

Librarianship and Bibliography in the International Arena: The Subcommittee for Bibliography of the International Committee for Intellectual Cooperation, 1922-1930

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Abstract

In 1922, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was established to serve as an advisory organ of the League of Nations in respect of science, arts and education. It took an interest in promoting international bibliographic projects and library cooperation. This article focuses on the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation's Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography, established in 1923, and situates it in the context of the League's evolving and complex administrative and communication infrastructure for intellectual cooperation, to which the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation was added in 1926. A general overview is given of the Subcommittee's membership, its relationship with the International Institute of Bibliography of Paul Otlet and Henri Lafontaine, and its activities as reflected in its

agendas, minutes and reports. Its membership comprised eminent scientists and scholars, with directors of some major libraries serving as associate members, some of whom later played leading roles in IFLA.

Keywords: Library history 1922-1930; International bibliographic control; League of Nations; International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation; International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation; Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography

Brief Bio:

Peter Johan Lor holds a D.Phil. degree (1991) as well as an honorary doctorate (2008) from the University of Pretoria. He was South Africa's first National Librarian (2000-2003), and served as Secretary General of IFLA during 2005-2008. In retirement he continues to pursue scholarly interests as a research associate in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria. He has published a book and many papers on international and comparative librarianship. In the context of preparations for IFLA's centenary in 2027, his current research focuses on the history of IFLA.

Introduction

The role of UNESCO in the development of IFLA has been generally acknowledged (Gabel, 2008; IFLA, 2022). When IFLA was revived after the Second World War, UNESCO, recognising the Federation's potential for supporting its mission of striving for peace through international understanding, provided both guidance and financial support.

This enabled IFLA to become a more professionally run organisation and to play a more significant international role, collaborating with various international bodies (Lor, 2012). The relationship evolved over time, but IFLA continues to collaborate in various UNESCO projects, such as Memory of the World and the World Book Capital Network. The two organisations jointly sponsor important statements and guidelines, such as the IFLA–UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (IFLA, 2021). At IFLA’s annual World Library and Information Congress, one of the open sessions is usually devoted to the UNESCO programmes that are relevant to libraries and information.

It is not so well known that IFLA had a significant relationship with UNESCO’s predecessor, the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC; in French, Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle), and that committee’s executive agency, the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (in French, Institut international de coopération intellectuelle). As IFLA’s centenary (1927–2027) approaches and its history is re-examined, this relationship also deserves scholarly attention. The ICIC was a novel intergovernmental organisation with a complex structure, which evolved considerably during its relatively short lifetime. It is not easy to determine in which ICIC units or entities activities relating to libraries and bibliography were taking place. As a preliminary to a study of the relationship between IFLA and the ICIC, this article focuses on the composition, scope and activities of the first unit within the ICIC

that played a significant role in respect of libraries and bibliography – namely, the ICIC’s Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography (in French, Sous-commission des sciences et de bibliographie).

To avoid confusion, the abbreviation ICIC is used to refer to the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, whilst the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation is referred to as ‘the Institute’ or ‘Paris Institute’ and the Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography as ‘the Subcommittee’. The main sources for this article were documents in the online League of Nations Secretariat archives (United Nations Archives Geneva), with some from the online archives of the Institute, now held at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

The League of Nations

The League of Nations (in French, Société des Nations) was founded in 1920 as an outcome of the Paris Peace Conference. Its Covenant was signed on 28 June 1919 and entered into force on 10 January 1920. Its main purpose was to maintain world peace. Because it failed in this – as a result of various geopolitical factors – it was for a time a somewhat neglected historical topic (Pedersen, 2007). However, it is today the subject of

a growing literature (e.g. Dykmann, 2015; Gram-Skjoldager and Ikonomou, 2019; Grandjean, 2016). According to some scholars, this predecessor of the United Nations was in fact an innovative institution, which broke new ground by creating a large-scale international administration, and showed increasing maturity and professionalisation (Kahlert, 2019).

The main components of the League of Nations were the Assembly, consisting of representatives of all the member nations; the Council, an executive body with permanent and non-permanent members; and the Permanent Secretariat, the administrative unit with permanent staff headed by the Secretary General based in Geneva. Its various support services included the League's Library. Within the Secretariat, there were 11 Sections, each dealing with a portfolio of matters of concern to the League. One of these was the Intellectual Cooperation Section (also known as the International Bureaux and Intellectual Cooperation Section), the main objective of which was to promote international understanding and peace by encouraging international intellectual cooperation. This Section served as the administrative secretariat of the ICIC and as the channel of communication with the Institute (United Nations Archives Geneva, 2022b). They are described below.

