

Folk Art and Politics in Inter-War Europe: An Early Debate on Applied Ethnology

by BJARNE ROGAN

Since the early twentieth century, European ethnology (including folklore), with its predilection for regional or national studies and its focus on describing and charting popular culture, has striven hard to become a comparative, academic discipline. In order to overcome the problems associated with diversity of methods and rather weak theoretical foundations, as well as the isolation caused by geographical and political borders, international co-operation has been regarded as important. An early initiative, and perhaps the most permanent result of this internationalist striving, was *La Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires* (CIAP, 1928–64), the forerunner of *La Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore* (SIEF, 1964–present). The pre-war CIAP largely owed its existence to the League of Nations, through its Geneva-based sub-organisation CICI (*La Commission Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle*), an organisation responsible for international co-operation within the field of art, museums and culture, just as post-war CIAP, as well as SIEF in its early phase, were under the auspices of the United Nations, through the UNESCO umbrella.

My continuing research on the history of CIAP and SIEF has made me aware of some interesting features concerning international academic co-operation within the field of culture. The first one is how dangerous — but also how useful — the discipline was considered to be by the political leaders of the time. Popular culture, and especially the broad field covered by the term ‘folk art’ (Fr. *art populaire*), was regarded as dynamite, and not less so in the easily inflammable inter-war years. The comparison of regional cultural traits was not an innocent activity. The recognition of regional or national cultures was seen as a potential source of conflict. On the other hand, folk art was regarded as a medium for mutual sympathy and understanding between populations and ethnic groups, and also as a possible means for controlling and opposing the unintended, negative consequences of industrialisation and the modernisation of European society. It is a well known fact that social anthropology partly developed as an applied science in colonial areas, but the inter-war efforts towards practical applications of European ethnology are less well known. The second feature, and the corollary of these risks and possibilities, is how much effort the League of Nations, through its sub-organisations CICI and ILO (the International Labour Organisation) put into steering and controlling an international academic organisation like CIAP. The scientific representatives of CIAP were by no means free in their pursuit of research interests. On a more general level, there was a strong political desire to use the results of the discipline, in the field of folk art, to make the researchers change their research programmes and take

more social responsibility. The researchers, on the other hand, were not especially willing to follow these political directives. The point of departure for this article is the turmoil surrounding the creation of CIAP, while the latter part deals with the difficult communication between authorities and researchers on the subject of the application of the discipline.

In 1922 the League of Nations, which had an ambivalent attitude to popular culture, undertook responsibility for international co-operation within the field of art, museums and culture, through the establishment of a consulting commission, *La Commission Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle* (CICI), situated in Geneva.¹ The twelve commission members, among whom we find personalities like Marie Curie (France and Poland), Albert Einstein (Germany), Henri Bergson (France), and Kristine Bonnevie (Norway), were appointed on the basis of their intellectual reputations. In 1926 the French government inaugurated — not without opposition from other powers — an affiliated institution in Paris, *L'Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle* (IICI), which became the executive organ of CICI.² The Prague congress, and later the organisation and the running of CIAP, was one of the main tasks of IICI in Paris. Another important task for CICI/IICI was to administer the *Organisation Internationale des Musées* (OIM), the forerunner to ICOM under the umbrella of UNESCO.

The Pact of the League of Nations did not originally include co-operation in the field of culture. The consulting organ, CICI, came about through a French initiative (1921/22), just as did the executive organ IICI in 1925/26. Through the inter-war years there was a strong rivalry, mainly between French and British interests but also between the Germans and the French, with CICI and especially IICI as the battlefield — the institute being regarded as a French tool for cultural hegemony.³ These diplomatic manoeuvres and political battles constitute a backdrop to CIAP. But even if IICI was dominated by French interests, French researchers never gained real influence over CIAP, probably due to the rather weak academic position of popular culture studies in France. Neither folklore nor European ethnology had a university basis in France, in contrast to the situation in German-speaking Europe. Through the inter-war years CIAP was dominated mainly by ethnologists and folklorists from German-speaking countries, and to some extent also by Belgian, Dutch and Swiss scholars.⁴ CICI hesitated for a long time before engaging in popular culture. In 1926 it decided, however, to organise an international congress on folk art. The first initiatives had been taken as early as 1922, according to the Belgian folklorist Albert Marinus, a longstanding supporter and officer of CIAP, but it took years to persuade the League of Nations that the aim of folklore

is to unveil the similarities between peoples [and] not only to present the original aspects of regions, but also, through deep investigations, to discover what the whole of humanity has in common.⁵

Prague was chosen as the venue for the congress, from the five European cities that volunteered to host it. The event took place in October 1928.

The congress was planned and organised from Paris, Arnold van Gennep states in a later memo.⁶ IICI was responsible for the formal arrangements and all the practical issues, and van Gennep was engaged as scientific secretary of the congress.⁷ It was he who — under the strict supervision of the IICI officials — formulated the

congress programme. The aims were twofold: ‘... to serve at the same time scholarship and the ideal of reconciliation of peoples.’⁸ The official objective, as expressed in the programme, was to highlight what the different nations had in common, to study the geographical distribution of the manifestations of folk art and make an inventory of surviving traditions — and, finally, to examine ways of keeping alive what could still be found of popular art. Or as underlined in the programme, ‘This shows that the aim is not only scientific, but also practical’.⁹ The concept of *arts populaires* used in the congress title was not arbitrarily chosen. Van Gennep reveals that the League of Nations ‘did not want the see used officially’ designations like *ethnographie*, *ethnologie* or *folklore*. He gives no further explanation for this, but writes that the term *folklore* was interpreted (by the congress committee and in the programme) in its broadest sense, covering all varieties of material culture as well as folk music, songs, dance, theatre and dramatic performances, and from all parts of the world. But — to his disappointment — it did not include what he, as a scholar, considered as folklore in a stricter sense: that is, popular religion, legends and fairy tales, incantations, etc.¹⁰

