless crop top or simple band made from fabric with straps attached. In 1929, to promote the "correct" clothing for children among parents *Narkompross* issued a book and a kit of 25 patterns under the title "Clothing for preschool children" (*Odezhda rebenka-doshkol' nika*) which included five patterns for *trusiki*, slightly different in cut and how the straps were made, one pattern for *lifchik* and one pattern for a *kombinatsiia*.

This approach to sportswear differs from the pre-revolutionary one when outfits required for sports included more cloth and accessories and less body revealing, especially for girls and young women. "A Practical Guide to Rational Pedagogical Gymnastics" by Ivan Gerd, which saw five reprints before 1917, offers for boys tops with open necks and short sleeves, short trousers slightly below the knee or shorts above the knee, long stockings or high leggings, and light soft shoes without heels. For girls it recommends a blouse with long sleeves and without an open neck, short pants similar to the boys' ones, and over all that, a tunic to just below the knee with wide straps. This tunic had to cover the pants, and a wide belt could be added. Stockings and soft shoes without heels were also required.⁴⁹

Such projects for manufacturing simple *trusiki* or loose combinations as *fizkul'tura* or recreational suits exemplify one branch of early Soviet experimental design which I call "situational projects". They might be not linked with famous artists and be less appealing in terms of visual aesthetics than constructivist projects by Stepanova, but such situational projects were developed within the same framework of Sovietization by materiality. They were inspired by the same transformative impulse to change the "old" materiality and conventions and introduce people to a new way of life with

47. M. Zarina, "Vo chto odevat' detei letom [How to dress children in summer?]," *Rabotnitsa*, no. 13 (1925): n.p.g.

48. In contemporary Russian this term meant women's bra.

49. I.Ia. Gerd, *Prakticheskoe rukovodstvo k ratsional'noi pedagogicheskoi gimnastike* [Practical guide to rational pedagogical gymnastics] (Petrograd: V. Berezovskii, 1915), 40-41.

the help of new practices and new clothing. Their transformative scope seems even more ambitious since they appeared to challenge not only social conventions but also the climate, which for most territories of the former Russian empire does not favor indulging in the air- and sunbathing for most of the calendar year.

The particular form of the output of such projects was also informed by the awful economic and industrial conditions of the Soviet 1920s and emerged from the idea of providing the population with an accessible and affordable, if not to say the cheapest possible, material environment. Unsurprisingly, *trusiki* were often advertised not only as more hygienic but also as cheaper clothing.⁵⁰ Under the industrial and economic circumstances of the 1920s, the price of sportswear depended on the amount of fabric and other materials⁵¹ and how complicated the manufacturing was. *Trusiki* or body exposing combinations advocated by doctors and theorists of *fizkul'tura* did not require a lot of fabric or tailoring skills. Given that one of the main challenges of 1920s Soviet *fizkul'tura* as a social project was the lack of financial backing, and sport groups (*kruzhki*) experienced permanent shortages of financial support, such advantages cannot be underestimated.

Avant-garde experiments in new clothing and sportswear design

The following section focuses on examples of another branch of experimental early Soviet sportswear design targeted at children. Here I explore several projects linked with the well-known avant-garde artists such as Varvara Stepanova or made within the same framework of the ideas they championed.

In 1926, *Zhenskii zhurnal* [Women's magazine] published an open call for projects of new Soviet clothing fit for the new socialist lifestyle and society. For an unknown reason this contest remained unfinished, but the magazine did publish some of the projects. Among them was a transformer suit for teenage girls⁵² made by someone named Zhukova (Fig. 3). No first name or occupation of the author were mentioned, however, the sketches were made by a professional hand and were similar in style to the pre-revolutionary Russian and contemporary Western fashion magazines of the era. Based on that, I assume that Zhukova might be an artist or employed in the clothing industry.

50. As stated in "Pedagogical poem," "Since early spring, the colonists have not worn trousers – *trusiki* were more hygienic, more beautiful and cheaper" (Anton Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaiia poema* [Pedagogical Poem] (M.: Goslitizdat, 1935), 243).

51. Gymnastics trousers cost more than *trusiki*, the price for sportswear could also increase with the size of the item: TSGA (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga), f. P-6276, Leningradskii oblastnoi sovet profsoiuzov [Leningrad Regional Council of Trade Unions], op. 153, d. 29, Kniga glavnaia magazina sportodezhdy i inventaria 1925 g. [Main account book for a sportswear and equipment store. 1925], l. 104, 111.

52. "Konkurs 'Zhenskogo zhurnala' ["Women's magazine contest"], *Zhenskii zhurnal*, no. 8 (1926): 26-27.

Fig. 3: Zhukova. Transformer school outfit for teenage girls, *Zhenskii zhurnal*, no. 8 (1926): 26. From the collection of E. Kulinicheva



This suit consists of a blouse with collar and chest pocket, *sharovary*, skirt, and jacket with the blouse buttoned into the waist of *sharovary* and the skirt. In the sports context, term *sharovary* referred to a specific type of women's sports pants similar to western bloomers, knee-length or slightly shorter and more loose-fitting than *trusiki*.

