Unfairness at the funfair: the French Syndicate for Travelling Showpeople in the long nineteenth century

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Unfairness at the funfair: the French syndicate for travelling showpeople in the long nineteenth century

Eva Andersen

Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium

eva.andersen@uantwerpen.be

Author bio

Eva Andersen is a postdoctoral researcher on the EU-funded project 'Science at the Fair: Performing Knowledge and Technology in Western Europe, 1850-1914' (www.scifair.eu). Her current research focuses on the social and professional networks of itinerant showpeople and explores the various social and practical aspects of their profession. She obtained her PhD in history at the Center for Contemporary and Digital History at the University of Luxembourg. Her areas of expertise and research interests are the history of knowledge, history of science and digital history.

Abstract

The article explores the historical significance and agency of itinerant showpeople, a marginalized and frequently overlooked community, in the late 19th century. Focusing on the French Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Voyageurs Forains (CSPVF) and its journal Le Voyageur Forain, this study sheds light on the struggle of showpeople to safeguard their economic interests, counter societal prejudices, and gain respectability in society. The CSPVF, Europe's first employers' association of this kind, played a pivotal role in supporting itinerant entrepreneurs. By analyzing the CSPVF's organizational structure, professional networks, and efforts at integration, the article underscores the socio-economic dynamics of the era and between individuals positioned at the perceived centre and periphery of society. Drawing on union periodicals, the study examines the CSPVF's objectives and internal dynamics, the initiatives aimed at professionalizing the itinerant showpeople's trade and its influence on economic policies. Additionally, the research explores the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion encountered by showpeople within and outside their community and their

strategies to combat stigmatization while seeking respectability. By addressing these themes, the article contributes to a broader understanding of labor history, syndicalism, and the interplay of social identity and economic pressures in the itinerant entertainment industry during the late nineteenth century.

Keywords: itinerant showpeople, funfair, stigmatisation, employers association, respectability

Introduction

In 1882 the *Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Voyageurs Forains* (CSPVF) was founded in Paris with a resolute mission:

"We have come to try to defend the interests and expose the hopes of a class of workers who, until now, have been ignored. The people who come to enjoy themselves at the fairs should only see us as industrialists who, although nomadic, pay a licence and, in short, are as useful to society as the sedentary traders [...]. […] [T]hanks to the benefits of the association, prejudices will disappear and the public will understand more easily that it has before it workers who live arduously but honestly from their industry and who, although on the public road, are entitled to its respect".[1]

As itinerant showpeople (*forains*) in the nineteenth century grappled with rising challenges over their identity and right to exist, their presence in society has, however, a long history. Fairs, closely entwined with religious holidays, date back to the middle ages and functioned as a trade market to exchange goods and livestock, also attracting street entertainers. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, fairs were gradually accompanied, and eventually replaced, by various forms of entertainment such as itinerant theaters, museums and carrousels. Funfairs became an integral aspect of people's lives.[2] Yet, by the middle and late nineteenth century the entertainment sector was changing. Sedentary venues (e.g. theatres, museums, cabarets, …) grew in number and importance, catering to the expanding middle and working class as well.[3] Some forains transitioned to permanent buildings for their shows, while others continued travelling around, or combined shows at the funfair with performances in permanent venues.[4] Itinerant showpeople not only had to contend with each other but also with sedentary entertainment which regularly resulted in economic

[1] Le Voyageur Forain (VF), 1883, no.1.
[2] Musée de la vie wallonne, *Foires et forains en Wallonie: magie foraine d'autrefois.* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga, 1989), 11–39; Vanessa Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity: Community, Women and Language in Showland Society, from 1890 to the Present Day*, 1997, Chapter 3; Nic Ulmi, 'La Culture Du Champ de Foire', 1995, 18–26.
[3] Sofie Lachapelle, *Conjuring Science: A History of Scientific Entertainment and Stage Magic in Modern France*, 2015, 3–12; Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, Chapter 3.
[4] Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants, 'Magie En Wetenschap in de -spektakelcultuur van de Negentiende Eeuw: Henri Robin in de Lage Landen', *Tijdschrift Voor Mediageschiedenis* 20, no. 2 (2017): 37–38.

conflict. The renowned Ménagerie Pezon, for example, was in 1895 not allowed at a funfair in France because he was a competitor to the local theatre.[5] Additionally, the nineteenth century witnessed growing distrust towards funfairs as places of immoral behavior, and efforts to ban it across Europe.[6]

Moreover, nation-states tightened control over their territory and citizens, leading to more regulated travel within and across borders.[7] In 1893 for example, in the long aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war, madame Eulalie Bracco travelled with her museum to Mullhouse in the Alsace-Lorraine region in Germany. After authorities discovered she was a Française, she was denied a spot on the fair and her necessary travel papers were declared invalid, after which she sought refuge in Switzerland.[8] In addition, migration became more regulated and scrutinized, and nomadic populations, including *forains*, were viewed with suspicion by the state and the general public. They were considered an elusive group on a socio-economic and political level and were perceived as a thread.[9] It is within this climate that showpeople began to establish syndicates to counter the various issues they experienced.

