

# Intellectual Cooperation, a Short Historiographical Overview

## Introduction to the conference

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Intellectual cooperation? As an introduction to the centenary conference of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC) of the League of Nations (LoN), writing a new definition of this well debated concept would be a bit disrespectful of this century of work around the League's involvement in scientific and cultural issues. Basically, either we take up the vocabulary of the institution and the question of definition is quickly answered, or we embark on an enterprise whose scope is beyond such an introduction and mostly redundant with the rich existing literature. As an opening of this centenary event, and to leave room for the contributions of the conference participants who will all respond in their own way, let us ask ourselves the question of how to establish such a definition? The question is therefore not so much the content of the definition as the conditions of possibility of such a definition.

Indeed, the prestigious experts who met for the first time in a Geneva meeting room in August 1922 do not know precisely what the ICIC consist of. The League of Nations is itself a very recent institution and the debates that led to the creation of the Committee were far from unanimous. To add to the possible confusion, the administrative terminology is no clearer than the more political diatribes the LoN Assembly has witnessed in previous years on this subject, especially around Léon Bourgeois' resolution. How to establish a precise definition when for 20 years this term has been systematically used to avoid giving details about this field of activity of the League of Nations?

In a somehow underrated 1922 note summarizing most of the issues of the new Committee to General Secretary Eric Drummond, Under Secretary General Inazo Nitobe admits that the Secretariat's communication strategy is to use the term "intellectual cooperation" to avoid confusion. To avoid that people think that the ICIC is interested in the rights of intellectual workers, and to avoid the League of Nations involvement in educational questions, which are too sensitive in national contexts. Basically, it is a "negative" definition, which says everything that intellectual cooperation is not, but which uses relatively impenetrable terms:

In French the term 'Organisation internationale du Travail intellectuel' was consistently used; but in English this Committee has been called by various names, giving rise to a good deal of misunderstanding. In the Assembly resolution the term 'International Organisation (sometimes 'Coordination') of Intellectual Work' was used [...]. It naturally led to a mistaken idea that the object of the Committee was to start an organisation something like the International Labour Office for intellectuals [...]. Then it was also believed by outsiders that the Committee would deal with questions of education, and hence terms such as 'Committee on International Education', 'Intellectual Intercourse and Education', and 'Intellectual Development Committee' were used by correspondents. We thought that the title 'Intellectual Cooperation' would do away with these misconceptions [...] so we persistently used this in our correspondence.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the precautions of the Secretariat, this lack of definition will cause many problems and misunderstandings. But in the end this strategy works quite well in that it establishes a kind of very encompassing definition, whose lack of clarity makes it a kind of "big tent" likely to suit everyone since

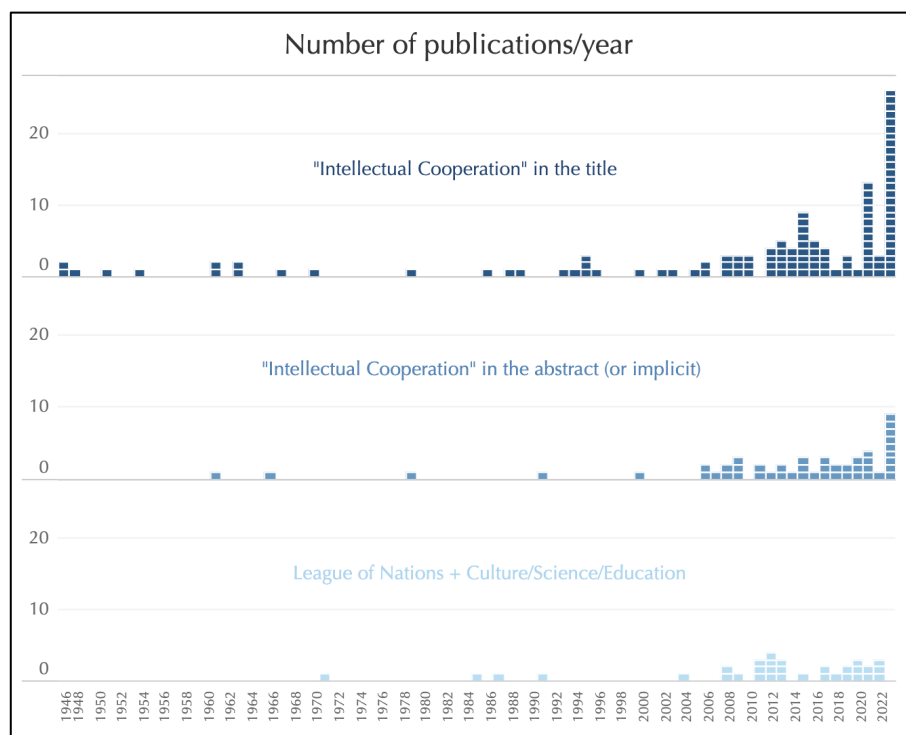
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<sup>3</sup> Nitobe, Inazo, 'Observations on the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation', 18 August 1922, p. 1. League of Nations Archives (UNOG Library) R1031/13/22652/14297. Online: <https://archives.ungeneva.org/committee-on-international-cooperation-in-intellectual-work-dr-nitobe-transmits-observations-on-the-constitution-and-work-of-this-committee>

everyone understands what suits them. Of course, more precise definitions were formulated at the time of the League of Nations, but they are so often included in pompous declarations in public events or publications that they lend themselves more to an analysis of the discourse than to a real discussion of the substance.