This project stands out in many ways. First, it represents one particular line in early Soviet experiments in clothing design which so far have received little scholarly

attention—transformative garments with the ability to change its physical shape when the context of use or purpose required. To judge from the mass media, the idea was popular in the 1920s. Among artists and designers who developed such projects were artist Aleksandra Ekster⁵³, famous clothing designer Nadezhda Lamanova, and sculptor Vera Mukhina.⁵⁴ More such projects were also made by unidentified authors.

The idea behind transformative clothing in the Soviet context was to help people buy fewer items and spend less on clothing, without wearing the same outfit all the time and in many different settings. Such garments or outfits often included removable parts developed for the requirements of particular occupations: a telling example is removable leather sleeves included by Ekster in her project of workwear for female office workers, which protected the dress's sleeves from friction on the desk's surface. In Zhukova's project, different combinations of items give a girl three different outfits: all items worn all together for attending classes; blouse plus skirt and *sharovary* without the jacket for playing games and other active recreation; and blouse plus *sharovary* without skirt for *fizkul'tura*.

North American projects might take credit for inspiring such early Soviet sartorial transformers since, in the 1920s, Soviet women's magazines showed prototypes and projects of transformative clothing and furniture developed in the US. However, Soviet sartorial transformers had their specificities. Most importantly, all stages of the transformation fitted the idea of the new Soviet way of life and "correct" occupations and activities prescribed for new Soviet women or children. While American transformative garments might transform from day dresses to evening or party wear, the typical Soviet projects offer transformations to workwear and *fizkul'tura* suits. Zhukova's project represents such an idealized idea of the correct Soviet child and sets a normative scenario for the everyday life of a Soviet schoolgirl which includes lessons, playing, and *fizkul'tura*.

The gender aspect is also interesting here: girls were encouraged to wear comfortable *sharovary* only for *fizkul'tura*, but in other public settings such as classes or even active games they were still required to wear a socially approved skirt. That makes this project both progressive in some aspects and conservative in others.

Zhukova's transformer suit represents another branch within early experimental Soviet design which, from an economic and industrial perspective, I conceptualize as "utopian projects". What differentiates them from situational projects is that they were made for an ideal socialist future, with less attention to the disastrous economic situation in the 1920s, the shortage of fabric and other components, and the mostly broken production chains which needed to be rebuilt first. I also classify at least two of Varvara Stepanova's *sportodezhda* designs for adults published in Lef magazine

53. A.E. (A.A. Ekster), "Sovremennaia odezhda [Contemporary clothing]," *Krasnaia niva*, no. 22 (1923): 28.

54. Their joint project of transformative everyday wear was published in "Kostium dlia ulitsy i raboty [Urban casual dress and workwear]," *Iskusstvo v bytu* [Art in everyday life] (M.: Izdatel'stvo "IzvestiiTsIK SSSR iVTsIK", 1925), fig. 27. Other examples of sartorial transformers see in "Kombinirovannoe plat'e [Multipurpose dress]," *Chetyre sezona*, no. 4 (zima) (1927): 15; "Sportivnyi kostium-plat'e [The combo of sportswear and a dress]," *Chetyre sezona*, № 1 (Vesna-let) (1928): 15.

– a women’s basketball outfit with a skirt and a football set with a star on the chest
– into the same utopian branch.

The co-existence of the situational and utopian approaches to project making and developing a new material environment was apparently set, intentionally or not, by the state itself and how it briefed artists, other professionals, and industry. One letter sent in 1920 from the Department of Textile within the Commission for Standards and Templates⁵⁵ under The Council for Labor and Defense (the STO) to the Main directorate of Textile Enterprises serves as an example. When talking about “the development of a new, more rational” range of products to “fulfill the need of the Republic” and plan orders to place them at the factories the letter asked if directorate had already started working on this, and if so, how, “in a more abstract way, so to speak, theoretical, desirable way” or taking into account the current state of the factories and the availability of materials and fabric.⁵⁶ No clarification on which one the state preferred was given in this document.

Zhukova’s transformer-suit requires a significant amount of fabric of at least two different colors and a skillful manufacturer. In the context of the 1920s Soviet economy, if someone decided to manufacture such a suit, the cost of production would be high and that makes such a design expensive and unaffordable for most institutions and private individuals. It is safe to say that under early Soviet industrial and economic circumstances, the chances of such utopian projects being mass produced were very limited.