Albert Marinus gives a fuller explanation of why the League of Nations wanted to restrict the field and why it had been so hesitant about the whole arrangement. The League realised that culture could be dangerous

You have perhaps observed that the word ‘folklore’ was used neither for the congress nor for the commission that came out of it. The simple reason is that to the former League of Nations, the word ‘folklore’ was banished, just as was the word ‘ethnography’. Actually, they believed that the word ‘folklore’ would give stuff to political claims, and that the populations would not resist from claims, with reference to similarities in costume, songs, etc. Such attitudes were to be feared especially for disputed regions between neighbouring countries.¹¹

The League of Nations forbade the treatment of topics including oral literature and popular religion. What happened at the congress, then? Their fear was not totally unfounded, ‘Some participants, from different countries, made as conclusions to their reports insidiously political annexationist claims’, Marinus writes,¹² adding that there were also present ‘a certain number’ of persons and scholars ‘who had nothing but scholarship in mind and who were free from any ulterior political motives or border claims’.¹³ We may so far conclude that the confusing backdrop to the congress, and consequently to the creation of CIAP, was partly international diplomatic rivalry for hegemony in the field of cultural co-operation, and partly a fear of what the discipline of folklore might offer as ammunition to belligerent parties on the European inter-war scene. The latter fear emerges clearly from personal notes, memos and letters, for example the correspondence between the ICII official Richard Dupierreux — administrative secretary of the congress — and curator Sigurd Erixon from the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm, on the possible participation of the renowned Lund folklorist C. W. von Sydow. On the request of Erixon that von Sydow be invited to give a lecture in Prague on ‘la poésie populaire en prose de caractère narratif’, Dupierreux refused the contribution of von Sydow with the polite, diplomatic understatement that ‘la poésie populaire a été écarté de nos préoccupations’ (folk poetry has been excluded from our preoccupations).¹⁴ When the League of Nations reluctantly accepted the idea of the congress and CICI voted the motion in 1926, the intention was that it should be accompanied

by an international folk art exhibition, to be held in Bern in Switzerland. The exhibition was however postponed several times until World War II put a final stop to the plans.

Once accepted formally by the senior authorities, the campaign for the congress started on a high pitch. The following passages are taken from the Belgian journal *Neptune* of 1 May 1927

There is every reason to be delighted with the decision. The practical consequences of this congress, and even more the lessons to be learned, may be considerable. It is highly possible that this congress will be an effective tool for universal peace. [Folk] art will increasingly become the flower of peace . . . The aim of the promoters of the Prague congress . . . is both aesthetic and social, and we would suggest: political. By studying the expressions of folk art in different regions — the most varying and the most distant the one from the other, one will be able to establish the deeper reasons for the analogies of form and the identity of patterns, between peoples of different races, and consequently the relations which have existed between peoples who are today strangers, even sometimes enemies. The demonstrations of these old relations and their fertile influence on culture and the evolution of art will serve as an element of reconciliation, the awakening, in some way or other, of a source of friendship, stronger than any diplomatic approach . . .¹⁵

The text goes on to inform readers about the twofold aim, scientific and practical, of the congress 'The task is enormous, and seldom has an international congress had a more heavily charged agenda'; it will be 'a congress not filled with academic talk without obligations', but a congress 'in the service of peace and coexistence'.

The Prague congress was attended by a large number of participants — exactly how many is difficult to say — from thirty-one countries, including official government delegates from nineteen of these countries. It was not a purely European event; Asia as well as North and South America were represented. As scientific secretary of the congress, Arnold van Gennep edited the booklet of summaries, as well as the programme. By 15 August 1928, van Gennep had received proposals for more than 300 session papers, in addition to the eight plenary lectures, but he complained repeatedly in letters and notes that new proposals continued to pour in long after the deadline. According to the Austrian ethnologist Arthur Haberlandt, more than one-third of the papers were read in the sessions, either by the authors or by their representatives.¹⁶ A total of 230 papers was handed in to the congress secretariat,¹⁷ and the published proceedings of the congress, *Art populaire*, I-II (Paris, 1931), contains 180 of these.

The concept of *arts populaires* or *folk art* was the object of long discussions and efforts of definition, before, during and after the congress. But while this and other issues were discussed, another important battle was being fought in between the sessions and in the corridors; that is, on how to follow up on the congress. There were strong tensions between groups of representatives, of which we may distinguish three or four: those having a background in scholarship (from universities, museums and archives); those with an artistic background (authors, painters and musicians); representatives of organisations working for the conservation and the propagation of popular art and aesthetic impulses; and finally, bureaucrats and official representatives of different kinds. In the official documents very little is to be found on these disagreements and discussions, but obviously there was a deep cleavage between the scholars on the one hand, who wanted to establish an independent

