

CATALONIA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Preface: Catalonia and the League of Nations

Manuel Manonelles i Tarragó



Illustrator: [Jesús Galdón](#)

The historical, political, social and international context that marked the creation of the League of Nations in 1919-1920, after the end of the First World War, and the international treaties that ensued, coincided with a particularly intense period in the history of Catalonia. Catalonia, like so many other parts of the world, was in a state of effervescence, in part due to the new global context that was just taking its first steps, but also because of domestic dynamics, both within Catalonia and linked to the (always complex) relationship between Barcelona and Madrid. A significant proportion of Catalan society had enthusiastically followed the course of the Great War and Catalan intellectuals viewed the League of Nations project with interest and curiosity, as it shared common ground in many aspects with the postulates of modernity and civility of Catalan Noucentisme.

Furthermore, the failure of the proposed Statute of Autonomy in 1919, attributable to Spanish intransigence and the country's complex social situation, induced a number of leading Catalan politicians and intellectuals to think that perhaps the League of Nations could provide a framework for channelling Catalan aspirations for self-government and freedom. Events would eventually show that these hopes were unfounded, but the attempts made to take the Catalan question, first to the Peace Conference in Paris (1919) and later to Geneva at the debates of the League of Nations —through direct and indirect channels—

deserve *to be known* and, for this reason, they take up a large proportion of the articles included in this dossier.

And in the midst of all this, almost like a gift fallen from heaven, it so happened that the first intergovernmental conference organised by the League of Nations was held in Barcelona. This was the International Conference on Communications and Transit, held in March and April 1921, with the Palau de la Generalitat and the Saló de Cent as joint venues. This unprecedented event was seen as an opportunity by Josep Puig i Cadafalch, at that time President of the Mancomunitat and pioneer in the development of a foreign action policy implemented by government institutions in contemporary Catalonia. A decade later, as is also related in the dossier, this policy would no longer be pursued with the same interest by the Republican Generalitat.

Precisely to commemorate the centenary of the Barcelona Conference (1921-2021), it was decided to organise a cycle of lectures whose content has been distilled into this monographic dossier, edited jointly with Dr. [Lucila Mallart](#). With the dossier, our goal is to shed light on a specific period in our history. But we also wished to foster Catalonia's international projection in a context, that of the 1920s, that shows intriguing —and in some cases, very poignant— parallelisms with the present.

Catalonia's relationship with the League of Nations was obviously broader and more complex, especially if we consider the latter institution's inaction with respect to the Spanish Civil War and the consequences this had for Catalonia. For the reasons we have given above, we have decided to focus this dossier's framework of analysis on the League of Nations' first decade of existence —in fact, its most successful decade— during which it was followed with interest by a substantial part of Catalan society and its intelligentsia. Among these, we have highlighted three: Francesc Maspons i Anglasell, Lluís Nicolau d'Olwer and Amadeu Hurtado, each of whom has an article devoted to them in the dossier. However, we could also mention many more who are also featured in the articles included in the dossier, starting with Eugeni Xammar, and following with Joan Estelrich, Puig i Cadafalch (whom we have already mentioned), Josep Maria Batista i Roca and so many others. Thus, this dossier provides solid evidence of the League of Nations' impact among Catalan intellectuals in the 1920s and the aspirations of a significant part of Catalan society to build an international presence.

**Manuel Manonelles i Tarragó**

Manuel Manonelles i Tarragó is the former director of the Center for Contemporary Studies (CETC). Since 2013, he works as an Associate Professor of International Relations at Blanquerna - Ramon Llull University, and has collaborated with the Human Right Centre at the University of Padova (Italy). He had previously been an advisor to the Presidency of the Catalan Government, Representative of the Government of Catalonia to Switzerland and to International Organizations and General Director of Multilateral and European Affairs. He has a degree in Political Sciences from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and holds a European Master's on Human Rights and Democratisation from the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation. He has senior level experience within the diplomatic and public sector. For two years, he was Special Advisor to the United Nations High Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations and has participated in several summits, forums and processes within the United Nations and other international organizations such as the Council of Europe. He has also been head of the *Cultura de Pau* Foundation and the UBUNTU Foundation, and has been an OSCE International Electoral Observer and Supervisor.