



# ‘Soldiers for a Joint Cause’

## A Relational Perspective on Local and International Educational Leagues and Associations in the 1860s<sup>1</sup>

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Between 1819 and 1830, the Dutch moral reform society *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* [Society for Public Welfare] failed to establish any long-lasting local branches in the Catholic southern part of the Netherlands. Thirty years later, an upsurge in the number of international social reform congresses rekindled the desire to establish southern sister organizations. In this article, Carmen Van Praet and Christophe Verbruggen argue that the congresses of the *International Social Science Association* (ISSA) from 1862 to 1865 played a vital role in bringing together intermediaries from across Europe. These international congresses offered a transnational space where attendees not only exchanged information about social reform experiments, but also contributed to the dissemination of association structures. During the Amsterdam congress of the ISSA in 1864, the principal Belgian advocates of secular education were strongly influenced by contacts with the advocates of *Tot Nut*. Shortly after this contact, the Belgian *Ligue de l'Enseignement*, an association aimed at improving education and establishing public libraries, was founded and was modelled on the associational structure of *Tot Nut*. The *Ligue* also maintained contacts with other single and multi-issue European organizations, resulting in an educational reform network of sibling associations.

*‘Bondgenoten in de strijd’*. Een relationele benadering van lokale en internationale onderwijsverenigingen in de jaren 1860

De *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* slaagde er in de periode van het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1815-1830) niet in om duurzame afdelingen te vestigen in het katholieke Zuiden. Dertig jaar later flakkerde de wens opnieuw op om in

het ondertussen onafhankelijke België zusterverenigingen op te richten. Vooral de internationale contacten tijdens de congressen van de *International Social Science Association* (ISSA) tussen 1862 en 1865 voedden dit verlangen. Deze bijeenkomsten brachten experts vanuit verschillende landen samen en waren laboratoria voor de uitwisseling van informatie over sociale experimenten. Tijdens deze samenkomsten werden ook de verschillende organisatievormen van diverse verenigingen bestudeerd. Zo werden de Belgische pleitbezorgers voor seculier onderwijs tijdens het ISSA-congres in Amsterdam (1864) sterk beïnvloed door het organisatie-model van *Tot Nut*. Kort na dit internationale contact werd in België de *Ligue de l'Enseignement* gesticht, een vereniging die het openbaar onderwijs wilde hervormen en openbare bibliotheken wilde institutionaliseren. De structuur van deze Belgische vereniging toont veel gelijkenissen met die van *Tot Nut*. Carmen Van Praet en Christophe Verbruggen onderzoeken deze transfer om een beter zicht te krijgen op de effectieve uitwisseling van deze organisatievorm en analyseren de internationale contacten van de *Ligue* om na te gaan welke impact deze Belgische vereniging had in het bredere netwerk van verenigingen die streefden naar onderwijshervorming.

## Introduction

One characteristic feature of the nineteenth century was the continuous pan-European rephrasing of the 'social question'. Misery, poverty and social abuse in the working class were particularly visible and threatening for the (upper) middle classes in the cities.<sup>2</sup> Urban intellectuals were the first to address these social issues, as they saw the problems as socially unacceptable and in conflict with their Enlightenment ideals. They founded or started using existing socio-cultural associations as platforms to exchange knowledge and to find solutions to local social problems.<sup>3</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, these associations constituted the ground forces for social reform, until a more state-

1 We would like to thank Christian Müller for his work on the first draft of this article, and Lewis Pyenson and the reviewers for their valued remarks and suggestions.

2 D.J. Wollfram, 'Social Politics and the Welfare State: An International and Local Perspective', *Historisk Tidskrift* 124:4 (2007) 685; B. Wartena, H. Goeman Borgesius (1847-1917). 'Vader van de verzorgingsstaat'. *Een halve eeuw liberale en sociale politiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2003) 3, 372.

3 Ch. Leonards and N. Randerad, 'Transnational Experts in Social Reform, 1840-1880', *International Review of Social History* 55 (2010) 218.

oriented social policy gained prominence in the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> The Dutch association, the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (the Society for Public Welfare, hereafter *Tot Nut*), can be considered as an example of these tendencies. From its beginnings, members of this moral reform society showed a zeal for ‘civilizing the people, in order to spread out general wellbeing’.<sup>5</sup> The local gatherings of *Tot Nut* served as exponents of sociability where the upper class fostered their new socio-cultural, political and economic ideals.<sup>6</sup> The improvement of education, the distribution of textbooks and the foundation of schools and public libraries were first-rate means to achieve these goals.<sup>7</sup>

The historiography of *Tot Nut* has often focused on the national association and its local branches. In the following pages, we argue that from the 1860s, the supra-local associational model of *Tot Nut* was disseminated as an example of setting up European movements on public education as an emancipatory cause. Moreover, we investigate whether the international congresses from 1862 to 1865 of the *Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales* (International Social Science Association, or ISSA) and its associational culture, functioned as a mobilizing force in this process. In particular, we examine the transnational contacts during the international gatherings of the ISSA between the protagonists of *Tot Nut* and the Belgian founders of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* (League for Education, hereafter *Ligue*).<sup>8</sup> By focussing on this Dutch-Belgian interaction, we consider the extent to which this case is illustrative for a broader development, specifically the convergence of several local associations and personal contacts within an internationalist arena, which peaked for the first time in the 1860s.<sup>9</sup> The translocal exchange of information on social reform and practical advice on

4 M.S. Dupont-Bouchat, ‘Du tourisme pénitentiaire à l’Internationale des philanthropes: La création d’un réseau pour la protection de l’enfance à travers les congrès internationaux (1840-1914)’, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of History of Education* 38:2-3 (2012) 533-563; M. Janse, *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007) 395; Ch. Smit (ed.), *Fatsoenlijk vertier. Deugdzame ontspanning voor arbeiders na 1870* (Amsterdam 2008) 300.

