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**“Whose “Urban Internationale”? Intermunicipalism in Europe, c.1924-36:  
the Value of a Decentred, Interpretive Approach to Transnational Urban  
History**

Shane Ewen (Leeds Metropolitan University)

Stefan Couperus (Utrecht University)

**Introduction**

The transnational historical turn has, since the mid-1990s, shed light on the increasingly common problems faced by municipal governments across Western Europe during the early twentieth-century, as well as their responses to these.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the majority of responses have been varied and subject to specifically local circumstances, there also emerged an international effort to develop a co-ordinated strategy for managing urban and municipal networks.<sup>2</sup> The Union Internationale des Villes/International Union of Local Authorities (UIV), formed at the Ghent

International Exposition in 1913, marked the formalization of what Patrizia Dogliani

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<sup>1</sup> For a survey of this literature see P-Y. Saunier, ‘Introduction: Global City, Take 2: A View from Urban History’, in P-Y. Saunier and S. Ewen, eds., *Another Global City: Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850-2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-18. More recently still, see W. Whyte, ‘Introduction’, in *Ghent Planning Congress 1913. Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. v-xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, we have labelled this process ‘transnational municipalism’, which owes a great deal to work in political geography, as well as urban studies. See, for example, H. Bulkeley, ‘Reconfiguring Environmental Governance: Towards a Politics of Scales and Networks’, *Political Geography*, 24/8(2005), pp. 875-902; S. Ewen, ‘Le long XXème siècle, ou les villes à l’âge des réseaux municipaux transnationaux’, *Revue Urbanisme : Villes, Sociétés, Cultures*, n.383 (2012), pp. 46-49.

identifies as an intermunicipalist approach, ‘the idea that municipalities and local authorities worldwide should pool their knowledge and experience of technical and social advances in local government.’<sup>3</sup> Pierre-Yves Saunier identifies the UIV as the best example of the emerging ‘Urban Internationale’ during the inter-war period, in which appropriate tools, methods and people came together to study the modern city.<sup>4</sup> This, in turn, has further opened up scrutiny of the diachronic nature of transnational networks across a range of geographical, politico-economic and cultural vistas.<sup>5</sup> However, whereas much recent scholarship has unearthed the institutional matrix and ideological values that have shaped this intermunicipalist ethos, less attention – with perhaps the exception of the planning history literature<sup>6</sup> – has been paid to the varied roles played by individuals – administrators, officials, mayors and academics – in building, steering and driving this institutional apparatus.<sup>7</sup> This omission overlooks an

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<sup>3</sup> P. Dogliani, ‘European Municipalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: The Socialist Network’, *Contemporary European History*, 11/4 (2002), p. 585.

<sup>4</sup> P-Y. Saunier, ‘Sketches from the Urban Internationale, 1910–50: Voluntary Associations, International Institutions and US Philanthropic Foundations’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25/2 (2001), pp. 380–403.

<sup>5</sup> For a flavour of this scholarship, see A. Iriye and P-Y. Saunier, eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Trans-national History: From the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> For example, S. V. Ward, ‘What did the Germans ever do for us? A Century of British Learning About and Imagining Modern Planning’, *Planning Perspectives*, 25/2 (2010), pp. 117–140; N. Vall, ‘Social Engineering and Participation in Anglo-Swedish Housing 1945–1976: Ralph Erskine's Vernacular Plan’, *Planning Perspectives*, 28/2 (2013), pp. 223–245.

<sup>7</sup> This person-centred focus has begun to emerge, though it remains strongly wedded to the institutional matrix. See, for example, our own work in this instance: S. Ewen and M. Hebbert, ‘European Cities in a Networked World during the Long 20th Century’, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 25/3 (2007), pp. 327–340; S. Couperus, ‘Backstage Politics. Municipal Directors and Technocratic Ambitions in Amsterdam, 1916–1930’, in S. Couperus, C. Smit and D.J. Wolffram, eds., *In Control of the City: Local Elites and the*

implicit understanding that networks are not agents in their own right, but are instead the product of human endeavour; that is, they constitute ‘loci of transnational and intercultural communication and negotiation by individual human beings, not just collective actors.’<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter, we are interested in the changing dynamics of the UIV during the inter-war period and how these were the products of diachronic individual-institutional interactions. We do so by decentring the formal network, shifting the focus from the macro-institutional level and onto the role played by key individuals, in this case the Dutch socialist-alderman, Florentinus Marinus (‘Floor’) Wibaut, and the British civil servant-academic, George Montagu Harris. Wibaut (1859-1936) sat on the UIV Secretariat and was its President from 1925-36, whereupon he was succeeded by Harris (1868-1951), the honorary secretary to the British Standing Committee of the UIV and a former Chairman of Council of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association; Harris subsequently served as President until 1948. Both men are representative of their respective national traditions of local government: whereas Wibaut combined an ideological commitment to universal brotherhood with a working interest in housing and town planning, Harris was dedicated to the practical contribution that local government could make in the comparison of administrative techniques, as well as the application of local

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*Dynamics of Urban Politics, 1800-1960* (Leuven, Paris and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), pp. 175-190; S. Ewen, ‘Transnational Municipalism in a Europe of Second Cities: Rebuilding Birmingham with Municipal Networks’, in Saunier and Ewen, eds., *Another Global City*, pp. 101-118; S. Couperus, ‘In Between ‘Vague Theory’ and ‘Sound Practical Lines’: Transnational Municipalism in Interwar Europe’, in D. Laqua, ed., *Internationalism Reconfigured: Transnational Ideas and Movements Between the World Wars* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2011), pp. 65-87.

<sup>8</sup> W. Kaiser, ‘Bringing History Back in to the Study of Transnational Networks in European Integration’, *Journal of Public Policy*, 29/2 (2009), pp. 235-236.

government administration to planning practice. Both provide an alternative route into examining the role that cities and their representative bodies played in the forging of a networked urban world.

