



# Transcending national borders through educational practices: the Children's Castle in Luxembourg

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## Abstract

This article offers an international history of welfare ideas and practices in the intermediary space of Luxembourg by retracing the early phases of the *Kannerschlass*, an innovative pedagogical establishment for children in distress based in a Luxembourgian village close to the French border. It reveals how the institution was able to develop a unique didactic project under municipal ownership after the Second World War, thanks to international exchanges. This was largely the initiative of the directors, educators and policymakers who creatively amalgamated international pedagogical approaches in their practice in the *Kannerschlass*.

## Keywords

Children, welfare, borderlands, intermediary space, Luxembourg, *Kannerschlass*/Children's Castle

## Introduction

This article reveals how the *Kannerschlass* (Children's Castle) in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg was able to develop a unique didactic project under municipal ownership in

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the 1950s, thanks to international exchanges that converged in the specific local context in the South of the country.

Located close to the Luxembourgian-French border, since the late nineteenth century, the canton of Esch-sur-Alzette welcomed a nationally diverse population to work in the production of steel and iron (Caregari et al., 2012; Portas Vázquez, 2024). The international composition of the labour force fostered the development of new social provision practices: next to publicly, privately or religiously led institutions providing welfare, initiatives created by companies, trade unions and foreigners arose, and providers often overlapped in competencies or competed for beneficiaries.<sup>1</sup> By the beginning of the 20th Century, it were mostly municipalities or steel companies which provided the infrastructure for child welfare initiatives, religious congregations performed the work on the ground, and these congregations received financial support from municipalities or companies to carry out their duties.<sup>2</sup> Within that Luxembourgian mixed economy of welfare, the *Kannerschlass* established itself as the first secular institution for orphans in the aftermath of the Second World War. This innovative institution for orphans was characterised by an in-built impetus to transcend borders to develop its pedagogical programme. The *Kannerschlass* was a local initiative which, thanks to its interactions with representatives of national and international levels of decision-making, could grow into an innovative and distinctive project in Luxembourg.

Following research on the innovative contributions of steel companies to the Luxembourgian mixed economy of child welfare in the late 19th and first half of the 20th Century (Priem and Herman, 2019), this article shows the role of international historical actors in the development and implementation of ideas and practices of child welfare in Luxembourg in the aftermath of the Second World War. Our article reveals attempts to create a European consciousness built on the narrative of a borderless Western Europe guided by principles of solidarity in a social initiative for orphans. Without the necessary local and national expertise in the provision of child welfare according to new secular educational methods, the founding fathers of the *Kannerschlass* looked abroad for inspiration. They embraced the principles in education and social provisions driven by international organisations and adopted on other welfare premises for children across Western Europe, such as the well-being of the child and the creation of a familial environment.

The authors consider Luxembourg as an intermediary space where international ideas and practices on child protection met local initiatives, an encounter that provided fresh insights into the developments of social protection for children. Advanced by the historian Philipp Ther, the concept of intermediary space (*Zwischenraum*) overcomes methodological nationalism in European historiography, which privileged the nation-state as an analytical category, by endorsing other scales of analysis, such as the local and the international (2003a, 2003b: 70). Luxembourg has been referred to as an intermediary space characterised by a constant dialectic between Luxembourg's self-perception as a borderland – a space where different cultural and linguistic elements circulate and meet – as well as a nation-state on a political level (Spirinelli, 2020: 75). Through the analysis of the early phases of the *Kannerschlass*, we demonstrate how that intermediary space was given meaning to with the help of an international circulation of ideas, practices and people revolving around children social provisions.

After introducing the Luxembourgian mixed economy of child welfare, the article discusses the internationalisation of child welfare in Luxembourg. Later follows an analysis of how the international summer camp organised at the Castle in August 1950 functioned as a laboratory to experiment with educational methods at the time unpractised in Luxembourg, which were later consolidated in the pedagogical project of the *Kannerschlass*.

## A Luxembourgian mixed economy of child welfare

From the mid-19th century onwards, Luxembourg was characterised by a mixed system of social providers; the main carriers were Catholic congregations, the state and philanthropists.<sup>2</sup> Luxembourg's small size encouraged collaboration across different initiatives and fostered synergy among individuals involved in philanthropic causes as well as legislative and political decision making.