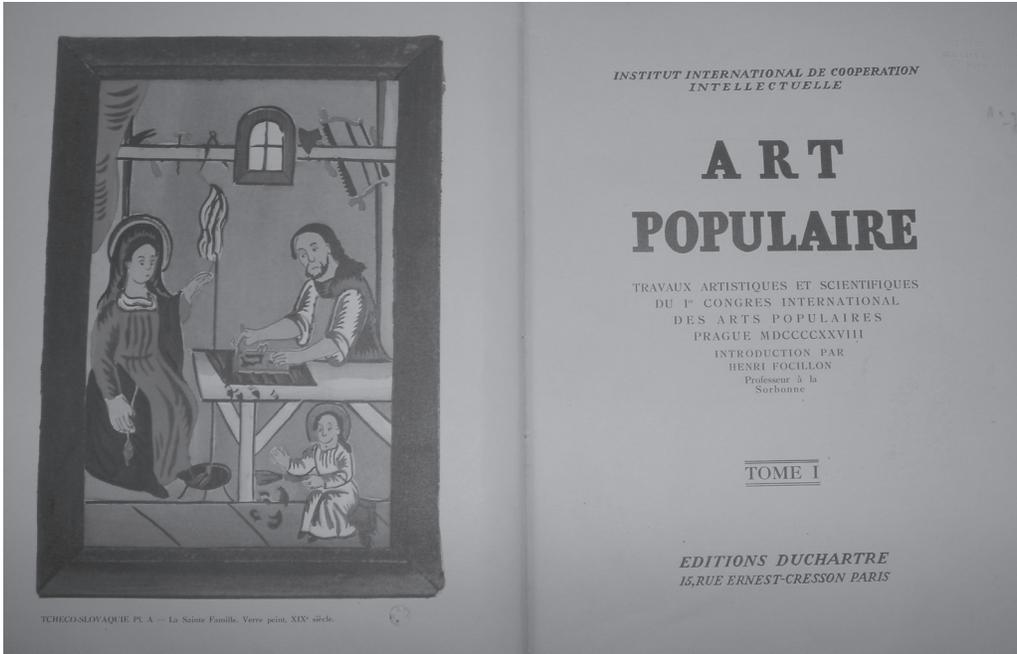


FIG. 1. Volume I of the proceedings from the Prague congress. *Art Populaire*, I-II, Paris, 1931

Photograph: B. Rogan

scientific organisation, and on the other hand those who wanted an organisation with more practical aims and applied functions. And the representatives present from the League of Nations preferred no permanent organisation at all, although they considered an organisation controlled by IICI to be the least bad alternative.

According to Arthur Haberlandt,¹⁸ his proposal for a permanent commission consisting of nine scholars, all specialists on folk art, combined with a scientific programme worked out by Albert Marinus, was rejected. The compromise was a permanent *Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires* composed by the leaders of the national delegations (approved by twenty-four of the thirty-one countries present), from whom a board of five persons were elected.¹⁹ Marinus adds that he himself — being the author of the proposal for a scientific programme — was refused a place on the board. Correspondence, notes and memos in the archives disclose several details of this tug-of-war and also reveal how IICI officials in the following months tried to reduce the damage caused by the election of a permanent commission: by rewriting or ‘doctoring’ the text of the resolution in order to tie CIAP closer to IICI in Paris; by offering to serve as the secretariat of CIAP; by convening an immediate reunion of the CIAP board in Paris under the auspices of IICI; by proposing a set of statutes giving IICI control over CIAP; by proposing to appoint and pay a scientific secretary for CIAP; by trying to prevent CIAP meetings in places other than Paris, and in other ways.²⁰

Once the establishment of CIAP was secured, other motions and actions were approved unanimously by the congress. Only two of these are of interest for our

further discussion: the congress accepted the aim of working for the maintenance and propagation of popular manifestations — in co-operation with the international movement for better leisure habits for workers, and they decided to create *national* commissions for folk art in the member countries.

A permanent CIAP was not welcomed by the League of Nations and its sub-organs. IICI had wanted to use popular art to promote their political aims, which were mutual understanding and peace. But they had a strong fear of seeing scholarly results being used for other political purposes, like identity claims with possible territorial claims following in their wake. Their preoccupation, as expressed openly in the Institute's report to Geneva on the Prague congress, was 'to reconcile the scientific independence of the researchers and scholars of CIAP with an administrative organisation where the Institute should have control. These two interests oppose each other and it is necessary to define the limits strictly'.²¹ IICI ordered the CIAP board to convene very soon after Prague; a first time in Paris on 18 January 1929, when the German Otto Lehmann (Altona) was elected President, and a second time in Bern on 23 May. On the issue of controlling the scientific programme, the CIAP board refused the proposal of a scientific secretary appointed by IICI. On other issues IICI had their will. Richard Dupierreux,²² a department director of IICI and secretary of the Prague congress, was appointed (administrative) secretary of CIAP (later General Secretary), and it was accepted that Section 1 of the statutes confirmed the close contact between CIAP, CICI (in Geneva) and IICI (in Paris). Apparently — but only apparently — IICI had regained control over CIAP during spring of 1929.

A CIAP general assembly, that is, the commission consisting of the twenty-four delegates from Prague, was planned to convene in Barcelona in September 1929, in connection with the World Fair. This meeting was cancelled, for reasons that do not concern us here.²³ It was suddenly and unexpectedly moved to Rome in late October 1929, where it was hosted by the recently established Italian National Commission for Folk Art. This transfer was arranged in connivance with the ICII secretary Richard Dupierreux, but against the wish of his superior, the French ICII director Jules Luchaire. Luchaire could accept that purely administrative meetings took place outside Paris, but he wanted — on behalf of the League of Nations — full control of meetings with a scientific content.²⁴ The general assembly of CIAP was, however — as willed by the Prague congress — a meeting with both an administrative agenda and a scientific content. The Prague congress had decided that the first general assembly should treat the topic 'Folk music, singing and dancing in their relation to social life'. This was in accord with the overall idea of promoting folk art in the service of mutual understanding. But it must have been felt a too-risky project to be left to the researchers alone; director Luchaire reproached his subordinate for this lack of vigilance.