The International Committee of Intellectual Cooperation

In 1922, the ICIC was added as an advisory organ of the League of Nations in respect of science, arts and education. The ICIC and the Institute (discussed below) were described as together forming part of an Intellectual Cooperation Organisation, which was under consideration by the Assembly of the League of Nations in 1920. Until the late 1930s, however, there is little evidence of this organisation's existence as a significant entity. The ICIC was at first thought of as 'a temporary and consultative organ' ('un organe temporaire et consultatif') with very limited resources, but it was made permanent a few years later (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, 1929).¹

Initially, the ICIC was a committee of 12 members. It included intellectual giants such as Henri Bergson, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein and Paul Valérie (Brzeziński, 2017). In 1934, the ICIC reformulated for itself the following definition of 'intellectual cooperation':

The *object* of intellectual co-operation is international collaboration with a view to promoting the progress of general civilisation and human knowledge, and notably the development and diffusion of science, letters and arts. Its *purpose* is to create an atmosphere favourable to the pacific solution of international

problems. Its *scope* is that of the League of Nations.' (League of Nations 1934, 38)

The 'field of action of intellectual co-operation' included promoting and facilitating the exchange of ideas, personal contacts among intellectual workers, cooperation between relevant institutions, and 'the spread of a knowledge of the literary, artistic and scientific efforts of different nations' (League of Nations, 1934: 38) Thus, much like UNESCO after the Second World War, it also concerned itself with international collaboration in respect of bibliography and libraries. Like its parent body, the ICIC has seen a resurgence of scholarly interest (e.g. Brzeziński, 2017; Grandjean, 2016; Laqua, 2011; Pemberton, 2012; Saikawa, 2009). A comprehensive overview of the historiography of the ICIC is provided in the PhD thesis by Grandjean (2018: 16–27). However, there do not appear to be any works dealing in depth with its involvement in libraries and bibliography.

The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation ('the Institute')

Over time, the structure of the League of Nations changed and grew increasingly complex. Initially, the ICIC had limited funding and lacked a permanent, adequately staffed office to support its work. In response, the French government came forward with

a solution, offering to fund and host a permanent support structure, named the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. The proposal was accepted in 1924, against some initial opposition from the United Kingdom and its dominions, which had been unenthusiastic about the League's involvement in intellectual cooperation in the first place (Schroeder-Gudehus, 2018). Scholars have argued that the French were intent on raising the profile of France in the international intellectual sphere (Brzeziński, 2017). The Institute was to serve as an executive organ for the ICIC. Its functions were set out in Article 2 of its 'Rules of Procedure':

The principal object of the Institute shall be to prepare the work to be discussed by the Committee on Intellectual Co-operation, to ensure in all countries the carrying out of the decisions and recommendations of that Committee and, under the Direction of that Committee and of its Executive Committee, to promote, through international co-operation, the organisation of intellectual work throughout the world, and generally, to develop international co-operation in literature, art and science. (League of Nations 1934, 44–45)

The Institute was inaugurated in January 1926 and was installed in a wing of the Palais Royal in Paris. It was funded by France, not by the League of Nations. This gave it a degree of autonomy, enabling it to maintain relations with member states independently

of the Secretariat. It was also an instrument of French soft diplomacy, a counterweight to anglophone influence (Brzeziński, 2017; Grandjean, 2014, 2022). In terms of a decision taken in 1925 by the ICIC, all the successive chairmen of the Paris Institute's Governing Body, were French. The source I cited attributes the decision to the ICIC alone and does not mention reference to, or ratification by, the Council of the League of Nations (1934: 46).

In association with the Intellectual Cooperation and International Bureaux Section of the ICIC Secretariat, the Institute was responsible for preparing the meetings of the ICIC and those of its subcommittees and expert committees, and for carrying out their decisions. The advent of the Institute added a further layer of complexity to the archival record. Developing rapidly, it affected the distribution of responsibilities and the 'workflow' ('rythme de travail') of the ICIC. It also led to a greater degree of dispersion of the documents that reflect its day-to-day activities, and a greater degree of bureaucratisation (Grandjean, 2018: 118). This is reflected in the organisation's activities relating to bibliography and libraries.

Using the methodology of social network analysis, Grandjean (2022) has examined the relationship between Geneva and Paris as 'the two hubs of internationalism' during the interwar period, and has traced the shifting balance of power between the ICIC in Geneva

and the Institute in Paris. From its inception in 1926 until 1930, the Institute grew into an ambitious bureaucracy. Among other things, it took over liaison with the ICIC's national committees for intellectual cooperation. However, growing disquiet about its effectiveness came to a head in 1930, when a drastic reorganisation was undertaken. This 'reform' tried to put together the ICIC and the Paris Institute under a common direction as components of a homogeneous whole called the Intellectual Cooperation Organisation. But the pendulum swung back. In the second half of the 1930s, a movement arose to dissociate the Intellectual Cooperation Organisation from an increasingly ineffective League of Nations. According to Grandjean (2022: 88-90), some scholars see this move as an attempt to ensure the Organisation's own survival. In December 1938, a new international act (*Acte internationale concernant la coopération intellectuelle*) was adopted, which gave the Intellectual Cooperation Organisation roughly the same status as the League itself, effectively sidelining the Geneva-based ICIC.

However, before enough state parties could ratify the Act, the Second World War broke out, and the Organisation closed in June 1940. It was briefly resuscitated in 1945 and its assets, including its archives, were transferred to UNESCO in 1946. These organisational changes affected the fortunes of the League of Nations entities involved with libraries, and this is reflected in the archival fonds.

Organisation structure and internal communication

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify the terminology and organisational structure relevant to the entities concerned with library matters. It is hardly encouraging that Hans Aufricht (1951: 92), in his authoritative *Guide to League of Nations Publications*, states that ‘the rather complex committee structure of the League almost defies classification’.