A decree of 1846 instructed municipalities with the duty to take care of people in need, but the state did not provide municipalities with a budget to do so.<sup>3</sup> In 1855, a Grand-Ducal decree foresaw the temporary establishment of a central hospice in Ettelbruck supported by the state, which later transformed into the Hospice du Rahm.<sup>4</sup> It hosted destitute children below the age of 12, including orphans and abandoned children alongside the elderly, mental patients, and adult beggars. From 1883 onwards, the state shaped a public health sector through legislation and provided it with financial support, while municipalities oversaw the implementation of its activities (Zahlen and Schoos, 2010). The modernisation of social intervention took the form of a specialisation and differentiation of its function, which gradually moved from punitive to preventive (Zahlen and Schoos, 2010). As a single institution hosting people of different ages and in different conditions was no longer considered a long-lasting solution, in the late 1880s, the Hospice du Rahm,<sup>5</sup> managed by a Roman Catholic congregation, opened its doors solely to orphans (Zahlen and Schoos, 2010: 52). The state mobilised municipalities to place children in the central hospice, whereas before, a placement in families had been highly encouraged to provide an orphan with a familial environment.

In 1890, the chief officer at the Department of Justice, Auguste Ulveling, published the booklet, "The protection of the child. Support for prisoners and freed people" (Protection de l'enfance. Patronage des Détenus et des Libérés). He also created the "Society for childhood's protection" (Société pour la protection de l'enfance) (1898) and promoted the first municipal day nursery (1898) (Escher Tageblatt, 1917: 1; d'Letzeburger Land, 1998: 2). Later, he became the President of the Commission for the Protection of Childhood (Commission pour la Protection de l'Enfance) created in 1912 by Prime Minister Paul Eyschen to suggest policy solutions for the care for disadvantaged children. In 1915, the Commission presented a draft law prescribing the Hospice du Rahm as the only public establishment to care for disadvantaged children, but it would last until the 1930s before the law was implemented (Wingerter 2022: 169). While preparing the draft law, the Commission had considered the national legal frameworks of mainly Luxembourg's surrounding countries to develop suitable propositions for the country. As all other hospices for disadvantaged children were provided by religious institutions, and the

capacities of the Hospice du Rahm were limited, the Commission suggested that a new state infrastructure for disadvantaged children would have to be built, unless the municipalities in the South would consider proposing intermunicipal solutions ([Commission pour La Protection de l'Enfance, 1915](#): 36). This proposition displayed the close collaboration of municipal authorities, religious groups, and secular organizations in southern Luxembourg.

From the late 19th Century onwards, a new historical actor appeared who soon played a central role in the Luxembourgian mixed economy of child welfare: the liberal bourgeoisie. In the rapid transformation from an agrarian to an industrial society following the discovery of iron in the late 19th Century, Luxembourgian steel companies, as Priem and Herman wrote “aimed to create a skilled, indefatigable, and loyal workforce, redesign the social fabric, and establish new lifestyles, while at the same time targeting the micro-level of the workers’ bodies and minds, the meso-level of the factory, and the macro-level of society” ([Priem and Herman, 2019](#): 16).

The daughter of a Belgian timber merchant and spouse of the most influential industrialist Émile Mayrisch, Aline Mayrisch-de Saint-Hubert, was a driving historical actor in this respect ([Dittrich, 2021](#); [Goetzinger, 2013](#)). The creation of open-air schools, summer camps, a day nursery for children of working mothers in collaboration with the Red Cross and other child welfare initiatives resulted from intensive exchanges of industrialists with philanthropists not only of surrounding countries, but also through emersion in foreign cultures and ideologies far away ([Dittrich, 2019](#); [Hadžalić, 2017](#)). The day nursery, for example, was created by the industrial sector in collaboration with the Red Cross, and was later conjointly administrated with the municipality of Esch-sur-Alzette.<sup>6</sup> Using their international networks and financial wealth, the industrialists could often surpass the objectives of other public and private child welfare initiatives in the country. After the Second World War, the *Kannerschlass* established itself as a new secular institution influenced by new international pedagogical ideas within this mixed economy of welfare.

