

Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

Archives of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1925-1946

ID Code [2016-108]

1.0 Summary (max 200 words)

The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (1925-1946) was created as an agency of the League of Nations by the French Government. The Institute worked on a wide range of intellectual questions, such as university collaboration, textbooks and the teaching of history and geography, libraries and museums, translations and the use of new media (radio and moving pictures) with the overall idea of promoting a peaceful, international spirit.

The archives of the Institute consist of 115 linear meters of files, documents and publications, which are in the custody of the UNESCO Archives and are kept at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris. They reflect the activities of the Institute and the involvement of personalities and intellectuals from different parts of the world, including Rabindranath Tagore, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, Miguel de Unamuno, Henri Bergson, Thomas Mann and Gabriela Mistral. These archives provide unique evidence on the hopes, dreams and practical actions of the interwar international intellectual community. They are nominated for the Memory of the World Register because of their universal significance, documenting successes and failures of a minor utopia. Knowledge of these archives will promote deeper understanding of international intellectual cooperation and of the interwar activities that anticipated the creation of UNESCO.

2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)

UNESCO Archives

2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

UNESCO Archives inherited custody of the IICI archives after the Institute's liquidation.

2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

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2.4 Contact details

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3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

Archives of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1925-1946

The International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (normally referred to by the French acronym, IICI), established with the aid of the French government and located in Paris, began its work early in 1926. It provided a permanent secretariat for the League of Nations International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation which aimed to promote international cultural/intellectual exchange between scientists, researchers, teachers, artists and other intellectuals. The Committee was composed of 12 eminent persons (later 19) and met for the first time in the summer of 1922 under the chairmanship of the French philosopher Henri Bergson. Unable to secure the funding required to maintain a significant office in Geneva, the Committee was offered assistance from France to establish an executing agency: the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation.

The Institute was inaugurated with an official ceremony on 16 January 1926. Between 1926 and 1939, the directors of the IICI were all French. However, the IICI had an autonomous status, separate from the League of Nations and the French Government, and held diplomatic relations with its member states. The states established national commissions for intellectual cooperation and appointed delegates to represent their interests at the Institute in Paris. In 1939, 44 delegates and 45 national commissions worked with the Institute.

The Institute, the national commissions and the delegates of the member states formed an international organization for intellectual co-operation. The organization's structure was confirmed by the International Agreement concerning Intellectual Cooperation, adopted during a conference in Paris in December 1938. The agreement came into effect in the middle of World War II with its eighth ratification in January 1940.

The Institute was closed between 1940 and 1944, but reopened in February 1945, continuing its work until the end of 1946 when UNESCO took over part of its responsibilities.

3.4 History/provenance

The Archives Service of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation was created in 1928. During the IICI's existence, its archives inherited fonds from the Office International des Musées (OIM) and the Comité français de l'Institut international du cinéma éducatif. In June 1940, the archives of IICI and its staff were evacuated, following instructions from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, first to Guérande in the West of France, then to Bordeaux; they were returned to Paris by mid-July of the same year. During the German occupation of France from 1940-1944, some material was lost.

In 1946, UNESCO inherited all property of IICI. The archives and publications were transferred to UNESCO headquarters in Avenue Kleber, Paris.

Conserving and indexing these archives were one of the first tasks of the archives service of

UNESCO in 1947. The losses from the Second World War can be understood by reviewing the [Inventory](#) where UNESCO archives staff have indicated missing material by the word “manque.”

It should also be noted that the records of the IICI “subfonds” of the Comité Français de l'Institut international du cinéma éducatif constitute some of the most complete evidence of the work of the League of Nations' Institut international du cinéma éducatif (IICE), which was based in Rome. The IICE's records are assumed to have been destroyed in air bombardments during the Second World War.

A leak in the UNESCO archives depot in July 2003 damaged the Publications series. The water-damaged books and booklets were treated and stabilized at that time.

4.0 Legal information

4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name	Address
UNESCO Archives	7, place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris, France

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4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name	Address
Same as owner	

Telephone	Facsimile	Email
Same as owner		

4.3 Legal status

The custody and ownership of the archives of the IICI were formally transferred to UNESCO by the end of 1946 in conformity with an agreement between the IICI and UNESCO (cf. document of the 1st session of UNESCO's General Conference: 1 C/30).

Article III, Section 6 of the United Nations' “Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies” (adopted by the General Assembly in 1947) stipulates that “The archives of the specialized agencies, and in general all documents belonging to them or held by them, shall be inviolable, wherever located”.

