

# Building a transnational network of social reform in the 19th century

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# BUILDING A TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK OF SOCIAL REFORM IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY



*Chris Leonards and Nico Randeraad*

The general aim of this chapter is to make an empirical and methodological contribution to understanding the transnational dimension of social policy from 1840 to 1880. This period more or less coincides with the first of three consecutive ‘circulatory regimes’ in the field of social policy, which Pierre-Yves Saunier has recently identified. Saunier briefly describes the first circulatory regime as the exchange of words and experiences among churchmen and women, political activists, entrepreneurs, men of learning and migrants in order to resist, devise, support or change the response to problems stemming from the industrial and urban revolutions.<sup>1</sup> The first objective of this chapter is to add flesh to this concise typology, and to present a more elaborate picture of the first circulatory regime in this period, in terms of both content and mechanisms. A note of caution in advance: Saunier – probably on purpose – avoids the question of whether ‘regime’ is the best concept to capture what was going on between people and institutions in the nineteenth century. To underline his versatility, he is quite willing to exchange ‘regimes’ for ‘configurations’, although that does not completely solve the issue. Like Saunier’s article, this chapter does not delve into conceptual subtleties, and proposes to use the concept rather lightly.<sup>2</sup>

A second objective of this contribution is to point out under which conditions ideas on social policy circulating in the transnational arena were likely to have a real impact on social reform. The degree of success enjoyed by transnational ideas and arrangements is a surprisingly neglected theme in literature on transnationalism, particularly in the period under consideration. In order to assess their impact, the chapter highlights the ideas

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and arrangements concerning labour, labour conditions and early welfare arrangements as they were developed by the Belgian reformer Édouard Ducpétiaux.

The chapter consists of three parts, the first two dealing with the first objective, and the third with the second objective. To begin with, it zooms in on the substance of social reform, in particular on topics and arrangements put forward by progressive liberal reformers. Subsequently it deals with the channels of communication that were at the reformers' disposal. It ends with an analysis of the relationship between ideas about social reform and social policies that were eventually implemented. In sum, the chapter successively tackles the 'what', 'how' and 'when' (i.e. the context) questions related to social reform in the nineteenth century.

## **Matters of Exchange: The Substance of Social Reform**

The call for social reform arose from the social question. This apodictic statement conceals a multiplicity of (perceived) problems and solutions. Industrialization and urbanization were causing insecurity, hardship and poverty, in particular for the working classes. In the course of the nineteenth century this persistent state of destitution became known as 'the social question'. Genuine concern for and fear of social upheaval among the better off gave rise to an amalgam of responses. Some believed free trade and minimal government would automatically restore social harmony; others preached class struggle and revolution to bring about work, justice and food for all. Between these extremes, social reformers of every sort and kind put forward abstract ideas and concrete schemes to alleviate suffering. The diversity of the social reform movements is reflected in the different forms the welfare state has eventually assumed in European countries.

Tracing and analysing the foundations of different welfare state arrangements have become major themes in social and political history.<sup>3</sup> The framework of the nation-state has often been the starting point for historical analysis, with a certain emphasis on compulsory insurance and other types of government action related to social services.<sup>4</sup> Bismarck's national insurance scheme, introduced in the early 1880s, is the usual benchmark in this line of reasoning. The spectrum of voluntary saving schemes, friendly societies, widows' and orphans' benefits, relief programmes run by churches, and the like, based on self-help but often indirectly supported by the state or local authorities (e.g. through legal recognition) preceding the nationalization of social insurance, is often depicted as a side-track. In many European countries, however, the mutual benefit societies

constituted an important step towards more direct state intervention.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that the participants in the earliest international congresses on social reform (of the 1840s and 1850s) were trying to collect and exchange information on exactly these kinds of arrangements.

For Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels it was easy to explain why these early reformers were addressing the social question: the self-interest of a part of the bourgeoisie, to which the reformers almost invariably belonged, made them anxious to redress social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. Hence, they wrote in their *Communist Manifesto* that 'economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, [and] hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind' were actively propagating some sort of bourgeois socialism, with the sole purpose of maintaining the existing relations between capital and labour.<sup>6</sup> *Pace* Marx and Engels, this is exactly what eventually happened in Western Europe. As Dirk Jan Wolffram concludes, throughout the Western world social policy became a successful project of inclusion: 'its aim was to tie the worker to the state and the nation'.<sup>7</sup>

The ideas and projects, therefore, of the 'bourgeois socialists' are well worth taking into account when analysing the arena of social reform in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even then social reform was a container concept, including countless attempts to absorb the multiple social costs of industrialization by way of initiatives from below and state regulation.<sup>8</sup> The four basic characteristics of bourgeois social reform that Rüdiger vom Bruch held specific for Germany are by and large also applicable to other industrializing European countries: (1) the social reformers originated from typically nineteenth-century forms of *sociabilité* – learned and professional societies, circles, clubs and church organizations – and mostly belonged to the high-middle classes and to state and local bureaucracies, although we can sometimes also find them among entrepreneurs, clergymen and independent professionals; (2) bourgeois social reform and social policy gradually merged, albeit with considerable variation in different countries; (3) as the nineteenth-century public debate demonstrated time and again, it hovered 'between communism and capitalism', and can be regarded as some sort of 'third way'; morality and patronage played an important role; and (4) bourgeois social reform grew as an autonomous sphere of interest, particularly between the 1830s and the 1870s; thereafter it was gradually absorbed by the state, political parties, and other organizations.<sup>9</sup>