In the first year of its existence, the ICIC, being itself a committee that only met once a year, established four subcommittees to study the various fields of its activities and make recommendations for its consideration. Each of the subcommittees was composed of three members of the ICIC itself (the ‘plenary committee’) together with additional expert members, referred to as assistant then, later, ‘associate members’ (*membres adjoints*). One of the subcommittees was the Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography. In 1925, following the establishment of the Paris Institute, working procedures changed, and expert committees were appointed to investigate specialised or technical issues. Initially, they reported to the ICIC through the appropriate subcommittees. Most expert committees were short-lived, being disbanded after reporting on their work, but a few became permanent. All of the committees, including the expert committees, were appointed by the ICIC and ultimately had to report to it (Pham, 1964: 78–83). Communication from the expert committees to the ICIC via its subcommittees was found to be time-consuming

and, in 1930, as part of the drastic reorganisation referred to earlier, the subcommittees were disbanded and their members were reallocated to relevant expert committees.

In 1930, the League of Nations Secretariat in Geneva had 11 administrative Sections, each dealing with a portfolio. One of these was the International Bureaux Section, also known later as the Section of International Bureaux and Intellectual Cooperation. Intellectual cooperation eventually became its main concern. It served as the link between the League of Nations and the ICIC and three international institutes – the International Institute for the Unification of Public Law, the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (both in Rome) and the Paris Institute, which, as we have seen, served as the executive organ of the ICIC. As shown in Grandjean’s (2017) diagram, in 1930, the Institute had seven Sections of its own. One of these was responsible for ‘Scientific Relations’. Later documents additionally mention a Section of Exact and Natural Sciences and a Section of Historical and Social Sciences. All three of these were involved in the work of the Subcommittee, being responsible for administrative support (managing membership, meetings, agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) and professional support (conducting research, which mainly involved gathering information through questionnaire surveys sent to member states or national committees) as requested by the subcommittees and expert committees. In practice, this meant that the Institute could exercise considerable influence. After 1925, communication between the expert committees, subcommittees

and plenary meetings of the ICIC flowed through the Paris Institute. A schematic representation of the flow of information through the levels of the ICIC system is given in Figure 1.

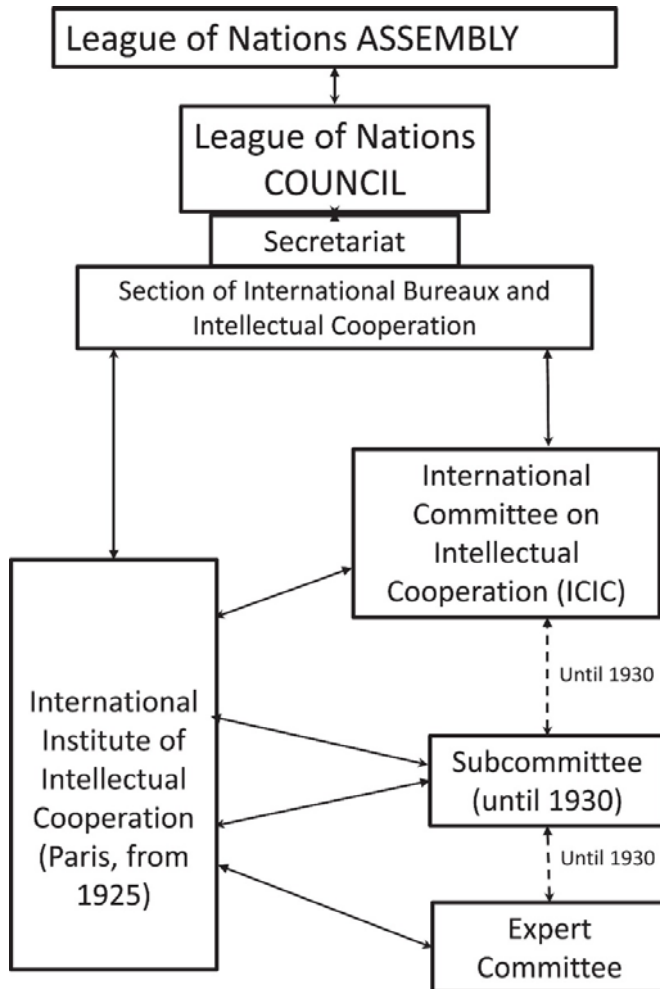


FIGURE 1: SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF DOCUMENT FLOW THROUGH PARIS INSTITUTE AND THE ICIC ENTITIES

The League of Nations Archives

The files that were consulted comprised a great variety of communications flowing between and within the Sections and committees, including handwritten, typed, mimeographed and printed notes, memos, letters, telegrams, circulars and programmes. There were numerous confidential notes about the selection and appointment of committee members, which involved careful manoeuvring to balance expertise and national representation. There was much documentation relating to meeting arrangements and expenditure; agendas, notes and minutes in various degrees of detail; and reports to higher entities and feedback from them. Often, the bulk of a file was made up of a series of drafts with comments and corrections, chronologically preceding the final document.

To the extent that these flowed through the Geneva Secretariat, all these items were filed by its central Registry. However, certain Sections established files independently. Grandjean (2018) has provided a brief but clear exposition of the structure and functioning of these archives. The custodian of the League of Nations archives is the library of the United Nations office in Geneva (Blukacz-Louisfert, 2014). A project to digitise all of the League's archives was completed by United Nations Archives Geneva in 2022, and the archives are available on an online platform as part of the 'Total Digital Access to the League of Nations Archive' project (United Nations Archives Geneva,

2022d). The structure, time series and complexities of the League of Nations Secretariat and Section fonds are explained in the ‘Context Area’ and ‘Content and Structure Area’ notes to the League of Nations Secretariat fonds (United Nations Archives Geneva, 2022c). There are also finding aids, and it is possible to chat online or correspond with helpful archivists.