## The internationalisation of child welfare in Luxembourg

Until the creation of the *Kannerschlass*, the provision of child protection in Luxembourg remained at an embryonic stage in comparison to international developments towards child well-being and protection, the visionary child welfare initiatives of Luxembourg’s industrialists notwithstanding ([Ulveling, 1921](#)). Following the first international congresses on childhood of the 1870s and 1880s, the early twentieth century welcomed the establishment of international organizations, such as the “International Union for the Protection of Infancy” (Union internationale pour la protection de la petite enfance) (UIPE) and the “International Association for the Protection of Childhood” (Association internationale pour la protection de l’enfance) (AIPE), founded in Brussels in 1907 and 1913 respectively, as well as the “International Union for Children’s Assistance” (Union internationale pour le secours aux enfants), established in Geneva in 1920 ([Droux, 2011](#)). The creation of these bodies, the appearance of published series on the theme, and the organization of joint events, such as the “International Congress for the Protection of

Children” (Congrès international pour la protection des enfants) in Paris in 1928, pointed at a dense web of international contacts in the field of child protection (Denéchère, 2019; Niget, 2019). In 1921, Paul Ulveling, president of the “Committee for the Protection of Morally Abandoned Children” (Comité de Protection des Enfants moralement abandonnés) in Luxembourg, called for the creation of a national chapter of the “Association for the Protection of Childhood” (Association internationale pour la protection de l’enfance) (AIPE) (Hoffmann, 1960).

This internationalisation continued after the Second World War, enhanced by the foundation of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1945, of which the preamble of its constitution reads: ‘Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be concentrated’ (UNESCO Courier, 1966). Its creation should also be viewed as part of the creation of other international structures, such as the United Nations (UN, 1945), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, 1949), the Council of Europe (1949) and the Western European Union (WEU, 1954), the European Coal and Steel Community (CECA, 1951), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1961) (Péporté, 2022; Trausch, 2003), which reshaped the world after the Second World War by orienting national policies towards pacifism and international understanding (Dittrich, 2021; Rohstock and Lenz, 2012; Venken, 2023: 86).

Luxembourg joined the International Federation of Educative Communities (FICE - Fédération Internationale des Communautés Educatives) in 1948, created under the patronage of UNESCO during a conference organised in the children’s village Pestalozzi for destitute children in Trogen, Switzerland, in 1948. The children’s village of Pestalozzi, where these pacifist and internationalist ideas were transformed into a small-scale educational reform programme for children since its foundation in 1945, was the thriving force behind the development of an international network of children’s villages across Western Europe (Hartmann, 2022, 221). On the conference, the directors of facilities for disadvantaged children across Western Europe discussed the needs of displaced children with psychologists, pedagogists and psychiatrists. One also for the first time used the label of ‘children’s republics’ to refer to the special villages created across Europe to host war orphans (Boussion et al., 2020b; Gardet, 2010). Erected out of a humanitarian belief in the necessity to educate children as ‘free citizens of the world’ without prejudices towards ‘looks, nationality, religion, race or any other distinguishing characteristic’ (Rotten, 1945: 127), these villages applied the methods promoted by “New Education” (éducation nouvelle), an international pedagogical movement that emerged in the late 19th century and aimed to reform educational practices by placing the child at the centre of attention (Gardet, 2010; Gutierrez, 2011). New Education, as conceived in the period we analyse, included, for instance, the importance of providing a child with the feeling of being in a family, even if it was deprived of relatives, fostering its individual initiative and expression, and orienting its mind towards a peaceful and democratic ‘intellectual and cultural internationalism’ (Hartmann, 2022, 217). FICE supported UNESCO in elaborating pedagogical methods and practices. FICE’s organisation of international camps for children represented an attempt at international cooperation in the educational field. Three camps were organised in Moulin-Vieux (France) in 1949, Sanem (Luxembourg) in 1950

and Jugenheim (Germany) in 1951 (UNESCO Courier, 1949). The children's camp organised in Sanem in 1950 represented the first occasion for an exchange on secular pedagogy approach that, as the authors will demonstrate in the two following sections, later inspired the *Kannerschlass*.

## The international camp: a “Europe in miniature”?

The decision of the FICE to hold the second international camp at the castle of Sanem in the south of Luxembourg was strategic as it presented an opportunity for the young international organisation to establish a national section in the country (AE (hereinafter Archives of the municipality of Esch-sur-Alzette), Dossier SOC-2-f-1-013 (a)). For its Luxembourgian interlocutors hosting the event was congruent with the country's ambition to be actively involved in a peaceful reconstruction of post-war Europe (Hirsch, 1999). Although the national section of the FICE only materialised in 1978 as “National Association of Educational Communities” (Association Nationale des Communautés Éducatives) (ANCE), its founding members had interacted with FICE during the preparation of the international camp.<sup>7</sup> The forerunner was the first director of the *Kannerschlass*, Fernand Oth, who proposed to the international branch of FICE to become an associate member (Schmit, 2007). The fact that the event was defined as “one of the most interesting educational experiments in the history of Luxembourgian pedagogy [...]” by Luxembourgian school teachers demonstrates the importance of the international influences for the development of child welfare in the country (AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-003, 1950).