But things turned out even worse, in the eyes of CICI. Some persons — among whom was probably the Belgian folklorist Albert Marinus, who had been voted down and rejected in Prague for his scientific programme — had broadcast the meeting in Rome and encouraged the Italians to prepare something resembling a full congress instead of a general assembly only. The result was that instead of the twenty-four members of the commission (by then actually twenty-seven), as many



FIG. 2. Albert Marinus (1886–1979), Belgian folklorist and sociologist. He was an active participant at the Prague congress in 1928, and later served CIAP, as board member through the difficult 1930s, and after the war as its vice-president

Photograph: Collection de la fondation Albert Marinus, Brussels

as 350 persons convened to discuss and demonstrate folk songs and dances²⁵ — an amazingly high number, and all the more so as the time for organising this had been extremely short. A new board — this time consisting of nine persons, among whom eight were researchers and one a secretary²⁶ — was elected. New statutes were approved, stating that CIAP was only *temporarily* attached to ICII, and it was decided that CIAP's second congress should take place in Belgium the following year (Antwerp, 1930).

This must have been felt like a declaration of war to CICI and the League of Nations. CICI felt that CIAP was once more out of their control and reactions soon followed. At the following (twelfth) session of CICI in Geneva, in July 1930, its President Jules Destrée presented the case in the following way:²⁷ the Prague congress had turned out such a success that the congress itself had ventured to elect a commission (CIAP); however, 'without the intervention nor the consent of CICI, a fact that had been given a rather cool reception in Geneva' — a strong reproof in diplomatic language! Furthermore, Destrée admitted that the meeting in Rome had been an even greater success; and whereas CICI over the years and with much pain could muster only thirty-five national commissions, CIAP had managed to raise twenty-seven in a few months. Destrée informed CICI that serious talks had taken place and that 'now, however, the escaped bird is ready once again to enter its cage'. Negotiations were to take place immediately, as it was 'indispensable that the situation be brought under control' before the forthcoming second general assembly and congress of CIAP in Antwerp. CICI wanted to make CIAP pay dearly for the embarrassing Rome affair, and the conditions imposed by CICI were hard: CIAP should have two presidents, one elected by its board and one appointed by the CICI president. Furthermore, CIAP should have one secretary appointed by

its board and another by the CICI president. Finally, the general assemblies of CIAP should be arranged *by* (and not only *with the assistance of*) IICI.

With no funding or any administrative resources, the CIAP board played a rather weak part in the subsequent negotiations. Still, 'the escaped bird' did not quite accept being caged, at least not yet. The German president Otto Lehmann and the newly elected board member Albert Marinus turned out to be competent negotiators. CICI had to withdraw the proposal for two presidents, and also a later proposal to have CIAP fused with OIM (later ICOM). The negotiations ended in January 1931, with CIAP in a position directly under CICI, and with one board member appointed by CICI and a secretary appointed by IICI — but nonetheless with a secretariat and a (modest) budget secured. By the beginning of 1931, then, the *League of Nations* once again had secured control over CIAP and its rebellious scientific members.

The topic for the CIAP general assembly, planned to be held in Oslo in August 1932, was folk art and workers' leisure time. It is worth noting that the assembly was to be hosted *not* by the University of Oslo, with its chair and institute for folklore, *nor* by the open-air museum (*Norsk Folkemuseum*), with its staff of specialists on national ethnography and ethnology — but by the museum for applied arts (*Kunstindustrimuseet*).²⁸ However, the event was supported by the political authorities, since the minister of education was scheduled to give the inaugural speech. But the assembly was cancelled for lack of interest from the delegates and instead was held in Paris in January 1933. This assembly was meant to be an important stage in a project initiated from Geneva. As early as 1927, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), through its executive organ the International Bureau of Labour (IBL), had taken a keen interest in the planning of the Prague congress. Their first initiative led to an amusing correspondence²⁹ between IBL and IICI on the aims of the congress. Wanting to co-operate in the arrangements, IBL sent a letter explaining that their conception of 'folk art' (*l'art populaire*) was 'art for the people' (*l'art pour le peuple*). IICI official Richard Dupierreux responded immediately by stressing that the scope of the congress was not 'art for the people' (in the sense of creating a market for workers and peasants), but rather 'art by the people' (*la production artistique traditionnelle du peuple*). The next step from IBL was to claim that they had not meant *pour* (nor *du*), but *par* (Eng. by), 'art by the people' — with the excuse that a dactylographic misprint had changed *par* to *pour*. IICI and IBL subsequently agreed that the two meanings might sometimes merge, but that *par* (by) was the important issue, that is, the safeguarding, practice and adaptation of traditional techniques which might lead the workers to an active, better and more intelligent (and moral) use of their leisure time. This agreement between the IICI and IBL officials functioned for the planning of the Prague congress, where an ILO delegate was invited to give a paper on folk art and its possible applications for a better employment of the workers' leisure time. But the distinction would remain a headache and a contradiction for the researchers and scholars of CIAP, as we shall see below.

As a follow up to the Prague congress, IBL made a proposal to IICI in March 1931 to launch an investigation on 'folk art as a means to develop workers' culture in general, through a better use of their leisure hours'. ILO's objective was once

more stressed: the workers should not be taught only to enjoy folk art, for their distraction and for the embellishment of their homes, but also the goal was to be of a more elevated kind — to make the workers participate by becoming themselves creators of folk art and practitioners and organisers of artistic events, 'son programme n'est pas seulement l'art pour le peuple, mais l'art par le peuple'.³⁰ It becomes clear, through the reading of the final report, that it is *par* that was paramount to ILO and IICI, not *pour*. That is, activities rather than passive consumption. The background to the 'leisure time problem' was twofold. A general reduction of working hours had taken place in many countries, as a consequence of the adoption of the Washington Convention, with its recommendation of eight-hour working days. Second, the economic depression had led to partial or total unemployment on a large scale in the 1930s. A third problem is mentioned in the preface of the report

. . . the contemporary worker found himself, sometimes as soon as the early afternoon, being faced with spare hours which he did not know how to use.

If consequently he chose to use them for working, the unemployment would increase even more! In short, ILO's folk art programme was a policy both for employment (for the unemployed) and for a better use of the recently acquired spare hours of the masses.