By taking a bottom-up approach to understanding network composition and behaviour, we posit that it is the beliefs and actions of individual actors and their relations with one another that make and remake the institutional apparatus of transnational networks. R.A.W. Rhodes, the expert in policy networks and intergovernmental relations, has long espoused a constructivist approach towards network analysis, insisting that: ‘The ‘facts’ about networks are not ‘given’ but constructed by individuals in the stories they hand down to one another.’<sup>9</sup> It is only through “thick descriptions” of individual behaviour that one can unearth the multiple symbols behind these and, ultimately, their belief systems.<sup>10</sup> This lends itself to historical research because it can be done by studying the written texts – private documents, minutes, memorandums, published writings and lectures – of network members in order to identify their beliefs and motivations. Written documents are never simply the empirical record of decision-makers; they reveal social and cultural attitudes towards institutional change, as well as the administrative and bureaucratic practices of large organisations and their membership. Individuals – as chairmen, vice-chairmen, secretaries, clerks, executive and council members, and so on – are instigators of collective decision-making and practice within institutions such as the UIV. The archival record, thus, sheds significant light upon the everyday life of the

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<sup>9</sup> R.A.W. Rhodes, ‘Putting People Back into Networks’, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 37/3 (2002), pp. 400-401.

<sup>10</sup> R.A.W. Rhodes, *Everyday Life in British Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 298-299; R.A.W. Rhodes, ‘Everyday Life in a Ministry: Public Administration as Anthropology’, *The American Review of Public Administration*, 35/3 (2005), pp. 3-25; C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

individual within the network and offers an alternative to the traditional empirical approaches in both urban and administrative history.<sup>11</sup>

A decentred approach to networks, according to Rhodes, Mark Bevir, David Richards and others, helps to explain policy change over time. In so doing, it questions the positivist assumption that we can easily learn the beliefs, interests and actions of individuals by studying the way that a network functions. Rather, networks should be seen as the creations of individuals working under their own beliefs and subjective experiences. It is, therefore, vital to tell the human stories behind networks in order to better understand how they originate, as well as how they are governed and how they govern urban society. Such an interpretative approach towards human action in a particular contingent, historical context, enables comparative research in beliefs, attitudes and behaviour that cross traditional, national and cultural borders.<sup>12</sup> Thus, we need to know more about how transnational networks function in their national and urban settings, but equally how the representatives of national associations influenced the actions and behaviours of these networks.

### **Florentinus Marinus ('Floor') Wibaut: the mediating internationalist**

Florentinus Marinus ('Floor') Wibaut (1859-1936) ranked among the few rich proponents of socialism who were able to contribute financially to the foundation of

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<sup>11</sup> S. Davies, *Empiricism and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 59-75.

<sup>12</sup> M. Bevir and D. Richards, 'Decentering Policy Networks: Lessons and Prospects', *Public Administration*, 87/1 (2009), pp. 132-141; M. Bevir, 'Public Administration as Storytelling', *Public Administration*, 89/1 (2011), pp. 183-195; M. Bevir, R.A.W. Rhodes and P. Weller, 'Comparative Governance: Prospects and Lessons', *Public Administration*, 81/1 (2003), pp. 191-210.

the Dutch socialist party, founded in 1894.<sup>13</sup> Having amassed a fortune in the wood industry in the southern province of Zeeland, Wibaut increasingly engaged in the society-like gatherings dedicated to the social question. From his late twenties onwards, he moved away from his Catholic background and into progressive liberal circles. His first meeting with the Amsterdam based journalist P.L. Tak in 1883, led to an intensive master-apprentice relationship which, ultimately, put Wibaut in the direction of the Dutch milieu of self-proclaimed Marxists.<sup>14</sup>

In 1891, Wibaut, to many then still an unknown public figure, published his translation of Fabian Essays in Dutch. The preface gave account of Wibaut's 'avowal to socialism'.<sup>15</sup> Many scholars have echoed this confession to mark the starting point of his career as the most remarkable (socialist) politician in Dutch local government in modern times.<sup>16</sup> However, his learned interest in Fabianism during the 1890s marked two ambivalent outlooks that would become central to Wibaut's somewhat paradoxical intellectual and political beliefs.

Firstly, Wibaut indulged in many theoretical elaborations on Marxism, whilst also, simultaneously, promoting a strand of pragmatic, policy-based municipal

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<sup>13</sup> For a biographical account of Wibaut's professional and personal life see: G.W.B. Borrie, *F. M. Wibaut, mens en magistraat : ontstaan en ontwikkeling der socialistische gemeentepolitiek* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> For an account of Tak's life and his encounters with Wibaut see: Gilles W.B. Borrie, *Pieter Lodewijk Tak (1848-1907) : journalist en politicus, een gentleman in een rode broek* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> F.M. Wibaut, *Socialisme: ("Fabian essays in socialism")* (Amsterdam: Van Looy Gerlings, 1891).

<sup>16</sup> For the most recent reference see: Herman de Liagre Böhl, *Wibaut de machtige. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013).

socialism.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, his texts, speeches and political actions during the interwar period navigated between – sometimes utopian – ideals of internationalism and the feasible yields of internationalist endeavours at the level of municipal administration.<sup>18</sup> As such, Wibaut initially was able to mediate between the various competing blood groups manifesting themselves within the Dutch and international socialist movement. He palled up (and corresponded intensively) with many convinced Marxists, both domestically as well as during one of the many Socialist International meetings he attended, but also expressed his empathy for those in favour of social reform through parliamentary democracy.

At the age of 45, Wibaut moved to Amsterdam to fully commit himself to the socialist movement and party. After a period as an elected councillor for Amsterdam, Wibaut accepted the position of alderman in 1914, which he kept, with some brief intervals, until 1931. His aldermanship, as an administrative position within the prevailing polity, produced a permanent rift between him and his Marxist relations, who continued to reject any form of participation in parliamentary democracy at any level of government. The start of his career as an alderman, during which he was mainly responsible for wartime distribution politics, municipal housing and finances, largely coincided with his engagement in what Saunier has coined the ‘Urban Internationale’. In addition, notions of pacifism and feminism, finding expression in some joint publications with his wife, increasingly enlaced his public and private writings.

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<sup>17</sup> F.M. Wibaut, *Gemeentebeheer: (Financieel beheer. Bedrijfsbeheer)* (Amsterdam: Ontwikkeling, 1926).

<sup>18</sup> The most illustrative publication in this respect is a Dutch text from 1929 in which he tries to reconcile internationalist ideals with the daily routines of municipal administration. See: F.M. Wibaut, 'Internationale gemeentepolitiek', *Haagsch Maandblad* 11 (1929), pp. 484–495.



Attempts at synthesizing his governmental activities at the municipal level in Amsterdam with an ever-expanding agenda within a variety of international networks, amounted to a narrowed-down focus on trans-border intermunicipalism. Starting from the early 1900s, Wibaut joined with the Belgian socialist senator Emile Vinck, who was the instigator behind the resolution adopted by the Socialist International in 1900 encompassing the propagation of a 'socialisme municipale'. Vinck was an ardent proponent of a well-organised structure for socialist local politicians in Belgium, resulting in a central information office and educational programme that was soon adopted by the Dutch socialist party as well.