Zhukova’s project gives us a rare example of such a utopian experimental approach to design targeted at children, while the most well-known 1920s designs created by famous avant-garde artists or clothing designers involved in developing experimental clothing and material culture were targeted at adults.⁵⁷ Another notable exception is the design for stage costumes of children made by Varvara Stepanova for the play “The Death of Tarelkin” in 1923. These outfits included short pants, a loose blouse and a peaked cap. A photo of actors also shows what looks like longer pants put on under sports shorts. However, it is unclear if this addition was part of Stepanova’s original idea or was made for practical purposes such as keeping actors warm during performances. Regarding their visual dimension, the shorts and blouses were decorated with diagonal stripes of contrasting color to make the design more visually striking and appealing.

It is unknown if Stepanova saw this particular design from “The Death of Tarelkin” as a prototype for mass produced sportswear for children, whether she had any ideas on how to make the production easier or cheaper, or whether she had any specific theories on children’s clothing. Although she described her children’s costumes as

55. Tekstil’naia sektsiia normalizatsionnogo otdela komissii po ispol’zovaniiu STO.

56. RGAE, f. 362, op. 1, d. 386, Perepiska s Glavnym upravleniem tekstil’nykh predpriatii, Glavnym voenno-khoziaistvennym upravleniem i drugimi upravleniiami ob obraztsakh vyrabatyvaemykh sortov tkanei i odezhdy [Correspondence with the Main directorate of textile enterprises, the military-economic department, and other departments about samples of produced fabrics and clothing], l. 5 (oborot).

57. Other rare examples are two children’s dresses by Ekster: A.E., “Sovremennaia odezhda,” 28.

“prototypes of sportswear,”⁵⁸ these designs cannot be qualified as a prototype ready to be copied in the industrial sense of the term. It is impossible to understand from a few surviving photos and her sketch how these garments were made and how they fastened. More importantly, what we see in the photos is a theatrical costume made for the purpose of particular play: to judge from the images, Stepanova and the costume makers played with garment size and proportions to make adult performers look smaller and more like children. However her ideas on geometrical decoration could have been used outside the theater for regular children’s sportswear. An identical solution was used by Stepanova for her female one-piece *fizkul’ tura* suits designed for the theatrical group (*kruzhok*) of the Academy of Communist (Social) Education to perform at An Evening of the Book. A sketch identical to one of the children’s costumes from that play, was also published in 1923 to illustrate her manifesto “Present day dress is workwear”, where it was introduced as a football outfit.

Stepanova’s and Zhukova’s designs illuminate another problematic aspect of new sportswear development in the USSR in the 1920s. To my knowledge, Stepanova’s designs made for “The Death of Tarelkin” were never published anywhere as an example of *fizkul’ tura* wear for children for mass production or homemaking. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate whether her ideas went beyond the circle of those interested in new experimental theater and reached a wider audience, including parents, *fizkul’ tura* policy makers, and people interested in the practical aspects of making children’s clothes. Were they aware such projects existed? If so, what did they think of them?

Despite sports and *fizkul’ tura* inspiring many Soviet artists, during the 1920s we do not see any strongly established industrial connections between artists or designers, *fizkul’ tura* policy makers, and the industries involved in sporting goods mass production. By such industrial connections, I mean networks with a capacity to develop joint projects which would include all the production stages from sketch development and negotiation to implementing them into production, and then the testing and adoption of such designs by real *fizkul’ turniki*.

There were a few examples of collaborative interactions between the art world and *fizkul’ tura* community in the 1920s. The most well-known project is the *Tefizkul’ t* (teatralizatsiia fizkul’ tury - theatricalization of *fizkul’ tura*), where the famous director Vsevolod Meierkhol’d was involved. In the mid-1920s, the Supreme Council of Physical Culture (VSFK) also attempted to collaborate with Moscow VKhUTEMAS, Higher Art and Technical Studios, for the development and production of the All-union unified badge of *fizkul’ turnik*, an early analogue of the GTO badge. However, to judge from archival documents, this collaboration was short lived and unsuccessful.⁵⁹ It seems surprising that such projects did not include

58. V.F. Stepanova, *Chelovek ne mozhет byt’ bez chuda. Pis’ma. Poeticheskie opyty. Zapiski khudozhnitsy* [A person cannot live without a miracle. Letters, Poetic Experiments, Notes of the Female Artist] (M.: Sfera, 1994), 176.

59. RGALI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva), f. 681, Vysshie gosudarstvennye khudozhestvenno-tekhnikheskie masterskie, Vysshii gosudarstvennyi khudozhestvenno-tekhnikheski institut (VKhUTEMAS, VKhUTEIN) [Higher art and technical

mass sportswear development, given that one side had a huge need for new designs and the other was able to provide them with solutions, and many artists, including Stepanova, expressed their willingness to participate through their works. However, for some reason in the 1920s, such a promising match never happened.

The example of Stepanova is indicative of missed opportunities. She is known for her interest in sportswear design, and in the first half of the 1920s she was employed at the Institute of Aesthetic Education,⁶⁰ which saw its mission as “the systematization [of knowledge] and publishing all kinds of guidebooks and templates on the general artistic education of the child.”⁶¹ However Stepanova’s experience and interest in clothing development remained unrequired there.