The practical way of carrying through the investigation was to have the national committees under CIAP, *les Comités nationaux d'Art populaire*, answer a questionnaire.³¹ These committees had been created in the wake of the Prague congress. In addition, the national IICI committees (which were preoccupied with cultural issues in general, including theatre, cinema, libraries) were asked to give supplementary information, as were also individual specialists and some other national institutions. The investigation was organised by IICI, who also edited and published the report. CIAP's role was reduced to giving a comment on the final report and to work out the attached bibliography on folk art. Correspondence³² between IICI and the national committees shows that national authorities generally looked with sympathy on the idea of using folk art as a means of ameliorating the conditions for workers (or perhaps to pacify them), and that it had been tried out already in some places. When, for example, The British National Committee of Intellectual Co-operation sent over their material 'on the utilisation of popular arts for the better employment of workers' spare time', the secretary added that:

. . . in the winter 1932–33, considerable attention was paid to the promotion of schemes for preventing the demoralising effect of unemployment of workers who had lost their occupations. Some of the schemes for the promotion of unemployment welfare included the organisation of groups in different centres concentrating on the revival of folk arts, dancing, drama, handicrafts, etc.³³

But it also becomes clear that such measures were not always very effective, as this comment from Switzerland shows

The experience from Switzerland, concerning folk art in these times of crisis . . . You are certainly informed that our organisation a year ago established a centre for folk art [*un comptoir d'art populaire*] in Geneva. The result was disappointing and very unsatisfactory. We were forced to close the place this month.³⁴

The final report, published in 1934, was entitled *Art Populaire et Loisirs Ouvriers*. The introduction and the analytical part of this 300-page book (but not CIAP's critical assessment of it) was also published in the League of Nations' bulletin *Coopération Intellectuelle*, vol. 22–23 (pp. 1213–44), under the following heading: *L'Art par le peuple*.³⁵ The report is organised in six parts, the first focusing on folk art in contemporary society and the reasons for its decay. The second is a discussion of if and how folk art could be used to ameliorate the problem of the workers' spare time. The third is an inventory, country by country, of measures taken to protect and disseminate folk art. The fourth section contains CIAP's reactions to the investigation and the philosophy behind it. The fifth and longest part presents all the national answers, and the sixth is a bibliography of national publications on folk art. I shall briefly comment upon the most interesting parts, with a focus on CIAP's refutation of the report.

The report moves between a realistic understanding of labour in modern society, based on new economic and social conditions, industrialisation and urbanisation, and — at least when seen in the back mirror — a set of rather romantic and paternalistic ideas of how to educate, refine and ennoble the industrial or agricultural worker, described as an often over-specialised technician in an age of machines, standardisation and rationalised work. The text starts by drawing the dark horizons of folk art in contemporary society, and the reasons for its decay are elaborated: a closed national or even regional economy, where folk art used to prosper, had been replaced by an open, international economy with no room for folk art, the whole process being accelerated by the current economic depression. And to this is added a long list of other social, economic and religious factors, positive in themselves but with negative consequences for traditional, popular creativity. With this picture of cultural decay as the backdrop, the rhetorical question is posed: is it possible to make the workers interested in filling their newly won spare time with folk art?

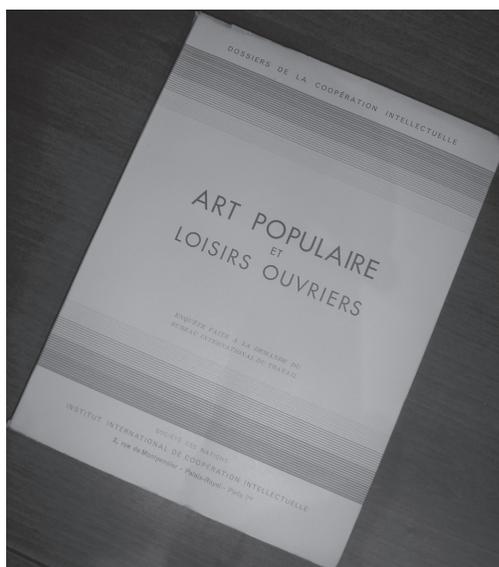


FIG. 3. *Arts populaire et loisirs ouvriers*, Paris 1934. The ILO/League of Nations report on the workers' 'leisure time problem'. An important governance issue for the authorities, in a period of unemployment and with recently reduced working hours, was to engage the workers in a better (and morally sound) way of consuming their leisure time. Political authorities optimistically considered folk art an appropriate means, but the researchers did not hail this invitation for an applied ethnology

Photograph: B. Rogan

Through arguments about the psychology and the soul of the people, emphasising that Man has not lost his sense of beauty whatever his position in society, this question is answered in the affirmative. A renaissance of folk art, on the basis of traditional forms but adapted to contemporary life, should be possible. But care had to be taken — according to the report — to prevent the worker from feeling that he is being forced or deluded into something that is contrary to modernity. Paternalism lurks around the corner: tact and discretion were required from the educator or instructor for the worker to feel that practising folk art was a natural and amusing pastime in an industrialised or urbanised setting. But how could this be done, and by what means? The report acknowledges the immense pedagogical challenge of the project, but it has few concrete suggestions, except generalised references to roles of school, organisations and museums. Proposals from the folk art specialists consulted were also few: they envisaged possibilities within the field of traditional music, singing and popular theatre, but had hardly anything to suggest about other fields of folk art proper.