The international camp represented a testing ground for the coordinators. To ensure its communal international spirit, the participants were to stay at the same premises, to be of comparable age and familiar with the spirit of the event through their prior participation in FICE's national branch organisations (Boussion et al., 2020c; Dercourt-Terris, 2014). During the camp, UNESCO organised study days at the municipality of Esch-sur-Alzette to discuss the psychological and physical development of the child, the re-education of disadvantaged children and the principles of communitarian education, which emphasised a child's self-fulfilment (Escher Tageblatt, 1950a: 4; 1950b: 2; 1950c: 3). The organisers aimed to gather children from different children's communities to build what they considered to be a peaceful Europe. The children were accompanied by international professionals in the education sector, which made it possible to discuss pedagogical issues and draw the attention of the public and the Luxembourgian authorities to the needs of disadvantaged children. The international understanding of child welfare demonstrated at the international camp consisted, first, of a promotion of the pedagogical movement of “New Education”, which had spread in the 1920s within reform-oriented institutions to foster gender-equal and experience-based education, communal life and mutual respect; second, the furtherance of a community feeling among children with different nationalities; and, third, the preparation of children to become active citizens (Boussion et al., 2020a; Brosse, 1950; Chi-Pao, 1949).

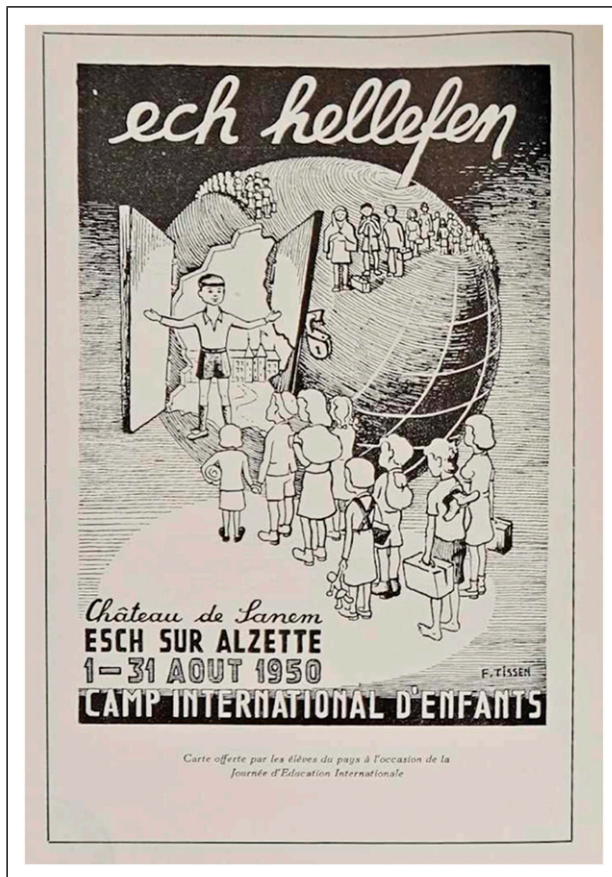
In a broadcast message, UNESCO Director-General Jaime Torres Bodet stressed the international characteristics of the camp. Defining it as “a Europe in miniature” (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 9), he specified how “around fifty boys and girls will live in a

joyful community; they will sing together in several languages; five young Luxembourgers will welcome friends from England, Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Holland, Italy and Switzerland” (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 22). The intention to create a peaceful integrated Europe was exemplified in the choice to invite children from Western Germany five years after the end of the Second World War. What remained largely unarticulated, however, was the absence of other guests. An archival document mentions a “regret” about the impossibility to meet representatives from Eastern and Scandinavian countries, the US and other non-European countries (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 21). Creating a peaceful Europe was understood as unifying the Western part of the continent. Authoritarian regimes and civil wars in Southern Europe, the Iron Curtain separating the Western and Eastern blocks and the middle way proclaimed by the Nordic countries shaped the specific meaning of a peaceful Europe.