5 B. Kruithof, ‘Godsvrucht en goede zeden bevorderen. Het burgerlijk beschavingsoffensief van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen’, in: N. Bakker, R. Dekker and A. Janssens (eds.), *Tot burgerschap en deugd. Volksopvoeding in de negentiende eeuw* (Hilversum 2006) 69-74.

6 J.J. Kloek, W.W. Mijnhardt and E. Koolhaas-Grosfeld, 1800. *Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (The Hague 2001) 123.

7 V. Kingma and M.H.D. van Leeuwen (eds.), *Filantropie in Nederland. Voorbeelden uit de periode 1770-2020* (Amsterdam 2007) 41.

8 E.H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries, 1780-1940* (Oxford 1978) 218, quoting the obituary of Jules Tarlier by Charles Potvin, in: *Revue de Belgique* 2:3 (1870) 228-232.

9 Ch. Müller and J. Van Daele, ‘Peaks of Internationalism in Social Engineering: A Transnational History of International Social Reform Associations and Belgian Agency, 1860-1925’, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 90 (2012).

associational structures were the main incentives behind the international gatherings and congresses organized from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>10</sup>

We start by detailing the local-association model of the multi-issue movement, the Dutch *Tot Nut*. It was a multi-issue movement because its members tried to tackle a wide variety of social issues and championed multiple causes. In the second part, we focus on the period of the 1860s, when an upsurge in the number of international social reform congresses rekindled the desire of *Tot Nut* to establish sister organizations in Belgium, as well as elsewhere in Europe. We examine the significance of the international congresses of the ISSA with regard to establishing personal connections and information flows between organizations. Then we look at the foundation of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement* in Belgium in relation to the Dutch *Tot Nut*. In the final part, we focus on a European educational reform network with sibling organizations within Belgium and abroad, foreshadowing the galaxy of social reform of the *Belle Époque*.<sup>11</sup> We examine how the Belgian *Ligue* was not only intertwined with *Tot Nut*, but also with other European initiatives, believing in the vision that all educational leagues and associations could constitute a united army of 'soldiers for a joint cause of progress'.<sup>12</sup>

### Branching out: the Dutch moral reform movement *Tot Nut van 't Algemeen*

In 1784, a pro-Patriotic association, named the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* was founded by a group of Protestant dissenters in Edam, a city in North Holland.<sup>13</sup> From its beginnings, *Tot Nut* served as a multi-issue bourgeois organization and as a 'container' for theorizing the social question in order to bring together local notables. The scope of this moral reform society was paternalistic, as its members believed that knowledge transfer would improve the 'ignorant paupers' by making them 'moral and virtuous citizens'. In line with their Enlightenment ideals, the members of *Tot Nut* believed that education, instruction and the foundation of reading clubs and public libraries were the foremost solutions to the increasing

10 Leonards and Randerad, 'Transnational Experts', 216-220.

11 Ch. Topalov (ed.), *Laboratoires du nouveau siècle: La nébuleuse réformatrice et ses réseaux en France, 1880-1914* (Paris 1999); Ch. Verbruggen and J. Carlier, 'An Entangled History of Ideas and Ideals: Feminism, Social and Educational Reform in Children's Libraries before the First World War', *Paedagogica Historica* 45:3 (2009) 291-308.

12 *Bulletin de la Ligue de l'Enseignement* (hereafter *Bulletin*) 2:8 (Brussels 1866-1867) 233.

13 Barry J. Hake, 'The Pedagogy of Useful Knowledge for the Common Man: The Lending Libraries of the Society for the Common Benefit in The Netherlands, 1794-1813', *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society* 29:6 (2000) 497.

social problems.<sup>14</sup> They saw annual contests, giving awards for solutions to poverty, unemployment, hygiene issues, family life, education and welfare, as significant keys to achieve their goals.

The associational structure of *Tot Nut* strengthened the consideration that it was not the national government, but instead the existing socio-cultural associations that were the platforms and places of cordiality where local social problems could be discussed. After being launched in Edam, *Tot Nut* was soon established in Amsterdam as a national organization with many local branches. The association was consequently based on a local and urban structural platform, yet always intimately connected nationally.<sup>15</sup> This tight network of local branches helped to make *Tot Nut* an effective philanthropic reform association that dealt with the multiple tasks of public moral education and the betterment of the lower classes towards a bourgeois ideal of citizenship. Moreover, being a supra-local association, *Tot Nut* aspired to learn from and contribute to local solutions for solving social problems, by circulating information, people and ideas, and financial aid.

In the first part of the nineteenth century, *Tot Nut* was an important propagator of public lending libraries. In 1794, the Haarlem division opened a free library for residents of limited means, which soon became a model adopted by other local branches. By the 1850s, various local branches of *Tot Nut* had established no fewer than 245 lending libraries in total.<sup>16</sup> The national administration of *Tot Nut* played no role in establishing local libraries, but nevertheless used these institutions as a means for securing the wider distribution of its own publications. The library collections had to conform to selection criteria, notably that the publications stressed the moral virtues of diligence at work and self-help.<sup>17</sup>

From its foundation, the Dutch *Tot Nut* also played an active part in the internationalization of the social question. Although it was mainly concerned with the diverse problems of social reform in a changing governmental and religious environment in the Northern Netherlands, it was always eager to transcend national boundaries. During the period of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830), *Tot Nut* tried to establish southern branches. The first Flemish branch of *Tot Nut* was founded in 1819 in Diksmuide, soon followed by others in Ostend, Ieper, Nieuwpoort, Bruges, Dendermonde, Antwerp, Namur, Ghent, Bredene, Tielt, Leuven and Brussels.