A fifth characteristic, we would add, is the transnational outlook of the social reformers. It is quite remarkable that from very early on the

debates were not confined to national or regional contexts. Experts were eager to consult ideas and legislation in countries other than their own. International congresses became an appropriate medium for this mutual consultation. The subject matters seemed to differ widely. Marx and Engels were right about that. Looking at the titles of international congresses held in the second half of the 1840s and in the 1850s, one notes an apparently bewildering variety of interests: prison reform, free trade, meteorology, medicine, international peace, statistics, welfare, hygiene, agriculture and forestry, sanitation, temperance, social sciences, botany and horticulture.<sup>10</sup> But on closer inspection a considerable number of these congresses were attended by the same people, in particular the congresses on prison reform, welfare, statistics and hygiene.<sup>11</sup> This was not so much because the participants had such diverging interests, but rather because they thought these themes centred round the fundamental problem of how to win the fight against pauperism. The heart of the matter for the transnational reformers was not an abstract arrangement between capital and labour – they were not system builders – but offering concrete solutions to societal problems that they perceived as urgent, because of their strong sense of responsibility and their propensity for patronage.<sup>12</sup> The same people who participated in the international congresses that were related to social reform also communicated findings, ideas and strategies about the fight against pauperism in other ways. In sum, social reform was considered a matter of exchange par excellence.

### **What Matters is Exchange: The Channels of Communication**

In order to get a better idea of the first circulatory regime, it is important to scrutinize the channels of communication that were available to the activists, not only the traditional media such as letters, books, journals, travels and associations, but also more modern ones such as congresses and expositions.

‘We are living in the century of gatherings’, Marie-Matthieu von Baumhauer wrote in 1856.<sup>13</sup> He would know. In a study of transnationalists who were active in the area of social reform in the mid nineteenth century, he came first in terms of the number of visits to selected congresses.<sup>14</sup> The congresses related to social reform were connected by the people who attended them and by the topics discussed at them. A striking example of the latter is the issue of prison reform. After two penitentiary reform congresses in Frankfurt (1846) and Brussels (1847), a third gathering was postponed because of the revolutionary uprisings of 1848. The proceedings

of the first continental Peace Congress that took place in Brussels 1848 included an elaborate account of Mettray, the French agricultural colony for young criminals, without any comment as to why this subject would be of importance to the congress, but apparently it was.<sup>15</sup> The first Congrès International de Bienfaisance, moreover, which took place in Brussels 1856, devoted one of its three sections exclusively to penitentiary reform, thereby securing the continuity of this theme on the social reform agenda. The hybridity of social reform clearly manifested itself in a great many sessions of the international statistical congress held in these years.

The international congresses were the logical successors of national congresses of scientists and philanthropists that had been organized in different European nations, such as the gatherings of the *Gesellschaft Deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte* (since 1822), the congresses of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (since 1831), the *Congrès Scientifiques de France* (since 1833), and the *Congressi degli Scienziati Italiani* (since 1839). From the 1830s, men and women committed to social reform had been developing networks across borders, paving the way for what has been called 'philanthropic tourism'. An international meeting on charity during the 1855 World Exhibition in Paris, for instance, prepared the start of a series of welfare congresses from 1856 onwards.<sup>16</sup>

The actual call for international congresses came simultaneously from different directions. Ducpétiaux and Georg Varrentrapp were certainly among the first propagators. In his correspondence with Karl Josef Anton Mittermaier, the illustrious Heidelberg-based prison reformer, Varrentrapp, relates Ducpétiaux's idea to organize a first *Congreß der Gefängniß-reformfreunde* in Paris in the autumn of 1846. After consultation with Mittermaier both he and Ducpétiaux were convinced that Frankfurt was preferable because of its more central location in Europe and because two other congresses had been scheduled in Frankfurt at the same time, which would enhance the appeal of the penitentiary congress.<sup>17</sup> Ducpétiaux also initiated the first Hygiene Congress (Brussels, 1852) and the first Welfare Congress (Brussels, 1856). He corresponded with Mittermaier about the organization of both congresses, not only to invite him personally, but also to get acquainted with potential visitors from Mittermaier's extended German, and indeed international, network.<sup>18</sup> Ducpétiaux's compatriot, the well-known statistician and astronomer Adolphe Quetelet, initiated the first international statistical congress, also held in Brussels, in 1853.<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-1850s international congresses were an accepted form of scientific and policy exchange in the realm of social reform. Being diverse indeed, the congresses nevertheless had several common and converging traits: gatherings were preferably held in West European cities, including

Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt, London and Geneva, and were often combined with other congresses, exhibitions or festivities. In this kind of environment the organizers could officially receive guests, treat them to banquets and soirées, confer knighthoods on them, and show them around the best examples of local charity, public facilities, hospitals and prisons. Thus entertained, visitors were often in a generous mood, inclined to mutual eulogy and compromise during the actual *séances* when they had to reach agreement about the issues under discussion. Regarding concrete solutions to societal problems, the shared custom of congresses was to conclude a session with 'resolutions' that were preferably made unanimously. These procedures, combined with a tendency to streamline congresses with thoroughly prepared proposals, discussions and outcomes, with permanent central secretariats and local organizing committees, added to the congresses' gradual transformation from easy-going 'debating societies' into authoritative bodies of expert knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

As one of the most frequent visitors, von Baumhauer was quite positive about the congresses' potential. So were other, sometimes more famous, individuals such as Gustave Moynier and Edwin Chadwick, Louis Wolowski, Willem Hendrik Suringar and Giovanni (Jean) Arrivabene. Congresses became the main channel for a progressive liberal, transnational 'epistemic community', aiming at social reform and patronage of the poor and working classes – but not everybody was as excited about these gatherings. The lithographer Jean Baptiste Jobard from Brussels, for instance, wrote a hilarious parody about some congresses held in the Belgian capital, ending his piece with the rather inglorious statement: 'These resolutions, voiced and printed, are bound and placed in libraries; then, the sessions are adjourned to the following year, in order to fill another volume with new resolutions, which the governments do not take into consideration for want of time, will, and obligation'.<sup>21</sup>