As Campbell Warner shows with the example of mass female sportswear development in the US,⁶² private institutions of higher education served as the equivalent of an experimental lab where new ideas or designs introduced by private enthusiasts took material shape and were tested. Later some of them gained popularity among a broader range of consumers. As photos witnessed, during the 1920s some Soviet educational institutions became such test centers for the situational projects of new sportswear and employed simple *trusiki* and one-piece suits promoted by hygienists as *fizkul'tura* and recreational suits for children (Fig. 4). The results, to judge from pictures, might seem confusing: the garments often look too loose and too long, fitted badly and in fact do not look comfortable to exercise and play in. Apparently, these institutions lacked resources to adapt mass produced garments with standardized sizes to individual kids or preferred not to do so in a hope that bigger garments might serve fast growing children longer. But at least an attempt was made, and these situational designs did not remain on paper only.

Unfortunately for many artists and creative professionals, it seems that in the 1920s Soviet Union educational institutions could not serve in the same capacity for more utopian projects of sportswear for children or adults. The experimental and propaganda theater became the only platform where these more complicated and elaborated designs were developed on a regular basis up to the early 1930s, and some of them took material shape and were presented to the public not only as stylized sketches but in their final form as a garment during the shows.

studios, Higher State Art and Technical University], op. 3, d. 285, *Perepiska o vypolnenii zakazov dlia Vysshego Soveta fizicheskoi kul'tury* [Correspondence about fulfilling orders for the Supreme Council of Physical Culture], l. 14, 21-25.

60. This institution worked within the system of the Academy of communist education.

61. TsGASpB (Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga), F 3106, *Akademiia kommunisticheskogo vospitaniia imeni Krupskoi* [Academy of communist education named after Krupskaja], op. 1, d. 19, *Plany rabot, smety i otchety o rabote instituta esteticheskogo vospitaniia. Spiski sotrudnikov institute esteticheskogo govospitaniia* [Plans of action, expenses, and reports on the work of the Institute of Aesthetic Education], l. 5.

62. Patricia Campbell Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play: The Birth of American Sportswear* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 196-226.

Fig. 4: Children's playground, the *Avangard* commune, Zaporozh'e (now Ukraine). Photo by Mikhail Katsenko, taken before 1931. Postcard from the collection of E. Kulinicheva



Standardization vs. cultural conventions

An analysis of the 1920s debate on children's and youth *fizkul'tura* shows tensions between a unified approach and more variational and inclusive policy making. As with the introduction of general education, the development of unified *fizkul'tura* programs faced serious difficulties which started from determining age groups for different curricula. In general, the life of a child was divided by Soviet theorists into the preschool period, school years, and the period that followed graduation from school until "adulthood." Each of these periods was divided into smaller ones, but there was no uniform approach to age ranging yet, and different theorists developed different age taxonomies. The age ranges may also vary for boys and girls.⁶³ Thus,

63. For example, Professor Gorinevsky singled out "the younger preschool age" (3–5 years) and "the senior preschool age" (5–7 years), while Lev Barkhash divided the same period into three: 0–1, 1–3, and 3–6 (L.L. Barkhash, "Fizicheskaia kul'tura rebenka [Physical education of a child]", *Zhenskii zhurnal*, no. 4 (1926): 4–5); for Lydia Chulitskaia the three preschool periods were 0–2 years, from 2–2.5 to 5.5–6 and from 5.5–6 to 7–7.5. What we see here is the multiplication of age categories and debates over their boundaries. Similar trends can be seen in how schoolchildren, teens and youth were classified in the 1920s. Georgii Diuperron believed that childhood covered the period from 0 to 12 years, and proposed the following inner classification for the purpose of *fizkul'tura*: 4–7 (preschool), 8–10, and 11–12 (Georgii Duperron, *Teoriia*

it is safe to say that in the 1920s, how childhood and teenhood was understood was also contested.

The reason behind these debates was the fact that in the 1920s, children and adolescents lived radically different lives in cities and villages even in the European part of the former Russian empire, not to mention national republics and regions of Soviet Russia with non-Slavic populations. The same can be said of different groups of the urban population. Not all children attended school. Many began to work as early as adolescence and thus formally fell into the category of adult *fizkul' turniki*. Some started education later than others. For example, the book of practical advice for physical education in schools mentions⁶⁴ one additional category of students —“*pererostki*” (overgrown ones)— adolescents aged 15–17 who still attended primary school which normally accommodated those who were up to 12 years old. Such students required *fizkul' tura* programs designed for older teens where male and female groups were to be separated according to the views of the time.