This article explores the French syndicate with three goals in mind. A first objective is to contribute to the general history of travelling showpeople. While scholars have shown increasing interest in the history of funfairs[10], a thorough exploration of itinerant showpeople has remained absent.[11] This stands in sharp contrast with the substantial growth of research

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[5] VF, 1895, no.290.

[6] Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, Chapter 4; G. H Jansen, *Een roes van vrijheid: kermis in Nederland* (Meppel: Boom, 1987), 66–68; Musée de la vie wallonne, *Foires et forains en Wallonie*, 28–29.

[7] VF, 1893, no.187; VF, 1893, no.191; VF, 1893, no.234; Matthieu de Oliveira, 'Négoce et territoire: les passeports nordistes au XIXe siècle (1791-1869)', *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine* 48–2, no. 2–3 (2001): 104–5.

[8] VF, 1893, no.187; VF, 1893, no.191.

[9] Claire Zalc, 'Contrôler et Surveiller Le Commerce Migrant, Nomades, Forains et Ambulants à Paris (1912-1940)', in *Police et Migrants: France 1667-1939*, ed. Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard et al., Histoire (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 365–88; Wim Willens and Leo Lucassen, 'Roma', in: Matthew J. Gibney and Randall Hansen, eds., *Immigration and Asylum: From 1900 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 526–27; Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar, 'Introduction', in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, by Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1998), 11–12.

[10] See, e.g.: "Science at the Fair", www.scifair.eu; Nele Wynants, 'Wetenschap Op de Kermis. De Verspreiding van Technologie, Kennis En Spektakel in Belgische Provinciesteden Tijdens Het Fin-de-Siècle', *Volkskunde*, no. 1 (2020): 1–33; Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*; Most research on funfairs comes from outside academia, see e.g.: Musée de la vie wallonne, *Foires et forains en Wallonie*.

[11] Literature on itinerant showpeople comes mainly from outside academia, e.g.: Jacques Garnier, *Forains d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, un siècle d'histoire des forains, des fêtes et de la vie foraine.* (Orléans, 1968); Max Rosseau, *De boeiende geschiedenis van enkele kermisnijveraars en de Gentse foor* (Gent: Drukkerij Sanderus, 1960); The only exception is Toulmin's work: Vanessa Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*; see also Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, 'Introduction', 1 on the lack of research.

on the history of nomadic minorities such as Gypsies and Travellers.[12] In addition, forains have been mainly viewed through the eyes of third parties such as law enforcement, civil servants, journalists and the general public.[13] Police reports, administrative documents or newspapers only allow a circumstantial and often negative view on their identity and working circumstances. However, examining periodicals produced by organizations such as the CSPVF offer a more nuanced understanding of their social and professional lives.[14] The CSPVF' journal *Le Voyageur Forain* (1883-1940s), later called *L'Industiel Forain*, gives us unique and valuable insight into their own voices and ideas, especially their needs and grievances.

Secondly, I want to build on the existing scholarship about unionisation and syndicalisation mechanisms by examining the entertainment sector and, in particular, broaden our view on the role of employers' organisations in the nineteenth century. Labour history has traditionally concentrated on sedentary professions, the working class, and to a limited extend, larger patronal associations.[15] This has created very specific definitions of what labour, trade and employers' unions are and do. Yet, these terms are sometimes rather

[12] Becky Taylor and Jim Hinks, 'What Field? Where? Bringing Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History into View', *Cultural and Social History* 18, no. 5 (2021): 629–50; Leo Lucassen and Wim Willems, 'The Weakness of Well-Ordered Societies: Gypsies in Western Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and India, 1400-1914', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 26, no. 3 (2003): 283–313; Leo Lucassen, Wim Willems, and Annemarie Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Serge Jaumain, 'Un Metier Oublie: Le Colporteur Dans La Belgique Du XIXe Siècle', *BTNG|RBHC* XVI, no. 3–4 (1985): 307–56.

[13] Zalc, 'Contrôler et Surveiller Le Commerce Migrant, Nomades, Forains et Ambulants à Paris (1912-1940)'; Leo Lucassen, 'Eternal Vagrants? State Formation, Migration and Travelling Groups in Western Europe 1350-1914', in *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*; Leo Lucassen, '"Harmful Tramps". Police Professionalization and Gypsies in Germany, 1700-1945', *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés/Crime, History & Societies* 1, no. 1 (1997): 29–50; Annemarie Cottaar and Wim Willems, 'Justice or Injustice? A Survey of Government Policy towards Gypsies and Caravan Dwellers in Western Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', *Immigrants & Minorities* 11, no. 1 (1992): 42–66.

[14] Mark Neuendorf, 'Keeping the Light Shining: The National Asylum Workers' Union Magazine and the Print Culture of British Trade Unionism, ca. 1912–14', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 54, no. 1 (2021): 114–15; On the lacune of trade journals as source material see e.g.: Tony Grace, 'The Trade-Union Press in Britain', *Media, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2 (1985): 233; Arthur Marsh and J. G. Gillies, 'Trade Union Journals Revisited', *Industrial Relations Journal* 14, no. 2 (1983): 52–53.