Article 14 of the “Agreement between the Government of the French Republic and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization regarding the Headquarters of UNESCO and the Privileges and Immunities of the Organization on French Territory” stipulates that “The archives of the Organization and, in general, all documents belonging to or held by it shall be inviolable wherever they are located”.

4.4 Accessibility

The IICI archives are open to the public, without any restrictions. The Archives reading room is open to the public and information on the archives is provided through the website of the UNESCO Archives: <http://www.unesco.org/archives/new2010/index.html>. An archival reference service replies to queries and guides and facilitates research: archives@unesco.org

An archival description is available online in the web-based open source archival description tool “Access to Memory” (AtoM): <http://atom.archives.unesco.org/international-institute-of-intellectual-co-operation>

An older inventory and a list of IICI publications are available online (see hyperlinks above, 3.2).

The UNESCO Archives has launched a digitization project, which aims at making the totality of the IICI archives available online by 2018.

4.5 Copyright status

Records that are over 70 years old are most likely in the public domain. However, it cannot be excluded that there may, in certain cases, be copyright terms that have not yet expired. For that reason all digitized records and documents posted online as part of the anticipated digitization project will appear with a disclaimer that has been established upon consultation with UNESCO’s Legal Advisor and the Division of Public Information.

5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria

5.1 Authenticity.

The authenticity of the archives of the IICI was established in 1946 when they were transferred to UNESCO.

5.2 World significance

The archives of the IICI constitute a unique and irreplaceable source of information on attempts to establish international intellectual cooperation in the period between the two World Wars. The world community, through the League of Nations, acknowledged the need to work in a wide range of cultural and scientific fields to bring about mutual international understanding. In a number of areas the IICI succeeded and left a basis to be built upon by the United Nations and, in particular, UNESCO. Examples are work on languages and translations (Index Translationum was created by the IICI in 1930 and continued by UNESCO), international conferences with discussions on philosophical matters of crucial importance – such as Albert Einstein’s and Sigmund Freud’s correspondence “Why War?” and conferences on topics like “Towards a New Humanism”, “The Future of Culture” and standard-setting work, for example in the fields of libraries and museum. Preservation of cultural heritage was already one of the concerns of the IICI as was cultural diversity (at the time called “the particularity of cultures”). The work on textbooks, in particular in history and geography, with a view to fighting prejudices and stereotypes was started by the IICI and continued by UNESCO. The role of the mass media (radio in particular) for the promotion of peace was one of the priority areas for the IICI and this as well was later followed up by UNESCO.

Apart from all the specific areas where the IICI has had a lasting impact, there is a more fundamental dimension which relates to the course of history. This fundamental perspective is the understanding that it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed (to paraphrase the preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO). The IICI has a unique historical importance and relevance in its own right, as one of the bastions against xenophobia, racism and hatred in the inter-war period. In a longer historical perspective it constituted an experience and a series of lessons learnt for its successor-organization, UNESCO. The basic idea, that soft power matters, that the “intellectual and moral solidarity” of humanity is just as important, if not more, than political arrangements lives on in UNESCO.

UNESCO became a more political organization than the IICI, just as the UN learnt from the League of Nations, UNESCO learnt from the IICI that governments had to be at the forefront and take full responsibility for strategies and programmes. At the same time the IICI’s very successful attempts to reach out to and include civil society inspired UNESCO. Institutionally this was reflected in the continuation of National Commissions, which were created as national partners of the IICI. The creation of numerous international NGOs by UNESCO was also inspired by the IICI, which worked closely with civil society organizations, both NGOs and foundations, such as the Carnegie and Rockefeller, which funded substantial parts of the IICI budget.

The IICI was what the historian Jay Winter has called “a small utopia” (Jay Winter: “Dreams of Peace and Freedom. Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century”, Yale University Press, 2006). The IICI archives bear witness to dreams and hopes that were momentarily defeated but which were born again after World War II. The creation of the IICI was the first time in the history of humanity that there was an attempt to create a truly universal organization for intellectual cooperation. There were important shortcomings, in particular due to colonialism, but it was a beginning, a first attempt. The work of the IICI, its successes and failures, its dreams and hopes, its political strength and weaknesses and the involvement of thousands of men and women – all this is reflected in the archives, which thereby become an important part of the memory of humanity, the memory of the world.