These southern organizations encountered strong resistance and opposition from Belgian Catholics. In 1824, the northern department had more than 12,000 members, in contrast, the southern branches barely counted

14 Kingma and Van Leeuwen (eds.), *Filantropie in Nederland*, 42-43.

15 Hake, 'The Pedagogy of Useful Knowledge', 500.

16 T. Hermans (ed.), *A Literary History of the Low Countries* (Rochester 2009) 376.

17 Hake, 'The Pedagogy of Useful Knowledge', 507, 511.

500. Although some local southern branches – such as the associations in Ghent, Bruges and Ostend – developed educational activities in the 1820s and also established local lending libraries, the southern parts of *Tot Nut* were never very successful. The different political constellation and the stronger Catholic bias in educational policies and charity in the South caused the southern branches of *Tot Nut* to fade away after Belgian independence in 1830. Weijermars (2012) argued that the difficult establishment of *Tot Nut* in the South was symptomatic of the incompatibility between northern and southern socio-cultural life in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.<sup>18</sup> However, she also recognized the importance of the early southern branches of *Tot Nut* for the expansion of public libraries. Furthermore, she contended that *Tot Nut* was always closely tied to other traditional learned societies and literary associations, which did not cease to exist in 1830.<sup>19</sup> In this way, the Dutch-Belgian tradition of philanthropic associations was not completely cut off after 1830. New connections were made with several Belgian cultural and social associations through personal interests. For example, *Tot Nut* established contacts with several members of the *Willemsfonds*<sup>20</sup>, a cultural circle founded in 1851 in Ghent, which promoted the Flemish culture and was named after Jan Frans Willems.<sup>21</sup> The Dutch moral-reform society also corresponded with *De Vlijtige Buitenlieden* (Brussels), *De Toekomst* (Antwerp), *Vrienden des Vooruitgangs* (the library association of the *Willemsfonds* in Bruges) and the *Cercle d'Ouvriers* in Brussels, led by Ida Baroness van Crombrughe.<sup>22</sup> These contacts intensified in the 1860s.

### Local organizations as the backbone of international organizations

*Tot Nut* members did not restrict themselves to transnational contacts with their former compatriots in Flanders and Brussels. In 1856, the central administration committee of the organization sent a delegation to the first international *Bienfaisance* congress in Brussels, and in so doing, it progressively developed a web of transnational relationships. From the 1850s, international

18 J. Weijermars, *Stiefbroeders. De Zuid-Nederlandse literatuur en het literaire bedrijf in het Verenigd Koninkrijk der Nederlanden (1814-1834)* (Hilversum 2012) 179-181.

19 *Ibid.*, 192-193.

20 *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant*, 12 March 1851.

21 Jan Frans Willems is considered to be the 'father' of the Flemish Movement. In the 1820s, he was an active member of the Antwerp Society *Tot Nut der Jeugd*, not to be confused with the

Antwerp branch of *Tot Nut van 't Algemeen*.

Although Jan Frans Willems was never allied to the Antwerp department of *tot Nut*, he actively 'dutchified' his *Tot Nut der Jeugd*, and distributed cultural texts that emphasized the 'inextricable alliance between the North and the South', cf. Weijermars, *Stiefbroeders*, 154-158.

22 *Jaarboek der Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (hereafter *Jaarboek*) (1863-1864) 14.

N<sup>o</sup>. 1.

**BULLETIN ILLUSTRÉ**

1864.

DU

# Troisième Congrès des Sciences Sociales



Éditeurs van Es frères, Amsterdam.

Prix 30 c.

Lundi 26 Septembre.

## Prospectus.



International congresses had a steady local basis. The city of Amsterdam hosted the ISSA in 1964.

*Annales ISSA (Amsterdam 1864).*

congresses gradually began to offer the opportunity to stage, discuss and legitimize ideas for solving the social question and to meet kindred spirits.<sup>23</sup> These international social congresses played a major role in establishing a dense information network, as relationships were both established and strengthened at such meetings. The international meetings thus provided new spaces to bring together an older generation of reformers – who combined religious and lay philanthropy – with a new generation of internationalist experts interested in social reform who had experience as public surveyors, inspectors, doctors or interested observers. Some were legal professionals, while others already combined their status as a public intellectual ‘*homme de lettres*’ (‘letterheer’) or journalist, with a political vocation.<sup>24</sup>

The annual congresses of the *International Social Science Association* (ISSA) constituted a new platform for *Tot Nut*. The congresses from 1862 to 1865 in Brussels, Ghent, Amsterdam and Berne were exceptional because of the wide range of discussion topics. Liberals and republicans from across Europe had founded the ISSA during the summer of 1862, to put social progress on the European agenda.<sup>25</sup> After the 1848 revolutions and the Crimean War (1853-1856) they felt that a ‘politics of stasis’ had taken over Europe. Moreover, they feared that a new revolution would not stop at reforming political institutions, but would go further by abolishing the whole social order, including labour hierarchies and property rights. The self-declared social experts thus set up internationalist arenas and transnational networks to forestall these developments and to provide immediate and future solutions by constructing an ideal bourgeois society model as a positive alternative.<sup>26</sup> Instead of discussing single topics, the founding fathers of the ISSA combined an international outlook with a multi-disciplinary perspective on social reform. In order to deal with a large spectrum of subjects, the ISSA was equally split into five large subsections, which could frame almost every topic as a matter of social science: 1) comparative legislation, 2) instruction and education, 3) art and literature, 4) public health and welfare, and 5) political economy.<sup>27</sup>

23 S. Van De Perre, ‘These Mutual Lessons of Nation to Nation: The International Philanthropic Congresses of 1856, 1857 and 1862’, *Conference paper VAHS Liverpool* (Ghent 2008) 1.

24 R. Aerts, *De letterheren. Liberale cultuur in de negentiende eeuw. Het tijdschrift De Gids* (Amsterdam 1997).

25 The French liberal republicans Eugène Desmarest and Louis-Antoine Garnier-Pagès, the Irish-Belgian Michel Corr van der Maeren, and the Belgian liberals Edouard Ducpétiaux and Auguste

Couvreur in particular contributed to the foundation; *Congrès International de Bienfaisance de Bruxelles 1856*, vol. 1 (Brussels 1857) 116-119.

26 Ch. Müller, ‘Designing the Model European: Liberal and Republican Concepts of Citizenship in Europe in the 1860s: the ISSA’, *History of European Ideas* 37:2 (2011) 223-231.

27 *Annales de l’Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales I* (hereafter *Annales ISSA*) (Brussels 1862) 11.