Ultimately, the camp in Sanem hosted 24 boys and 18 girls, aged between 14 and 18, coming from 20 different children’s communities across Western Europe, such as the “Pestalozzi Village” (Villaggio Pestalozzi) in Trogen, Switzerland, the “Odenwald’s school” (Odenwaldschule)<sup>8</sup> in Heppenheim, Western Germany, and the “Children’s Republic” (République d’enfants) in Moulin-Vieux, France (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003). These communities were recognised as innovative pedagogical establishments for children in their respective countries and were integrated into FICE’s network to foster exchanges. Whereas the Pestalozzi village and the Children’s Republic hosted children in distress, the Odenwald’s school and the Children Community Workshop (Werkplaats Kindergemeenschap) in the Netherlands adopted new pedagogical approaches attracting children of different backgrounds.

Luxembourgian schoolchildren received promotional postcards about the camp to sell (Figure 1). At the top of the postcard is the symbolic message “Ech hellefen” (“I help”), with reference to a globe where Luxembourg is represented as unlocking its doors. The picture of a young boy in the foreground of the castle of Sanem and a group of children coming from all over the world seeking refuge complete the postcard. An archived report informed that the involvement of Luxembourgian schoolchildren represented a “decisive contribution from children to children”, brought in over a million of French francs and made “[...] possible for the victims of the war from all over the world to come together and live in a spirit of joy, progressive understanding and mutual esteem...” (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 8). The evoked global perspective was more an ideal than an actual implementation, as children participating in the camp came from a limited number of countries in Western Europe.

The educators arrived from France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Luxembourg, and brought with them a variety of educational backgrounds. They aimed at “opening up the minds and hearts without hate” of the young participants, without coercing them in learning processes that disregarded their personalities (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003). The pedagogical organisation of the camp was based on the self-organisation of the young participants, who, divided in committees elected by the Youth General Assembly, organised practical, educational and leisure activities. An educator was appointed to each committee as advisor. There were a technical committee to organise cleaning, the setting up of the dining hall, laundry and linen service; a singing and theatre committee; a

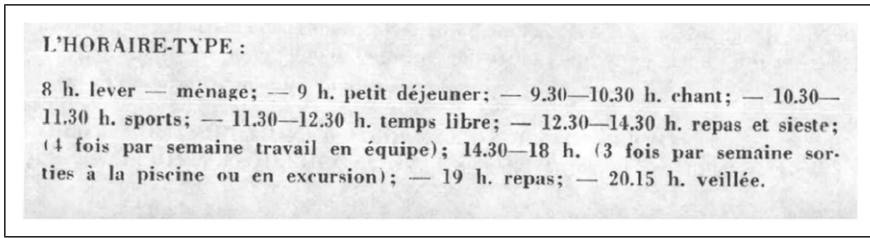


**Figure 1.** Image of the International camp for children. (Numéro spécial du bulletin des instituteurs réunis du Grand-Duché du Luxembourg, 1950, p. 2.

research committee for small inquiries on the camp and to study the history of Luxembourg; a reception committee; a sports committee and an evenings' committee for the activities after dinner. Archived self-composed messages written by the young participants of the camp point at the difficulties in communicating in multiple languages, but also show their happiness to have been able to share experiences with peers coming from various national contexts and the lack of gender-divisions during activities; both boys and girls cleaned the premises (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 38-43).

A day during the international camp followed a specific rhythm, as detailed out in [Figure 2](#): 8 a.m. Waking up and cleaning; 9 a.m. Breakfast; 9.30-10.30 h. Singing; 10.30-11.30 h.; Sports; 11.30-12.30 h. Free time; 12.30-14.30 h. Lunch and nap; 14.30-18 h. 3 times a week: swimming pool or excursions and 4 times a week teamwork; 19 h. Evening meal; 20.15 h. Evening activities. The fact that this structure later inspired the calendar of





**Figure 2.** Daily activities at the international summer camp (AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-003: 20).

activities of the *Kannerschlass* demonstrates the influence of international exchanges on its pedagogical practice. In addition to the formal education received by the children in public schools, the “Internal Regulation of the Children’s Home “*Kannerschlass*”” (Règlement d’ordre intérieur de la Maison d’Enfants « *Kannerschlass* » Sanem) indeed paid special attention to leisure activities, such as drawing, singing, dancing, theatre, educational walking, play, cinema, gardening, scouts, sport, reading and interior design. Manual work was also included. Whereas the activities for the boys included bricolage and carving, girls learned weaving and knitting (KA (hereinafter *Kannerschlass* Archives), 1973).