The Paris Institute set up its own archives service in 1928. These archives were evacuated to Guérande in Brittany in June 1940, but returned to Paris in July of the same year. During the German Occupation, some material was lost. After the Second World War, the property of the Paris Institute, including its archives, was transferred to UNESCO (UNESCO, 1990: 1:10). The Institute’s archives have been digitised and can be accessed online using the UNESCO Archives AtoM (Access to Memory) Catalogue, where useful archivists’ notes are also provided (UNESCO, 2016).

For the inexperienced researcher, particular challenges arise from the evolving structure of the League of Nations. It was difficult for Registry clerks to keep up with the changes to the names of entities, since the authors of the documents they filed paid scant regard to consistency of word order, near synonyms such as ‘committee’ and ‘commission’, or the use of prepositions (as in ‘committee of’, ‘committee for’ or ‘committee on’). The

bilingual nature of the League of Nations (French and English) led to much confusion, as names of entities were translated from one language to another, and then back again

Entities concerned with libraries and bibliography

Online searches in the archives of the League (Geneva) and the Institute (Paris) for material relating to IFLA and other manifestations of international librarianship yielded documents relating to a confusing variety of entities concerned with documentation, information, bibliography and libraries.

The word 'documentation' occurs frequently in the sense of collections of documents supporting the work of various ICIC entities. It also co-occurs with 'bibliography'. The evolving and overlapping meanings of the terms 'bibliography' and 'documentation' during this period deserve an in-depth study, which is beyond the scope of this article, but some aspects are touched on below in relation to the Subcommittee and its uneasy relationship with the International Institute of Bibliography (IIB, also known as the Brussels Institute). In 1932, the IIB changed its name to the International Institute for Documentation, reflecting the evolution of the concept. Lists or directories of documentation centres are referred to in various files. For example, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace gave the ICIC a grant to publish a list of international

documentation centres in political science that had been compiled by the Section of University Relations (Picht, 1930). However, there appears not to have been any ICIC entity tasked with the general promotion or international coordination of documentation as distinct from bibliography. From the activities of the ICIC's Subcommittee for science and Bibliography (discussed below), it is evident that, for its purposes, the scope of the term 'bibliography' covered documentation as well.

The League's Information Section, the largest Section of the Secretariat, was concerned with the dissemination of information about the League, basically serving as its press office (United Nations Archives Geneva, 2022a). There was much correspondence concerning the League of Nations' own library. Apart from this, there are many files relating to libraries and bibliography as part of the ICIC's and Paris Institute's international work, which are not relevant to the present study.

There are two lists of the committees established by the League of Nations. The first occurs in a memorandum (League of Nations, 1934) drawn up by the League's Secretary General at the request of the Council, which – no doubt perturbed by their proliferation – had asked him to draw up rules for the appointment, composition and renewal of term of the League's committees. This document does not mention any of the committees of interest to us. The second list of committees was published in September 1945, after the

Second World War, with a view to decisions on what was to be done with the approximately 40 surviving committees of the League of Nations. However, neither the dozens of subcommittees nor any of the committees that would have no post-war purpose were included in this inventory (League of Nations, 1945: 6, 71). Fourteen committees were listed under the ICIC, including the Committee of Expert Librarians, which will be dealt with in work currently in progress. No committees other than administrative entities were listed under the Institute.

Searches in the Geneva fonds yielded information about at least 20 entities of potential interest. The relationships among these entities are difficult to unravel since, in most cases, multiple names were used to refer to the same committee, both sequentially and simultaneously. An 'International Library and Bibliographical Committee' is also encountered, but this was the name used to refer to IFLA from 1927 until its constitution was adopted in 1929. League of Nations Registry clerks continued for some time to use this name for IFLA, which after 1929 was more generally referred to as the International Library Committee. This leaves the following ICIC entities that are of interest to this study.

- The Subcommittee on Sciences and Bibliography
- The Committee of Library Experts ('Expert Committee')
- The Meeting of Directors of National Libraries

This article focuses on the first of these. The latter two were closely intertwined and deserve separate treatment.

The Subcommittee¹ on Science and Bibliography²

The Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography (mostly referred to as the Bibliographic Sub-Commission or the Sub-Committee for Bibliography) was created in the first year of the ICIC's existence. In August 1922, a resolution proposed by Jules Destrée was adopted to create 'a Sub-Committee to consider the best Method for preserving Knowledge accumulated in the Past and securing its rapid Dissemination in the Future' (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, 1922). The resolution of the League's Council stated:

[The Council] approves of the programme of investigation proposed by the Committee [the ICIC] to facilitate international co-operation as regards bibliography, to examine the question of a legally recognised international depot for publications, etc. The execution of this scheme has been entrusted to a Sub-Committee, which will have the power to co-opt not more than 5 experts or specialists." (Société des Nations 1922).

It was the first of the ICIC's initial three subcommittees and the one with the most precisely stated purpose – that of ‘improving periodical bibliography’ (Grandjean, 2018: 199) or, in today's terminology, bibliographic control of periodicals. There was a separate subcommittee dealing with intellectual property.