It is therefore mainly by observing the activity of the Committee, and then of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) opened in 1926 in Paris, that we can deduce this definition. And this is obviously the task to which many historians have devoted themselves in recent years. One of the ambitions of this centenary event is to bring together those who are writing the history of intellectual cooperation today. To make this small community concrete, to make it aware of itself. But if the goal is indeed to meet, to review our findings and to coordinate our future efforts, it is also to take a moment to appreciate the work that has been done. All this is because the definition of intellectual cooperation lies precisely in the collection of all this individual research.

Compiling most of the publications on the subject, based on the references cited by the current literature and the main academic search engines, is a way to grasp the size, evolution, and diversity of the intellectual cooperation studies (fig. 1). The limits of such an initiative are obvious (non-Western languages, old publications poorly referenced or unavailable, etc.), but by cross-referencing the citations of each publication, it is possible to establish a relatively coherent corpus. Doing this exercise also logically means questioning the definition of intellectual cooperation. Indeed, the ICIC actors make a rather systematic use of the term “intellectual cooperation”, so it is relatively easy to look for publications that cite this notion, but should we stop there?



**Fig. 1** Number of publications per year since the end of WW2<sup>4</sup>. Statistics from the Intellectual Cooperation Bibliography.<sup>5</sup>

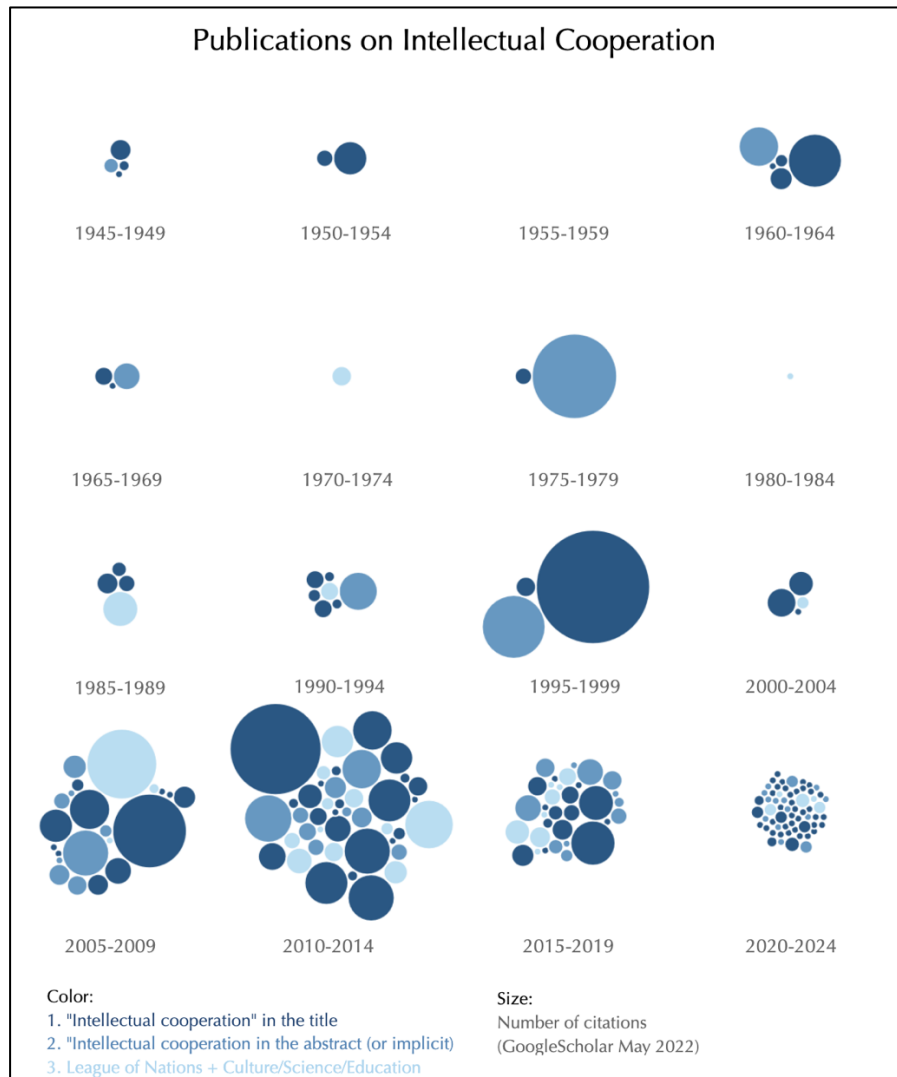
To stay within the scope of intellectual cooperation, we do not include the thousands of publications in the history of international relations, history of science, history of education, intellectual history concerning the 1920s and 1930s. A publication is included only if it mentions intellectual cooperation in its title or summary, makes an implicit reference to it (for example by citing a project carried out within the framework of the

<sup>4</sup> We have voluntarily included the 2022 conference papers in this data (the last bar on the right). Of course, these communications are probably less important than journal articles and monographs, but when we are interested in the impact of publications we are sometimes surprised at the short- and medium-term influence of shorter forms of publication.