The self-organisation of the camp was the driving principle of the international experience. What the UNESCO Director-General Jaime Torres Bodet called a “Europe in miniature” (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 9) aimed at fostering solidarity and cooperation among the participants, creating a sense of international community based on principles of active participation, autonomy and dignity. René Grégorius, an educator, activist and trade unionist for educators in Luxembourg, suggested in a column in the “Journal of the schoolteachers of the General Federation of Luxembourgian schoolteachers” (Journal des Instituteurs of the Fédération Générale des Instituteurs Luxembourgeois (FGIL)) that these aspects were to be followed in the organisation of education in Luxembourg once the camp had ended. He praised the active participation of the children in the management and organisation of activities, the work of the educators and their ability to find common solutions drawing from different educational backgrounds (Grégorius, 1950: 5). In the following section the authors introduce the premises of the castle and analyse the influence of the international camp on the *Kannerschlass*’ pedagogical project.

## The *Kannerschlass*

The castle of Sanem (Figure 3) is situated in the south of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. From the 7th century it hosted noble families. In December 1949, thanks to a financial contribution of the Muller-Tesch foundation,<sup>9</sup> the city of Esch-sur-Alzette bought the estate from the Tornaco noble family to transform it into an orphanage (AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-013, 1949b, AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-013, 1949c, AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-013, 1951; KA, 1949; Krier et al., 1956). The property was seen as a suitable environment for the newly perceived needs of children, as it could give them the feeling of



**Figure 3.** The castle in Sanem (KA, date unknown), scanned in 2023, © Kannerschlass.

being in a familial environment and offer a sumptuous setting to compensate their hardship (KA, 2001).

The *Kannerschlass* project was invented by local historical actors who wanted to transpose the pedagogical understanding of a child shared in international organisations to a new secular public welfare institution in Luxembourg. It was launched after a sensibilisation campaign promoted by young educators in Esch-sur-Alzette, and further sustained by Michel Rasquin, president of the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (1945-1951), the prevailing political party in the South of the country aboding the iron and steel industry, member of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg and mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette (1949-51) (Luxemburger Wort, 1975). While in office, he trusted the project to adopt and develop new understandings and practices in childcare. Also local educators active in international organisations contributed to the internationalisation of child welfare practices in Luxembourg. Rasquin was supported by Fernand Oth, the secretary of the "Federation of United Schoolteachers of Luxembourg" (Fédération des Instituteurs réunis de Luxembourg), and Edouard Barbel, a schoolteacher, municipal councillor in Esch-sur-Alzette and FICE's Treasurer from 1951 to 1965 (ANCE, 1999; Conter, 2021). The *Kannerschlass* project was established thanks to interactions among Luxembourgian caregivers and politicians who wanted to realise an international understanding of child welfare in a local setting. The international practices of local historical actors and the advocacy of educators and politicians to implement new understandings of children social provisions converged in the pedagogical establishment of the *Kannerschlass*. From the point of view of the Luxembourgian organisers, the UNESCO study days and the international camp organised in 1950 created an opportunity to exchange educational ideals of peace, social justice, education and solidarity before the foundation of the *Kannerschlass* as an institution (Kemp, 2006). Already during the study days, the Luxembourgian educators commented on the affinity between their vision to establish a

permanent institution for destitute children, and the international camp's pedagogical principles, such as the importance of the infrastructural environment surrounding a child's development and approaching minors as autonomous human beings. They also envisioned the event to have a long-term impact on the *Kannerschlass*:

"The 'children community' of Sanem has left its mark on the castle [...] Soon other children will move into the castle. [...] [T]hey also come from a hard school of life: orphans, half-orphans, children from unfavourable conditions, children from slums. We want to create a home where, as in a family, the basic needs of the child are satisfied: the need of intimate and safe love, the need for self-respect, the need for a meaningful role in a group of people. Modern educational science rejects education in large living communities. It demands pavilion buildings instead of large building complexes and calls for family education instead of institutional education [...] How do we achieve this educational goal in Sanem? We divide our children [...] into groups, living communities, families of 8 to 10 children of different ages with self-management and self-education under the discreet guidance of competent educators" (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 13).

These considerations reinforce the understanding of the *Kannerschlass* as a pioneering educational experience in Luxembourg, where pedagogical ideas and practices circulating internationally met and mingled with locally driven initiatives to experiment and create new methods in education. These methods were locally situated yet internationally inspired and represented innovative perspectives in the Luxembourgian mixed economy of child welfare.

Archival sources echo the importance of the camp. Its international value was stressed during the first meeting of the newly constituted "Commission for the Organisation of Sanem's Children's Home" (Commission pour l'organisation de la Maison d'Enfants de Sanem) on 10 November 1950, when Antoine Krier, deputy and future mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette articulated "[...] the internationally recognized value of the pedagogical experience of the children's camp organized in August in the castle of Sanem" (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003: 1).