As Patrizia Dogliani has rightly concluded, from this socialist nexus of internationally oriented advocates of municipal socialism – also comprising individuals other than Wibaut or Vinck – emerged the *Union Internationale des Villes et Pouvoirs Locaux* (UIV), founded at the world exhibition in Ghent in 1913.<sup>19</sup> After its renaissance at the Amsterdam congress of 1924, Wibaut served as the UIV's president, together with Vinck, the general secretary in Brussels, constituting the organisational force behind the thriving interwar organisation. Another internationally shared socialist agenda, the amelioration of urban housing, resulted in Wibaut's involvement in the European housing and town planning movement, starting with his attendance of the tenth *Congrès International des Habitations à Bon Marché* in The Hague in 1913 at which he presented a paper on the overpopulation of residential premises as a key urban problem.<sup>20</sup> Concurring with the 1924 UIV conference,

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<sup>19</sup> Dogliani, 'European Municipalism', pp. 573–596. .

<sup>20</sup> F.M. Wibaut, 'Surpopulation des habitations. Le système de la loi néerlandaise en matière d'habitations surpeuplées', in: N.N., *Xme Congrès International des Habitations à Bon Marché, La Haye-Schéveningue, septembre 1913, rapports. Pt. 3* (Rotterdam : Nijgh en Van Ditmar, 1913).

Wibaut in the same year chaired the second conference of the garden city-oriented International Association for Garden Cities and Town Planning (later Federation, IF). In 1928, in collaboration with the Dutch lobbyist Dirk Hudig and the German housing advocate Hans Kampffmeyer, Wibaut seceded from the IF, due to his conviction that scholarly town planning debates within the IF eclipsed the more pressing issues of social housing.<sup>21</sup>

One general thread runs through Wibaut's appearances at the many social gatherings, events and meetings, which was integral to the maturation of transnational organisations such as the UIV and the IF: he always sought to mediate between antipodes. Exemplary was his effort to ease the relationship between German and French delegates at the UIV congress of 1924 in Amsterdam. That particular congress, according to Wibaut, had to become a feasible transcendence of the post-Versailles geopolitical deadlock, having former enemies discussing possible solutions to universal problems of urban life through municipal intervention. In similar vein, and within the organisational fabric of the UIV, Wibaut tried to personify the irreconcilable two-track direction the UIV was taking during its formative years, i.e. the holistically inspired aspiration of widespread and universal municipal socialism instigated by the Brussels based headquarters vis-à-vis the pragmatic exchange of administrative knowledge, experiences and data, which increasingly predominated the UIV's agenda from mid-1920s onwards – to a large extent due to George Montagu Harris's scholarly input.

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<sup>21</sup> National Institute for Architecture Rotterdam, Collection NIROV, inv.nr. a22, various correspondences involving the IF and the International Housing Association. See also: F.M. Wibaut, *Private und gemeinnützige Wohnbautätigkeit : die sozialpolitische Bedeutung der Wohnungswirtschaft in Gegenwart u. Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main : Verlag des Intern. Verbandes für Wohnungswesen, 1931).

Even his secession from the IF, leading towards the creation of the Frankfurt based International Housing Organisation in 1928, did not prevent Wibaut from keeping on (very friendly) speaking terms with the London based secretary of the IF. In a personal memo, Wibaut wrote: ‘Since the creation of the International Housing Organisation, I have tried every thinkable option to achieve the most efficient promotion of this highly significant field of public life. However, the cause is best and only served by full co-operation [between the IF and the IHA, sc].’<sup>22</sup> A domestic equivalent was his continuous effort to restore bonds with his former Marxist friends who joined the Dutch communist party after 1909. In short, Wibaut was very prone to maintain and create (international) friendships, in part underpinned by his pacifist beliefs, but was not very good at admitting that public and international life also implied rejecting people and ideas.<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Wibaut’s – and Vinck’s – (geo)political ambitions were increasingly displaced from the UIV to the Labour and Socialist International (founded in 1923), his passion for practical municipal policy-making tied up with the propagation of administrative techniques, comparisons, surveys and policy schemes at the subsequent meetings of the UIV. It was particularly Montagu Harris’s contribution to the Paris congress in 1925, which made Wibaut decide that the agenda of municipal socialism did not fit the UIV anymore. In his memoirs, Wibaut remembered Montagu Harris’s report as ‘remarkable [...] in its comprehensiveness, in its depth’ and ‘much more

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<sup>22</sup> International Institute for Social History Amsterdam (IISH), Wibaut Papers, inv.nr. 107, notes on the international concern of housing [undated].

<sup>23</sup> A perfect illustration of Wibaut’s long-pending trust in people is his contact with the American Christian-socialist Charles Bouck White in 1924, who claimed to lead a World League of Cities. After weeks of correspondence and talking, Wibaut indisputably distanced himself from White, who, as it turned out, wanted a global messianic movement of cities as an almost violent counterforce to the League of Nations.

elaborate, systematic and neutral' than, what he called, 'the propaganda for a single system, which is so common'.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Wibaut exerted all his energy onto lobbying potential – without success – to have the UIV represented in the new economic organisations and committees of the League of Nations in 1927.<sup>25</sup> To Wibaut, still, a peaceful social order on a global scale was epitomised by cities, which had to be managed and maintained by their public institutions of administration. As such it was the municipality and its agencies that would promote global order locally. Transnational organisations were the vehicles to arrive at best practices for all cities.

Keeping in mind this rock-solid belief in border-crossing encounters, one could argue that Wibaut's non-organisational works (e.g. papers, presentations, speeches, reports) on municipal administration were just his two cents to substantiate a transnationally moulded corpus of municipal texts which, in time, would culminate in a single, universal best municipal practice – which, in turn, would buoy a global social equilibrium. Cities, rather than nations, were promoters of global peace and stability *par excellence* to him.

From the late 1920s onward, this sub-narrative of pacifist transnationalism transformed into the master narrative of his intellectual work. At first glance, his paper at the International Congress of Scientific Management in Rome in 1927 might seem a technical case study about the enhancement of efficiency in municipal service

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<sup>24</sup> F.M. Wibaut, *Levensbouw : memoires* (Amsterdam: Em. Querido's uitgevers-maatschappij, 1936), p.283.