Congresses were not the only venues that brought travelling social reformers together. Reciprocal visits and trips to other large-scale events, such as the world exhibitions, contributed to a feeling of transnational connectedness. Scholars have noted a direct relationship between the spread and growth of international congresses and world exhibitions, not only because of common interests among the visitors but also as a result of the wider availability of accommodation and other infrastructural improvements.<sup>22</sup> Some of the transnational reformers we have come to know from the congresses began going abroad on traditional Grand Tours as a completion of their studies. Others continued to travel to places of interest, such as industrial sites, public institutions and observatories, and to pay visits to the cultural and scientific heroes of the age. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Alexander von Humboldt ranked first among savants whom

one should visit. For example, Quetelet, before becoming an academic hero himself, studied with Pierre Simon de Laplace and went to see Goethe. Ernst Engel visited Frédéric Le Play at the École des Mines in Paris, and came to see Quetelet during his stay in Brussels. Ramón de la Sagra toured both the Netherlands and Belgium to collect information about their poor relief institutions, but also travelled to Cuba to study botany. Penitentiary reformers Suringar and Varrentrapp met several times on a personal basis, but individually also went to Belgium, France, England, various German states and Austria to study prison development, poor relief institutions, communal drainage systems and other social reform highlights.<sup>23</sup> The economist Jan Ackersdijck was known as a restless traveller. Prior to the late 1840s, his journeys resembled the model of eighteenth-century scientific travelling. Thereafter, when the international congresses became *en vogue*, he combined his usual travels with congress visits.<sup>24</sup>

In the meantime traditional media did not become obsolete. On the contrary, correspondence through letters, for instance, occurred more often than ever. Several collections of letters sent or received by social reformers known to have been active congressees have been preserved. Of these, the collected papers of Mittermaier is probably the most extensive and well-known correspondence to survive. Lars Riemer's two-volume edition of 665 letters to Mittermaier only covers letters that are related to prison reform, although some are of a wider social reform nature.<sup>25</sup> Among the direct correspondents to Mittermaier, Varrentrapp, Ducpétiaux and Christian Georg Nathan David are prominent in a 'top twenty' list of transnational social reformers.<sup>26</sup> Whereas Mittermaier himself can be seen as a true network 'hub' and 'connector', the three writers mentioned clearly functioned as 'boundary spanners': through references made by Varrentrapp, Ducpétiaux and David, no less than fourteen out of the top twenty congress-visiting transnationalists appear in Mittermaier's correspondence. Moreover, the collection of letters to Dutch philanthropist Suringar, held at the library of the University of Amsterdam, includes twenty-five from Varrentrapp and another twelve from Ducpétiaux.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in Quetelet's correspondence, fifteen out of the core group of twenty transnational social reformers can be traced.<sup>28</sup>

It is remarkable that many of the letters do not go into much detail about social reform itself, but rather function as cover letters for the submission of brochures, notices and schedules for congresses and other gatherings, suggestions for journal articles, corrections to proofs of articles, enrolments, attendances of and cancellations for congresses, and recommendations for others visiting the addressee. The letters offer a glimpse of the vast quantity of books, journals, brochures and other publications on aspects of social reform that were circulated in this way. Some publishers



and libraries, such as Guillaumin and Hachette in Paris, made sure they fed the reform network with catalogues and announcements of book titles and journals they published or had in stock.<sup>29</sup>

Wolowski, a Polish émigré in Paris, is prominent on our list of social reformers. In 1848 he convinced Guillaumin to publish his *Études d'économie politique et statistique*.<sup>30</sup> This work is typical of the way in which the written word of social reformers functioned. The book is a collection of several studies into divergent aspects of social reform, covering pauperism in Flanders, the agricultural and industrial exposition in Brussels, the commerce of cereals, the customs union, free trade and statistics. Nevertheless, this seemingly disjointed content is not unusual in publications on social reform written by authors of Wolowski's age. While the six studies in the book are brought together under the heading 'political economy' and while they are in one way or another related to Belgium, the work actually tries to feed its readers with snippets of information that Wolowski deemed crucial for the proper understanding of pauperism and social reform.

Yet, this book is typical in another way, as it contains an extensive dedication to Quetelet whom Wolowski had met at the congress of economists held in Brussels in September 1847. Shortly before this congress Quetelet had appointed Wolowski as corresponding member of the Belgian central commission for statistics. Completed in December 1847, Wolowski's volume is a mark of honour to the 'liberal and progressive spirit' of Belgium. By paying tribute to Quetelet, Wolowski made a political statement, but also reinforced the transnational bond of like-minded reformers. Many journals, yearbooks and proceedings in the field of social reform functioned in the same way. An outstanding example of a compilation work geared towards collecting evidence and forging a sense of community among penitentiary reformers is Varrentrapp's *Jahrbücher der Gefängnißkunde*, which he edited together with Julius and Noellner in the period 1842–49.<sup>31</sup> Many of the letters to Mittermaier provide evidence as to how the *Jahrbücher* became a pivotal source for all penologists.