[15] Danièle Fraboulet, *Quand les patrons s'organisent: Stratégies et pratiques de l'Union des industries métallurgiques et minières 1901-1950*, Histoire et civilisations (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2020), 17; Marie-Geneviève Dezès et al., 'Patronat et Syndicats à La Fin Du Xixe Siècle En Allemagne, En France et En Grande-Bretagne', in *L'invention Des Syndicalismes: Le Syndicalisme En Europe Occidentale à La Fin Du XIXe Siècle*, ed. Friedhelm Boll, Antoine Prost, and Jean-Louis Robert (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1997), 255–68; J. A. McKenna and Richard G. Rodger, 'Control by Coercion: Employers' Associations and the Establishment of Industrial Order in the Building Industry of England and Wales, 1860-1914', *The Business History Review* 59, no. 2 (1985): 203–31; John Benson, *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working-Class Entrepreneurs*, 1983, 2–3; Eric L. Wigham, *The Power to Manage: A History of the Engineering Employers' Federation* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 311.

diffuse and interchangeably used.[16] For example, the *Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Voyageurs Forains* changed its name to *Union Syndicale des Industrielle Forains* while retaining the same goals and functions. I argue that the lines between various types of organisations, their structure and objectives could be more diffuse then they are often perceived. In particular in the case of the non-sedentary entrepreneur who, depending on their means, stood in between the working-class, middle-class or big industrial patron.[17] To understand the distinctive and atypical character of the CSPVF as an employer's association, I explore several questions: why was it created? How stood this in relation to larger socio-economic developments? Did it follow a similar trajectory as that of other patronal unions? And did the existence of the CSPVF have an influence on (local) governmental policies or public opinion?

Lastly, I'm concerned with the concept of respectability vis-à-vis sedentary society and itinerant populations. During the nineteenth century society was permeated with this ideal, and shaped by discourses of othering and inclusion/exclusion mechanisms. This focus on respectability made the general public exclude forains and other types of travellers as a part of society.[18] Contemporaries, for example, found that they did not participate in the typical structure of sedentary life and that they had no or very low moral standards. Morals and professional competence formed one of the pillars of respectability. Some scholars have claimed that showpeople, as opposed to Gypsies, escaped stigmatisation by the general

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[16] A. Martinelli, 'Employers' Associations', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes, 1st ed (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001), 4485; W. Streeck, 'Labor Unions', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 8214; 'Syndicalist Movement. Worldwide 1890s-1920s', Neil Schlager, ed., *Saint James Encyclopedia of Labor History Worldwide: Major Events in Labor History and Their Impact.*, vol. 1 (Detroit: St. James Press, 2004), 283–84; Jacob H. (Jacob Harry) Hollander, *Studies in American Trade Unionism* (New York, H. Holt and Co., 1912), 185–217.

[17] The entertainment industry or itinerant showpeople are not mentioned in refence works such as Schlager, *St. James Encyclopedia of Labor History Worldwide*. Recently some sedentary entertainment industry associations have been investigated: Martin Cloonan, 'Negotiating Needletime: The Musicians' Union, the BBC and the Record Companies, c. 1920–1990', *Social History* 41, no. 4 (2016): 353–74; Martin Cloonan and Matt Brennan, 'Alien Invasions: The British Musicians' Union and Foreign Musicians', *Popular Music* 32, no. 2 (2013): 277–95; Angèle David-Guillou, 'Early Musicians' Unions in Britain, France, and the United States: On the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Transnational Militant Transfers in an International Industry', *Labour History Review* 74, no. 3 (2009): 288–304; Marie-Ange Rauch, 'L'Union des Artistes: du groupement associatif à la création d'un syndicat des artistes interprètes', in *Syndicats et associations: Concurrence ou complémentarité?*, ed. Danielle Tartakowsky and Françoise Tétard, Histoire (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 55–65; Christophe Charle, 'Des artistes en bourgeoisie. Acteurs et actrices en Europe occidentale au xixe siècle', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle. Société d'histoire de la révolution de 1848 et des révolutions du XIXe siècle*, no. 34 (1 June 2007): 71–104; Benson, *The Penny Capitalists*, 65–68.

[18] Woodruff D. Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map and Public Discourse in the Nineteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2017), 1–2 and 106.

public because they succeeded to distinguish themselves from other travellers.[19] However, I argue this was not as straightforward. Stigmatisation on a social level (in relation to gypsies) and economic level (in relation to sedentary entertainment) formed the catalysator for the CSPVF's creation, and would, moreover, stay a continuous struggle. By exploring how forains, and in particular within the CSPVF, dealt with stigmatisation and implemented the idea of respectability, we enhance our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics between sedentary and itinerant people.

In the following pages I will sketch how the CSPVF came into existence, and how it operated during the late nineteenth century. Thereafter, I delve deeper into the relationship between showpeople and society from a social and economic point of view.

