

The International Bureaux and Intellectual Cooperation Section

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Note that there is a Research Guide entirely dedicated to [intellectual cooperation](#).

1. Introduction

The International Bureaux and Intellectual Cooperation Section is not central in the overall activity of the League of Nations Secretariat. But despite its relatively small size, it occupies an important symbolic place for the League, for two reasons: First, it is the explicit connection with the internationalist spirit that pre-existed the institution, since it is supposed to be the link with all the international organizations created before the First World War. This "Belle Epoque" moment of international congresses and their permanent offices, from the second half of the 19th century, is indeed what the League of Nations seeks to complement and coordinate, or even replace to some extent. The establishment of a multilateral system, of a centralized place where all political and technical questions are discussed, contrasts with the decentralization of all these offices previously in charge of technical cooperation in very specific fields. Secondly, this section is the place where the spiritual dimension of the League of Nations is expressed: "intellectual cooperation" is not only a scientific or technical project, it is also and above all an idealistic attempt to bring to life a "League of Minds" that creates the necessary conditions for peace in a world that is emerging from a destructive conflict.

The coordination of the international bureaux having quickly proved to be limited, the Section is best known for having hosted the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC), which owes its high visibility to the famous scientific personalities who compose it, such as Henri Bergson, Marie Skłodowska Curie, Albert Einstein, Jagadis Chandra Bose or Hendrik Lorentz. The Institute created in Paris to serve as its executive branch (IIIC) is often considered the ancestor of UNESCO.

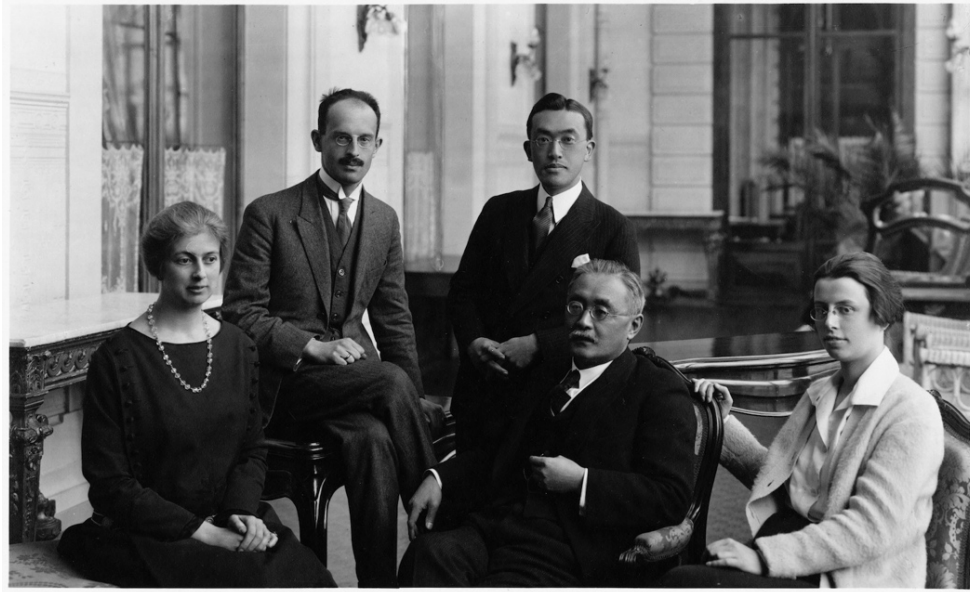


Figure 1. The International Bureaux Section, in the early 1920s ([LON Photographs Collection S13](#)) From the left: Katherine Stafford, Oscar Halecki, Ken Harada, Inazo Nitobe and Mrs Marsault

2. Coordinating the international bureaux

"Great Scott! Must we coordinate all these? I am sorry for Dr. Nitobe!", writes a member of the Section on September 10, 1919, on a note attached to the list of all existing international bureaux drawn up by the Union of International Associations before the war (LON Archives 13/299/1039). Indeed, the work of the section is based on surveys conducted before the First World War. And the first task of the Japanese Under-Secretary General Inazo Nitobe, director of the Section, is to ensure that the list is up to date before taking his pilgrim's staff and trying to visit them or at least contact them. But the situation has changed a lot and the lists are very heterogeneous and full of outdated information. Following a visit to fifteen Parisian offices in July 1920 with his secretary Miss Katherine Stafford, Nitobe decides to publish a Handbook of International Offices. The preparation of this document, the first volume of which is published in 1921 and has been reissued and updated several times since, is to be the focus of a great deal of the Section's activity. Many of these bureaux will have a more sustained relationship with the League, with some even planning a formal affiliation and a move of their headquarters to Geneva. But, this coordination momentum will clash with the logic of these bureaux, created to gather delegates to regular congresses around very specific technical issues. These communities already exist and, for those that have survived the war, are already sufficiently institutionalized not to wish to be taken over by this new multilateral political actor. The Section will therefore only compile lists of these organizations to facilitate the exchange of information but will never really coordinate their activities.