<sup>5</sup> More visualizations are available at <https://intellectualcooperation.org/stats> as well as links to interactive versions.

committee without naming intellectual cooperation itself), or deals with the relationship between the League of Nations and the scientific, educational and cultural fields.

This is a work-in-progress, but the result is striking: among the 200 publications that make up the core of this list, three quarters were published less than 20 years ago.<sup>6</sup> And given the number of colleagues who have responded to the call for papers of this conference, this trend does not seem to be diminishing. This purely quantitative statistic is pleasing for the dynamism of the field, but is this increase a guarantee of greater diversity in the subjects and approaches? This book of abstracts certainly proves it.



**Fig. 2** Number of Google Scholar citations (May 2022) of the publications listed in the Intellectual Cooperation Bibliography.<sup>7</sup> Max value = 225.

Beyond the simple quantity, the impact of these publications can be imperfectly assessed by looking at their citations. These books and articles are more than pure information, they are also links to other publications. A network of influences that could be reconstituted to try to understand the different working communities around intellectual cooperation, the different generations, the different schools, the different archives used.

<sup>6</sup> The time bias is obvious: the older a publication is, the more likely it is to be forgotten or not cited. But this effect is marginal compared to the overall trend.

<sup>7</sup> More visualizations are available at <https://intellectualcooperation.org/stats> as well as links to interactive versions with paper identification for each circle.

Fig. 2 shows the publications on intellectual cooperation by periods of 5 years. The size of the circles gives an idea of the current impact of these texts (number of Google Scholar citations). It is only one form of influence measurement among others. In a further study, the objective would be to measure only citations between publications that are part of the corpus and to focus on structure rather than quantity.

The biases of such a measurement are obvious, it above all gives a view of what is cited today (since it is recent publications that are indexed and whose references are analyzed). But it helps to remember that while the quantity increases over time, it does not always mean that recent publications replace old ones, which sometimes reinforce their “absolute reference” status over time. Basically, this graph shows a slightly different situation from Fig. 1. There is indeed a limited but very real number of clearly important publications before the 2000s. And on the other side, recent publications are numerous, but logically relatively little used, at least for now.

Without commenting on the intrinsic quality of all these publications, a few milestones seem to stand out. All are very different in their type (chapter, monographs or journal article), just as they differ in their approach and their role for our research community. They represent very distinct historiographical periods:

- The first monographic works in the 1950s and 1960s (Northedge 1953; Kolasa 1962; Pham 1962).
- The political history of science and intellectuals in the 1970s (Schroeder-Gudehus 1978).
- The rediscovery of the Institute's archives and their articulation with the history of French diplomacy in the 1990s (Renoliet 1999).
- The time of transnational analyzes and the explosion of interest around the League of Nations and intellectual cooperation in the 2010s (Laqua 2011b).<sup>8</sup>

But this is the history of intellectual cooperation written yesterday. This literature will continue to accompany our research community and bear fruit, but to continue our quest for a way to define intellectual cooperation, let us look at the history being written today, in this book of abstracts. And to introduce us to all the papers presented hereafter, let's leave the final word to Gonzague de Reynold, one of the only two members of the ICIC (with Gilbert Murray) to have been a member during its entire activity. In his 1937 report to the gathering of the national committees on intellectual cooperation, concerned about the future of the League, he writes:

I have seen intellectual co-operation born, I have followed all its steps since the first minute of the first hour of the first day. I know its past, but I cannot predict its future. Its present organisation is doubtless only a stage. What will happen to it later? It is possible that in the future historians will see intellectual co-operation as the basis of a new civilisation. It is also possible that this attempt will be recorded as a failure and that it will be forgotten because of its insignificance. Who can say now what part of all we have undertaken will be fruitful or sterile? But we are not responsible for the results: we are responsible only for making the attempt. Let us make it.<sup>9</sup>

So, what do today's historians say?

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<sup>8</sup> Other most cited publications (>20 citations) include Smith and Toynbee (1960), Schroeder-Gudehus (1986), Bekri (1990), Taillibert (1999), Canales (2005), Druick (2007), Fuchs (2007), Dumont (2008), Herrera Leon (2009), Löhr (2010), Riemens (2011), Wilson (2011), Goodman (2012), Pemberton (2012), Pernet (2014), Laqua (2011a), Grandjean (2014), Pita Gonzalez (2014), Grandjean (2017), Grandjean (2018).

<sup>9</sup> De Reynold, Gonzague, 'Function of Intellectual Co-operation in the Organisation of the Contemporary World', Report submitted to the Second General Conference of the National Committees on Intellectual Cooperation, Paris, July 1937, League of Nations Archives (UNOG Library) C.530.M.369.1937.XII, p. 59.

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