The pedagogical project of the *Kannerschlass* was further influenced by international expertise in its early phases. The "City of Childhood" (Cité de l'enfance) in Marcinelle, a project realised by the "Intercommunal Service Projects for the region of Charleroi" (Intercommunale des Œuvres Sociales pour la région de Charleroi (IOS)) belonged to the FICE network of innovative educational institutions, thanks to which the *Kannerschlass* received access to its expertise. This association was created in 1937 to build social infrastructures in a region characterised by a high mortality rate among children and a high number of orphans because of the accidents occurring in mines and factories (Joosten, 2020). The IOS' "City of Childhood" created surrogate family units for orphans. "Moved by the desire to profit of shining examples [...]" (AE, Dossier SOC-2-F-1-003:1), the Commission for the Organisation of Sanem's Children's Home decided to visit the "City of Childhood" in 1950. In a letter from 14 July 1952, a few months after the arrival of the first children in Sanem in late 1951, René de Cooman – FICE's president (1950-1970), deputy of the Belgian Socialist Party and a promoter of transformations in social welfare institutions in Charleroi – sent a letter to Antoine Krier, the mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette, to congratulate the city's efforts to create an avant-garde pedagogical establishment for

children which, “thanks to the admirable work done, would soon become an example for other pedagogical establishments across Europe” (AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-012, 1952a). In a retrospective celebrating the 20th anniversary of the *Kannerschlass*, Bruno Mousel, director of the Kannerschlass Foundation (1967-1988), stated that the International Children’s Camp had influenced the organisation of the *Kannerschlass*, and that this latter was a “model for other existing social institutions” in the country (KA, 1953, 1984).<sup>10</sup>

Three elements of international pedagogical ideas in the early post-war years were included in the pedagogical project of the *Kannerschlass*. First, the label “orphanage” was rejected and replaced by the name *Kannerschlass* on the first meeting of the newly constituted Commission (AE, Dossier SOC-2 f 1 013 (d)). Moreover, in a letter to Antoine Krier, the mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette, Thill Lucien, an inspector of early education, wished that *Kannerschlass* would become a recognized label in and beyond Luxembourg (AE, Dossier SOC-2-f-1-012, 1952b). Second, the promoters of the initiative wanted to mitigate the stigma of stray disadvantaged children and decided to educate them in public schools without them having to wear uniforms. Third, the *Kannerschlass* project also promoted a child’s development into an independent and socially integrated adult, and an individually tailored education to encourage and cultivate individual personalities. To that purpose, special attention was paid to leisure activities (KA, 1973: 10).

## Conclusion

The article presents an international history of welfare ideas and practices by retracing the creation of the *Kannerschlass*, an innovative pedagogical establishment for children in distress based in Sanem, a village in the South of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. After the Second World War, the *Kannerschlass* established itself as the first secular institution within the mixed economy of welfare in Luxembourg. Previously, a mixed economy of child welfare had developed in the country on the initiative of the state, municipalities and religious congregations. Within that mixed economy, the roles and responsibilities between the state and private entities were frequently intertwined and indistinct. Following the industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, Luxembourgian steel company owners envisioned to transform societal norms and lifestyles through welfare initiatives. From the late 19th Century until the Second World War, these philanthropists interacted with people from different countries and included diverse cultural elements in their innovative forms of private child welfare, such as open-air schools. This article demonstrates how after the Second World War, not private philanthropists, but local child caregivers and politicians took the lead to establish a secular institution for disadvantaged children by means of multiscale interactions with representatives of international organisations and child welfare establishments abroad. Approaching Luxembourg as an intermediary space where different cultural elements can be encountered and different levels of decision-making interact, guided the inquiry of the authors towards the detection of the relative importance of and interaction between the different scales of decision-making relevant for the *Kannerschlass* project: the local, national and international.

The first occasion to exchange on and experiment with pedagogical projects occurred during the “International Children’s Camp” organised in summer 1950. The camp

gathered pedagogues and children from different countries affected by the Second World War and provided a space for children's self-development and solidarity. In doing so, it raised the attention of the Luxembourgian authorities and public for the needs of children in distress. This, on its turn, promoted a long-term influence of the international pedagogical ideas of 'New Education', a movement emerged in the late 19th century with the goal to reform educational practices by placing the child at the centre.