More generally, we have noted that the publications emanating from the transnational community of social reformers, whether they focused on penitentiary care, poor relief, child labour or other aspects, had specific common traits enhancing their function as *traits-d'unions* between members of the network. Special dedications, like Wolowski's to Quetelet, were quite common. Sometimes, commentaries on certain issues were even published as open letters to experts in the field. Moreover, authors used to send their friends and acquaintances a copy of their work, often with a short note on the title page. Numerous copies that ended up in libraries around the world demonstrate this. Content-wise, authors were eager to

strengthen their arguments by referring to foreign projects and laws, supported by statistical evidence when possible. These characteristics became part and parcel of the recognizable shared reform discourse discussed in the first section.

There is yet another important channel of communication typically belonging to the nineteenth-century culture of sociability. Most of the social reformers were members of a learned society or professional association; through these they were either active as local corresponding members, reporting on social reform, or used the societies as springboards for international contacts. Membership of professional and learned societies and associations commanded respect at international congresses, whereas in their home countries members were often asked to join governmental commissions and inquiries.

Some of these associations already had a respectable history, such as the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques; others reflected the new interest in welfare and social sciences, such as the French Société d'Economie Politique, established in 1842, the Société d'Economie Charitable (1847) and the Société d'Economie Sociale (founded by Le Play in 1856), the British National Association for the Promotion of Social Science (1857), the Howard Association (1866) and the Sanitary Institute of Great Britain (1876). Chadwick and Samuel Brown, for instance, mounted the platforms of the Statistical Society of Manchester (1833) and the Statistical Society of London (1834) to promote their interests in sanitary reform, workers' rights, uniform weights and measures, and life insurances. Engel, however, was among the founders of the influential Verein für Sozialpolitik (1873). Moynier was co-founder of the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded (the Red Cross). Chadwick, once again, was elected a corresponding member of the Institutes of France and Belgium, and of the Societies of Medicine and Hygiene of France, Belgium and Italy. Varrentrapp, David, Mittermaier, Auguste Visschers and De la Sagra were honorary members of Suringar's Dutch prison reform society. In 1860 Ackersdijck was invited by the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques to attend its meetings and to inform members about the latest political and economic developments in his home country. In his role as a member of the Central Statistical Commission of Belgium, Visschers visited the World Exhibition of 1851. Afterwards, he circulated, with the commission's president, Quetelet, a proposal to convene an international statistical congress. The fact that they could speak in the name of a recognized and respected body added weight to the proposal, and drew a lot of experts to the Brussels congress of 1853. Hence membership of national bodies and adherence to an international network could reinforce each other. Not only did the national societies imbue their members with status

and respect, but they could also be important mediators for directing state subsidies towards the organization of international events.

## **Does Exchange Matter? Framing Social Reform across National Borders**

One alleged weakness of the recent wave of historical ‘transfer’ studies is the lack of attention paid to the impact of the various forms of exchange on the choice of certain policies over other policies, and on the implementation of these policies.<sup>32</sup> This is nothing more than one of those classic problems of political science, if not of all applied sciences – that is, how to translate an idea into practice, with the additional difficulty that the translation is meant to occur across borders. The challenge therefore is, as Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol have stated, ‘to understand more deeply both the ideas and socio-institutional locations of the bearers of new knowledge about society who figured so importantly in the origins of the early modern social policies’.<sup>33</sup> In their volume the emphasis lies on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most contributions apply a ‘classical’ comparative method, tracing the generation and use of social knowledge in different countries, rather than between countries, as more recent transnational and ‘transfer’ approaches would do. By focusing on the transnational circulation of proposals related to child labour, in particular as fostered by the eminent expert and ‘do-er’ Ducpétiaux, we aim, first, to map the transnational dimension of the knowledge claims surrounding these issues, and, secondly, to assess the chances of success in different contexts.

In order to achieve these aims some further theoretical and methodological notes are needed. Political sociologist John Campbell suggests a three-step approach to connect ideas to practices.<sup>34</sup> First, identify the actors – from single intellectuals to epistemic communities – who advance policy ideas that are likely to make a difference in policy making. Secondly, examine the ‘fit’ between ideas and the institutions that are meant to absorb them. And thirdly, explore how discourse shapes the ways in which ideas are translated into practice. Campbell makes it somewhat difficult for the historian to adopt these research strategies in full because he insists on specifying the causal mechanisms that link ideas to policy-making outcomes. Historians are generally wary of too much emphasis on causality, since this implies a tendency towards generalization and prediction, which is usually not their business. Nevertheless, as organizational starting points for historical research into the question of whether policy ideas matter, Campbell’s suggestions are certainly helpful.

Another, more focused, attempt to relate policy ideas to outcomes comes from Canadian political scientist Daniel Béland. He, in following John W. Kingdon's agenda-setting theory and Peter A. Hall's concept of policy paradigm (the pragmatic world view of actors involved in the policy process), stresses the crucial role of the construction and selection of problems on the policy agenda and argues that new ideas (policy alternatives) 'are grounded in constraining policy paradigms, and that political actors seek to frame alternatives in a coherent manner in order to sell them to the public'.<sup>35</sup> Again, this approach grounded in present-day political science helps us to get to grips with our basic problem, although we would like to stress that, in the nineteenth-century, contemporary concepts such as 'agenda setting' and 'policy paradigms' are difficult to align with what was going on in politics and government. Following Pierre Rosanvallon's insistence on the changing nature of *le politique* (what is being considered to belong to the domain of politics changes over time), we could argue that we are still in a world of politics that precedes agenda setting and policy making as we know it from the literature mentioned above. This does not mean, of course, that there were no agendas or policies, just that we need to adapt our understanding of these terms slightly in order not to drift away from nineteenth-century political culture.