<sup>25</sup> On this see: N.N., *Vth international congress of local authorities : London, May 1932 = Vme congrès international des villes et pouvoir locaux : Londres, mai 1932 = V. Internationaler Kongress der Städte und Lokalverwaltungen : London, Mai 1932* (Brussel: International union of local authorities, 1932); Couperus, 'In between 'Vague Theory' and 'Sound Practical Lines'', pp. 67-90.

delivery in Amsterdam.<sup>26</sup> However, the paper, among others, adds up to a series of techno-administrative contributions about local government and finance, which as a whole can be seen as the building block of the great global synthesis Wibaut was working on during the last five years of his life.

With his retirement from town hall politics and administration in 1931, he seemed to lose part of his tributary to transnational municipalism. Indeed, he attended and chaired the London congress of the UIV in 1932, but others had already predominantly determined the substantial agenda.<sup>27</sup> During the early 1930s, Wibaut showed a growing interest in the crystallizing notions about social and economic planning which traversed academia and socialist parties throughout Europe. The so called International Industrial Relations Institute (IIRI), founded in 1925 by a group of feminist reformers, industrialists, trade union representatives and visual designers from the US, the Netherlands and Austria, attracted Wibaut's interest.<sup>28</sup>

The Amsterdam conference on World Social and Economic Planning in 1931 clearly appealed to his earlier beliefs in creating a new world order. The last sentence of the preface of the conference's proceedings, a quote from the Scottish author William Archer, could have been written by himself: 'The human intellect, organizing, order-bringing, must enlarge itself so as to embrace, in one great conspectus, the

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<sup>26</sup> F.M. Wibaut, "Organization for securing efficiency in the municipal service of Amsterdam", *3rd International Congress of Scientific Management Rome* (1927), pp.3-7.

<sup>27</sup> N.N., *Vth international congress of local authorities : London, May 1932 = Vme congrès international des villes et pouvoir locaux : Londres, mai 1932 = V. Internationaler Kongress der Städte und Lokalverwaltungen : London, Mai 1932* (Brussels: International union of local authorities, 1932).

<sup>28</sup> IISH, Wibaut papers, inv.nr. 353, letter from Mary van Kleeck to Wibaut, 17 December 1931.

problems, not of a parish, or of a nation, but of the pendant globe.’<sup>29</sup> In short, planning, and the management of the concomitant political economy, was embraced by Wibaut as the new tool to arrive at a new global order. The old ones, efficient municipal administration, social housing and local welfare arrangements, seemed to have lost their potential to some degree. Wibaut engaged in the so-called ‘interim committee’ that would dedicate itself to the foundation of a ‘World Social Economic Center’.<sup>30</sup> Besides much correspondence and travelling, not much resulted from the committee.

By 1933, Wibaut had to withdraw from his internationalist activities due to deteriorating health and aging. In 1934, he published a book, *A World Production Order* (published in English in 1935), in which he unfolded an all-encompassing economic system that would superimpose, partly due to inevitable structural societal changes, the existing capitalist reality of production and trade. Again, this alternative global order bore the clear traces of an idealist internationalism impregnated with notions of pacifism, Marxism, feminism and scientific management. The main acting institution that would conduct the planning and regulation of this system was a so-called ‘World Economic Council’ (WEC). Within this WEC representatives of national Economic Councils (such as the Dutch *Economische Raad*, the German *Reichswirtschaftsrat*, and the British Economic Advisory Council), the International Labour Office and the economic agencies of the League of Nations would discuss the particularities of finely tuned planning schemes. The guiding principle of the WEC

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<sup>29</sup> M. Fleddéus, eds., *World social economic planning: the necessity for planned adjustment of productive capacity and standards of living: material contributed to the World Social Economic Congress, Amsterdam, August 1931* (The Hague and New York: International Industrial Relations Institute, 1932), p. xx.

<sup>30</sup> IISH, Wibaut papers, inv.nr. 353, 6 memorandums of the Interim Committee, 1931.

had to be ‘efficiency’ – the social version Wibaut had conceived of for local government in Amsterdam – which, eventually, would lead to a worldwide standard for wages and the international distribution of goods.<sup>31</sup>

Wibaut was one of the many internationalists around during the interwar period, who submerged in the avalanche of letters, meetings, proceedings, journeys, dinners and soirees produced and attended by many, what Wibaut would call, ‘friends’ divided over a number trans- and international organisations. Consequently, Wibaut had to navigate between a number of political, intellectual, ideological and social beacons, dispersed over the European continent and the Anglo-Saxon world. As his international career developed, Wibaut, counter-intuitively, was forced to ignore some beacons along the road. Being a mediator in the first instance, he always sought to compromise between people and ideas. Inspired by his daily experience in Amsterdam as a councillor and alderman, and intensified by the political and techno-administrative agenda of the UIV, Wibaut viewed municipal administration as the basic cell of a new global order. By the end of his life, he substituted municipal administration for socio-economic planning, trying to find yet another, though in his case final, synthesizing compromise for what ultimately was his lifetime ambition: to bring about a tangible global order which would deprive no individual from health and wealth.

Probably the funeral speech by his close friend Vinck brings forth Wibaut’s ambivalence best:

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<sup>31</sup> F.M. Wibaut, *Ordering der wereldproductie* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1934); F.M. Wibaut, *A world production order* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935).

For us, of the International Union of Towns, he was the man of science, the expert in the municipal sphere. It was to his accomplishments in that sphere that he devoted the best efforts of his intelligence and his soul. The local authority was to him a religion [...] From the foundation of our Union he has always fought for the defence of the international idea and he brought about its triumph. The struggle was not always easy, for even in matters of science it is sometimes difficult to isolate the international idea.<sup>32</sup>

### **George Montagu Harris: the academic-administrator as international networker**

George Montagu Harris's election as president of the UIV in June 1936, to succeed Wibaut who passed away two months earlier, came at a time when he was enjoying the fruits of his tireless efforts, over four decades, in researching and administering local government, building international networks in planning and related activities, and advocating a comparative approach to the study of local government. The second edition of his *magnum opus*, *Local Government in Many Lands: A Comparative Study*, was published in 1933; in March 1935 he was appointed to a Research Lectureship in Public Administration by the University of Oxford's Social Studies Research Committee where he undertook a book-length comparative study of British municipal government, published as *Municipal Self-Government in Britain: A Study of the Practice of Local Government in Ten of the Larger British Cities*, in 1939. He was also elected onto the aldermanic bench of Oxford City Council at the end of 1936, and, by March 1941, was serving on twenty committees across the public, educational and voluntary sectors in and around the city, including the National Council of Social Service, the

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<sup>32</sup> *Local Government Administration*, 2/2 (1936).