The *Kannerschlass* project was established in the aftermath of the international camp on the same premises. A public, secular institution for disadvantaged children from the South of Luxembourg under municipal sponsorship, it consolidated new pedagogical practices with regards to child welfare in Luxembourg. The Children's Castle embodied the importance of a spacious infrastructural environment for the development of the disadvantaged child. To counter the social stigma faced by parentless children, the term orphanage was avoided, the children attended public schools and were approached as autonomous future citizens of the world.

All in all, the *Kannerschlass* brought a new dynamic to the mixed economy of child welfare in Luxembourg in the aftermath of the Second World War. This establishment was a local child welfare initiative that could be established and represented as an innovative and distinctive project in public, secular and municipality-sponsored child welfare in Luxembourg thanks to international exchange. The *Kannerschlass* project was initiated by local educators and politicians and was inspired by visionary experiences with social welfare provisions for children across Western Europe, as in Charleroi (Belgium), as well as international developments in the conception of childhood and rights of the child promoted by the international organisations UNESCO and FICE. On its turn, this locally driven initiative served the national purpose to re-situate Luxembourg as an active agent in internationalist networking activities driving post-war Western Europe.

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## Notes

1. Examples of social welfare initiatives organized by private industrial historical actors concern health and accident insurance, disability and old-age pensions, annual leave, cost of living allowances, dormitories, canteens, casinos, maternity wards, cleaning assistance for mothers, creation of schools and pools, sanatoria and preventoria for children (Ed, 2005; Hadžalić, 2017; Schmitz, 2011) For an extensive study on ARBED's national, European and global philanthrocapitalism, see Priem and Herman (2019); for the role of trade-union mobilizations in triggering social reforms, such as the creation of collective labor agreements and the indexation of wages, see Scuto (2011). See Fehlen (1999) for a discussion on the decreasing role of Catholic religious congregations in Luxembourg as a result of social changes in the 1950s. Fayot (1999) shows that the Socialist Workers' Party (Parti Ouvrier Socialiste (POSL) was the prevailing party in the South of the country aboding the iron and steel industry. See also Scuto (2011) for an historical overview of the social developments enabled by the mobilization of workers' trade unions in Luxembourg in the 19th and 20th centuries.
2. For a historical overview of the legislative and political changes, as well as the associative and practical measures undertaken in Luxembourg for children from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until shortly after the Second World War, see Putz-Kinn (1949). This publication also discloses the language used (as for instance "retarded child", "complete idiocy", "cripple", "mongoloid" (pp. 86-87, 99)) and the perceptions of the spread of a "retarded youth" (p.101) in the aftermath of the Second World War. For a historical overview of the developments of social policies in the 18th and 29th centuries, see Etienne (1939).
3. See Putz-Kinn Armande, (1949), p. 87; and Beck and Henri (1996), *Le Rahm, asile de jeunes, in ons stad*, n. 53, 1996, pp. 6-9.
4. Service central de legislation, (1876), *Rundschreiben, die Unterbringung von Kindern im Centralhospiz betreffend. Circulaire concernant le placement des enfants dans l'hospice central*. See also Maisons d'Enfants de l'État (1994).
5. See Kolber et al. (2007), *Histoire des institutions et des professions. Rahmhospiz 1930-1940*, seminar work for Prof. Ulla Peters's class, M4, for a historical perspective on the Hospice du Rahm in 1930-1940.
6. See Barthel (2014) for a history of the Red Cross in Luxembourg.
7. The National Association of Educational Communities (ANCE) became the National Association of Educational and Social Communities (Association Nationale des Communautés Éducatives et Sociales) (ANCES) in 2011. ANCES contributes to the government planning of health, childcare and educational matters. For an historical overview of the foundation of the national section of ANCE in Luxembourg, see Schmit (2007).
8. Teachers of the Odenwaldschule were accused of sexual abuses on pupils in 2010 (Bartsch and Verbeet 2010). Rus et al. (2017) offer a global research perspective on sexual mistreatments in boarding schools and residential facilities.

9. The family Muller-Tesch, in particular Muller-Tesch Hubert, Muller René and Muller Edmond, were founding shareholders of ARBED, the biggest Luxembourg-based but cross-border steel and iron-producing united steelworks created in 1911 (Aciéries Réunies de Burbach-Eich-Dudelange: United Steelworks of Burbach-Eich-Dudelange) (Industrie.lu).
10. The *Kannerschlass* became a foundation in 1992, subsidized by the Luxembourgian state.

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