Having said that, and bearing in mind that both Campbell and Béland clearly refer to present-day policy making, their emphasis on the need to adjust or rework – to 'frame', as they call it – ideas on social policy for them to have an impact on reforms, or at least to become one of the alternatives on the policy agenda, is also of crucial importance for our research. This boils down to the question of how new ideas of social reform, exchanged in transnational reform networks, impact on national social reform policies.<sup>36</sup> Do these ideas actually matter? And if so, are they realized in similar ways in different countries? To what extent are they adapted to national or local contexts? Are specific ways of 'framing' the reforms discernible?

Some preliminary answers to these questions can be found by looking at specific reform ideas. Ducpétiaux, born on the threshold of the nineteenth century, is amongst the most prominent transnational experts of important aspects of social reform, such as reorganization of the prison system, improvement of working conditions, primary and secondary education and better housing. Academically educated as a lawyer, he spent much of his time as a journalist and writer dealing with controversial issues in public life and politics. Right after Belgium's 1830 secession from the Netherlands, Ducpétiaux combined his sometimes rather radical stance regarding issues of social reform with administrative responsibility for the Belgian prison and welfare system, having been appointed

inspector-general in these fields. The rare combination of having administrative governance responsibilities, a zealous interest in the politics of social reform, an open mind to the possibilities of innovative scientific research, and being a true believer in social networking and a productive writer, makes Ducpétiaux a showcase representative of the transnational expert community in nineteenth-century social reform.

Despite numerous obligations as inspector-general in two important areas of government, Ducpétiaux was present at three social reform congresses abroad, the penitentiary congress in Frankfurt (1846) and the welfare congresses in Frankfurt (1857) and London (1862), and registered for, but did not attend, the statistical congresses in Paris (1855), Vienna (1857) and Berlin (1863). Moreover, he put a lot of energy into (co-)organizing international social reform congresses in his hometown.<sup>37</sup> These events broadened the network of friends, colleagues, and like-minded social reformers. By correspondence he stayed in touch with prominent transnational experts such as Mittermaier, Suringar and Varrentrapp.<sup>38</sup> He was also a prolific writer. Through his impressive output he managed to tap into many branches of the social reformers' network. Between 1827, starting with his academic thesis on the death penalty, and 1868, the year of his death, he wrote, edited and translated 134 books, reports and brochures, apart from his journalistic pieces for the *Courier des Pays-Bas*, and for *la Revue Générale*, which he founded in 1856.<sup>39</sup>

Simultaneously active in the policy realms of penitentiary reform, welfare and statistics, Ducpétiaux had a special interest in the overarching theme of labour, be it work as an occupation for prisoners while in detention, as a re-socialization device for released prisoners, as a means to enhance societal welfare and relieve poverty of the masses, or as a general subject of concern because of the alienation and exploitation it caused, especially among young workers in Belgium.

In his seminal work *De la condition physique et morale des jeunes ouvriers et des moyens de l'améliorer*, published in 1843, Ducpétiaux starts out with an account of current working conditions in the major European countries, using information – both narrative and statistical – from his friends and kindred spirits, such as Chadwick, Louis de Villermé and Charles Dupin.<sup>40</sup> The Factory Act promulgated in Britain in 1833, which curtailed working hours for children, had provided food for thought and action in other industrializing countries. In France, following Jean Charles Léonard de Sismondi's early criticism in his *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*, published in 1819, the call for state intervention in working hours and child labour grew louder towards the end of the 1830s. With public support from influential reformers such as Joseph Marie de Gérando, De Villermé and Dupin, the French Parliament promulgated a law on child

labour in March 1841, which was heavily indebted to earlier British and Prussian legislation.<sup>41</sup>

Ducpétiaux, in turn, elaborated on all those models. Focusing particularly on children working in the expanding Belgian industrial factories, Ducpétiaux suggested a plethora of measures to foster good physical and moral conditions for the young, such as: a strict prohibition against children under the age of ten entering factories, mines and other working places; a restriction of six working hours per week for children aged between ten and fifteen, and of twelve working hours for those aged between fifteen and twenty-one; and mandatory schooling up to age fifteen for both boys and girls. But he also promoted joint bodies of government officials, factory owners and workers, and suggested new governmental institutions, such as an inspection service for work and social guidance in the larger industries.<sup>42</sup>

Ducpétiaux was not just a transnational activist keen on maintaining good contacts with friends abroad, but he was also locally and nationally integrated in institutions dealing with social care and social policy. In Brussels, where he lived, he founded a subsistence agency, acted as a local visitor to the poor and was a member of the communal council. On a national level he was inspector-general of the prison system and of welfare institutions, and a member of various advisory bodies. Edmond Rubbens, Ducpétiaux's biographer, states that since the start of his bureaucratic career he had been involved in fifty-nine measures in the area of public welfare. These measures related to work opportunities, price reductions, general measures in favour of the working classes and farmers, and amelioration of the intellectual, moral and sanitary conditions of workers.<sup>43</sup> He was asked to be a member of the commission charged with preparing a bill on child labour in Belgium.

In *De la Condition* the discourse of bourgeois reform emerges on every page. There is anxiety and fear for the working classes, but also an urge to act, to do something about it, inspired partly by religion and partly by economic interest. One is struck by the ample use of statistics and the legalistic, administrative language. As a member of the central commission of statistics (and honorary member of the Statistical Society of London) Ducpétiaux was well equipped to give innovative statistical evidence on child labour in France, Britain, the German states and the United States of America in order to lend weight to the politics of reform. Not only was statistical evidence conducive to reciprocal comparison on international, national and local levels, it also fostered the respectability and trustworthiness of the emerging epistemic community on social reform, and added to its scientific esteem. The administrative, regulatory language of 'do-er' Ducpétiaux is yet another sign of the willingness to act, to get things done

and to give clear, ready-made solutions to societal problems that could be deployed almost instantly.