The diversity of approaches to social reform has muddied research on the ISSA, which has been described either as an amalgam or as ‘a veritable shopping-list of liberal reform’.<sup>28</sup> However, behind this amalgamated shopping list lay a coherent programme, deeply rooted in the experiences of local bourgeois elites. Social politics was the domain of the cities and communities in most European states, so translocal discourse was the main incentive to come together at congresses.<sup>29</sup> These local structures were not chosen randomly; the ISSA relied on the very same bourgeois social associations to organize its international congresses.<sup>30</sup> During the four gatherings of the ISSA, almost ninety local organizations – including public corporations, private circles, royal academies, city councils, literary societies, scientific and professional associations, boards of labour legislation, charity institutions, medical societies, commercial associations and chambers of commerce – were represented, and their delegates participated actively in the discussions.<sup>31</sup> These local organizations can be considered as the backbone of the ISSA and can be divided into two categories. First, the typical nineteenth-century forms of sociability (e.g. learned and professional societies, circles, clubs and bourgeois societies) and, second, social reform organizations.

The first category consists of societies that were associational umbrella organizations, which merely paved the way for more reform-oriented movements. These organizations were not primarily concerned with social and cultural reform. The local university and many regional chambers of commerce sent deputies to the congresses, typically industrialists and entrepreneurs, plausibly to put their interests first. In addition, some members of ‘multidisciplinary art clubs’ – bourgeois elite clubs with both social and artistic purposes – attended the ISSA congresses.<sup>32</sup> This category of associations can be considered a combination of what Mijnhardt called ‘savant’ and ‘dilettante’ societies, which rallied savants or amateurs to exchange knowledge and to increase their bourgeois morality.<sup>33</sup> Local cultural organizations, as well as liberal and Freemasonry social networks, provided fertile ground for international associational life and the flow of ideas for

28 L. Goldman, *Science, Reform, and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Cambridge 2002) 19, 326; M. Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960* (Cambridge 2001) 15.

29 H. Dunant, manuscript (1862), ‘La Société Gènevoise d’Utilité Publique et ses correspondants’, *Bibliothèque de Genève* (BGE), Ms. fr. 2097, 15 fols.

30 S.L. Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750-1914* (Göttingen 2003).

31 *Annales ISSA* I, 10.

32 A.B.G.M. van Kalmthout, *Muzentempels. Multidisciplinaire kunstkringen in Nederland tussen 1880 en 1914* (Hilversum 1998).

33 W.W. Mijnhardt, *Tot heil van 't menschedom. Culturele genootschappen in Nederland, 1750-1815* (Amsterdam 1988).

solutions to the social questions.<sup>34</sup> This first type of organizations provided a link with local governments and administrations, for instance when they invited the ISSA to a location or when they established a local committee to organize a conference.

The second category of associations is what Mijnhardt defined as 'reformist societies', in which the bourgeois morality served as the norm for the society's agenda.<sup>35</sup> To achieve their goals, these local cultural and social reform associations used different means. They articulated their own initiatives, disseminated their ideas through the press and pamphlets, and had professional or informal contacts with key figures in the government apparatus. Moreover, they used foreign contacts to strengthen their position and broaden their legitimacy as experts at home.<sup>36</sup> These associations mostly tackled specific social topics and partially overlapped with some of the issues in the ISSA's multi-issue reform agenda: legal reform, prison reform, hygiene improvement and, of course, educational reform.

The Dutch reformist society *Tot Nut* was a rare example of a multi-issue social reform association that mirrored the ISSA's approach. It is therefore hardly surprising that the committee of *Tot Nut* took a particular interest in the ISSA congresses.<sup>37</sup> The administrative council of *Tot Nut* was flattered by the proposal that the association should serve as an associational and organizational model for the ISSA as a whole. As conversations between the leading ISSA representatives Couvreur and Fontainas, and the *Tot Nut* General Secretary (P.M.G. van Hees) suggest, the ISSA wanted to build a translocal network of officially 'ISSA recognized' local branches. However, the concept of modelling the international ISSA on the Dutch national model of *Tot Nut* did not succeed.<sup>38</sup> The ISSA continued to concentrate on connecting (mostly single-issue) local associations through their congresses – as well as by 'rooted

34 J. Tyssens, 'Association, Patronizing and Autonomy: Belgian Masonic Lodges as Sponsors of a Cooperative Movement in the 1860s and 1870s', *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism* 2:2 (2011) 261-292.

35 W.W. Mijnhardt, *Om het algemeen volksgeluk. Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief (1784-1984). Gedenkboek ter gelegenheid van het tweehonderdjarig bestaan van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (Amsterdam 1984); B. Kruithof, 'De deugdzaame natie. Het burgerlijk beschavingsoffensief van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen tussen 1784 en 1860', in:

B. Kruithof, J. Noordam and P. de Rooy (eds.), *Geschiedenis van opvoeding en onderwijs* (Nijmegen 1983) 371-385; Ch. Leonards, *De ontdekking van het onschuldige criminele kind. Bestrafing en opvoeding van criminele kinderen in jeugdgevangenis en opvoedingsgesticht 1833-1986* (Hilversum 1995) 70-84.

36 Leonards, *Criminele kind*, 74-80.

37 *Jaarboek* (1861-1862) 7 (Report of the Committee and letter by Couvreur and Fontainas, Brussels, 18 July 1862).