Membership

The Subcommittee's first meeting was held in Paris on 20 and 21 December 1922. As a subcommittee of the ICIC itself (the ‘plenary committee’), it consisted of three members of the ICIC and a number of librarians, who were described as *membres adjoints* (associate members). A sense of the expertise and gravitas of the membership can be gained from the names of the members who attended its initial meeting:

- Henri Bergson, influential French philosopher and academician, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927, was the first chairman of the Subcommittee (1922-1925).
- Mme Skłodowska-Curie, Polish-French physicist, was a double Nobel prize winner and the first woman to win that prize. She was a member of the CICI from its inception in 1922 to 1934, and a particularly dedicated and thoughtful member (Pycior 1996).

- Jules Destrée (1863–1936) was a Belgian lawyer, cultural critic, socialist politician and former Belgian Minister of Arts and Sciences.

Other eminent scientific and scholarly figures who served on the Subcommittee in later years were Kristina Bonnevie (a Norwegian biologist and feminist), F Stuart Chapin (an American sociologist), Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (an Indian physicist, botanist and polymath), Hendrik Antoon Lorentz (a Nobel Prizewinning Dutch physicist), Gilbert Murray (the Australian-born British classical scholar and public intellectual) and Otto Jespersen (a Danish linguist).³ These scientists and scholars were painstakingly selected to ensure that the various disciplines and the League's member nations were equitably represented. Not all the members pulled their weight – Einstein was notably lax in this regard (Pycior, 1996) – but they were not mere figureheads. Committee minutes and reports show them participating actively and sometimes forcefully. The status of intellectual work and international access to scientific information were clearly important to them.

The Subcommittee also included several librarians as associate members. At the first meeting, these were:

- Marcel Godet, Director of the National Library of Switzerland from 1909 to 1945, who played a leading role in international library matters, and later served as the third president of IFLA, 1936-1945 (Sub-Commission on Bibliography 1922).
- Dr Charles Theodore Hagbert Wright, Secretary and Librarian of the London Library, an independent subscription library founded in 1845. He was a public intellectual and political figure. His library held significant scholarly resources.
- Dr W. Dawson Johnston, Director of the American Library in Paris, and later European Representative of the Library of Congress. The United States had not joined the League of Nations, but a good number of Americans were nevertheless involved in the League's activities. At the time, attendance at meetings in Europe meant that senior American librarians such as Herbert Putnam, Librarian of Congress, would have had to undertake a transatlantic voyage in winter and spend three or four weeks away from their institution. Therefore, they often chose to delegate their attendance to an American already in Europe (American National Committee on Intellectual Co-operation. 1931).
- Waldo G. Leland, of the History Department of the Carnegie Institution, sent by that Institution to find and duplicate American history materials in European repositories. The connection to Carnegie may partly explain his presence at this meeting.

Although he turned out to be the Subcommittee's longest-serving librarian member, Godet did not head one of Europe's best-known research libraries, and his three fellow librarians were relatively lightweight compared to those who followed. Meetings of the Subcommittee were frequently attended by other persons invited for their special expertise – for example, in 1924, five editors of major indexing and abstracting journals. On various occasions, Paul Otlet and Henri Lafontaine were invited to state the case for their IIB. Towards the end of the Subcommittee's life, associate members from other fields were appointed to serve on it. Later minutes and reports do not always specify in what capacity those present participated.

From 1927 onwards, the librarians on the Subcommittee were almost exclusively heads of major national and research libraries, such as Dr AE Cowley, Bodley's Librarian, Oxford; Pierre-René Roland-Marcel, director of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris; and, after Germany joined the League in 1926, Dr Hugo Andres Krüss (1927), the internationally influential general director of the Prussian State Library. It was Krüss who, at the end of the American Library Association conference of 1926, formulated the proposal to establish an international library body, which ultimately led to the founding of IFLA. The presence of Godet and Krüss in the Subcommittee foreshadowed the close relations that developed between ICIC entities and IFLA.

At its meeting in 1928, Madame Curie presided over a reshuffled Subcommittee. The other eminent scientists and scholars in attendance were Bonnevie, Bose, Chapin and Jespersen (all mentioned above), and three newer members: Émile Borel (1871–1956), a renowned French mathematician and former Minister of the Navy; Albert Thibaudet (1874–1936), a French essayist and critic, and Professor of French Literature at the University of Geneva; and Constantin Ionesco-Mihăești (1883–1962), the Romanian physician and pathologist. Turnover of the membership had resulted in three members from France and one each from Britain/India, Denmark, Norway, Romania and the USA. The librarian *membres adjoints* present were still Cowley, Godet, Krüss and Roland-Marcel (Subcommittee on Science and Bibliography of the League of Nations, 1928).

No representative of the Brussels Institute?

It may come as a surprise that two prominent figures in international scholarly bibliography and documentation – Paul Otlet and Henri Lafontaine – were not invited to be members. As founders of the International Institute for Documentation (later renamed the International Institute for Bibliography (IIB)) and the Union of International Associations, they must have felt entitled to membership. The omission was the result of strained relations between the Union of International Associations and IIB, on the one

hand, and the League of Nations and ICIC, on the other. Relations had soured during the debates about the nature of the League and where its headquarters should be located. These debates were followed by disagreements about the ICIC and its relationship to the Union of International Associations, described in detail by Grandjean (2018) and Schroeder-Gudehus (2018).