Barnett House Survey Committee and the Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey Committee.<sup>33</sup> Despite being sixty-eight years of age himself upon his election to the UIV Presidency, Harris showed no signs of slowing down in his work; indeed, his enthusiasm for research, committee meetings and conferences remained unparalleled.

Like many of his peers, Harris epitomised the uneven transition from an insular and elitist closed-shop to a professional pluralist civil service in the century following the 1850s.<sup>34</sup> The son of a Torquay vicar and grandson of the first principal of Upper Canada College, Toronto, Harris was educated to Masters level at Newton College in Devonshire and New College, Oxford. He was initially called to the Bar at Middle Temple in 1893 before forging a highly successful career in public administration, successfully straddling the artificial divide between public service and academic approaches to local government administration. In this way, he was one of H.E. Dale's gentlemanly civil servants, an 'expert in a difficult art' of public administration, and, for the large part of his career, an adherent to Dale's 'learning by

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<sup>33</sup> G.M. Harris, *Local Government in Many Lands: A Comparative Study*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: P.S. King & Son, 1934); G. M. Harris, *Municipal Self-Government in Britain: A Study of the Practice of Local Government in Ten of the Larger British Cities* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1939); University of Oxford University Archives (UOUA), UR6/MS/3A, file 1, Minutes of the Social Studies Research Committee, 8 October 1935; Oxfordshire History Centre, C/TC/1/A1/27-36, City of Oxford Year Books, 1937-45; UOUA, SC1/13/2, Barnett House Survey Executive Committee Minutes, 9 December 1935; Nuffield College Library (NCL), Nuffield College Social Reconstruction Survey, NCSRS/A2/196, correspondence, G.M. Harris to G.D.H. Cole, 16 March 1941.

<sup>34</sup> G.K. Fry, 'More Than 'Counting Manhole Covers': The Evolution of the British Tradition of Public Administration', *Public Administration*, 77/3 (1999), pp. 527-540; J.A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local Government in Britain since 1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 111.

doing' philosophy.<sup>35</sup> Yet he bucked against Dale's dislike for the scholarly civil servant, being actively involved in the Institute of Public Administration from its formation in 1922, a regular contributor to its learned journal, *Public Administration*<sup>36</sup>, editor of two short-lived professional journals, *Local Government Abroad* (1927-30) and *Local Government Administration* (1935-37), and an internationally-renowned expert in the nascent discipline, not least in pioneering comparative methodology for the study of local government systems.<sup>37</sup>

Harris's administrative career began in 1901 as Secretary of the short-lived New Reform Club<sup>38</sup>, an avowedly Liberal organisation, but he soon moved on to the Secretaryship of the County Councils Association (CCA) from 1902-19, whereupon he was inculcated into parliamentary procedure through his regular appearances in ministerial delegations and as a witness to enquiries into subjects ranging from public health to traffic management to educational endowments.<sup>39</sup> Christine Bellamy argues

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<sup>35</sup> H.E. Dale, *The Higher Civil Service of Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 212-23.

<sup>36</sup> G.M. Harris, 'English and German Local Government Compared', *Public Administration*, 8/2 (1930), pp. 207-224; 'The Sphere of the State in Local Administration', *Public Administration*, 8/4 (1930), pp. 437-453 and 'International Congress of Local Authorities', *Public Administration*, 10/1 (1932), pp. 82-86.

<sup>37</sup> A. Lidström, 'The Comparative Study of Local Government Systems – A Research Agenda', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 1/1 (1999), pp. 97-115.

<sup>38</sup> Harris was also a member of the long-established Reform Club from 1895.

<sup>39</sup> University of Birmingham Cadbury Research Library (CRL), County Councils Association, CCA/A/1/5 Unsigned minutes, Executive Council Meeting, 8 May 1902, p. 40. Parliamentary Papers (PP) 1904 (Cd. 2070) *Report of the Departmental Committee appointed by the President of the Local Government Board to inquire with regard to regulations for the purposes of section 12 of the Motor Car Act, 1903. Part II*; PP 1905 (343) *Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Public Health Acts (Amendment) Bill*, pp.107-

that the CCA, from its origins in 1890, was oriented towards working through the central government's cumbersome bureaucracy in the pursuit of its goals. As the representative local authority association for the new county councils, the CCA's leadership built close ties with the traditional land-owning and county interests in Parliament. It preferred to influence local government policy from within, effectively embedding itself into the administrative structures and financial arrangements of central government.<sup>40</sup> As such, Harris's embedding into these institutional relationships influenced his repeated advocacy of institutional approaches towards local government reform, involving national associations of local authorities like the CCA and its urban countertype, the Association of Municipal Corporations (AMC), which was framed within a formal supervisory framework of central government control.

It was during his tenure at the CCA that Harris developed two significant interests that shaped his subsequent career. First, he edited, from 1908, the CCA's Official Circular, which included a record of the official proceedings, as well as notes and brief articles on matters of interest to CCA members, many of which were written by Harris himself. This included international subjects, such as the First International Road Congress, held in Paris in 1908, at which Harris attended and subsequently co-authored an account of the proceedings for an English readership. This interest in collecting, translating, editing and publishing news and notices on local government topics across the world subsequently shaped his research methods and later editorial

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108; PP 1906 (Cd. 3081) *Royal Commission on Motor Cars. Volume II*; 1911 (Cd. 5662] *Report of the Departmental Committee on Educational Endowments, Volume I*.