38 *Ibid.*, 7; *Jaarboek* (1862-1863) 13-14.

cosmopolitan' intermediaries – and not by strong associational ties and official structures.<sup>39</sup>

It can nevertheless be argued that the ISSA encouraged the convergence of several local associations and the foundation of new ones.<sup>40</sup> Contemporaries valued the importance of these congresses as hubs or knots in a diffuse and unstructured social reform network.<sup>41</sup> Fontainas, mayor of Brussels and the administrative head of the ISSA, made it quite clear at the opening congress in 1862 that international structures (and the ISSA in particular) could speed up the progress of 'slow' local circles and could connect them.<sup>42</sup> These first international interconnections are part of what Saunier (2008) called the 'first circulatory regime' in the field of social policy, characterized by 'the interchange of words and experiences, in order to resist, devise, support or change the response to problems stemming from the industrial and urban revolutions'.<sup>43</sup> However, not just ideas or concepts – which could be reframed in different national contexts – were transferred; associational structures and cultures were also shared through international association meetings such as the ISSA congresses.<sup>44</sup> Although the example of *Tot Nut* did not directly influence the structure of the ISSA as a whole, the national umbrella organization with its local branches did shape emerging educational and library movements in other countries. Triggered by the ISSA and the organizational model of *Tot Nut*, Belgian, French and Italian progressives established educational reform movements. Following the example of *Tot Nut*, they created national umbrella organizations of local platforms of sociability, where particular social problems could be discussed and solved with initiatives adapted to the local political and socio-economic situation.

39 Rooted cosmopolitans by definition are 'people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts', in S. Tarrow and D. Della Porta, 'Conclusion: Globalisation, Complex Internationalism and Transnational Contention', in: S. Tarrow (ed.), *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Oxford 2005) 237.

40 Müller and Van Daele, 'Peaks of Internationalism in Social Engineering'.

41 A. Rasmussen, 'Jalons pour une histoire des congrès internationaux au XIXe siècle: Régulation scientifique et propagande intellectuelle', *Rélations Internationales* 61 (1990) 120.

42 *London Standard*, 26 September 1863, 2.

43 P.Y. Saunier, 'Les régimes circulatoires du domaine social 1800-1940: Projets et ingénierie de la convergence et de la différence', *Genèses* 71:2 (2008).

44 Leonards and Randerad, 'Transnational Experts', 217; S. Kott, "'Une communauté épistémique" du social?: Experts de l'oit et internationalisation des politiques sociales dans l'entre-deux-guerres', *Genèses* 71:2 (2008) 27-28, 41-42.

In Belgium, schooling became a highly political topic in the second part of the nineteenth century. Catholics and liberals were polar opposites, not so much pedagogically but because of ideological discrepancies.<sup>45</sup> Education was part and parcel of the liberal concept of social progress and emancipation: it had to prepare working-class people to participate in future parliamentary elections, and it also had to ensure that they were committed to earning a moral living. The means to achieve these goals were 1) self-help and co-operative associations for savings and mutual interest with limited accountability, 2) educating through local or public libraries and 3) membership in a productive and consumptive co-operative. Together with frugality and saving, education and instruction were seen as major pillars on which the radical liberal ideology rested in order to solve the social question.<sup>46</sup>

Charles Buls, a young progressive liberal from Brussels, saw education as the pre-eminent tool with which to teach the masses 'correct' morality and virtuousness. He went to the ISSA Amsterdam congress in 1864 to participate in diverse discussions. While there, Buls was on the lookout for foreign associational models that could be adopted to promote laicized education in Belgium. Three months later, on 26 December 1864, Buls organized a gathering in Brussels, where he postulated his programme for a new association 'for the spread and betterment of education and schooling in Belgium'<sup>47</sup> and publicly announced the *Ligue de l'Enseignement*. A committee founded by the anti-clerical Belgian *Libre-Pensée* associations had already accomplished much preliminary work behind the scenes in preceding years, but without any practical consequences. As Buls later wrote in his diary, this committee regarded popular education and its organization primarily as a means of personal and political emancipation in order to overcome the 'Papist Roman-Catholic yoke'.<sup>48</sup> Buls differentiated between means and ends. Partly at his instigation, *Libre-Pensée* deliberately abstained from active propaganda and public support for the *Ligue* in order to overcome the clerical/anti-clerical antagonism. However, the *Ligue* soon became the obvious promoter of a secular alternative to Catholic education in Belgium and advocated many other educational initiatives with a strong liberal and *libre-penseur*

45 G. Deneckere, 1900. *België op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen* (Tielt 2006) 46.

46 H. Defoort, *Werklieden bemint uw profijt! De Belgische sociaaldemocratie in Europa* (Leuven 2006) 71.

47 J. Lory, *Libéralisme et instruction primaire 1842-1879: Introduction à l'étude de la lutte scolaire en Belgique* (Leuven 1979) 326.

48 M. Bots, *Het dagboek van Charles Buls* (Ghent 1987) 47-48.



'Savoir ce qu'on veut. Vouloir ce qu'on sait', Jean Macé as the French 'champion' of popular education and founder of the *Ligue de l'Enseignement*.

Drawing by André Gill of Jean Macé in: *Revue les hommes d'aujourd'hui*, no. 44 ([1878]).

Musée National de l'éducation (SCEREN CNDP), Rouen.

background.<sup>49</sup> In general, the Belgian *Ligue* tried to promote public education through libraries, co-operatives, working-class and adult educational initiatives, and the revision of the primary school law and suffrage.<sup>50</sup>

Although Belgian *Libre-Pensée* associations had previously suggested establishing a lay education movement, Buls and his confederates found the decisive inspiration when looking at the activities of the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* in the early 1860's. During the ISSA congress in Amsterdam Charles Buls came into close contact with key figures in the Dutch association. Another engaged internationalist who played a role in the local Belgian cultural network on education and schooling was Charles Potvin, a Belgian progressive Freemason, prolific writer and political thinker. Potvin was a very active member of the ISSA, and actively contributed at several sessions on art, morality and education. Being present together with Buls at the 1864 congress in Amsterdam, Potvin helped to design the statutes and the articles for the Belgian *Ligue* in line with the supra-local associational structure of *Tot Nut*.<sup>51</sup> The local circles of the *Ligue* also operated as a constant source for research and an exchange of information. They were intimately connected to the Brussels central administration and helped to make the *Ligue* an effective instrument for the spread and betterment of education and instruction in Belgium. Even before the foundation of the *Ligue*, the international congresses of the ISSA testify to the growing tensions between Catholics and freethinking liberal republicans. After the ISSA Ghent congress in 1863 illustrated the point, the local Bishop, Louis-Joseph Delebecque, ordered eight days of continuous high masses in the local Sint-Anna Church to 'purify' the town of the alleged blasphemy and the liberal representations displayed at the congress.<sup>52</sup>