Strained relations are evident from reports of the Subcommittee's meetings held in Brussels in 1923 and 1927. At the third session of the Subcommittee's meeting in 1923, Otlet and Lafontaine attended by invitation. Having hosted the Subcommittee members the previous day at the IIB and the Palais Mondial for a demonstration of their work, Otlet asked quite pointedly in what capacity he and Lafontaine were attending. He stressed the pre-eminent international position of the IIB and the Union of International Associations, and that the League of Nations had been requested to recognise it. He stated – not very diplomatically – that the IIB and the Union of International Associations 'could not lend their aid to newly established bodies which did not possess some connection with it' (International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1923b). During the sixth and final session of the Subcommittee's meeting in Brussels, there was a long discussion about universal bibliography and the role of the IIB in it.⁴ Otlet, who had submitted a written declaration, spoke again, complaining about the 'unpleasant' ('fâcheuse') procedure of the ICIC and the Subcommittee, and stressing the achievements of the IIB. At the end of

the session, the Subcommittee adopted a somewhat conciliatory resolution: the IIB ‘should be chosen as the sole international repository for the alphabetical “Bibliography Titles” [*sic*] arranged according to the names of authors’ and the ICIC ‘should decide to investigate the manner in which the organisation of this work may be completed under the auspices of the League of Nations in conjunction with the appropriate national and international associations and institutions’ (International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1923a).

In the documentation of subsequent meetings, a pattern is evident: vague promises were made to Otlet by the ICIC and its Subcommittee, but were followed up tardily and reluctantly. A draft agreement with the IIB was approved by the Subcommittee in 1924 after much discussion (International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1924). This was again discussed in 1925. In 1926, a long discussion was minuted concerning an agreement where the IIB was to have compiled a supplement to the *Index bibliographique*. Insufficient progress had been made, and it was unclear whether the relationship could be continued. After much debate, it was reluctantly decided not to terminate the agreement. Instead, a wait-and-see attitude was adopted (Sub-Committee on Bibliography, 1926).

There are several reasons for the reluctance of the ICIC and the Subcommittee to engage with Otlet and Lafontaine. Their approach was perceived as excessively idealistic and ambitious, and likely to incur great expenditure. There was fear on the part of the ICIC of being ‘annexed’ by the Union of International Associations. In the background was the earlier rivalry between Brussels and Geneva about the location of the League’s headquarters, and even a suspicion that the two free-thinking, secular Belgians might be freemasons (Schroeder-Gudehus, 2018). Other factors, such as the incompatibility of their personalities (Laqua, 2014) and orientations (Rayward, 1981), are also thought to have played a role.

The attitude of most of the Subcommittee’s members to the IIB contrasts with the interest they took in the nascent IFLA. Developments at international congresses of librarians in Washington in 1926 and Edinburgh in 1927, and at the International Congress of Libraries and Bibliography in Rome in 1929 (during which IFLA adopted its new name and constitution), were followed with interest. On 13 July 1929, the secretary of the ICIC wrote a congratulatory letter to Dr Isak Collijn, IFLA’s first president, expressing the wish for close collaboration with IFLA and inviting him to attend a following session in Geneva to discuss how IFLA and the ICIC could collaborate (Oprescu, 1929).

The Subcommittee's agenda

As the Subcommittee's initial name indicates, it was concerned with the bibliographic control of scientific literature and, more generally, with international cooperation in what we would today call 'scholarly communication'. A particular issue that had been referred to it when it was established was the extension of the 1886 Brussels Convention on the international exchange of publications. Until the late 1920s, the Subcommittee was the League of Nations' primary forum for bibliographic and library matters.

At its first five meetings, the Subcommittee mainly discussed ambitious and complex international schemes for facilitating access to scientific and scholarly literature. It is known that Madame Curie's international renown did not translate into generous financial support for her research (Pycior, 1996). Used to battling continual financial constraints herself, she was very concerned to provide support to intellectual workers. She proposed creating a universal library containing all the world's scientific periodicals, to be collected using a system of international legal deposit. The mind boggles at the amount of negotiation that would be required to persuade all the member governments to amend their legal deposit legislation to provide for international legal deposit. However, we must bear in mind that her suggestion was made in the more idealistic early days of the ICIC, when expectations of international solidarity were higher.

Madame Curie also proposed an international system of ‘dockets’ (bibliographic entries) to be submitted ‘to a centre for general collation’ (Bibliographic Sub-Commission, 1922). By this, she meant that the editors of scientific periodicals should add to each article a slip or card bearing an abstract of it. These entries would be submitted to a central agency so as to create an international bibliographical index (Pycior, 1996). This would indeed have been helpful but, in hindsight, arriving at a common standard and format for the entries, and persuading journal editors to contribute them, seems a formidable endeavour. These were ideas ahead of their time – four decades ahead of computerised cataloguing, the MARC (machine-readable cataloguing) formats, and the schemes of IFLA and UNESCO for Universal Bibliographic Control and Universal Availability of Publications. Indeed, a century later, Madame Curie’s wishes have been only partially fulfilled with the aid of the Internet and large-scale web-based content. It was also ironic, and a bitter pill for Otlet and Lafontaine, that these ideas were being proposed in disregard of the *Répertoire bibliographique universel* they had launched almost three decades earlier. In January 1923, Otlet complained bitterly:

How ironic! Here we have a commission responsible for promoting cooperation, which starts off by brushing aside a group of active collaborators, and as a prelude to its work, commits an act of non-cooperation.²