<sup>40</sup> C. Bellamy, *Administering Central-Local Relations 1871-1919: The Local Government Board in its Fiscal and Cultural Context* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 60-63.

responsibilities. It also chimed with Emile Vinck's vision of the UIV as a clearing house of technical information for municipalities around the world to enjoy. Indeed, it is likely that Vinck and Harris's relationship began with their participation at international events like the 1908 Paris Congress, the first Congress on the Administrative Sciences in Brussels in 1910 (Harris was the Secretary to the British Committee), and the follow-up Congress in Madrid in 1915.<sup>41</sup>

Second, Harris developed an interest in housing reform and planning at a time that county councils had become statutorily engaged with rural housing provision. The CCA had, from 1908, a Housing and Small Holdings Committee, which took particular interest in the Housing, Town Planning, &c. Act, 1909, the first national legislation to introduce a system of town planning within local government.<sup>42</sup> Harris was already a member of the Garden Cities Association (renamed, in 1909, the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association), and had authored a short pamphlet on Ebenezer Howard's model in 1906. He subsequently joined the GCA's Council and Executive Committee, wrote for its periodical, *The Garden City* (later renamed *Garden Cities and Town Planning*), on the housing of the working classes, and lectured widely on its work, including local branches of the National League of Young Liberals.<sup>43</sup>

Having developed a nascent interest in studying overseas local government problems during his formative years at the CCA, Harris subsequently built an

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<sup>41</sup> CRL CCA/B/2/1, Official Circular, Volumes 1-12, boxes 1-3; G.M. Harris and H. T. Wakelam, *The First International Road Congress, Paris, 1908* (London: Wyman & Sons, 1908). Harris's report on the Brussels Congress is published in G.M. Harris, *Problems of Local Government* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1910).

<sup>42</sup> CRL CCA/A/2/2, Signed Minutes of the Executive Council of the CCA, 28 May 1908.

<sup>43</sup> G.M. Harris, *The Garden City Movement* (London: Garden City Association, 1906); *The Garden City*, new series, 2/13 (February 1907), pp. 275, 280-1.

international reputation for his knowledge and expertise of administrative practice during his tenure as Head of the Foreign Branch of the Intelligence Division in the Ministry of Health, a position he held from 1919 until his retirement from the civil service in 1933. He developed a large network of overseas contacts in order to pursue comparative research; practically, this involved collating and assessing data on foreign and commonwealth local government collected on behalf of the Royal Commission on Local Government in 1924-25. The Commission had been formed in response to long-standing CCA pressure to curb the ambitions of county boroughs to extend their jurisdictional powers into rural areas. However, faced with a mass of data, in a variety of languages, the Commission omitted it from its report, 'owing both to want of knowledge and to want of time.'<sup>44</sup>

To capitalise on the rich database at his disposal, Harris wrote a book-length study of the structure of local government across a large swathe of the world. Initially published in French for the UIV, neither the Ministry of Health nor Foreign Office were interested in sanctioning an official publication, so P. S. King & Son issued an English version with an additional chapter on local government in Britain.<sup>45</sup> The book had a dual influence over Harris's later work. Firstly, although it was organised into separate chapters on individual countries, it pointed the way forward in approaching the academic study of public administration through a comparative empirical methodology. In so doing, the book built upon earlier comparisons of municipal

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<sup>44</sup> English National Archives (NA) HLG/8/62, Royal Commission on Local Government Paper No.222: M.(ontagu) H.(arris), 'Note on the publication of information received as to local govt in the British Empire and in foreign countries', 30 January 1926, p. 3; PP 1924-25 (Cmd. 2506) *First Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government. Constitution and Extension of County Boroughs*; Chandler, *Explaining Local Government*, p. 142.

<sup>45</sup> G.M. Harris, *Local Government in Many Lands: A Comparative Study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1925).

government, his summary chapter identifying three key areas in which local authorities everywhere were subject to increasing constraints: in their level of financial control over their budgets, their legal relations with central government, and their increasing reliance on unelected officials.<sup>46</sup> Central control was welcomed where it intended to improve local service delivery; whereas centralisation as an end in itself was a more worrying matter entirely. In the revised second edition, he further warned against emerging tendencies to centralise public service delivery, with the eradication of local democracy in totalitarian regimes serving as a lesson for democratic local government in Britain, the United States and elsewhere.<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, Harris exposed the difficulties of talking about local government in any holistic way, distinguishing instead between ‘local government’ and ‘local self-government’. Since the former historically referred to ‘...the power of the local authority, whatever it may be, to act independently of any external control,’ this was an increasingly redundant definition in an interdependent world. The latter concept, on the other hand, required a broader understanding to render it useful, notably ‘the participation of the community as a whole in the public administration,’ itself a growing concern with increasingly apathetic local electorates.<sup>48</sup> Driven by his growing concerns at diminishing voter turnout in English local elections, Harris later argued that, in order to encourage better citizen engagement with local democracy, local authorities, along with other bodies like the Workers’ Educational Association,

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<sup>46</sup> A. Lidström, ‘The Comparative Study of Local Government Systems – A Research Agenda’, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 1/1 (1999), pp. 97-115.

<sup>47</sup> Harris, *Local Government in Many Lands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, pp. 375-393.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

should take the initiative in educating adults in citizenship and also employ officers to publicise their activities.<sup>49</sup>

In a later book, Harris sharpened this dual definition by distinguishing between ‘local state government’ – ‘the government of all parts of a country by means of local agents appointed, and responsible only to, the central government’ – and ‘local self-government’ – that is, ‘government by local bodies, freely elected, which, while subject to the supremacy of the national government, are endowed in some respects with power, discretion and responsibility, which they can exercise without control over their decisions by the higher authority.’<sup>50</sup> For Harris, ‘local state government’ was coterminous with local administration in that power tended to reside in either the centrally-appointed agents – the French prefects and German burgomasters, for instance – and not with the elected representatives of local ratepayers, as was the case in England and Wales where ‘local self-government’ was commonplace:

To an Englishman ... He is imbued with the idea that genuine self-government means the participation of the whole community by means of representative councils, which are themselves vested with the legislative, executive and administrative authority to the exclusion of any other local body or person. The existence, therefore, of an executive which is independent of the representative council, the handing over of the actual government of a town for a number of years to a burgomaster or a small number of commissioners,

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<sup>49</sup> NCL, NCSRS/B6/12 Box 53, G.M. Harris, ‘Local Government Publicity’, 21 May 1942.

<sup>50</sup> G.M. Harris, *Comparative Local Government* (London: Hutchinson’s University Library, 1948), p. 9.

even though these are locally elected, is to him the negation of self-government.<sup>51</sup>

Harris's involvement with the UIV, therefore, came about through his academic curiosities as much as his governmental responsibilities and professional and personal connections. His continued participation in other national and international town planning networks – he was one of the founders and honorary secretary of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association in 1913 and the president of the Town Planning Institute in 1927-28 – broadened and deepened his expertise in local government matters from his roots in county council administration.<sup>52</sup> It was this international exposure – as an administrator, author and networker – and his connections to leading governmental elites within the Ministry of Health that gave him pre-eminence as one of the leading local government officials in England from the mid-1920s.