Some doctors and theorists of early Soviet physical education also highlighted the social environment and living conditions, using the concept of “physiological age”⁶⁵ (*fiziologicheskii vozrast*), which was determined by the physical development of a person, and often “lagged compared to the calendar age.”⁶⁶ Doctor Irina Pellingner suggested terms the “passport” and “biological” ages and stated: “You can’t determine the age by numbers only and group people only according to these numbers”.⁶⁷ Regarding girls and women as objects of care for the organizers of *fizkul' tura*, Pellingner introduced the following categories: children (before puberty), adolescents (from the appearance of the first visual signs of puberty), young girls (from when the menstruation starts), young women who lost their virginity, and adult women “in the prime of their sexual and childbearing life.”

Such theories showed that “age” as a basis for regulation combined physiological and social aspects related to specific lifestyles (dietary habits, time budget, and living conditions), social and cultural context, and family situation. In practice, under the poor circumstances of the Soviet 1920s, it was hardly possible to implement such an

fizicheskoi kul' tury [Theory of physical culture] (L.: Vremia, 1930), 514-515). For boys, he divided the boyhood into two periods, 13–16 and 16–18 (Duperron, *Teoriia fizicheskoi kul' tury*, 570. No opinion on the girlhood is given). From the age of 18, according to Duperron, adulthood begins, however, he also highlights a transitional period up to 23 years, when the ossification of the skeleton was still being completed. In contrast, the statistics of the Supreme Council of Physical Culture from 1924 classified those 16-19 years old as adults (GARF, f. R-7576, op. 28, 1921-1828 gg., d. 16, Vyderzhki i primechaniia k statisticheskim dannym Vysshogo Soveta fizicheskoi kul' tury o sostoianii sportivno-gimnasticheskogo dela v SSSR na 1 oktiabria 1924 g. [Extracts and notes to the statistical data of the Supreme Council of Physical Culture on the state of affairs in sports and gymnastics in the USSR as of October 1, 1924], l. 3).

64. Iakovlev, *Opyt prakticheskoi raboty*, 9.

65. This concept was used by Duperron, among others. See *Teoriia fizicheskoi kul' tury*, 514.

66. Ivanovskii, “Fizkul' tura v dele okhrany,” 217.

67. I. Pellingner, “Osnovy samokontrolia [Basic principles of Self-Control],” in Iu.N. Vonzblein, M.G. Shamanova, eds., *Legkaia atletika dlia zhenshchin* [Track and field for women] (M. – L.: Fizkul' tura i sport, 1930), 12.

individual approach to each child, teenager, or young adult. But an attempt to stress such questions as such deserves attention.

Such tensions between a unified and more variational approaches can also be witnessed in policymaking in clothing and sportswear. In theory, such a level of attention to the biological, cultural, and social aspects of children's lives could inspire the emergence of more new styles of *fizkul'tura* suits targeted at different ages and social groups. In 1929, *Iskusstvo odevat'sia* magazine gave an example of such multiplications of clothing design variations for newborn babies: the period from birth to one year was divided into three, and the author suggested to use a different cut for each of them in accordance to the changing character of the child's movements.⁶⁸

Besides pure physiology, such design projects could also consider cultural and social aspects. To judge from the remarks of the promoters of *fizkul'tura*, among them there could be, for example, "increased interest" in "adult" fashion from older schoolchildren and especially older schoolgirls,⁶⁹ which clearly influenced their preferences towards clothing and how they reacted to what was proposed by their teachers.

However, starting in the 1920s, what we see in the advice literature on sportswear for children is the drastic standardization and unification of design and style. Most regulations and templates on clothing and sportswear by state-affiliated policymakers limited the number of recommended styles to a very few. The "Spreadsheet on clothing for different ages" approved by Narkomzdrav and Narkompros, gives an indicative example regarding summer sportswear: "Sportswear for all ages and genders is advised to be as following: *trusiki* for boys, *kombinatsii* or tunics for developing girls".⁷⁰ An article by doctor Rozenberg suggested the same items and stated that *trusiki* and *kombinatsiia* "must be changed and washed twice a week."⁷¹ Although some doctors like Chulitskaia opposed the mass-production of drastically standardized clothes and advocated a more individual approach to clothing for children and cooperation between local manufacturers and particular educational institutions,⁷² the opposite approach prevailed. Most didactical materials offered one outfit and style, or two, at best, and one or two sketches or patterns, if any. For example, the pattern for *trusiki* with straps published by *Rabotnitsa* and mentioned above, according to the text, was created for 3-year-old children, but they suggest using the same cut for all ages, adults included, with the amount of fabric recalculated.

68. L.K., "Veshchi dlia novorozhdenного rebenka [Clothing for a newborn baby]," *Iskusstvo odevat'sia*, no. 8 (1929): 1.

69. Iakovlev, *Opyt prakticheskoi raboty*, 4. Here such interest is qualified as a negative issue.

70. *Zdanie shkoly, pitanie, odezhda, rezhim truda i otdykha: Normy, utverzhdennye otdelom okhrany zdorov'ia detei i podrostkov Narkomata zdravookhraneniia* [School building, food, clothing, and regimen of labor and rest: Standards, approved by the Department of Child and Adolescent Health Protection of the People's Commissariat of Health] (M.: Zhizn' i znanie, 1926), supplement.

