

European cultural diplomacies and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC)

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The paper explores the role and influence of the ICIC on the content and practices of the cultural diplomacy of Western European countries during the interwar period.

After the armistice, diplomats and intellectuals in Germany and France, and to a lesser extent in Britain, engaged in debates about how to adapt wartime propaganda to the peace time. Many agreed that the propaganda offices that had opened during the First World War were unsuitable for the peace time. Yet, they refused to relinquish some of the strategies that they had used to promote benevolent images of their nations among allied or neutral countries. Largely as a result of these discussions, cultural diplomatic offices opened within the ministries of foreign affairs in France (Service des Oeuvres françaises à l'étranger [SOFE] in 1920), Germany (Akademischer Austauschdienst in 1924), Italy, and Spain and the USSR (Martin and Chaubet 2011, 87). These offices further institutionalised and formalised practices and policies that had emerged in the nineteenth century and had been bolstered by practices of the 'civilising mission' in imperial contexts, and cultural propaganda during the First World War (Chaubet 2006).

The role of different members of the ICIC and their national agenda in shaping the ICIC has been discussed in the scholarship. Daniel Laqua has showed how the intellectuals who subscribed to the internationalism of the ICIC and busied themselves with transnational issues were 'actually conforming to national categories' and were trying to negotiate a path that overlapped national and transnational or international projects (Laqua 2011b, 53). Not only were members of the ICIC thinking within national frameworks, but they also aimed to uphold the prestige and influence of their nation of origin with the ICIC and the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) (Scholz 1994). In particular, French academic Julien Luchaire sought to establish France as the leader in the field of international intellectual relations by supporting the creation of the IICI. France was certainly not the only nation that hoped to improve its cultural assets through contribution to the ICIC. For example, Italy championed the opening of the International Educational Cinematographic Institute (IECI in existence between 1928 and 1937) which rapidly acquired a fascist character (Druick 2007, 83).

Some of the members of the ICIC and IIIC had had previous dealings with the cultural diplomatic strategies of their countries. Marie Curie-Skłodowska had been invited to lecture at the French cultural institute in London in the 1920s (Fonds Pierre et Marie Curie NAF 18462 XCVIII Sabatier Société d'encouragement, F 49-52). Julien Luchaire occupied a position at the Ministry of Public Instruction, and as a young lecturer in Italian at the University of Grenoble in the early 1900s, he had founded the first French cultural institute abroad (in Florence) in 1907 (Renard 2001). His knowledge of and networks within French cultural diplomacy were well developed and predated his involvement in cultural internationalism. Henry de Jouvenel, who dealt with the ICIC because of his role in the Confédération des Travailleurs Intellectuels and was a rapporteur for the Commission, was also active in the Association Française d'Echanges Artistiques (a close support of the SOFE). Moreover, themes discussed within the ICIC and the IIIC, including linguistic policy and academic exchanges, overlapped the very areas in which national cultural diplomatic offices were meant to intervene.

This paper examines how the ICIC influenced discussion over the content and methods of national cultural diplomacy in France, Britain and Germany and how the governments of these countries considered the ICIC and connected institutions in relation to their own cultural diplomacy. In other words, this paper aims to assess how intellectual cooperation in the interwar years impacted, if at all, the making and development of state-led cultural diplomacy in Western Europe. In addition, it is concerned with how civil servants and diplomats in charge of academic and cultural diplomacy considered the ICIC.

To address these questions, my work builds on the literature that has taken institutional and diplomatic approaches to study cultural internationalism (Renoliet 1999; 2020). In addition the works of Daniel Laqua but also the publications by Benjamin Martin on cultural treaties are particularly central (B. G. Martin 2021; Laqua 2011b; 2011a). This secondary literature is combined with an analysis of the archives of the ICIC national committees in La Courneuve, France, Berlin, Germany and the national archives in Kew, Britain as well as the private papers and memoirs of their key members (such as Gilbert Murray whose archives are deposited at the University of Oxford). Minutes and reports of the sessions of the ICIC digitised through the UN archives are crossed with an analysis of the archives of offices for cultural diplomacy in the ministries of foreign affairs in these three countries. In terms of methodology, the paper is concerned with policy and lexical analysis to trace evidence of the influence of internationalist thought and of the ‘internationalist-nationalist’ dialectic (D. Laqua) on the making of state-led cultural diplomacy.

The proposed paper is part of my new book-length project supported by the British Academy and the European Research Executive Agency (REA). This research looks at the institutionalisation of cultural diplomacy in a transnational and comparative perspective at a time when, in the late 19th and early 20th century, it became increasingly important for states and citizens to project a benevolent image of their nations abroad. Cultural diplomacy encompassed vehicles of culture such as literature, exhibitions, world fairs alongside cultural and academic institutions. The central question of the project will be, ‘how and when did cultural diplomacy emerge in Europe, and how can integrating this aspect of diplomacy help us rethink our definition of foreign affairs?’

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