The CSPVF and the dawn of itinerant showpeople associations

During the nineteenth century a wide range of occupations professionalized and specialized, creating in its wake various associations, unions and syndicates.[20] In France in particular there was a sharp increase of trade unions during the 1880s and 1890s.[21] While French laws regarding unionisation and syndicalisation were strict and they would only be fully legalized in 1884 with the law *Waldeck-Rousseau*, it did not prevent people from forming associations.[22] Non-sedentary professions had long been without any type of formal representation, but riding on this wave of unionization and professionalization, this changed in 1882 with the foundation of the French *Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Voyageurs Forains*.[23]

[19] Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, 60, 88, 128–29, 171–73, 175.
[20] E.g: surgeons, pharmacists, engineers, factory-workers, the police, cigarmakers, printers, and musicians. See: Thomas Brante, 'The Professional Landscape: The Historical Development of Professions in Sweden', *Professions and Professionalism* 3, no. 2 (2013); Maria Malatesta, *Professional Men, Professional Women: The European Professions from the 19th Century until Today* (SAGE, 2010); David-Guillou, 'Early Musicians' Unions in Britain, France, and the United States', 295–96.
[21] Keith Mann, *Forging Political Identity: Silk and Metal Workers in Lyon, France 1900-1939*, 1 (Berghahn Books, 2010), 34–35.
[22] Schlager, *St. James Encyclopedia of Labor History Worldwide*, 1:ix–x; Pierre Karila-Cohen and Blaise Wilfert-Portal, *Leçon d'histoire Sur Le Syndicalisme En France* (Paris, 1998), 14–15 and 43–44; Michel Dreyfus et al., 'Les bases multiples du syndicalisme au xixe siècle en Allemagne, France et Grande-Bretagne', in *L'invention des syndicalismes*, 269–84.
[23] VF, 1895, no.283; Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, 'Introduction', 2.

The CSPVF had four goals: shaping a positive identity, remedying various professional issues, community bonding and facilitating access to professional information. As French showpeople experienced a sense of invisibility and neglect within society, repeatedly encountering various biases that characterized them as crooked, untrustworthy, unhygienic, and immoral, a syndicate provided the means to shape their identity and create a positive image of their community. In doing so, they sought society's recognition and respect and distanced themselves from other travelling groups, a practice that is also observed in other showpeople associations.[24] Furthermore, their livelihood was affected by various practical, monetary and bureaucratic obstacles, and mistreatment from railway and insurance companies, pitch allocators and municipalities. One of the CSPVF's central missions was safeguarding their economic and industrial interests through several strategies. A more comprehensive examination of these initial two objectives will be provided in subsequent sections.

Lastly, accessing useful information could pose significant challenges for showpeople as they were constantly on the move across Europe and beyond. The CSPVF aimed to enhance community cohesion, provide job-related content and exchange knowledge through regular meetings in Paris and the provinces, and distributing a trade journal, which was launched in June 1883.[25] The journal served as a valuable resource for practical information, such as details on upcoming fairs; contact details, rules and costs to secure a pitch; summaries of fairs to evaluate which cities and villages could be beneficial to travel to; job opportunities; supplier announcements; advertisements for the sale of trades and equipment; and miscellaneous advice.[26] While the syndicate had no intention to dictate business operations, it did promote best practices, such as publishing recipes to make fabric water-repellent, or raising awareness about the importance of fire and calamities insurance.[27] Furthermore, the journal served as an information platform for sharing the syndicate's meeting minutes, recent decisions, and ongoing challenges. It also facilitated social and personal interactions by announcing births, deaths and marriages in their community, as well as (inquiring for) updates on the whereabouts of acquaintances, friends,

[24] Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, 128–29; Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, chapter 3 and 4.
[25] VF, 1883, no.1, VF, 1883, no.3.
[26] VF, 1881, no.1.
[27] VF 1883, no.2.

and family. In 1890, for example, an urgent message from a certain Buiron[28] was published: "A good old woman of 85 is at death's door. She is calling for her son and wants to see him before she dies. This son is Mr Rémi Mars, director of a menagerie. I appeal to your kindness and ask you, if possible, to let Mr Mars, of whom there has been no news for two months, know about his mother's condition".[29]

The VF became an indispensable medium. For showpeople it was a beneficial way to keep track of what was happening in their business and to gain a sense of community. For the CSPVF it served as a means to convey their ideas to a wider audience that also included the (local) government, police and press. In the 1890s, the VF's editor Emile Pianet, co-owner of a menagerie and animal trainer, considered the press to be "[…] the most powerful weapon for defending collective interests".[30] The journals' evolution from a monthly publication to a weekly one, sometimes with additional supplements, and a larger page-count, underscores its vital role.