By the 1860s, the *Ligue* had built up a structure of local associations in accordance with the Dutch model, which partly relied on existing circles and associations for educational reform and public libraries, and newly founded local branches. Buls prominently noted the public libraries, the community courses and lectures held at Brussels and St-Josse-ten-Noode, and the discussions of the local circles at Bruges and Liège. It is hardly a surprise that existing associations, which became branches of the *Ligue* – such as the *Vlijtige Buitenlieden* (Brussels), *De Toekomst* (Antwerp), *Vrienden des Vooruitgangs* (Bruges) and the *Soirées populaires* of the *Cercle d'Ouvriers* held by Ida Baroness van

49 Bots, *Dagboek*, 48; *Le Travail* (Ghent-Paris) no. 3, 30 September 1866, col. 69; *Bulletin Belge du Travailleur Associé* no. 2, 15 December 1866, col. 14.

50 P. Voituron, 'Instruction Obligatoire', *Le Travailleur Associé* 5 (15 May 1867) cols. 33-36; *Bulletin* 2:1 (Brussels 1866-1867) 7.

51 Ch. De Spiegeleer, *Een blauwe progressist. Charles Potvin en het liberaal-sociale denken van zijn generatie* (Ghent 2011) 120, 124; *Bulletin* 1:1 (Brussels 1865-1866) 4.

52 *Le Bien Public* (Ghent), 22 September and 4 October 1863; *Recueil des mandements, Lettres pastorales, Instruments et autres documents de Louis-Joseph Delebecque* (Ghent 1864) vol. 2, 37-41.

Crombrugge – were those that kept in touch with *Tot Nut* when the southern branches of *Tot Nut* faded away after Belgian independence.<sup>53</sup> The Belgian *Ligue* was also closely intertwined with the *Willemsfonds* in Ghent. From the 1862s, and in line with the supra-local organizational model of *Tot Nut*, the *Willemsfonds* also began the establishment of local branches across Flanders and Brussels.<sup>54</sup>

The Dutch were charmed by the fact that the Belgians had followed their example: ‘especially in Belgium, people are strongly competing to follow the associational model given by the Netherlands (the *Tot Nut*, c.v.p. and c.v.)’.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, on 9 October 1865, Buls received a letter from Van Hees, the secretary of *Tot Nut*, stating that the administrative council was genuinely delighted with the foundation of the Belgian *Ligue*. Van Hees assured Buls that the *Ligue* could always count on their help, advice and assistance, as both associations had the same perspective. He also requested that the *Ligue* kept the administrative council of *Tot Nut* informed about their progress. Both associations indeed continued to exchange information by sending their pamphlets, brochures, yearbooks, reports and ideas to each other, mainly concerning schooling and education.<sup>56</sup> The *Ligue* and *Tot Nut* became sister associations, but their network extended beyond the Low Countries. By 1865, both organizations had established a transnational network of associations that all worked together for the joint causes of popular education, the foundation of community and working-class libraries, and the social, moral and political education of the people.

### Educational movements in Europe in the 1860s

The growing tensions between the emerging political parties, especially over schooling and education, had an effect on republican and left-wing liberal movements in other European countries. After the foundation of the Belgian *Ligue*, French republicans became increasingly interested in setting up a national association that would use schooling and adult education as topics through which to present their social and political reform program. The French journalist and Freemason Jean Macé played an important role in transferring and transforming the Dutch and Belgian models for use in the French national context, through translocal and transnational communications and campaigning. Following the 1848 revolution, he

53 Ch. Buls, ‘Ligue de l’Enseignement - Brussels 12 February 1867’, *Le Travailleur Associé* (Ghent, Brussels), no. 2, 15 February 1867, cols. 36-37. See also NAC, *Bijvoegsel*, 6 October 1866 on the annual congress of the *Ligue* in Liège, 30 September 1866.

54 H. Van Velthoven, *Tussen opportunisme en radicalisme. Het Willemsfonds en de Vlaamse kwestie in 171 petitjes (1860-1913)* (Ghent 2008) 8.

55 *Jaarboek* (1864-1865) 7.

56 *Bulletin* 1:1 (Brussels 1865-1866) 29-30.

believed it was necessary to educate the masses about democracy, so that universal education became a natural prerequisite for universal suffrage. After Napoleon III's *coup d'état* in 1851, Macé took refuge in Beblenheim, near Colmar in the Alsace. In late 1862, he founded the (co-operative) *Société des bibliothèques populaires du Haut-Rhin* to promote adult education and strengthen local communities. Together with the Paris *Société Franklin*, he set up a project for people's libraries under the political catchphrase of *décentralisation intellectuelle*, referring to the democratising *décentralisation* discourse in the Second Empire.<sup>57</sup> In 1864, Macé joined the journal *Le Magasin d'Éducation et de Récréation* together with the French editor and publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel.

Macé became the French 'champion' of popular education for social progress.<sup>58</sup> In September 1865, he was invited to present his French projects at the Berne congress of the ISSA in the capacity of a specialist in popular education. He joined the panel with the head of the recently founded Belgian *Ligue*, Charles Buls.<sup>59</sup> Macé already had Belgian connections before the Berne ISSA congress. He had started a project for transnational encounters to promote public libraries in late 1864 and early 1865, and became acquainted with the *Soirées populaires* organized by Ida Baroness van Crombrughe in St-Josse-ten-Noode near Brussels. In this setting, the French republican contributed greatly to the discussions and also came into closer contact with the associational model of *Tot Nut* that served as an example of successful public library propagation for the *Soirées*.<sup>60</sup> After the Berne congress, Jean Macé became a corresponding member of the Belgian *Ligue de l'Enseignement* and he maintained a lively correspondence with Buls. In the first letters from Macé to Buls, Macé underlined the similarities between the *Ligue* and the *Société des bibliothèques populaires du Haut-Rhin*, both aiming at 'une oeuvre commune' of which 'ces affections franchissent (croisant, c.v.p and c.v.) non seulement les frontières des pays, mais aussi celles des idées'.<sup>61</sup>

Macé subsequently promoted the Dutch and Belgian examples as ideal organizational models for setting up public libraries all over France, relying on a national alliance with local co-operatives or associations to pursue its goals independently and adapted to the local situation.<sup>62</sup> In late 1866, the tensions between the Church, state and republicans grew in France. Moreover, the appointment of the anti-clerical and anti-papist Victor Duruy as Minister

57 'Die Gemeinde-Bibliotheken im Elsaß', *Der Bote vom Niederrhein* (Duisburg), no. 16, 5 November 1865.