71. S. Rozenberg, "Gigienicheskie navyki v shkole [Hygienic skills in school]," *Vestnik fizicheskoi kul'tury*, no. 10 (1927): 4.

72. Chulitskaia, "Fizicheskaia kul'tura rebenka," 131.

The same approach and trend to drastic standardization can be witnessed in policy-making in sportswear for adults.

Given how diverse climate zones in the USSR were, that summer season in *fizkul'tura* lasted from May to September, and most sports halls did not have heating, how comfortable was it for children and young people to spend time only in *trusiki* or short-sleeved and sleeveless one-piece suit? Tellingly, in his “Pedagogical poem,” Anton Makarenko mentioned how students of the colony near Poltava, Ukraine, were threatened, as form of punishment, with having to wear *trusiki*, which they had to wear as a regular street cloth from early spring, two weeks ahead of schedule.⁷³ If it was a punishment in South-Western part of the Soviet Union, what about the Northern Russia or Siberia? However, climate differences, although often gesturally mentioned, had little bearing on the proposed garments advocated by policymakers: in terms of changes in recreation and *fizkul'tura* suits, their suggestions for adopting garments to climate, if any, were insignificant such as just making top less open at the chest.

Girls and young women as *fizkul'turnitsy*

Competing discourses on sportswear for teenage girls and young women exemplify how the scientific theories of the 1920s and economically- and politically-driven standardization collided with social and cultural conventions.

Although the propaganda of mass female involvement in physical education and sport was closely related to the early Soviet project of women's emancipation and gender equality, in the 1920s, Soviet *fizkul'tura* for youth and adults was gender-driven and the break with the “bourgeois” and pre-revolutionary gender conventions that limited women's participation in sports was far from complete. There were many concerns about the impact of sports on fertility, and exercising during menstruation was considered dangerous. Some games and exercise like football, Sokol apparatus gymnastics, and hammer throwing were still labeled as inappropriate for girls and women.⁷⁴ Some other games like basketball were labeled as “fit” for women due to their less aggressive nature, still stereotyping women as “delicate” and “weak.”⁷⁵ This gender-driven approach to physical education is also clearly seen in the idea to develop a special “female” character of movements for girls which were advocated by many doctors.

Regarding teenhood as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood the question was: when does a rather ungendered child become a prospective male or female and should be treated as such? This question was essential for new Soviet parents, whether they were workers or peasants with no experience of regular

73. Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaia poema*, 450.

74. V.V. Gorinevskaya, *Fizkul'tura rabotnitsy* [The physical culture of a woman worker] (M.: MGSPS, 1925), 95.

75. “Pravila basketbola [Basketball rules],” *Izvestiia sporta*, no. 7–8 (1923): 8.

physical training and participation in sports in their childhood, or representatives of other urban social groups who, having received formal education before 1917, might be familiar with school gymnastics and “old” sartorial conventions and approaches to sportswear, which had been declared irrelevant to the new Soviet way of life.

Soviet physical education theorists attached particular importance to puberty, which was most often counted from the age of 11–12. Younger children were usually encouraged to exercise together and use the same training programs. From that age, however, physical education classes for boys and girls were recommended to be carried out separately.

However, from a sartorial perspective children were required to be divided based on their gender earlier. For example, Chulitskaia extended what she called the “neutral age” when boys and girls should be dressed identically only till 6–7 years. The mentioned “Spreadsheet on clothing for different ages” by Narkomzdrav and Narkompros also demands different everyday clothes for boys and girls after they start school or even earlier, during preschool period, “when it is required [by situation or institution].”⁷⁶ At the same time, another section of the book where this spreadsheet was published endorsed the idea of dressing children of both gender identically as long as possible, because “the difference between sexes is less emphasized that way and co-education of students of both sexes is facilitated”⁷⁷, and the age of 13 is mentioned as realistic for this purpose.

These tensions influenced sportswear design and how girls and young women made their choice. Although 1920s advice literature on sportswear endorsed significantly simplified and more minimalistic sports outfits than the pre-revolutionary literature and approved fewer differences between boys’ and girls’ uniforms, we still witness a gender-driven approach to sportswear throughout the decade. Visual sources make clearly visible the coexistence of the newly introduced and widely promoted *trusiki* well above the knee and more socially acceptable skirts as equally popular elements of *fizkul’tura* suits for girls and women. The promotion of *trusiki* as a garment suitable for both sexes in the 1920s is sometimes interpreted as propaganda for a unisex approach to clothing. But there is an important nuance here. The fact that children and adults of both sexes were encouraged to wear short pants for *fizkul’tura* did not mean that these shorts were identical for men and women. At least in the 1920s, this was often not the case. Guidebooks on cloth making often advise for girls to make sport shorts wider than for boys, even at an age when the body difference is not clearly detectable yet.⁷⁸ Regarding older schoolgirls and women the competition between two types of female sportswear is clearly seen: *trusiki*, which were shorter and more body-revealing and *sharovary*, which were more loose-fitting and in most cases also longer than *trusiki*. Such *sharovary* were more of a compromise: they fit into the proposed model, but exposed the female figure less than *trusiki* and also resembled more, in terms of fit and shape, sportswear depicted as appropriate in

76. *Zdanie shkoly, pitanie, odezhd*, supplement.