IICI was obviously not satisfied with the seriousness of commitment of the specialists who had answered the questionnaire, nor with that of academic circles in general. There was a clear message to the researchers, and not least to CIAP, which is addressed directly several times — sometimes with an invitation for co-operation, but more often in the form of overt or implicit criticism: the first difficulty to be surmounted, according to the report, is to liberate folk art on the one hand from closed, introverted academic study, and on the other hand from a romantic-nostalgic conception where the past acquires a value in itself

To the contrary, it is also necessary that the scientific milieus accept the inclusion in their research programmes of new aspirations of a more social kind, like those that inspire the International Bureau of Labour, and that they offer, to a steadily increasing degree, their contribution. It is necessary that the research milieus, which up to now have taken an interest in folk art as source material for agreeable historical or aesthetic presentations, now begin to realise the social aspect of the problem that preoccupies us, by offering their assistance in an efficient way. (p. 1230)

Returning to the problem of how to make contemporary industrial and agricultural workers feel that practising folk art would be an interesting activity — a problem that several specialists had brought up (but proposed no practical solutions) in their answers to the questionnaire, the report indirectly accuses the researchers of being more of a hindrance than an aid to the project. The report supposed that museums might be an important pedagogical tool, but its assessment of the contemporary museums responsible for the national popular heritage was far from positive

The present collections [were] established in order to give as exhaustive representation as possible of the popular culture of a country . . . and organised according to the most rigorous scientific principles, with the objects normally exhibited behind glass, arranged in chronological or topographical order. It must be admitted that the working classes and the peasants do not find the desired satisfaction in visiting this type of museums. The scientific apparatus of these museums, the great number of objects they contain, even their distance from rural centres and workers' quarters in towns, create difficulties of access for the popular classes. The scientific platform that workers and peasants are met with in these institutions does not always suit the simple and primitive spirit of these people. (p. 1239)

The type of museums advocated by the report should be the exact opposite of these scientific institutions. They should be small, cover only a district or a region, and be situated close to rural and workers' centres. The collections and exhibitions should not be organised with 'an excessive scientific rigour' (p. 1240), but with simplicity and clarity, in an agreeable and picturesque way. And as a last kick to CIAP and the researchers in general: the campaigns for promoting folk art should be based on small pamphlets 'dépourvues de tout encombrement scientifique' — free from every sort of scientific obstruction (p. 1241).

CIAP's assessment of the report, which was included in the IICI report (but not in the UNESCO bulletin), was worked out by Albert Marinus and approved by the board of CIAP. As might be expected, CIAP did not give the report a warm welcome. It expressed sympathy with the overall political aim that the worker should fill his spare time with 'ennobling activities' to 'ameliorate his intellectual and moral conditions' (pp. 82–83), but dismissed the project in its present form. It pointed out that the specialists consulted had widely different conceptions of the term 'folk art', that the actual position of folk art varied enormously from country to country, and that few if any practical solutions had been proposed — either by the specialists or by IICI. CIAP's main counter-argument, however, went to the core of the concept of folk art: tradition and spontaneity. If CIAP were to contribute to the project, they would do nothing that might lead to 'the destruction, the suffocation, or decomposition of folk art, so dear to us'. They quoted the Belgian national commission, which 'declares itself hostile to every sort of intervention that might modify the traditional and spontaneous character of folk art' (p. 83). The argument was based on an understanding of folk art as a process that could not be steered; it would be modified, changed or frozen in an artificial way the moment one tried to steer it — for instance, through the teaching of how to practice folk art. And trying to create spontaneity artificially would be contrary to the essence of folk art. Or, in CIAP's wording: it would mean 'leaving the field of "Art by the people" and instead fall back on the sterile conception of "Art for the people"' (p. 84).

The solution advocated by CIAP was to start a long and strenuous campaign in the various countries in order to make the workers acknowledge folk art, 'to recognise it, to understand it and to appreciate it . . . This does not mean teaching how to practice these arts, but only to become acquainted with them' (p. 84). This task alone would mean a pedagogical challenge and a long-term propaganda effort, according to CIAP. It is worthwhile quoting the Belgian national commission, on its experience with the dissemination of folk art to the workers (p. 113):

We have, a little everywhere, tried to inspire the workers with artistic activities, in itself a praiseworthy aim. We have tried to multiply the courses on art and to attract the workers; conferences have been organised: it was very far between those present; guided visits to the museums have been tried: visitors did not turn up; we have tried to spread reproductions of masterpieces, . . . we have organised exhibitions and contests, for prizes and for the glory; we have sometimes even tried to present artistic, low-price models of furniture for worker's homes . . . The fiascos were almost always overwhelming, and it could not have been otherwise. You cannot create an art *for* the people. You cannot bring the worker to the art, in all those fields where art can be expressed, unless it is the worker himself who creates this art.

All the same, the dissemination of knowledge about folk art is a field where CIAP declares itself willing to collaborate — as consultants and monitors, in their capacity as specialists — but on the condition that the school and other pedagogical institutions, including museums, labour unions and others take the main responsibility. But before any discussion about the practising of folk art by workers could continue, other questions, for example the teaching of techniques and the commercialisation of the products, had to be resolved through supplementary investigations; to believe that one could set up a programme and immediately pass to its execution implied, according to CIAP, ‘une vision étroite’ — a narrow understanding — of the whole question. And their final words are clear enough, ‘The Board of CIAP . . . once more emphasises its decision not to give support to an action that might alter the traditional or spontaneous character of folk art’ (p. 88).

To sum up: CIAP and the two sub-organisations of the League of Nations, IICI/CICI and IBL/ILO, seem to have been far apart in their dialogue on applied ethnology. Whereas IICI and IBL criticised the researchers for their closed and introverted academic attitudes, accused them of a lack of social responsibility in their research programmes and claimed that a scientific approach to folk art would be an obstruction to the project, CIAP refused to give their support to the project in its present form. This does of course not mean that the officials of the League did not see the relevance of scientific research, nor that CIAP did not see the necessity of bettering the conditions of the working classes. But their view of the possibilities of applied ethnology differed markedly. CIAP’s answer to the challenge of applied ethnology was a long-term effort for the dissemination of information and the mediation of knowledge. In their opinion, this task alone would mean challenges enough in the foreseeable future; and IICI’s and ILO’s ideas of practising the object of their discipline — in this case folk art — was based on a bureaucratic and fatal misconception of the real character of this object of study.