In 1843 (the publication of his book was timely) the Belgian government appointed Ducpétiaux to the commission preparing new legislation on child labour and factory inspection.<sup>44</sup> Most of the dramatic reports about child labour in shops, mines and factories were confirmed, although the number of child labourers was less alarming than feared. The physical, moral and intellectual conditions of children working in small industries and in shops at home were sometimes even worse than those of factory workers. The commission proposed measures in line with Ducpétiaux's *De la Condition*, notably limitations on working days, no child labour under age ten, no labour at night for under-eighteens, an organized inspection of factories and no underground labour for minors and females.<sup>45</sup> At the time, however, the project did not pass parliament because of the strong opposition from the chambers of commerce.

The lack of immediate success in Belgium at that time must have been a serious setback for Ducpétiaux, but in his eyes the local was intertwined with the transnational. *De la Condition* was more than a pamphlet. In one of the last sections of the book, dealing with how he hoped to realize his reform proposals, Ducpétiaux actually called upon nations to assist rather than obstruct each other, and to organize an international congress to settle disputes.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, in a final appendix to the book, he proposed an international association to promote scientific progress and the realization of moral and social reform, which eventually resulted in the Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales, established in 1862.<sup>47</sup>

It is rather far fetched to consider the plan to establish an international association of social sciences and progress, in connection with the zealous pleas for international coordination on the restriction of working hours, to be evidence of a preliminary step towards the International Labour Organization.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of Ducpétiaux's ability to connect the local to the transnational by framing the condition of young Belgian workers in a transnational context. First, he emphasized the similarity of poor working conditions in various European countries, using abundant data from various countries. Secondly, he underlined that the pressing national problem could only be solved by taking coordinated measures: if and when all the European nations concerned restricted working hours and child labour, entrepreneurs would then no longer be able to block such measures by invoking the threat of uneven international competition. Although Ducpétiaux thus ingeniously framed the problems of young workers in Belgium in a transnational setting, he did not live to see the problem solved. In Belgium, as in most other European

industrializing countries, effective legislation concerning child labour was only realized from the 1870s onwards.<sup>49</sup>

This brings us back to the theoretical considerations at the beginning of this section. 'Modern politics', including full democracy, political parties and welfare state arrangements, were still far off. Belgium was considered to be the most progressive state on the European continent, but the role of the state was nevertheless highly limited compared to twentieth-century standards. 'Agenda setting' and 'policy making' are therefore terms that we can only very tentatively use. Reform was often long in the making, unless triggered by sudden upheaval such as the revolutionary wave of 1848. Reform proposals sometimes came from unexpected quarters. As inspector of prisons and welfare institutions Ducpétiaux was perhaps not the obvious person to launch a reform project about the employment of children in industry and mining, but since the 1830s he had been active in preparing an 'agenda' for social reform. He shared his concerns with a number of like-minded bourgeois reformers, in Belgium and abroad, with whom he gradually built an 'epistemic community in the making'.<sup>50</sup> Few, if any, of its members were strictly speaking 'policy makers'. The offices where the social policies in question were to be made did not yet exist. A ban on child labour was more than just a policy; it was a matter of allowing the state to intervene in private enterprise. Hence, if Ducpétiaux and his network of reformers were setting an agenda, it was about a major reorientation of the state. They were not just making *policy*, they were constructing a *polity*. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it took some time before there was a 'fit' between reform ideas and institutions. What Ducpétiaux and others could hope for was that their way of framing the social question would gradually become accepted, and would lead to new legislation. A common element in this process of framing was that knowledge claims seemed to gain strength when they were transnationally embedded. Despite the different pace and pattern of industrialization in European countries the conception of social reform was transnationally converging. Putting ideas into practice was thus facilitated, although it would not be until the 1870s that measures against child labour became stricter.

## Conclusion

We set out in the footsteps of Saunier's typology of transnational circulatory regimes, in particular by elaborating on the issue of social reform during the first circulatory regime. Our analysis went through three stages. First, we defined nineteenth-century social reform in a European



perspective. In various European countries – in different stages of industrial development – experts on apparently diverse subjects such as prison reform, welfare arrangements, statistics, social housing and poor relief found each other in a transnational arena, where it appeared that these subjects were if not fully interchangeable then at least complementary. The accumulation of responses to the social question reflected the ‘encyclopedic’ thrust of the mid-nineteenth-century reform movement. But despite the apparent diversity and despite the specific needs of local authorities and national governments throughout (north-west) Europe, bourgeois social reform was an amazingly homogeneous domain characterized by a strong sense of moral responsibility and patronage among the reformers, and by gentlemanly attempts to engender transnational connections.

Secondly, in order to shed light on these transnational connections, we focused on the means of communication available to the reformers. They made use of both old and new media to carve out a position for themselves as networkers. They wrote letters, thousands of them, not so much to reveal their innermost emotions or to develop grand theories, but to introduce themselves or others, to exchange quick notes, to comment on recent publications, and to announce participation in or absence from assemblies and congresses. Many of their publications resembled ‘open letters’ or were actually published as such. Again, few ventured into abstract theory and dogma; most tackled current problems and drafted proposals that were logistically and legally feasible. In their books and articles references to foreign examples and statistical underpinning were accepted markers of expertise. The new channels of communication, such as congresses and exhibitions, functioned as catalysts of connections established through publications, study visits and correspondence. These often spectacular international meetings rapidly gained momentum as hubs of scientific and political transfer.