While the CSPVF was the first of its kind, it was soon joined by a growing number of similar organizations in both France and Europe. Germany had since 1883 a trade journal, *Der Komet,* which functioned as an crucial mouthpiece and source of information, and still exists today. A few years later, in 1885, the *Verein reisender Schausteller und Berufsgenossen*, located in Hamburg, sprouted from the in 1882 created "Klim-Bim" association.[31] Different city-based sister divisions would follow over the upcoming years.[32] In Nürnberg the *Süddeutsche Verein reisender Schausteller und Handelsleute* was erected in 1888, which was another important association in the German regions.[33] These were followed by the *United Kingdom showmen and van dwellers protection association* in 1889 – now the Showmen's Guild.[34] More associations followed in the 1890s, such as the Italian *Società internazionale fra propietari di spettacoli viaggianti* (°1890); the Dutch association *Ons Belang* (°1899); the

[28] Possibly the owner of wax museum Buiron. He was not a member but had a subscription.
[29] VF 1890, no.11.
[30] VF, 1894, no.260.
[31] 'Die Anfänge: 1882-1890', Süddeutscher Schaustellerverband, accessed 12/06/2023, http://sueddeutscher-schaustellerverband.de/die-anfange-1882-1890/.
[32] 'Schaustellerverband Berlin e.v.', accessed 12/06/2023, https://www.schaustellerverband-berlin.de/schaustellerverband-volksfeste.html; Hamburger Abendblatt- Hamburg, 'Schaustellerverband Hamburg von 1884 e.v.', accessed 12/06/2023, https://www.abendblatt.de/adv/winterdom/article107593299/Schaustellerverband-Hamburg-von-1884-e-V.html.
[33] 'Die Anfänge: 1882-1890'.
[34] Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, Chapter 3 and 4.

Belgian *Ligue générale des voyageurs forains Belge* (°1893) and *La Société Mutuelle des Voyageurs* (°late 19th century), and the *Syndicat Suisse des Commerçants et Industriels Forains* (°1894).[35] While some were modelled on, and found inspiration in, the CSPVF, comparisons between them are currently impossible due to the lack of research on fairground associations.[36] They laid the early foundations of those associations that (still) exist today.

A syndicate for whom?

The CSPVF united patrons of various itinerant attractions such as theatres, museums, circuses, menageries, carousels, shooting booths, joyrides, lotteries, photo and cinema booths, as well as owners of fries, waffle and ginger bread stalls, and sellers of clothing and jewellery. Owners of immoral and illicit attractions were explicitly excluded and employees of funfair attractions (e.g. animal keepers or circus acrobats) were also unable to join.

Those allowed entrance fell mainly into two groups, with some having an in-between position: the "petite banque" and "grande banque". The former entailed smaller businesses such as the owners of shooting booths, throwing games and lotteries. The latter comprised affluent owners of large scale attractions such as museums, theatres, carousels and menageries.[37] Initially, the majority of the CSPVF's members were small-scale business owners, but the CSPVF quickly became dominated by the larger entrepreneurs.[38] In 1883, 55% of the 154 active members belonged to the petite banque (dominated by game booth owners) while the grande banque comprised 36%.[39] Twenty years later, in 1903, the share of smaller attractions dropped to 23%, while that of larger attractions rose to 54% (dominated by theatres, museums and carousels) on a count of 260 active members (figure 1).[40]

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[35] Franco Della Peruta and Elvira Cantarella, *Bibliografia dei periodici economici lombardi: 1815-1914* (FrancoAngeli, 2005), 171–72; Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, 128; Musée de la vie wallonne, *Foires et forains en Wallonie*, 39–40.; VF, 1894, no.236.

[36] The only exception is Vanessa Toulmin's work on the British Showmen's Guild: Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, chapter 3 and 4. I have a book chapter planned on these various associations.

[37] Le Temp, 23/04/1887; VF 1889 no86; VF, 1894, no.268; Charles Malato, *Les forains* (Paris: Gaston Doin, 1925), 295.

[38] VF, 1883, no.1; VF, 1904, no.752.

[39] Some attractions are difficult to label into petite/grande banque. The remaining attractions are labelled "Unknown/other" such as joyrides, cinema and photography booths (8%).

[40] As some attractions are difficult to label into petite/grande banque. The remaining attractions are labelled "Unknown/other" (23%).

	1883	1903	Percentage 1883	Percentage 1903
Grande banque	**56**	**141**	**36%**	**54%**
Carousel	26	38	17%	15%
Circus	-	7	-	3%
Menagerie	2	13	1%	5%
Museum	16	40	10%	15%
Theatre	12	43	8%	17%
Petite banque	**85**	**59**	**55%**	**23%**
Food	23	24	15%	9%
Freakshow	-	2	-	1%
Games	58	25	38%	10%
Trade	3	8	2%	3%
Other/unknown	1	-	1%	-
Other/unknown	**13**	**60**	**8%**	**23%**
Cinema	-	13	-	3%
Joyride	-	9	-	3%
Photography	5	4	3%	2%
Other/unknown	8	34	5%	13%
Grand total	**154**	**260**		

Figure 1. Absolute numbers and percentages of CSPVF membership in 1883 and 1903. Source: VF.