58 *Der Bote vom Niederrhein*, no. 16, 5 November 1865.

59 *Annales ISSA IV* (Berne 1865) 259-286 [especially 262-266].

60 *Oeuvre des Soirées Populaires: Assemblée Générale des Membres*, tenue le 8 Décembre 1865 (Brussels 1865) 12.

61 *École Charles Buls Bruxelles, Archives Ligue de l'Enseignement, Correspondance Internationales* (hereafter *Ligue Correspondance Internationale*), Macé to Buls, 23 November 1866.

62 *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant*, 15 January 1866.



of Education marked a new era in government strategy for popular education, in which the state played a more vigorous role.<sup>63</sup> Duruy's term cleared the way for lay schooling and he worked to diminish the role of the Church. Under Duruy's reforming leadership, Macé, together with some of his republican friends such as Pierre-Jules Hetzel, finally started to organize French republicanism nationally around the topics of school reform, public libraries and adult education. For Macé, *Tot Nut* and the *Ligue* served a dual role. First, he used them as direct examples to propagate public library co-operatives in the *Département Haut-Rhin*. Second, the transformed model of *Tot Nut* represented by the Belgian *Ligue* served as a means to press for legal reforms in schooling and to educate working-class people for universal suffrage on a national scale.<sup>64</sup>

The correspondence and contacts between Macé and Buls and their respective organizations intensified after Macé participated in the general assembly of the Belgian *Ligue* in Liège in September 1866 in order to make personal contact with its members. On 25 October 1866, Macé published a long article about his journey to Liège in *L'Opinion Nationale*, a notorious 'red' newspaper in France. He elaborated on the *Ligue* and called for the establishment of a similar organization in France: 'Je me demande pourquoi nous n'aurions pas aussi en France notre Ligue de l'Enseignement'.<sup>65</sup> One week later, two other French newspapers, *La Gironde* and the *Annales du Travail*, announced that Macé himself had started the project to establish a *Ligue d'Enseignement en France*. Macé urged Buls to find two or three people who would become members of the French *Ligue*: 'C'est un atout dans mon jeu si je puis montrer qu'on prend déjà la chose au sérieux à l'étranger'.<sup>66</sup> Two weeks later, on 15 November 1866, *L'Opinion nationale* also carried Macé's appeal for a French counterpart to the laudable Belgian enterprise.<sup>67</sup> In February 1867, the French *Ligue* already counted 2109 adherents; in July of the same year, 4075 people were on the membership list.<sup>68</sup> Again, in France – just as in Belgium – the Freemasons played a major role in the foundation of the *Ligue*. The proposed statutes declared by Macé were reprinted by the *Monde maçonnique*, and the paper *L'Action maçonnique* also supported Macé's idea that local circles could govern themselves.<sup>69</sup>

63 A.T. Quartararo, *Women Teachers and Popular Education in Nineteenth-Century France: Social Values and Corporate Identity at the Normal School Institution* (Newark 1995) 76.

64 Report on the annual congress of the Belgian *Ligue* in Liège, 30 September 1866, *Nieuwe Amsterdamsche Courant, Bijvoegsel*, 6 October 1866; *Der Bote vom Niederrhein* no. 47, 20 April

1866; see also: K. Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie: The Ligue de l'Enseignement and the Origins of the Third Republic, 1866-1885* (Cambridge 1982) 77.

65 *Bulletin* 2:4 (Brussels 1866-1867) 74.

66 *Ligue Correspondance Internationale*, Macé to Buls, 23 November 1866.

67 Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie*, 77.

68 *Bulletin* 2:4 (Brussels 1866-1867) 120.

69 Auspitz, *The Radical Bourgeoisie*, 78.

Transnational connections and alliances were of great importance for both the French and the Belgian *Ligue*. Like *Tot Nut* and the ISSA, the Belgian and French sister associations were regular correspondents for years. On a personal level, Macé and Buls exchanged letters with a wealth of information and references to publications for the working class to enlarge their libraries. Compared with Belgium and the Netherlands, the French *Ligue* faced more difficulties in setting up local activities, because of the rigid control of the French state:

Nul acte de la vie civique ne peut guère s'accomplir que sous l'agrément de l'administration. Réunions publiques, bibliothèques populaires, cours publics, écoles d'adultes, écoles modèles, cours normaux, publications de bulletins, ces choses, – qui peuvent se faire librement, sans que nulle autorité ait à les permettre, les surveiller, les contrôler, en Belgique, – tout cela est absolument impossible en France, car l'autorité ne voudrait tolérer ces choses qu'à la condition d'y avoir l'œil, sinon la main.<sup>70</sup>

It took almost two years before the first local circle was founded in Metz, in August 1868.<sup>71</sup> However, the local associations were vital in putting pressure for reform on the French *Empire libéral*, even more so than in Belgium and the Netherlands: 'La Ligue ne doit vivre et prospérer que par les tentatives locales'.<sup>72</sup>

Just as was the case for the Dutch and Belgian sister associations, transnational contacts were also of great importance to the French *Ligue*, and Macé repeatedly highlighted the importance of 'arcs-boutants'<sup>73</sup> in foreign countries. He soon forged a relationship with Italian left-wing liberals, who were already using school education and public libraries as local and still ill-connected tools to educate workers and students to practice self-help in the provinces.<sup>74</sup> Macé, having been involved in the network on adult education and public libraries during the preceding two ISSA congresses, was in close communication with the Milan editor and bookseller Emilio Treves (1834-1916) and the freethinker Luigi Luzzatti (1841-1927). Treves was the first modern editor in nineteenth-century Italy. During the 1850s, he had lived in Paris as a political refugee and was thus in close touch with French editors. He imported several prestigious French works, such as books written by Macé or published by Hetzel, and translated them into Italian.<sup>75</sup> As an editor and

70 *Bulletin* 2:3 (Brussels 1866-1867) 74.