77. *Zdanie shkoly, pitanie, odezhd*, 52.

78. E.M. Shvetsova, *Kroika i shit’e odezhd* [Cutting and sewing clothes] (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1926), 79.

pre-revolution women's mass media and the fashionable 1920s Western designs targeted at young women which reached Soviet Russia.

To sum up, 1920s Soviet policy makers promoted uniformity in design for children's sportswear rather than a multiplication of designs even when the medical and scientific views or cultural conventions seem to call for the opposite. What the case of competing approaches towards sportswear for teen girls and women illuminates is that the prescribed boundaries might be stretching in two ways, and consumers might still bring the beliefs and conventions they shared into consideration. This example also encourages a close look at how the advice literature on sportswear and proposed models related to real-life sartorial practices in different climatic zones and social or ethnic groups.

The Sovietization of Western designs

In this section, I focus on direct cultural imports from the West, which brought some sportswear design to early Soviet consumers.

In 1925–1929, *Domashniaia portnikha* magazine published many designs introduced to readers as sportswear, gymnastic wear, or *fizkul'tura* suits targeted at schoolgirls and teenage girls. Based on the presentation style, it is safe to say that these sketches were reproduced from unidentified Western magazines or trade catalogs.⁷⁹ They represent typical examples of mass North American women's sportswear of the 1920s: middy blouses with sailor collars or contrasting scarves, baggy bloomers or skirts with bloomers underneath.

Reprinting or copying Western fashions was not rare in 1920s Soviet illustrated fashion magazines: there were much more such copies published on their pages than new experimental projects made by Soviet artists or designers. It was justified as a temporary solution, and Soviet designs were expected to replace foreign ones in magazines over time.

This practice received a lot of ideological criticism from state representatives and fellow journalists as not fulfilling the needs of women workers and making them follow wrong examples. However, in my opinion, such critics did not do justice to what the magazines did. The full picture was more complex than just ideological subversion or *faux pas*, and designs from *Domashniaia portnikha* serve as a good example. Several aspects make them stand out among other reprinted Western fashions. First is the use of new Soviet terminology to introduce some Western designs to Soviet readers: besides *fizkul'tura* suit and dress⁸⁰ there were also sketches described as a pioneer shirt,⁸¹ a special uniform for woman working at machines⁸² or

79. On the fashionable 1920s Western designs see: Stella Blum, *Everyday Fashions of the Twenties as Pictured in Sears and Other Catalogs* (New York: Dover publications, 1981).

80. *Domashniaia portnikha*, no. 8 (1926): 13.

81. *Domashniaia portnikha*, no. 4 (1926): 13.

82. *Domashniaia portnikha*, no. 8 (1926): 13.

spetsodezhda for agricultural workers.⁸³ The latter example depicted an outfit more suitable to gardening at a country house than to actual farming, but for sportswear, in most cases the new labels fitted.

The second aspect is the selection of samples. Although many examples of Western fashion look out of place in Soviet magazines and in the Soviet context, the case with sportswear published in *Domashniaia portnikha* is different. In contrast to “bourgeois” tennis dresses or casual sport suits with fashionable narrow skirts, these sets of loose tops and bloomers generally fit the scheme championed by *fizkul'tura* policymakers although they required more fabric and were more difficult to make than simple *trusiki* with t-shirt or *kombinatsiia*. These designs also meet the demand for sportswear that visually distinguished girls from boys and revealed less of girls' bodies.

What is also indicative is that in contrast to tennis dresses, paper patterns were offered for many of these reprinted sportswear sketches. Thus, the magazine went beyond simply informing its readers on what is “correct” or fashionable for practicing sports, but also gave them an easy way to copy and employ such designs. I assume that some of these paper patterns might have been developed by Soviet pattern makers: in some cases the cuts were simplified and patterns did not contain some details we can see in the sketch, probably in order to save fabric and buttons and make the garment cheaper and easier to make. What we see here is the selection of designs which might suit the new Soviet life albeit as temporary solutions, and their Sovietization by attributing new terms and new functions to them, as well as by modifying the cut.

The influence of these imported designs on the fashion imagination of Soviet consumers should not be overlooked. As media and private archives show, bloomers and middy blouse-like garments with or without a scarf were widely used by Soviet female sport practitioners during the 1920s (see Fig. 5). In many cases there were significant differences with the US examples: besides the simplified cut, the most frequently seen departures and specificities were footwear (homemade *chuni* or simple gymnastics shoes instead of canvas and rubber sneakers), abandoned long stockings, and the fact that Soviet bloomers were often shorter than Western ones. It is safe to attribute these differences to the influence of poor economic circumstances and material shortages.