These changes mirrored the composition of the syndicate's executives: the more economically powerful had the reigns of the association in their hands. The syndicate was managed by a group of *syndics* nominated by the members. In addition, there was a secretary, treasurer, *comptable* and several *commissaires.* The latter acted as representatives and were tasked with recruiting members and corresponding about the issues and concerns that lived on the fairground. While in 1883, nine out of 19 syndics were game-booth-owners, only two out of ten were in 1903. In the same year, four syndics, the secretary and seven out of 19 *commissaires* belonged to the *grande banque*. Affluent and well-known itinerant entrepreneurs held the most important positions and were key figures in the association, such as Emile Pianet. He had a large social network, and was involved in the syndicate for 13 years, in particular as the journal's editor.

Although the syndicate wanted to represent the wider community and claimed to serve all morally sound patrons regardless of their wealth and prosperity, they did not fully succeed. Friction was sometimes caused between wealthy and poorer forains. The latter complained that the syndicates used elitist practices that were only catering to the more affluent ones, causing the creation of new associations and journals such as *L'Avenir Forain*.[41] Less wealthy forains were also worried about their continued inclusion in the CSPVF. Members had to pay a one-time fee of 10 franc and an annual cost of 12 francs (this came

[41] L'Avenir Forain 1904, no.1 ; VF, 1904, no.752; Comète Belge, 01/06/1913.

with certain benefits such as receiving the journal for free and some free advertising space) but during the 1890s price raises were put on the agenda. Paul Mollet, the owner of an aquarium, for example, wrote to the CSPVF's board: "I've been paying my contributions for 10 years, one franc a month: I can pay them, but you might raise them to 3 francs, my means, my job, my large family, prevent me from paying 36 francs a year, so I'm struck off and lose all my rights".[42] However, prices would, with an exception in 1895, stay the same from the 1880s to at least the early 1900s. Journal subscription fees for non-members however did rise (from 2 francs in the 1880s to 22 francs in the early 1900s) which might explain why membership fees could stay stable.

In addition, while the association mainly catered to French showpeople, those with other nationalities could enter as well.[43] The well-known Russian-Austrian Nikolaï Kobelkoff, also known as *l'homme tronc*, was a member and the Italian Guglielmo Cattaneo, president of the Italian associations for forains, had an honorary membership. Yet, when it came to German forains this caused difficulties. The famous Pierre Spitzner (owner of an anatomical museum) was initially refused membership due to his German descent, while he had been naturalised.

The CSPVF's active membership (excluding honorary members and correspondents) was very small and only counted a couple of hundred members, while there were circa 40.000[44] showpeople active in France.[45] Yet, through the circulation of copy (circa 4000 in 1892) they also reached a somewhat larger audience. While other unions and associations in the French entertainment industry had far higher membership rates, the formation of smaller unions or syndicates was common, especially in France.[46] Even with limited reach, these could sustain a community identity.[47] As we shall see, despite the CSPVF's small size and more elitist demeanour, they did manage to uphold a community identity among themselves and also addressed issues faced by the majority of itinerant showpeople.

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[42] VF 1891, no142.
[43] VF, 1885, no18; VF, 1885, no21; VF, 1885, no28; VF, 1886, no.30; VF, 1886, no.33; VF, 1892, no.169.
[44] It is unclear if this number contains owners and all their personnel.
[45] CSPVF's active membership grew gradually from 154 in 1883 to around 290 in the 1890s and back to 260 in the early 1900s. The membership lists in the VF were published irregularly and seem to not always have been complete. See e.g.: VF, 1883, no.1; VF, 1892, no.169; VF, 1892, no.175; VF, 1895, no.287; VF 1904, no.753.
[46] Vincent Cardon and Mathieu Grégoire, 'Les syndicats du spectacle et le placement dans l'entre-deux-guerres', *Le Mouvement Social* 243, no. 2 (2013): 21; Rauch, 'L'Union des Artistes'; Charle, 'Des artistes en bourgeoisie. Acteurs et actrices en Europe occidentale au xixe siècle'.
[47] Mann, *Forging Political Identity*, 34–35; Neuendorf, 'Keeping the Light Shining', 115.

An atypical association

Not only its small size or unbalanced membership composition made the CSPVF atypical. Also its agenda, which drew on elements characteristic to both employer and labour associations, made it unique. Despite being a 'chambre syndicale patronale,' it differed from the standard concerns and interests of sedentary employer associations who are typically defined as organizations that defend entrepreneurs' collective interests, influence market access and government policies, and act as pressure groups in labour relations as a defence mechanism against workers' unions.[48]

The CSPVF primarily focused on influencing local and national policies, and mediating the problems faced with municipalities and various companies. Topics of concern included railway prices; rising pitch prices at auctions; access to water, gas, and electricity during fairs and taxation of shows and spectacles (*droit des pauvres*). The syndicate used diverse tactics to address these issues – some resembling those of patronal organisations, others more akin to that of labour unions. One method was to point out wrongdoings, or in the words of the syndicate's board: "[…] nail[ing] them [their wrongdoers] to the pillory of public opinion […]".[49] The CSPVF also sought long-term solutions through rational dialogue and negotiation. Another strategy was offering legal advice to their members in cases of abuse and disputes. We also see this judiciary aspect in other entrainment industries, such as labour unions for musicians.[50] Other tactics included petitions and strikes, although the latter was infrequently used. In 1911 in Sotteville, for example, a dispute arose with the municipality regarding the