During its eight years, the Subcommittee's agenda gradually evolved. Whilst issues relating to 'analytical bibliography' – that is, abstracts, reviews and analytical summaries – continued to feature on every agenda, less attention was paid to grand universal schemes and more to more concrete, 'bite-sized' projects. Thus, the editors of a number of abstracting and indexing services in physics and physical chemistry were invited to the Subcommittee's fifth meeting in 1924 to discuss the 'coordination of work on analytical bibliography', where concern was expressed about the duplication of effort and it was felt that it was necessary to coordinate their work (International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1924). Eventually, committees of experts investigated the coordination of the bibliography of other sets of disciplines, including economic sciences, classical antiquity and biological sciences – with limited success. At the same time, the Subcommittee's agendas grew with the addition of topics of a practical nature, such as the quality of paper and ink (the poor quality after the First World War being thought to endanger the preservation of scientific literature); how to deal with works published in less-spoken languages (especially in newly independent countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia); the international lending of books and manuscripts; tables of constants; the standardisation of periodical formats (a hobby horse of Madame Curie, who was nothing if not persistent); and 'microphotography'.

However, the Subcommittee did not lose sight of the more ambitious, universalist goal of making the world's scientific and scholarly literature readily available, so obviating the need for researchers to travel to distant libraries, or at least enabling them to undertake their travels better informed as to where to go. A world catalogue of bibliographies and a guide to national services to provide information on interlibrary lending and publication exchanges were specific projects that were intended to meet the needs of scholars and scientists working across national borders.

One such project, of particular interest here, arose from discussions about the organisation of scientific information at the national level, with an emphasis on international interlibrary lending and publication exchanges. In 1925, it was decided to study ways and means to publish national union catalogues of periodicals (*Sous-commission de bibliographie*, 1925). In the following year, the Subcommittee discussed the 'international coordination of libraries for documentation' ('*coordination internationale des bibliothèques pour la documentation*'). Such coordination would comprise two stages:

In the first place the most powerful libraries would be required to inform the Institute what resources were in their possession concerning a given subject and, as subsidiary information, on resources of the less important libraries affiliated in practice to them. Secondly, an endeavour should be made to draw up definite

bibliographies for the use of persons undertaking research work who asked for them. (Sub-Committee on Bibliography 1926). (Punctuation added.)

It was decided that the four library experts on the Subcommittee would meet in Paris in the following year to discuss the issue. By 1927, the project appears to have morphed. A ‘meeting of experts to coordinate the work of libraries’ (‘reunion des experts pour coordonner les travaux des bibliothèques’) was held. It made recommendations for the functioning of an ‘International Service for the Coordination of Libraries’ (‘Service international de coordination des bibliothèques’) to be set up at the Paris Institute (Godet, 1928). In the process, these meetings gave birth to the Committee of Library Experts.

As mentioned earlier, a significantly renewed Subcommittee took over in 1928. From that year on, the word ‘Science’ was added to its name in all its documents. The ICIC was concerned with much more than science and bibliography, as shown in the documentation of its plenary meetings in 1928 and 1929. Here, the topics on the agenda included collaboration with the International Labour Office’s Advisory Committee on Intellectual Workers; the instruction of youth on the aims of the League of Nations; revision of the statutes of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute; national committees on intellectual cooperation; and exchanges of teachers and secondary school children (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, 1928, 1929; Institut

international de coopération intellectuelle, 1928). In 1930, a new topic was added: the Committee of Enquiry into the work and organisation of the ICIC, which dominated the discussion that year (Société des Nations, 1930) and led to the ‘reform’ mentioned earlier.

While less prominent on the ICIC’s later agendas, topics relating to science and bibliography continued to receive the Subcommittee’s attention. In addition to a proposed new item on ‘Material resources necessary to sustain scientific research’ (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, 1928), work continued on matters that had already been on the agenda for some time – for example:

- Coordination of scientific and scholarly bibliography, with emphasis on current abstracting (with limited progress reported)
- Exchange of publications (revision of the 1886 Brussels Convention – a matter taken up at the governmental level)
- Relations with the International Institute of Bibliography
- Standardisation of linguistic terms
- Conservation of printed works and manuscripts
- Publication of a guide to national information centres for interlibrary lending
- Information sharing among large libraries about purchases of foreign books

Impact of organisational changes

From 1925, the Paris Institute's Section of Scientific Relations was responsible for administrative support (membership, meetings, minutes, reports, etc.) and conducting research (mainly questionnaire surveys) requested by the Subcommittee and, later, by its Committee of Library Experts. The Subcommittee's documents show that the advent of the Institute – and concomitant increasing use of expert committees – had a significant impact on its work. From 1925, we see questions on the Subcommittee's agenda, such as the quality of paper and ink, being referred to the Institute for investigation (Subcommittee on Bibliography, 1925). The minutes of the eighth meeting (1926) provide evidence that a lack of clarity about the transfer of certain responsibilities from the Subcommittee to the Institute had given rise to some tension between them. That this was seen to be a sensitive issue is evident from the editing of the draft minutes (Subcommittee on Bibliography, 1926).

