

How the 'S' came to be in UNESCO

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It was only on the sixth day of the United Nations Conference for the Establishment of an Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945, that the reference to science was added to the new organization's name. It had taken nearly three years for the 'S' to make its way into the acronym of an intergovernmental organization that was initially conceived as focusing on education, and then on culture and education. The following is a brief account of how science came to be part and parcel of UNESCO.

During the 1920s, international scientific cooperation had been rekindled with the restoration of peace after the First World War. The League of Nations' International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, founded in Paris in 1926, included a section devoted to Scientific Information and Scientific Relations. Among the activities of the International Bureau of Education, established in Geneva (Switzerland) the previous year, was scientific research. In the nongovernmental sector, the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) would be founded in Brussels (Belgium) in 1931.

Then the Second World War broke out. By 1943, however, Allied victories encouraged politicians to turn their attention to post-war planning. On both sides of the Atlantic, non-governmental projects proposed the creation of an international organization for education. The same year, [Joseph Needham](#) launched a campaign from China to develop post-war international scientific cooperation in the form of a World Science Cooperation Service. A biochemist at Cambridge University in the UK, in 1937, he had received a cultural shock when three Chinese students arrived in Cambridge to work with him and his wife. He found their company exhilarating, learned Chinese and, much later on, married one of them. The British Government sent Needham to China in February 1943 as a representative of the Royal Society to consolidate Anglo-Chinese cultural and scientific relations. In December of the same year, Needham wrote to China's Foreign Minister elaborating his idea of international scientific cooperation: 'The time has gone by when enough can be done by scientists working as individuals or even in groups organized as universities, within individual countries ... Science and technology are now playing, and will increasingly play, so

predominant a part in human civilization that some means whereby science can effectively transcend national boundaries is urgently necessary'. Needham's immediate goal was the transfer of advanced basic and applied science from highly industrialized Western countries to the less industrialized ones, 'but', he assured, 'there would be plenty of scope for traffic in the opposite direction too'.

Meanwhile, in London (UK), at the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME), representatives – many exiles from Nazi-occupied countries – met between 1942 and 1945 to discuss and plan post-war educational reconstruction. Among the conference's various activities was the creation of the Commission on Scientific and Laboratory Equipment. During the war, the Nazis had sabotaged scientific laboratories, and ransacked and closed down universities and institutions, in an effort to halt scientific activity in occupied countries. The commission took charge of assessing these post-war reconstruction needs and the appropriate measures to meet them.

On the other side of the Atlantic, in a declaration to the press in March 1944, the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull explained the rationale for US participation in emergency educational and cultural reconstruction of war-torn countries: 'Teachers, students and scientists have been singled out for special persecution. Many have been imprisoned, deported or killed, particularly those refusing to collaborate with the enemy. In fact, the enemy is deliberately depriving the victims of those tools of intellectual life without which their recovery is impossible'.

A month later, in London, an American delegation presented the CAME with a 'Suggestion for the development of the CAME into the United Nations Organization for Educational and Cultural Reconstruction'. A modified version of this text referred to 'science' four times. Reparation of damage through theft of scientific apparatus was mentioned twice and the restoration of scientific laboratories once, as was 'including scientific research' in the 'interchange between nations bearing upon educational and cultural problems'.

Joseph Needham pursued his campaign in China by sending out the first of three memoranda to scientists, politicians and diplomats in Allied countries on the creation of an International

Science Cooperation Service (July 1944). He explained that the Service would have permanent representatives in all countries or regions, advise governments and assist international organizations on scientific matters. After discussions with colleagues in the British Council and Royal Society, he sent out his second memorandum from London, 'Measures for the organization of international cooperation in science in the post-war period'.