With the increasing transnationalization of social reform, the question cannot be evaded as to whether the connections and transfers across borders had any impact on the proliferation of social legislation in Europe. Strictly speaking, this question takes us somewhat out of the conceptual framework of circulatory regimes. Saunier’s regimes are about the diffusion, transfer, exchange and circulation of knowledge, much less about the use of this knowledge. Nevertheless, the question cannot be totally avoided, since whether knowledge is usable or not, and if so by whom and when, must eventually have effects on the nature of the circulatory regime. We concentrated on the issue of child labour, which played an important role in the thinking of Ducpétiaux, a champion of transnationalism around the middle of the nineteenth century. Following sociologist

Campbell we explored whether Ducpétiaux was able to embed his ideas within the institutions of his country (Belgium) and to what extent they were transmittable to other contexts. It is too soon to draw conclusions from this example, but it is clear that there was a considerable time gap between the genesis of the ideas and their realization in the form of social legislation. In the meantime, however, the ideas of Ducpétiaux and others were slowly penetrating the transnational discourse on the employment of children, which made it more likely for politicians, administrators and activists to allow state intervention in this matter. In terms of implementation, one of the characteristics of the first circulatory regime seemed to be the lack of power of transnational actors to gain direct access to the political arena. This was not only due to weaknesses of the transnationalists themselves, who were not able to gather sufficient momentum, but also to the radical transformation that the state had to go through to meet its new obligations towards society.

## Notes

1. P.-Y. Saunier, 'Les régimes circulatoires du domaine social 1800–1940: projets et ingénierie de la convergence et de la différence', *Genèses* 71 (2008): 14–21.
2. According to the generally accepted definition from Krasner, an international regime is a set of 'implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations', quoted in C. Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, (2nd edn, Basingstoke 2001), 177. Like many concepts developed by political scientists that have gained a certain popularity among 'transnational historians' (e.g. epistemic community, transfer, policy learning) a 'regime' can only have a 'sensitizing' effect when applied to the nineteenth century, but cannot be taken too literally, since it is generally associated with strong institutional actors, complex regulatory powers, and well-developed international systems. Cf., for example, B. Eberlein and E. Grande, 'Beyond Delegation: Transnational Regulatory Regimes and the EU Regulatory State', *Journal of European Public Policy* 12(1) (Feb. 2005).
3. See, for a recent overview, D.J. Wolffram, 'Social Politics and the Welfare State: An International and a Local Perspective', *Historisk Tidskrift* 17(4) (2007).
4. For example D. Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (3rd edn, Basingstoke 2003); A. Gueslin, *L'invention de l'économie sociale: idées, pratiques et imaginaires coopératifs et mutualistes dans la France du XIXe siècle* (2nd edn, Paris 1998); B. Harris, *The Origins of the British Welfare State: Society, State and Social Welfare in England and Wales, 1800–1945* (Basingstoke 2004); G.A. Ritter, *Soziale Frage und Sozialpolitik in Deutschland seit Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Opladen 1998).
5. M. van der Linden (ed.), *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies* (Bern 1996).

6. The quotation has been taken from the English edition: F. Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1888), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/61/61.txt> (accessed 3 Jan. 2011).
7. Wolffram, 'Social Politics and the Welfare State', 685.
8. R. vom Bruch (ed.), *Weder Kommunismus noch Kapitalismus'. Bürgerliche Sozialreform in Deutschland vom Vormärz bis zur Ära Adenauer* (Munich 1985), 7.
9. *Ibid.*, 9–11.
10. L'Union des Associations Internationales (ed.), *Les Congrès Internationaux. Tome 1: de 1681 à 1899, liste complète*, 2 vols, vol. 1 (Brussels 1960).
11. C. Leonards and N. Randeraad, 'Transnational Experts in Social Reform, 1840–1880', *International Review for Social History* 55(2) (2010).
12. P. Becker and J.J.H. Dekker, 'Doers: The Emergence of an Acting Elite', *Pedagogica Historica* 38(2–3) (2002).
13. M.M. von Baumhauer, 'Het liefdadigheidscongres en de tentoonstelling van huis-houdelijke voorwerpen te Brussel in September 1856', *De Economist* 5(1) (1856): 108.
14. Leonards and Randeraad, 'Transnational Experts in Social Reform', 226.
15. The paper had been delivered by W.H. Suringar, a Dutch visitor to the Peace Congress and founder of the Dutch Prison Society, who had recently visited Mettray together with von Baumhauer, author of the paper.
16. C. Leonards, 'Ter bestrijding van armoede, misdaad, oorlog en immoraliteit; Europese congrescultuur in de negentiende en vroege twintigste eeuw vanuit filantropisch perspectief' in *Filantropie in Nederland; Voorbeelden uit de periode 1770–2020*, eds V. Kingma and M.H.D. van Leeuwen (Amsterdam 2007), 57. Also, see letter from Ducpétiaux to Mittermaier dated 19 Dec. 1855 in L.H. Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde' (1830–1872). Karl Josef Anton Mittermaiers Briefwechsel mit europäischen Strafvollzugsexperten*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main 2005), no. 441, 1102.
17. See letter from Varrentrapp to Mittermaier dated 20 Feb. 1846, in Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde'*, no. 207, 700. See also letter from Varrentrapp to Mittermaier dated 25 May 1846, no. 211, 706.
18. See letter from Ducpétiaux to Mittermaier dated 19 Apr. 1852 in Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde'*, no. 440, 1099. Also, letter dated 27 Mar. 1856, no. 442, 1103.
19. N. Randeraad, *States and Statistics in the Nineteenth Century: Europe by Numbers* (Manchester 2010), 5, 13 and 15.
20. D.J. Wolffram, 'Deftige hervormers. Internationale congressen van statistici en hygiënisten in de negentiende eeuw' in *Identiteitspolitiek. Media en de constructie van gemeenschapsgevoel*, eds M. Broersma and J.W. Koopmans (Hilversum 2010).
21. J.B.A.M. Jobard, *Les nouvelles inventions aux expositions universelles* (Brussels and Leipzig 1857), 135–36 [our translation].
22. A. Rasmussen, 'Les congrès internationaux liés aux expositions universelles de Paris (1867–1900)', *Mil Neuf Cent. Cahiers Georges Sorel. Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 7(24) (1989).
23. Suringar is said to have visited fifty foreign prisons. See E. Laurillard, *Levensschets van W.H. Suringar*, vol. 16, *Levensberichten van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde te Leiden* (Leiden 1873).
24. N. Randeraad, 'De statistisch reizen van Jan Ackersdijck', *De Negentiende Eeuw* 32(1) (2008).
25. Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde'*.
26. Leonards and Randeraad, 'Transnational Experts in Social Reform', 226.
27. Collection of W.H. Suringar's letters, Amsterdam University Library, 'Bijzondere Collecties'.