British participation in the UIV's activities was, at best, lukewarm for the first decade or more of its existence, which made Harris's involvement all the more significant. Notwithstanding sporadic interest from individual municipal officers, there was no sustained co-ordinated institutional interest in participation. The UIV's proposal to establish a central statistical office in Brussels was dismissed within central government circles as 'entirely mischievous,' the work of a small group of self-serving socialists seeking to undermine the work of existing international bodies like the League of Nations and the International Congress on Administrative

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<sup>51</sup> Harris, *Local Government in Many Lands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. p. 376.

<sup>52</sup> His election as President was, according to his predecessor, designed to 'keep them in touch with what was being done in other parts of the world': *Journal of the Town Planning Institute*, 13/9 (July 1927), p. 272.



Sciences.<sup>53</sup> Despite Vinck's repeated efforts to secure ministerial support for the venture, civil servants – notably the Ministry of Health's principal assistant secretary, Ioan Gwilym Gibbon (Harris's superior officer) – were deliberately stand-offish. Gibbon warned Vinck that 'the one chance of obtaining active support from the British municipalities is to convince them that the "Union" is going to be of practical help to them in dealing with their own problems ... [T]he mere collection of facts is not sufficient; their significance must be appreciated, and a proper value attached to them.'<sup>54</sup>

Harris' involvement – which formally began with his participation at the second UIV congress in Amsterdam in 1924<sup>55</sup> – can, therefore, be read as the overlapping of two agendas. Firstly, it was the natural extension of Harris's personal and academic interest in intermunicipalism. Secondly, he was hand-picked by Gibbon, himself an advocate of marrying scholarship with administrative expertise, to monitor Vinck's motives and movements. Careful to cultivate a neutral political identity so as not to ostracise his peers, Harris was a popular choice to act as the link between the reformist-minded internationalists on the UIV and the more conservative elements of the English civil service. Indeed, his contributions at meetings drew repeated praise for their practical benefits to other British participants. For example, at the Paris Congress in 1925, he acted as de facto translator for the vast majority of French papers, and allegedly provided the only sustained intellectual discussion on the

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<sup>53</sup> NA HLG/52/1000, Anonymous note on the work of the IULA, 17 January 1921.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, Correspondence between Emile Vinck and I.G. Gibbon, 15 May 1924 – 28 December 1924. Quote from letter, 6 June 1924.

<sup>55</sup> NCL NCSRS/B8/17 Box 59 comprises a folder of UIV material collected over the years by Harris. The earliest document pertains to the Amsterdam congress: *Compte Rendu Sommaire du Iie Congrès International des Villes*. Amsterdam 1924 (Bruxelles: UIV, 1924).

papers.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, his growing friendship with Vinck gave him intimate access to the UIV's Secretariat, which he used to convince Gibbon of Vinck's practical motives. Harris and Gibbon subsequently convinced the English local authority associations to join the UIV on a trial period; the individual had evidently laid the groundwork for institutional proliferation in the urban network, though it helped that he himself was a product of this environment.<sup>57</sup>

Official sanction inevitably brought greater local authority participation in the UIV's activities, aided in no small part by its adoption of the English title 'International Union of Local Authorities' alongside its French title. An English Standing Committee of the Union was constituted in March 1927 with Harris as its general secretary and editor of its quarterly journal, *Local Government Abroad*, which carried news and reports on international municipal activities. In 1928 he was elected as one of England's three representatives on the UIV Permanent Bureau. Harris's involvement is noticeable for signalling a changed direction in the Union's work, away from its initial utopian objectives of pacifism and universal brotherhood and towards more practical matters of local administration. Harris himself noted the English delegation's 'considerable influence' in framing new policy at the Düsseldorf council meeting in October 1926, which approved of addressing practical subjects at its congresses – the Seville and Barcelona congress in 1929 duly discussed local government finances, municipal trading and land expropriation – and the collation of useful information for local authorities' practical use; the AMC inevitably approved

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<sup>56</sup> NA HLG/52/1000, Report by English representatives on 'Union Internationale des Villes et Communes Congress at Paris', 28 September to 4 October 1925, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, note by G.M. Harris, 11 February 1926.

of this too.<sup>58</sup> All documentation would also be available in English upon request; Harris himself translated and published abridged articles from the UIV's official periodical, *L'administration locale*, for his journal's readership, further indicating his influence over its changed direction.

As the chief English representative on the UIV, Harris played a pivotal role in seeking official sanction and organising the programme for the 1932 Congress in London.<sup>59</sup> Working in tandem with officials in the London County Council, with input from a special committee of the AMC, Harris devised a programme around two themes that were pertinent to contemporary English local government: the practical working of local authorities, and the recruitment and training of paid officials. During the preparations, the comparative dimension was continuously flagged up as a point of interest, Harris being particularly interested in the contrasts between the English committee, German burgomaster, French prefecture and North American city manager systems.<sup>60</sup> The stress on administrative practice and comparative study obviously resonated with the US Government, which sent its first official delegation of local authority representatives to the congress, as well as numerous large British

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Harris to Gibbon, 11 October 1926; Minutes of Standing Committee for England and Wales, 10 March 1927, 11 May 1927; NA HLG/52/1001, Minutes of Standing Committee for England and Wales, 27 January 1928; CRL AMC/A/2/10, Association of Municipal Corporations, Minutes of Council, Report of Sub-Committee on the Union Internationale des Villes et Communes, 1 February 1927.

<sup>59</sup> NA HLG/52/1001, Vinck to Harris, 4 June 1928; CRL AMC/A/2/10, Minutes of Council, 17 October 1929, p. 163.