[48] Research on employers' associations in the entertainment industry is very limited in comparison with that on labour unions. See e.g.: Neil H Ritson, 'Employer Associations: Collective Bargaining, Services and Power in Historical Perspective: The Case of the EEF in the UK', *Labor History* 61, no. 3–4 (2020): 286; Michael Barry and Adrian Wilkinson, 'Reconceptualising Employer Associations under Evolving Employment Relations: Countervailing Power Revisited', *Work, Employment and Society* 25, no. 1 (2011): 150–52; Martinelli, 'Employers' Associations', 4485–88; Dezès et al., 'Patronat et Syndicats à La Fin Du Xixe Siècle En Allemagne, En France et En Grande-Bretagne'; Arthur J. McIvor, *Organised Capital: Employers' Associations and Industrial Relations in Northern England, 1880-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 15–16; McKenna and Rodger, 'Control by Coercion', 204; Wigham, *The Power to Manage*, 311; Jean-Louis Robert, Antoine Prost, and Chris Wrigley, eds., *The Emergence of European Trade Unionism* (New York: Routledge, 2018), Trade unions and socialism; Richard W. Gable, 'Birth of an Employers' Association', *Business History Review* 33, no. 4 (ed 1959): 537–39.

[49] VF, 1883, no.1.

[50] David-Guillou, 'Early Musicians' Unions in Britain, France, and the United States', 289, 295 en 300.

start date of the fair. After failed discussions, forains from various French associations went on strike, after which the city administration agreed to the requested starting date.[51]

As in regular patronal organisations, the CSPVF tried limiting market access to competitors. They aimed to limit access to funfairs for two specific groups. Firstly, those who owned prohibited or immoral attractions as the CSPVF valued emancipation, honesty, and credibility.[52] Creating and maintaining a positive identity was crucial for achieving a more socially and economically valuable position in society, as we shall see later on. Additionally, they sought to limit the presence of foreign itinerant showpeople, in particular Germans, as they were found to drive up pitch prices to exuberant hights, which had an economic impact on, primarily less affluent, forains and led to frustrations in and outside France.[53] An unknown French forain, for example, called one of his German colleagues a "pesky German bidder" when he outbid all other showpeople at the 1890 fair in Antwerp, Belgium.[54]

Yet, limiting these practices was not straightforward and a delicate endeavour. The strained relations between French and German citizens since the Franco-Prussian war was also felt at the fairground. In 1888 the French politician Emile Richard, for example, put in a motion to ban German entrepreneurs and all those employing people with a German nationality from the Parisian fairs. The CSPVF was however not convinced of its feasibility as it could backfire with reprisals abroad or falsely accusing forains of employing Germans, as happened with Madame Auny, the director of a menagerie.[55] Moreover, while there were occasional conflicts between French and German forains, itinerant showpeople also transcended borders to collaborate and support each other due to their precarious and marginalised position, which made it important to maintaining amicable relations.

The CSPVF distinguished itself from typical employer associations by not incorporating an anti-unionization discourse or a negative view on strikes. Discussions related to issues with their employees are notably absent from the VF. Moreover, CPSVF's members actively encouraged and supported the creation of a syndicate for their workforce in the early 1890s, donating funds and offering their expertise.[56] This endowed the employees' union with

[51] VF, 1911, no.1137. Another example is: VF,1894, no.274.
[52] VF, 1895, no.283.
[53] VF, 1889, no.86; VF, 1904, no.771; VF, 1904, no.782.
[54] VF, 1890, no.115.
[55] VF 1888, no.63.
[56] VF, 1892, no.175-177.

certain characteristics of a yellow union.[57] They mainly wished to serve as an auxiliary to the employers' syndicate, but its existence appears to have been short-lived, if it exited at all. No traces of can be found and it is only sporadically mentioned in the VF between 1892 and 1894.[58] In addition, the CSPVF focused on social issues and the identity and position of its members in society, resembling more of a pressure group than a traditional employers' union.

The CSPVF stood out as a unique employers' association, incorporating elements from different types of organizations including employers' unions, labour unions, and pressure groups. The union's focus on defending collective interests, restricting market access, supporting unionization, and addressing social issues and identity formation among its members highlights the wide range of goals, socio-economic dynamics, and power relations that employers' associations could engage with in the nineteenth century.

"recreer honnêtement": internal exclusion/inclusion mechanisms

Respectability is often associated with the bourgeoisie or middle-class, yet it was not limited to these particular groups.[59] Itinerant showpeople identified as a separate class (*classe forain*) yet strived as well towards respectability and improving their social standing. In 1891, Jules Pianet, menagerie co-owner and brother of Emile Pianet, expressed this idea by stating: "Let us have one passion: to raise our intellectual level, as well as our social level. Let us help our neighbour to achieve this goal".[60] Self-respect, being respected by others, moral and professional competence, and consumerism, formed the pillars of respectability as outlined by Smith.[61] These facets were integral as well to how CSPVF members conveyed their identity within the union and presented themselves to society.