When this debate took place in 1934, CIAP was not only an engaged bird, to borrow Jules Destrée’s expression. Actually, the organisation was as clip-winged as any bird — or any organisation — could be. As mentioned above, IICI/CICI had secured control over CIAP, at least for all administrative purposes, early in 1931 after the Rome adventure. In the following years, CIAP became steadily more dependent upon IICI and increasingly less creative in its scientific activities. It suffered a permanent state of financial crisis, as the CICI allocation was very low, and several meetings were cancelled, not only the planned general assembly in Oslo in 1932. Furthermore, the German and especially the British suspicion of the French-dominated IICI and the alleged French hegemonic aspirations can hardly have been propitious for CIAP. And its ‘Godfather’ — the League of Nations — was itself in crisis, declining in prestige and influence during these years. In 1933, CIAP’s German president Otto Lehman had had to retire, as Germany withdrew from the League of Nations. In 1936, his Italian successor Emilio Bodrero had to do the same, when Italy withdrew. The last couple of nails in the pre-war CIAP coffin came from the rival, politically independent scientific organisations of ethnology and folklore,³⁶ which appeared on the international scene in the mid thirties, arranging their own congresses and launching scientific journals. This refusal in

1934 to collaborate on an ILO/IICI-project they found scientifically unsound seems to have been one of the last acts of rebellion by the CIAP folklorists and ethnologists against a political regime that ended up by slowly suffocating the organisation as a scientific forum. The rest of CIAP's pre-war history may be summarised in a single word: decline.

A recurrent issue in this tale is the League of Nation's strong desire to use the results of the discipline for political purposes, that is, to promote peaceful coexistence. At the same time, these authorities feared the possible misuse of the results, a fear that turned out to be detrimental to CIAP as an organisation for international scientific co-operation and led to a seeming bureaucratic-political underestimation, if not contempt, of research on cultural issues. Another issue, closely interwoven, was the battle over the use of applied ethnology for the bettering of the workers' conditions. It seems clear that CIAP showed very little consideration for the social perspective and the possible applications of their research. ILO and IICI had planned a political action within the cultural sphere that must have appeared fully legitimate at the time, and they insisted on the co-operation of CIAP. CIAP did not question the political message, but their support was half-hearted. Their argument derived its legitimacy from purely scientific discourses.

Why this 'ivory tower' attitude? I think that one important reason is to be found in the self-understanding of CIAP. As stated in the introduction, CIAP had striven hard to become an academic discipline, to overcome the many deficiencies associated with the regional and national ethnographies of Europe. CIAP's ambition was to become an international forum for research and an instrument of renewal of the science. It defined itself as a *scientific* organisation. But since its inception in Prague in 1928 (when Marinus's proposal for a scientific programme had been voted down), it had been torn between this ambition of its own and directives from its benefactor, the League of Nations, which wanted CIAP to be an organisation for cultural action — and not scientific purposes, which they actually feared. The battle over applied folk art is one of the clearest examples of the blind alley into which CIAP was driven.

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¹ The following paragraphs on the Prague congress are a revised version of parts of my text on the creation of CIAP; see Rogan, 2004.

² I use the French terms for IICI and CICI. The CICI of the *League of Nations* was mainly a French adventure, with a predominantly French staff. See Renoliet, 1999. For a short introduction on CICI/IICI, see *L'Inventaire des Archives de l'Institut international de coopération internationale (IICI) 1925–46*, Paris, June 1990, <http://www.unesco.org/general/eng/infoserv/archives/>

³ See Renoliet, 1999, for a detailed discussion. Gorgus, 1995, also mentions the German–French rivalry.

⁴ The Italian folklorist (and senator) Emilio Bodrero, who followed the German Otto Lehmann as President of CIAP (1933 to 1936), does not seem to have exerted a strong influence on the organisation.

⁵ Albert Marinus was a member of *la Commission Belge de Folklore*, later the head of the Belgian *Commission Nationale des Arts Populaires*, and he had several international commitments. He participated at the 1928 Prague congress and served as Vice-President of CIAP both before and after the war. The quotation is from Marinus's inaugural speech to the CIAP Congress of Namur in 1953 (*Actes de la Conférence de Namur, 1956*). All translations of quotations into English by B. Rogan.

⁶ Archives MNATP, Carton 804, M. Cuisenier, Memo of 15 October 1945, signed Arnold van Gennepe: 'Comité national des Arts et Traditions Populaires.'

⁷ President of the Congress was the Swiss CICI member Conzague de Heynold, and the administrative secretary the Belgian Richard Dupierreux — an IICI official with a former position as professor at the

l'Institut des Beaux-Arts in Antwerp and who later became president of the Belgian national commission. Dupierreux was also General Secretary of CIAP in the 1930s.

⁸ UNESCO archives, Paris. Commission Internationale de Coopération Intellectuelle de la Société des Nations 1928.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Archives MNATP, Carton 804, M. Cuisenier, Memo of 15 October 1945.

¹¹ Marinus, *Actes*, 1936, p. 18. Translation B. Rogan.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On the other hand, IICI official Richard Dupierreux states (on behalf of IICI) that no such claims were made: 'D'aucuns avaient redouté qu' [...] ce congrès fût l'occasion pour certaines minorités d'exprimer des revendications inopportunes. L'art populaire est, en effet, souvent beaucoup plus régionale que nationale. Pas un instant, ces appréhensions ne se sont vérifiées. Les congressistes n'ont trouvé, dans la sphère de leurs travaux, que des occasions de s'accorder.' See Dupierreux, 1929, p. 15. On more than one occasion, however, Dupierreux was on collision course with Marinus and the other researchers who wanted to create an independent CIAP.