28. L. Wellens-De Donder, *Inventaire de la correspondance d'Adolphe Quetelet déposée à l'Académie royale de Belgique* (Brussels 1966).
29. C. Haynes, *The Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA and London 2010).
30. L. Wolowski, *Études d'économie politique et statistique* (Paris 1848).
31. Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde'*, 678.
32. N. Randerad, 'The International Statistical Congress (1853–1876): Knowledge Transfers and Their Limits', *European History Quarterly* 41(1) (2011): 50–65. For a thorough analysis of prison reform in Prussia, using actor-network theory and pointing to the importance of foreign expertise, see Thomas Nutz, 'Global Networks and Local Prison Reforms: Monarchs, Bureaucrats and Penological Experts in Early Nineteenth-Century Prussia', *German History* 23(4) (2005): 431–59.
33. D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds), *States, Social Knowledge, and the Origins of Modern Social Policies* (Princeton 1996), 7.
34. J.L. Campbell, 'Ideas, Politics, and Public Policy', *Annual Review of Sociology* 28 (2002).
35. D. Béland, 'Ideas and Social Policy: An Institutional Perspective', *Social Policy & Administration* 39(1) (2005): 1.
36. For an early analysis of the transfer of social reform ideas, see J. Reulecke, 'Englische Sozialpolitik um die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts im Urteil deutscher Sozialreformer' in *Die Entstehung des Wohlfahrtsstaates in Großbritannien und Deutschland 1850–1950*, eds W.J. Mommsen and W. Mock (Stuttgart 1982). Another more recent example, highlighting the role of international organizations in the scientization of the Swiss social insurance system in the twentieth century, is M. Lengwiler, 'Konjunkturen und Krisen in der Verwissenschaftlichung der Sozialpolitik im 20. Jahrhundert', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 50 (2010). Both authors point to adaptation and modification during the transfer process.
37. Ducpétiaux organized the 1847 penitentiary congress and the 1856 welfare congress, co-organized the 1852 hygiene congress, and took the first step towards the 1862 congress of the Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales, all held in Brussels. In a later phase of his life he organized three Catholic congresses in Belgium (1863, 1864 and 1867).
38. Riemer, *Das Netzwerk der 'Gefängnisfreunde'*, part 2, 1071–1111; Collection of W.H. Suringar's letters, Amsterdam University Library, 'Bijzondere Collecties'; B. Vanhulle, 'Dreaming about the Prison: Édouard Ducpétiaux and Prison Reform in Belgium (1830–1848)', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés* 14(2) (2010): 114–18.
39. T. Juste, *Notice sur Édouard Ducpétiaux, membre de l'Académie*, Extrait de l'Annuaire de l'Académie royale de Belgique, 37ième année (Brussels 1871), 14, 55–64.
40. E. Ducpétiaux, *De la condition physique et morale des jeunes ouvriers et des moyens de l'améliorer*, 2 vols (Brussels 1843).
41. C. Heywood, *Childhood in Nineteenth-Century France: Work, Health, and Education among the 'classes populaires'* (Cambridge 1988), 229–30.
42. Ducpétiaux, *De la condition physique*, 2: 313–19; Juste, *Notice sur Édouard Ducpétiaux*, 32–33.
43. E. Rubbens, *Édouard Ducpétiaux 1804–1868*, 2nd vol. Études morales, sociales et juridiques (Louvain 1934), 40–46.
44. Rubbens, *Édouard Ducpétiaux*, 98.
45. *Ibid.*, 100.
46. Ducpétiaux, *De la condition physique*, 2: 311.
47. *Ibid.*, 2: 420–23. Following careful preparations in cooperation with the British Association and lobbying at the London Welfare Congress in 1862 by Wolowski and

- Ducpétiaux, the Association Internationale pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales organized its first congress in Brussels in 1862. See 'Annales de l'Association pour le Progrès des Sciences Sociales, première session, Congrès de Bruxelles' (Brussels 1863).
48. J.W. Follows, *Antecedents of the International Labour Organization* (Oxford 1951), 46–48.
  49. G. Deneckere, *1900: België op het breukvlak van twee eeuwen* (Tielt 2006), 130. See, for other countries, H. Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, eds J. Morrill and D. Cannadine (London and New York 1995), 144–45; P.M.M. Klep, 'Governmentality, Statistics and State Power: Dutch Labour and Agricultural Inquiries (1840–1914)' in *The Statistical Mind in Modern Society: The Netherlands 1850–1940*, eds J.G.S.J. van Maarseveen, P.M.M. Klep, and I.H. Stamhuis (Amsterdam 2008), 264–71.
  50. Leonards and Randeraad, 'Transnational Experts in Social Reform', 236.