3. Intellectual cooperation

The concept of "intellectual cooperation" is not precisely defined by the Assembly of the League of Nations. On the contrary, it is a term used to describe various concerns that arise as early as 1920 around scientific, educational and cultural issues. Some delegates first propose the creation of an organization of intellectual work, on the model of the International Labor Office, but the Assembly vote a Léon Bourgeois resolution in 1921 to create a temporary and advisory committee tasked with clarifying needs around scientific and cultural collaboration (educational issues are too political and are left aside). The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) meets for the first time in August 1922. It quickly becomes the focal point of the activity of the Section: as its sessions only bring its 12 to 18 experts together once or twice a year, the Secretariat must ensure the continuity. The Committee's work covers a variety of topics, such as inter-university relations, conditions of intellectual work, student and professor exchanges, international bibliographic coordination, intellectual property, and artistic and literary issues. In 1924, the French government makes it known that it wants the work of the ICIC to benefit from a more efficient secretariat. The Committee therefore becomes a permanent organ of the Section and an Institute is created with the financial support of France. The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) is founded in Paris in 1926. It quickly becomes an important administration whose size exceeds that of the Section in Geneva. Soon, it is no longer simply a secretariat but a real executive center for intellectual cooperation, which makes the link between the Committee (and the Section) and the National Committees for Intellectual Cooperation that are created in many countries. Under its first director, Julien Luchaire, the IIIC becomes so independent that the League fears that it will make decisions in total autonomy - and strongly influenced by the French government. For this reason, the Institute is reorganized in 1931 and entrusted to a new director, Henri Bonnet, who, while also French, is closer to the League of Nations. The Second World War, and the German invasion of France, interrupts the activities of the Institute in 1940, also putting an end to a final reform that should have consecrated the IIIC as a full-fledged international organization. In 1946, UNESCO is created by taking over some of the missions of the Institute, inheriting its archives.