¹⁴ UNESCO archives, Paris, IICI Correspondence, F.IX.⁸ Participation de la Suède. Letter from Erixon dated 31 January 1928 and from Dupierreux registered 8 February 1928.

¹⁵ The article was probably the initiative of Richard Dupierreux, the Belgian IICI official. Translation by B. Rogan.

¹⁶ Haberlandt, 1928, p. 131.

¹⁷ UNESCO archives, Paris, CIAP 1-13/1928-31 (Box 450): Rapport de l'Institut sur le Congrès international des arts populaires de Prague.

¹⁸ Haberlandt, 1928, pp. 129-34.

¹⁹ Otto Lehmann (Germany), G. Julien (France), Arthur Haberlandt (Austria), J. van Schrijnen (Holland), Jiri Horak (Czechoslovakia, later replaced by Ludvik Kuba). Haberlandt soon after wanted to cede his place to Albert Marinus (Belgium), who was actually elected at the 'rebellious' meeting in Rome in 1929.

²⁰ UNESCO archives. See especially correspondence, etc., in F.IX.57 Le Congrès International des arts Populaires, Prague 1928. Organisation générale., and F.IX.69 Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires. Bureau de la CIAP. 1ère réunion Paris 18.1.1929.

²¹ UNESCO archives, Paris. CIAP 1-13/1928-31 (Box 450). Société des Nations. Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle. Rapport de l'Institut sur le Congrès international des arts populaires de Prague, p. 4 (summer 1930).

²² Richard Dupierreux, a Belgian professor serving in the ICII administration, seems to have played a double role. Obviously he felt obliged to keep CIAP under the wing of ICII. Also, he took several initiatives on behalf of CIAP. Actually he was reproached by CIAP board members (von Schrijnen, NL) for taking liberties and making decisions that only the board was authorised to do. On the other hand, he seems to have defended CIAP and to have accepted or even initiated actions on behalf of the CIAP board that his IICI superiors thought to be the responsibility of the IICI and the CICI, and for which he was reproached by the director of ICII. See UNESCO archives, Paris: F.IX.69 Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires. Correspondance jusqu'au 30.9.1929; F.IX.73 Arts Populaires. 1ère réunion plénière de la Commission Internationale des Arts Populaires. Rome 25-31 Octobre 29.

²³ Mainly because of the clumsy treatment of the affair by the Spanish National Commission for Popular Art. Sources as for the above footnote.

²⁴ See UNESCO archives, Paris, F.IX.68 and F.IX.73.

²⁵ For a detailed presentation of the contents of the meeting, see Lehmann, 1930. For the minutes of the first General Assembly and the new statutes voted, see Archives MNATP, Box 804 (Jean Cuisenier), dossier: CIAP 1929-1932(37).

²⁶ Otto Lehmann (Altona, Germany, re-elected President), Emilio Bodrero (Italy, elected Vice-President), Georges Julien (France), Daniel Baud-Bovy (Switzerland), Ludvik Kuba (Czechoslovakia), Adam Fisher (Lwow, Poland), Albert Marinus (Belgium), Johs. van Schrijnen (Niemegen, the Netherlands), Saburo Yamada (Tokyo), and as secretary, Richard Dupierreux (IICI/Paris). Shortly after, however, A. van Erven Dorens (the Netherlands) appears on the board, whereas van Schrijnen and Yamada have disappeared.

²⁷ Archives MNATP, Box 804 (Jean Cuisenier), dossier: CIAP 1929-1932(37). CICI/12e Session. Procès-Verbal 11.

²⁸ At this period, the *Kunstindustrimuseet* kept some collections on Norwegian and Sami folk art, later transferred to the Norwegian open-air museum in Oslo. Still, the seeming lack of interest from the scientific staff at the University of Oslo and the open-air museum is noteworthy.

²⁹ UNESCO archives, Paris, IICI Correspondance, F.IX.57, 58.

³⁰ *Art populaire et loisirs ouvriers*, 1934, p. 7. IBL also asked IICI for a corresponding investigation on the use of libraries for the same goal, and a report on this topic was presented to IBL/ILO in spring 1934.

³¹ The questionnaire consisted of four questions:

- A. Estimez-vous que l'art populaire traditionnel joue un rôle: 1. Dans la vie du travailleur d'industrie contemporaine; 2. Ou de la masse paysanne mise en contact avec la civilisation actuelle?
- B. Dans l'affirmative, quelles sont les manifestations de ce phénomène que vous avez pu observer dans votre pays?
- C. Plus particulièrement, pensez-vous qu'il soit possible et désirable de développer l'art populaire traditionnel dans l'utilisation des loisirs ouvriers, et de quel façon?
- D. Ne pensez-vous pas que la vie du peuple contemporain et, plus spécialement, des masses ouvrières, donne naissance à un art populaire nouveau, différent de l'ancien? Quels en seraient d'après vous les caractères principaux?

Several of the national contacts responded by long essays, up to 10, 15 or 20 pages, to these questions. The questionnaire was criticised from English-speaking countries for translating the French 'art populaire' as 'popular arts'. The US national committee pointed out that the correct translation should be 'folk art', and refused to allow the IICI to use the answers from the United States.

³² UNESCO archives, Paris, IICI Correspondance, F.IX.78.

³³ Letter dated 3 January 1933.

³⁴ Letter from *l'Union Suisse des Paysans*, 5 January 1933.

³⁵ The following references to page numbers between 1213-44 refer to the bulletin *Coopération Intellectuelle*, whereas low page numbers (below 300) refer to the book *Art populaire . . .*

³⁶ See Rogan, 2003, for a presentation of these rival organisations, IAFE led by Sigurd Erixon (Sweden) and CIFL led by Georges Henri Rivière (France).