71 *Bulletin* 3:2 (Brussels 1867-1868) 56-57.

72 *Bulletin* 2:8 (Brussels 1866-1867) 230-231.

73 *Ligue Correspondance Internationale*, Macé to Buls, 8 March 1867.

74 L. Luzzatti, 'Discorso sulle Biblioteche Popolari', *Relazione della Società promotrice delle biblioteche popolari* (Milano 1867).

75 M. Nikolajeva, *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature* (Westport 1995) 83.

bookseller, Treves focussed particularly on children's books and in the left-wing liberal tradition, he was a supporter of secular education.<sup>76</sup>

Luzzatti, who was the Prime Minister of Italy in a later stage of his political career, was closely associated with the foundation of the *Società promotrice delle biblioteche popolari di Milano*.<sup>77</sup> He was also the figurehead for Italian co-operative economic theory in Milan and he popularized the economic ideas of Franz Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch. Around 1865, he founded the first Italian community banks in Milan and Cremona.<sup>78</sup> In Italy too, schooling, education and public instruction were closely tied to the promotion of co-operative associations, as part of the left-wing liberal concepts of self-help and social progress. Treves and Luzzatti wanted to model the Italian library movement on the French example. The national association for education in Italy emerged in 1866, when Lombardo-Venetia was attached to the Italian kingdom as a result of the Italian *Risorgimento* or national unification. As had been the case in Belgium, this Italian *Ligue* built on pre-existing local associations and relied on former local initiatives. The Italian advocates for popular education and public lending libraries maintained communications with other reform movements abroad, and Treves and Luzzatti also followed the developments of the more radical lay and anti-Catholic approach of the Belgian *Ligue*.

Direct personal connections between the reforming societies and their intermediaries in promoting the Dutch-Belgian model were also vital for the Italian development, although they were less prominent. In 1867, Charles Buls and Luigi Luzzatti came into contact and Jean Macé, acting as an intermediary, was delighted to see that Buls made an acquaintance with Luzzatti: 'Quand nous serons une cinquantaine comme cela, des quatre coins de l'Europe, qui nous sentirons les coudes, nous ferons une force qui sera sérieux'.<sup>79</sup> However, the persevering propagator of the *Ligue* in France even dreamt of a *Ligue universelle de l'Enseignement*, as he wrote to Buls in March 1867: 'Nous l'aurons, notre Ligue Européenne, je ne lâcherai pas avant d'en avoir fourré l'idée partout'.<sup>80</sup>

By way of conclusion, it can be argued that *Tot Nut*, and the Belgian, French and Italian *Ligues* are fine examples of nationally organized but locally embedded socio-cultural structures of sociability, which were the driving force for social reform – and in this case for educational reform – up to the

76 J. De Maeyer, *Religion, Children's Literature and Modernity in Western Europe: 1750-2000* (Leuven 2005).

77 *Bulletin* 2:7 (Brussels 1866-1867) 185-186.

78 S.A. Ashley, *Making Liberalism Work: The Italian Experience, 1860-1914* (Westport 2003) 75-76; S. Turnell, *Fierce Dragons: Banks, Moneylenders and*

*Microfinance in Burma* (Copenhagen 2009) 72;

A. Milward and S.B. Saul, *The Development of the Economies of Continental Europe 1850-1914* (New York 2012) 231.

79 *Ligue Correspondance Internationale*, Macé to Buls, 25 September 1867.

80 *Ibid.*, Macé to Buls, 8 March 1867.

early 1880s. In the 1860s, the local associations gradually developed a web of transnational relationships (and vice versa), among other means, facilitated by attending the congresses of the ISSA. This early cosmopolitan association played a vital role in bringing together many intermediaries from all over Europe. Personal contacts – sometimes already existing, but strengthened during these international gatherings – within the transnational field of the educational reform movement were perceived as being invaluable. By attending the conferences and exchanging ideas, intermediaries such as Van Hees, Buls, Macé and Luzzatti, forged relationships between the local and the transnational levels.

While it has been shown that international activists always had one eye on their home political aims when connecting transnationally with regard to education and library topics, the vital importance of individual agency in triggering and facilitating the transnational exchange of concepts and organizational models has also been pointed out. The congresses of the ISSA served not only to provide a sociable network for general talks, banquets, toasts and festivities but also to draw together people who would recognize each other, build closer relationships and exchange ideas about associational life and politics. The ISSA congresses provided a free space for liberals and republicans to discuss their issues and promote their causes in both political and scientific ways, and served as close meeting points for an exchange of ideas, concepts and building the backbone of the ISSA: local organizations. The translocal exchange of information on the social question was one of the main incentives behind the international gatherings, and to this end, it was necessary to rely upon a dense network of local organizations across Europe.

Although the model of *Tot Nut* did not directly influence the structure of the ISSA as an overall transnational organization, its example was eagerly discussed and adopted by participants. Buls (directly), and Macé and Luzzatti (indirectly), all borrowed from the Dutch model of *Tot Nut*. The examples of public libraries and educational reform movements show that mediation on an international stage led to organizational exchange. The advocates for popular education mainly acted in their respective home countries and cities, trying to solve the social question via an emancipatory path towards universal political and social citizenship. However, they did not act independently, as they were connected through a transnational network of exchange. Foreign ‘arc-boutants’ or transnational connections between nationally established local organizations were highly valued. The interacting reformers truly hoped that they would constitute a united army of ‘soldiers for a joint cause of progress’. ◀

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