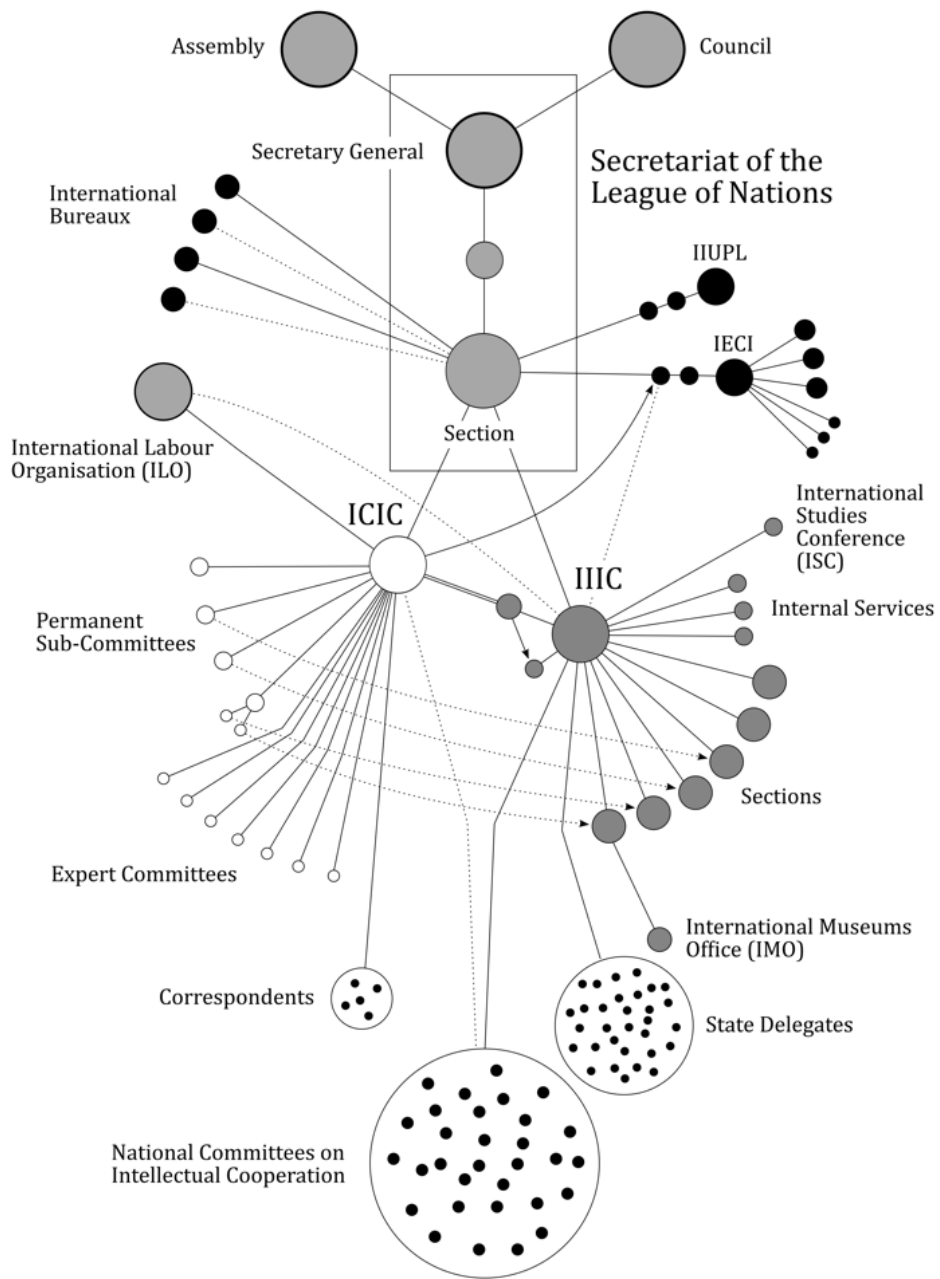


Figure 2. Organisation chart of Intellectual Cooperation at the League of Nations in 1926-1930 (picture from Grandjean 2022). The Section is at the top, with the Committee on the left (ICIC) and the Paris Institute on the right (IIC).

4. Personalities

Officials

Notable officials from the Section (and the Paris Institute):

- Henri Bonnet, Director of the Institute (1931-1940)
- Albert Dufour-Féronce, Under-Secretary General, Director of the Section (1927-1932)
- Richard Dupierreux, Chief of the Section for Artistic Relations of the Institute (1925-1929)
- Julien Luchaire, Director of the Institute (1926-1930)
- Jean-Jacques Mayoux, Director of the Institute (1945-1946)
- Inazo Nitobe, Under-Secretary General, Director of the Section (1919-1927)
- Georges Oprescu, Member of Section, Secretary of the ICIC (1923-1930)
- Massimo Pilotti, Under-Secretary General, Director of the Section (1933-1936)
- Alfred Zimmern, Vice-Director of the Institute (1926-1930)

Experts

ICIC members who have attended 5 or more sessions:

- Masaharu Anesaki (1934-1938)
- Henri Bergson, president of the Committee (1922-1925)
- Kristine Bonnevie (1922-1931)
- Jagadis Chandra Bose (1924-1931)
- Julio Casares (1925-1931)
- Jose Castillejo (1931-1939)
- Aloysio de Castro (1922-1931)
- Jules Destrée (1922-1932)
- Albert Einstein (1922-1932)
- Edouard Herriot (1934-1939)
- Johan Huizinga (1935-1939)
- Hendrik Lorentz, president of the Committee (1925-1928, member since 1923)
- Gilbert Murray, president of the Committee (1928-1939, member since 1922)
- Paul Painlevé (1926-1933)
- Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1931-1939)
- Gonzague de Reynold, secretary of the Committee (1922-1939)
- Alfredo Rocco (1926-1935)
- Francesco Ruffini (1922-1925)
- Marie Sklodowska Curie (1922-1934)
- Joseph Susta (1928-1939)
- Aikitsu Tanakadate (1927-1934)

Complete list of members, other participants and their attendance in Grandjean (2018, 286).

5. Archival materials

The League of Nations Archives

The Registry files of the International Bureaux Section can be found in the series [13](#), [13A](#), [13B](#), [13C](#) and [44](#) for 1919-1927, then [5A](#), [5B](#) and [5C](#) for 1928-1932 and [5A](#), [5B](#) and [5C](#) for 1933-1946. File 13C/14297 (boxes R1029-1038) contains all the debates related to the creation of the Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, it is a very good starting point in these archives. The Section files ([S401-410](#)) are few and of marginal interest.

UNESCO Archives

The archives of the International Institute on Intellectual Cooperation have been digitized by UNESCO and are also [available online](#). It is a complementary collection to the archives of the League of Nations. It should be noted that a certain number of documents on both sides are copies. It is a complementary collection to the archives of the League of Nations. It should be noted that a certain number of documents on both sides are copies. A significant part (about 30%) of the Institute's archives were lost during the evacuation in 1940.

6. Suggested readings

- Grandjean, Martin. *Les réseaux de la coopération intellectuelle, la Société des Nations comme actrices des échanges scientifiques et culturels dans l'entre-deux-guerres*. University of Lausanne, 2018.
- Grandjean, Martin. 'The Paris/Geneva Divide. A Network Analysis of the Archives of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations'. *Culture as Soft Power*, De Gruyter, 2022, 65-98.
- Laqua, Daniel. 'Transnational Intellectual Cooperation, the League of Nations, and the Problem of Order'. *Journal of Global History* 6, 2, 2011, 223-247.
- Pernet, Corinne. 'Twists, Turns and Dead Alleys: The League of Nations and Intellectual Cooperation in Times of War'. *Journal of Modern European History*, 12, 3, 2014, 342-358.
- Renoliet, Jean-Jacques. *L'UNESCO Oubliée, La Société des Nations et la Coopération Intellectuelle (1919-1946)*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999.
- Centenary of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, 2022, <http://intellectualcooperation.org/book-of-abstracts-2022>

7. Other resources

- The website created for the centenary of intellectual cooperation, which contains the proceedings of the conference and a bibliography on intellectual cooperation (over 300 publications): <http://www.intellectualcooperation.org>
- The research guide on the Institute, produced by the UNESCO archives: <https://unesco.libguides.com/iici>
- The research guide on intellectual cooperation, produced by the UN archives: <https://libraryresources.unog.ch/lonintellectualcooperation/>