A general pattern of communication developed. The Subcommittee's agendas and minutes, as well as those of any expert committees reporting to it, were prepared by the Institute's Section of Scientific Relations. Questions arising in the Subcommittee were referred (via that Section) to expert committees for investigation and recommendations. The Subcommittee and expert committees requested the Section to conduct investigations

(often by means of postal questionnaires distributed to member states). The expert committees advised on the research procedure, commented on the results and reported back (via the Institute's Section) to the Subcommittee, which in turn reported to the ICIC, also via that Section. Until it was disbanded as part of the 'reform' of 1930, the Subcommittee served as the conduit for communication between the ICIC and committees of natural scientists and historical and social scientists, and expert committees – some of which were short-lived and others, like the Committee of Library Experts, more permanent. The Subcommittee's agendas and minutes reflect an increasing reliance on its expert committees, with its agendas being dominated by discussions of reports from them. Presumably, this was also the case in the ICIC's other subcommittees. It is therefore not surprising that, in 1930, the degree of duplication that occurred led to a decision to 'terminate' ('supprimer') all the subcommittees (League of Nations Council, 1930). After the Subcommittee had been abolished, the bulk of its work was continued by the Committee of Library Experts.⁶³

Conclusion

Judged by concrete, practical outcomes, the results of the Subcommittee's work are modest, especially when considered against the backdrop of the idealistic and ambitious proposals made at its first meeting. The creation of a universal library through

international legal deposit and a system of international bibliographic control of journal literature through the voluntary submission by journal editors of bibliographic data (Madame Curie's 'dockets') both appear hopelessly unrealistic – politically as well as technologically. A century later, more advanced technology has helped us only to inch closer to the realisation of universal bibliographic control and universal availability of publications. Technologic barriers have been eased, but the geopolitical factors that ultimately sank the League of Nations have in our times morphed into equally intractable political-economic constraints that continue to inhibit the free movement of scientific and scholarly information.

It is wise to tackle wicked problems by breaking them up into smaller pieces. However, scaling down the Subcommittee's initial ambitions and concentrating on a few fields such as physics, physical chemistry, biological sciences or economics achieved limited success. In 1929, the last full year before the Subcommittee was terminated, the ICIC was able to report to the League's Council that sufficient improvement had occurred in the biological sciences but, in the other fields, meetings and negotiations continued. There was limited progress on projects of smaller scope. Work on an international code for periodical abbreviations continued, as did work on the exchange of publications. A new supplement to the *Index bibliographicus* was being planned. The project for the exchange among major libraries of information on purchases of foreign books was still under way,

awaiting more precise specifications (Commission internationale de coopération intellectuelle, 1929).

Progress continued at a snail's pace. As is the case today, those working on these projects did so alongside other responsibilities. In the 1920s, their questions and responses had to be sent by post or, in urgent cases, telegram. Scheduling meetings was time-consuming; the meetings themselves involved expensive and time-consuming travel by train and steamship. But the main obstacle was not technology or logistics; it was the complexity arising from the number of stakeholders in many countries and speaking different languages – government agencies, universities, research institutes, professional bodies, publishers, editors, scientists and scholars – all with different aims, interests, traditions and standards. Histories and personalities played a part, as seen in the unfortunate case of relations with the IIB.

On the positive side, until the late 1920s, the Subcommittee served as the main forum for library and bibliographic cooperation. Professional friendships developed across national and disciplinary borders. Library leaders sat around the same table as some of the finest scientists and scholars of the time – leaders in their fields who understood that libraries and bibliography were critical to science and scholarship, and who could communicate this to their peers and their governments. A nucleus of well-connected library leaders was

formed: Godet, Krüss, Collijn and others were able to continue the work of international collaboration in the Committee of Library Experts and in IFLA.

The weakness of the League of Nations is reflected in the ICIC and its subcommittees. Today, it is recognised that the League left a valuable legacy, not only by creating a new kind of international organisation, but also in terms of its guiding themes and ethos. In its modest way, the Subcommittee for Science and Bibliography contributed to keeping the flame of internationalism burning.

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Endnotes

1. The archival documents of subsidiary entities of the League of Nations are entered under their own names in the list of references, using the form of name used in the documents. The documents in the United Nations Archives Geneva can be accessed by entering their reference codes (e.g. R2201-5B-22381-404) in the search box on the home page, <https://archives.ungeneva.org/>
2. ‘Subcommittee’ was originally spelled ‘Sub-Committee’, with a hyphen. It is mostly known as the Subcommittee for Bibliography. Subcommittees were sometimes called ‘sub-commissions’ (*sous-commissions*). In the archives and literature of the League of Nations, the terms ‘committee’ and ‘commission’ were used quasi-interchangeably, as were the French *comité* and *commission*. In English, ‘committee’ was more common; in French, *commission*, the latter then indicating an entity at a higher level than a *comité*.
3. Where not otherwise stated, information about the members was obtained on the World Wide Web, mainly from Wikipedia.
4. The sessions of the Subcommittee comprised a series of meetings over two or three consecutive days.

5. ‘Oh! Ironie! Voici une commission chargée de provoquer la coopération qui commence par écarter un groupe de collaborateurs actifs et prélude à ses travaux par un acte de non-coopération!’ (quoted in Schroeder-Gudehus, 2018: ch.5, par.13).
6. Krüss (1961) refers to the successor of the Bibliographical Committee as the Bibliothekskonferenz des Völkerbundes (‘Library Conference of the League of Nations’). This German name does not match any of the other entities encountered in English or French in the League’s archives, but he probably meant the Committee of Library Experts, since the list of members he cites (which includes three later IFLA presidents) exactly matches the membership of that committee.

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