These sovietized Western designs exemplify another branch of new Soviet sportswear development and another facet of the intellectual transfer from the West with Soviet magazines serving as cultural intermediaries. Among other examples of such transfer which influenced and shaped early Soviet *fizkul'tura* are European gymnastic programs, US sports, such as basketball, which were promoted heavily in the USSR in the 1920s, and translated books on sport and physical education by French, Austrian, and other European theorists. What I aimed to show with this section is that such “imported” designs were not just copies, they were appropriated creatively and transformatively in their Sovietization.

83. *Domashniaia portnikha*, no. 4 (1927): 17.

Fig. 5: Mix-gender group of unknown *fizkul'*turniki, probably students, the 1920s (dated by E. Kulinicheva). Male students are dressed in *trusiki* only, female students wear middy blouses with scarfs, wide bloomers, and dark stockings. Photo from the collection of E. Kulinicheva



Conclusion

This paper investigates competing discourses on new sportswear for Soviet children and numerous designs developed in the 1920s as a part of broader cultural and social projects, such as public health and generally accessible medicine, new education, theorizing on age and gender, and new clothing as an element of the new non-capitalist material environment. It looks at Soviet social and cultural policy as material practice with children's and youth *fizkul'tura* as a case study and shows the importance of approaching the social policies in which the material environment plays an important role from industrial and economic perspectives. These perspectives help to see where such projects might go off track and why. The intellectual pursuits and idea making during this decade of negotiation and contestation over the vision of the socialist future were intense, involved actors with different backgrounds from well-known avantgarde artists to doctors, and brought a wide range of experimental projects and theories to life. From the perspective of consumers, however, the 1920s, using the terminology by *Vestnik fizicheskoi kul'tury*, were "a period of equipmentless poverty,"⁸⁴ and that, I argue, might explain the relatively low popularity of *fizkul'tura* among children.⁸⁵

84. Dobrovol'skii, Iablonovskii, Gerkan, "Fizkul'turnaia kniga k zimnei kruzhkovoi rabote [Physical education book for winter work in sport groups]," *Vestnik fizicheskoi kul'tury*, no. 12 (1926): 24.

85. For reports on the low numbers of children who practiced *fizkul'tura* voluntarily outside of organized classes see: M.S. Bernshtein, N.A. Rybnikov, eds., *Biudzhel vremeni shkol'nika* [School children's time budget], (M. – L.: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927).

This case also shows how economic and industrial issues structured cultural production. Scientific theories of age and gender differences, climatic differences and the diverse cultural environments in which people lived encouraged the multiplication of design variations, but the poor economic and industrial environment pushed those who governed and practiced *fizkul'tura* to adopt the simplest and cheapest designs. That pushed the drastic standardization and unification of styles even harder and left almost no space for more experimental projects to be tested and adopted. The question should be stressed then: how satisfied were children, teens, and young people, or their parents, by such standardization and its output?

This perspective also broadens our understanding of early Soviet experimental design and the development of the new materiality, offering a valuable methodological addition to more conventional preoccupations of design and art history. I sought to overcome the simple dichotomies of avant-garde vs anti-modernist design, utopian vs realized, and endemically Soviet vs copied from the West, which are popular in the scholarship and media. Instead, this paper offers a more nuanced picture. With new sportswear targeted at children and from economic and industrial perspectives, I conceptualize two major branches within the experimental Soviet design of the 1920s—situational projects and utopian projects—and the situational and utopian approaches to project making. They emerged within the same framework of Sovietization by materiality but the potential of their outputs to be mass produced under the Soviet economy differed from relatively high to low.

I also show how Western examples of sportswear designs for girls and young women were appropriated in the USSR during the 1920s and influenced material production in this field.

Regarding the scholarship on the early Soviet experiments in new clothing development, this paper also aims to broaden the range of important actors considered by scholarship on design and art history. Besides well-known masters of fine art and famous clothing designers this list should also include other contributors such as doctors and theorists on education, whose works offered not only general advice, but also detailed descriptions and patterns for new clothing and sportswear. Such projects by doctors and other professionals involved in new sportswear development, especially ones aimed at children, reframe 1920s Soviet experimental designs from an inspiring but purely utopian endeavor to a predecessor of what now is called social design or social model in design where “the primary motivation is to promote positive social change within society” when designers and creative professionals adopt “proactive role and effect tangible change to make life better for others.”⁸⁶

This paper also yields new insights into why the most experimental avant-garde projects from the Soviet 1920s never reached mass production. Besides poor

86. Elizabeth Resnick, “Introduction,” in Elizabeth Resnick, ed., *The Social Design Reader* (London – New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 3.

economic conditions it illuminates other aspects such as the lack of established industrial connections between stakeholders, in this case, between managers and policymakers on *fizkul'tura*, and artists and designers.

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