On a journey to Washington DC (USA) in February 1945, Needham was astonished to find that one of the main topics of conversation was the creation of an organization for culture and education. Surprised at how far the project had come, he concluded that it would be more reasonable to incorporate scientific cooperation into this organization, on the condition that the word 'science' be included in its name. Needham's influence could be seen in the March version of the American project, which contained multiple references to scientific cooperation as a contribution to peace and security. However, 'science' was still missing from the name, which remained 'the International Organization for Education and Cultural Cooperation'. This new project was presented to the CAME in April 1945, whose drafting committee turned the American project into a CAME document. Responding to the suggestion that 'science' be included in the organization's name, a member of the US delegation explained that, for the American public, the word 'culture' covered 'science'.

Needham sent a third memorandum from China in April 1945 to important scientific officers in several Allied countries. He insisted that, if they wanted scientists to be interested and involved in the organization, it must be evident that the organization was interested in them. Needham also requested that 'science' include applied sciences, in other words technology, which the word 'culture' would not cover. For Needham, the new organization's principal role would be to promote exchanges between industrially advanced countries – which he called 'the bright zone' – and the less advanced ones, nations 'on the periphery'. Needham supposed that the organization would not transfer commercial secrets from technologically advanced countries to less developed ones, but rather encourage industries to introduce the use of new technologies in the 'periphery.'

Delegations to the San Francisco Conference (which elaborated the United Nations Charter, from 25 April to 26 June 1945, in San Francisco, USA) agreed upon a French recommendation to convene a conference to establish an international organization of intellectual cooperation. The American astronomer Harlow Shapley was for including 'science' in the name of the proposed organization, but other members of the American delegation felt this would make for a wordy name.

For Joseph Needham, it was a June 1945 trip from Tehran (Iran) to Moscow (USSR) that was the turning point. Tehran airport turned out to be the meeting place for national scientific delegations on their way to Moscow to celebrate the 220th anniversary of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Needham's third memorandum was distributed to the American, Indian and Chinese delegations, all of whom displayed strong interest. Other delegations were given copies in Moscow; only the Soviet delegation proved unresponsive. The American scientists promised to undertake an important campaign to push Needham's point of view.

Invitations were sent out during the first week of August 1945 to attend the United Nations Conference for the Establishment of an Educational and Cultural Organization to be held in London November 1-16, 1945. Atomic bombs dropped on Japan, the 6th and 9th of the same month ended the 2nd world war. And by the end of August, Harlow Shapley, had given up trying to convince the US State Department to include 'science' in the name of the Organization as he was sure that the British – Drs Needham and Huxley would be convincing at the London Conference. He was right.

The United Nations Conference for the Establishment of an Educational and Cultural Organization was held in London from 1 to 16 November 1945. Ellen Wilkinson, British minister of education and president of the conference, announced in a plenary session that, although 'science' was not part of the original title of the organization, the British would put forward a proposal for it to be included. 'In these days', said Wilkinson, 'when we are all wondering, perhaps apprehensively, what scientists will do to us next, it is important that they should be linked closely with the humanities and should feel that they have a responsibility to mankind for the results of their labour'.

On 5 November, the Conference divided itself into Commissions. The First Commission was charged with drafting the Title, Preamble and Aims and Functions of the new organization. It was the American delegate who proposed that it be called the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. After hesitating for twenty-four hours, the commission decided in favour of the UNESCO title, which simultaneously served as an instruction to insert the word 'science' in the text of the Constitution wherever indicated. For example, 'The purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture'.

In its concluding report, the First Commission felt it necessary to explain that the inclusion of 'scientific' in the title and elsewhere in the text implied inclusion in the Organization's activities of the philosophy of science and not its applications (science as touching on military security would be dealt with by the disarmament conference). It was vital that scientists be in touch with those who saw the world in 'human' terms. On the afternoon of 16 November 1945, the heads of thirty-seven delegations signed UNESCO's Constitution.

That UNECO should have become UNESCO is proof that the need for such an organization was greater than any mistrust prevailing at the time. The delay in including science in the Organization's mandate, on the other hand, underlines the multiple, delicate and difficult relationships between science and governments in those turbulent years. This in turn would influence the various definitions attributed to the term 'international scientific cooperation'. But that is another story...

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