<sup>60</sup> NA HLG/52/1001, Minutes of Standing Committee, 28 February 1929, p. 2; *The Municipal Review (TMR)*, 1/12 (December 1930), p. 523.

municipalities; Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, York and Cardiff were each invited to serve on the Congress committee.<sup>61</sup>

The Congress was, by and large, a success: despite not attracting the number of overseas delegates as anticipated, owing to the world depression, forty-four countries were represented in an official capacity, including some from the British Commonwealth, and a good number from South and North America, who had shown little interest in the UIV's activities hitherto.<sup>62</sup> Most significantly, the Congress cemented Britain and, in particular, Harris as integral members of the intermunicipalist framework, so much so that Harris was earmarked as Wibaut's likely successor as President. Following his retirement from the Ministry of Health in 1933, he embarked on a year-long tour of local government, studying municipal systems in North America, India, Jamaica and Japan, and lecturing on comparative local government to universities, state leagues of municipalities and research institutes.<sup>63</sup> His subsequent book, published by the Union, comprised a series of observations on municipal systems in these countries, and reiterated his belief in the comparative method.<sup>64</sup> The book builds on his prior administrative experience by offering a window onto the historically-specific contexts within which local authority associations evolved. Whilst his case studies (beginning with the Florida League of Municipalities and ending with the Local Self-Government Institute of Bombay) lack comparative or theoretical depth, they point towards a growing convergence of urban

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 4 July 1929, p. 2. Leeds and Sheffield were later added, along with Edinburgh and Glasgow: 18 October 1929, p. 2

<sup>62</sup> For a summary of the Congress papers and reports, see *TMR*, 3/29 (May 1932), pp.195-207 and 3/30 (June 1932), pp. 255-261.

<sup>63</sup> *TMR*, 5/55 (July 1934), p. 313.

<sup>64</sup> G.M. Harris, *Westward to the East: The Record of a World Tour in Search of Local Government* (Brussels and London: International Union of Local Authorities, 1935).

and municipal experiences, particularly across the vista of existing and former empires, as recently recognised by historians.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Harris cites the paucity of systematic ‘municipal research’ in Britain relative to the United States as proof that such studies highlight important lessons for metropolitan policy-makers and challenge the assumptions of ‘those who still think (perhaps rightly) that our [British] system of local government is the best in the world.’<sup>66</sup>

Harris never wavered in his conviction that there was a practical value in international networking. Having succeeded Wibaut to the UIV presidential chair, his first official responsibility was to preside over the 1936 Congress in Berlin where he met privately with the German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler.<sup>67</sup> Although the Ministry of Health refused to send any official delegates, Harris justified his attendance in robust fashion in a letter to one of the Ministry’s senior officials: ‘it would be absurd for a body of the character of the International Union to stand aloof from Germany on account of the present form of government, especially as it is definitely precluded from paying attention to any of the politics of any of the countries to which it may visit or with which it may be connected.’<sup>68</sup> The absence of local democracy in Germany made no difference to Harris in this sense; German local government had effectively become ‘a purely bureaucratic institution’ under the direct control of the

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<sup>65</sup> A. Brown-May, ‘In the Precincts of the Global City: The Transnational Network of Municipal Affairs in Melbourne, Australia’ in Saunier and Ewen (eds), *Another Global City*, pp. 19-34; J. Griffiths, ‘Were There Municipal Networks in the British World c.1890-1939?’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37/4 (2009), pp. 575-597.

<sup>66</sup> Harris, *Westward to the East*, pp. 143-145.

<sup>67</sup> *Local Government Administration*, 2/3 (September 1936), pp. 133-134.

<sup>68</sup> NA HLG/52/1001, G.M. Harris to H.S. Hunter, 22 June 1936.

central government, which inevitably rendered it even more important to study as a comparator to other western models.<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, a decentred take on individual agency, on personal beliefs, orientations and actions, allows for an interpretative approach of the constructivist and agency-driven nature of transnational municipalism during the interwar period.

Stepping away from macro-institutional inquiries into the networks and events of transnational municipalism, and instead highlighting the way in which historical protagonists – in this case Wibaut and Harris – actually operated within a variety of networks and organisations, provides us with insights into how transnational institutions were vested with acts, ideas and ideals stemming from personal beliefs and motivations.

We argue that a decentred interpretation helps to explain institutional practice and change. Human action renders visible institutional practice. Institutions reflect social realities and human personalities; they are constructed categories, perceived (temporary) structures that, simultaneously, enable possibilities and limitations of human action within a particular setting in time and space. As Rhodes and Bevir, amongst others, have demonstrated, it is this decentering of human agency that reveals the ways in which individuals influence institutional practice.

In addition to this, Rhodes and Bevir have established the value of providing thick descriptions of the lives and careers of political actors. The same can be said for Wibaut and Harris. Firstly, their stories make a significant historiographical

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<sup>69</sup> Harris, *Comparative Local Government*, pp. 14-15.

contribution to our wider understanding of inter-war transnational municipalism, not least because they have both been overlooked actors on the international stage. Secondly, they provide a human link between the local and the international spheres of government: both men represented local government interests through their work for, in Wibaut's case, the Amsterdam municipality, and, in Harris's case, as secretary for the County Councils Association; they subsequently manifested these local interests on the international stage. Thirdly, the fact that both men juggled a plethora of interests, their lives are – to the historical eye at least – fragmented across a range of archival sources, many of which require 'reading against the grain' in order to identify their own voices and piece together their career path. Thick description offers a way of linking together these multiple roles in order to flesh out their individual roles and establish their cultural beliefs and attitudes. Finally, Wibaut and Harris's contributions to the organisation and management of the UIV were shaped by their work elsewhere: Harris's commitment to the UIV's practical work, for example, was the product of his work with the local authority associations and the garden cities movement, where he also developed his enthusiasm for comparative research as the best method for identifying solutions to urban problems.

A striking similarity between Wibaut and Harris is their coexisting belief in, on the one hand, the practical functionality of transnational endeavours and collaboration, and, on the other hand, an overarching, deeply rooted intellectual outlook. However, this coexistence of incentives of feasible, physical output and theoretical, metaphysical input also points at a major difference between the two. Harris, being one of the leading experts in public administration studies in Britain, elegantly interlinked his scholarly skills and findings to the comparative setup of the UIV's substantial agenda from the mid 1920s onwards. Wibaut, in contrast, openly

appreciated the comparison between policy schemes, organisational models, municipal finance and administrative routines as a means to arrive at best practices, but in the same breath espoused ideals of universalism and brotherhood, which were so key during his formative years as a publicist and administrator.

The beliefs and motivations of Wibaut amounted to a blend of municipal socialism, socialist internationalism and pacifism which all materialised during the last decades of the nineteenth century. As such, the institutional genesis of the UIV in 1913 was the culmination of an ongoing differentiation within the expanding universe of – mostly ideology laden –internationalist movements, of which the ‘Urban Internationale’, and thus the UIV, was one outcome. After its rejuvenation in 1924, Wibaut’s generation within the UIV was confronted with the beliefs of Harris’s generation, which expressed a firm belief in the non-political methods of social science and boasted its practical experience in public service, not as politicians but rather as scholars and administrators.