5.3 Comparative criteria:

Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)

1 Time

The archives of the IICI are the first archival collection to reflect the operations of a universal organization in the intellectual field. They reflect the interwar crises and dilemmas, as emblematically exemplified in the discussion on whether or not the Institute should, as a political demonstration, reprint the books that were burned by the Nazi-regime in Germany in 1933. For better and worse, it reflects the state of the international community when faced with the dangers of fascism, Nazism and Stalinism. For worse, it showed the community's impotence to be a bulwark for the values it represented. For better, it provided a forum for the free expression of diverse voices, such as those of Thomas Mann and Gabriella Mistral and numerous other intellectuals from different parts of the world.

2 Place

The documents and archives describe an institution that has itself vanished as has, in a sense, the worldview it represented. Though they also capture the international or transnational space that continues to elude many national histories and historians. Although the IICI has left many traces and inspired UNESCO, its overarching vision of being "une société des esprits" has faded away. The archives bear witness to a way of thinking and perceiving the world, with a strong emphasis on the transforming power of intellectuals, which has now largely disappeared.

Research has shown that involvement with the IICI was particularly important for Latin American countries and individuals. Several conferences and major activities relate to that region. Chinese intellectuals also engaged actively with the Institute. Research still needs to be carried out to find out to what extent the IICI was of relevance to intellectual activities in and relating to Africa – the archives can provide evidence to tell that story as well.

3 People

Among the outstanding intellectuals who participated actively in the work of the IICI were Paul Valéry, Marie Curie, Yuang Pei, Victoria Ocampo, Salvador De Madariaga and Rabindranath Tagore – in addition to those already mentioned (Albert Einstein, Gabiella Mistral, Thomas Mann and Sigmund Freud). The life and work of these prominent individuals and numerous others are reflected in correspondence, documents and publications of the IICI. These intellectual elites were seen at the time to be the best expression of an international culture that transcended boundaries, uniting the peoples of the world while at the same time respecting the particularity of different cultures.

4 Subject and theme

The archives of the IICI reflect the development of intellectual reflections, discussions and programmes at an international level during the interwar period. Among the subject matters were the role and freedom of writers (the IICI worked with PEN, among others), standardization of university diplomas, encouraging international scientific cooperation, the development of shared archival and library descriptive systems (the UDC), the revision of textbooks, in particular in France and Germany and the promotion of peace studies.

The activities of the IICI were completely entangled with the major issues of the period, the 1920s and '30s. The archives reflect the interplay – the impact of international tensions and issues on the work of the Institute and, at the same time, the Institute's attempts to influence the course of history in the intellectual field.

5 Form and style

The IICI archives are a typical and characteristic example of an international body in the 1920s and 30s with telegrams and hand-written notes and letters, postcards (from Einstein, for example) and typed reports. They bring to life the world of a League of Nations agency, so vividly described by Albert Cohen in "Belle du Seigneur" (1968).

6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

The IICI and the wider context it was part of (the International Organization of Intellectual Cooperation) is today mostly forgotten. The title of Jean-Jacques Renoliet's essential book on this organization is most telling: "L'UNESCO oubliée". However, the IICI is part of the institutional memory of UNESCO, for the same reason that Renoliet would refer to UNESCO in his book on the Institute and the organization it was part of, namely that it was a predecessor of UNESCO. The very fact that the headquarters of UNESCO is today placed in Paris is to a large extent due to the fact the IICI was based here. UNESCO's set-up and organization was impacted by the IICI (in particular the creation of national commissions), organizations established by UNESCO, such as the CIPSH, resembled strongly the way the IICI involved intellectuals in its work and, as already described, many UNESCO activities continued efforts initially launched by the IICI. They are thus significant to the international community as it continues to find ways to work together.

Some of the leading intellectuals - Paul Valéry, Johan Huizinga, Victoria Ocampo and Gabriela Mistral, for example - have their names closely associated with the life and work of the IICI. These intellectuals have social significance in their own countries and beyond. Their influence is felt around the world

6.0 Contextual information

6.1 Rarity

The IICI archives are not only rare, they are unique and irreplaceable. They can be complemented by the League of Nations archives in the custody of the United Nations in Geneva but it is only by consulting the IICI archives that a comprehensive overview can be established on international intellectual cooperation in the period between the two World Wars. Furthermore, since the archives of the LoN International Institute of Cinematography in Rome were destroyed in by a bombing attack during WW II, the archives of the French committee for this institute, which form part of the IICI archives, have also achieved rarity by providing evidence – to some extent unique - on the work that was carried out by the Rome-institute.

6.2 Integrity

The IICI records were inventoried and their provenance confirmed at the moment of their transfer to the UNESCO Archives, by the end of 1946. They have since then been maintained as one single collection in UNESCO premises under the control of the Chief Archivist of UNESCO in conditions that preclude any modification or any other risk for their integrity.