Being highly concerned about their social and professional status, the editorial-board stressed in 1885: "we must, by all means, ensure that there is an association of honest people […]".[62] Self-censorship and othering served to reinforce forains' public image and identity. While it is unclear how the CSPVFs board checked prospective members' reputation,

[57] Robert, Prost, and Wrigley, *The Emergence of European Trade Unionism*, Trade unions and socialism.
[58] VF, 1892, no.175-176; VF, 1894, no.238.
[59] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*, 72.
[60] VF, 1891, no.141.
[61] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*.
[62] VF, 1885, no.19.

a manifesto on the frontpage of the VF gives insights into the characteristics of what good conduct and a reputable profession entailed. Individuals involved in illicit trades such as gambling-games were refused entrance, as well as those showing "ridicules", "repugnant" or "immoral" exhibitions such as *somnambules* (fortune tellers), *femme torpille en maillot (*women letting electricity run through them) or "fosses mystérieuses".[63] The latter three often included beautiful, charming, mysterious or exotic-looking women in short or revealing dresses, which could lead to immoral behaviour, and were often looked upon as frauds and tricksters. In addition, aspirant members needed an empty criminal record and were only admitted after recommendation by two members and a balloting procedure.[64] The latter was a common practice in other types of associations as well.[65] There are no exact numbers on how often membership was refused, but it likely was very limited as those with unsuitable professions knew in advance they would not be able to gain membership. These policies were strictly enforced and upheld throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as it were forms of quality control for the CSPVF.

Improper conduct, such as showing anti-social behaviour or misconduct towards the board and association, could also lead to expulsion after an internal review (although reinstation was possible).[66] This did not happen often, but throughout the 1880s and 1890s there were some noteworthy cases: Pierre Yunk, owner of a *Velocipedède*, had for example caused a scandal – it is unclear what exactly happened – at the festival of Ornano in Paris in 1886; Alfred-François Chemin had refused to be on strike with colleague-carrousel-owners in 1894 at the Montmartre fair, and André Victor Jacquin, a *confisseur*, was removed after bringing a lawsuit upon the association which dragged on for over 16 months.[67] The syndicate repeatedly emphasized the importance of honesty and proper conduct among its members and regularly reminded municipal administrations, the police, and pitch allocators of this as well to gain economic benefits and establish smoother social interactions.

[63] VF, 1883, no.4; VF, 1884, no.5; *Le Temps*, 23/04/1887, no.9484.

[64] VF, 1899, no.514.

[65] Eva Andersen, 'A Republic of Alienists? A Transnational Perspective on Psychiatric Knowledge Circulation across Europe (1843-1925)' (University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2021), 87–88; Hilde Greefs, 'Clubs as Vehicles for Inclusion in the Urban Fabric? Immigrants and Elitist Associational Practices in Antwerp, 1795–1830', *Social History* 41, no. 4 (2016): 382.

[66] VF, 1892, no.169 supplément.

[67] VF, 1886, no.32; VF, 1887, no.54; VF, 1889 no.100; VF, 1890, no. 118-124; VF, 1890, no.127; VF, 1894, no.273-278.

Setting out rules of inclusion/exclusion was one thing, ensuring and visualising lawful membership in and outside the syndicate was another, and presented separate challenges. During a disturbance in 1890 at the fair in Lens, for example, *Veuve* Auny (menagerie owner and only female syndic)[68] complained about the misbehaviour of a group of Bavarian *forains*, raising the issue of how to ascertain if someone was "one of their own" and were morally upright people.[69] The feasibility of various verification-attributes (e.g. membership cards, booklets, badges, stamps, diplomas, wagon plates) was continuously explored throughout the 1880s and 1890s.[70] They reinforced the connection with the CSPVF and served as evidence of honest conduct. They made in particular use of green oval-shaped memberships card (figure 2) that were introduced in 1885. In addition, they could, sometimes at an additional cost, obtain a booklet, badge, and stamp engraved with their personal name. Each attribute also served a specific purpose. While the booklet and the *carte verte* could be used as identification before public services (*l'état civil*), the badge was used during association meetings.[71] Former members were required to return these attributes to prevent fraudulent claims of membership. For similar reasons members' booklet had to contain a recent proof of payment to be valid.[72]

[68] A small percentage of women was CSPVF member. An article on the role of women entrepreneurs with Nele Wynants is forthcoming.
[69] VF, 1890, no.117.
[70] VF, 1883, no.4; VF, 1885, no.18; VF, 1885, no.21; VF, 1885, no.25; VF, 1889, no.95; VF, 1889, no.98; VF 1889, no.102; VF, 1890, no.106; VF, 1890, no.110; VF, 1890, no.114; VF, 1890, no.117; VF, 1890, no.121; VF, 1891, no.142; VF, 1899, no.517.
[71] VF, 1885, no.21.
[72] VF, 1891, no.139.

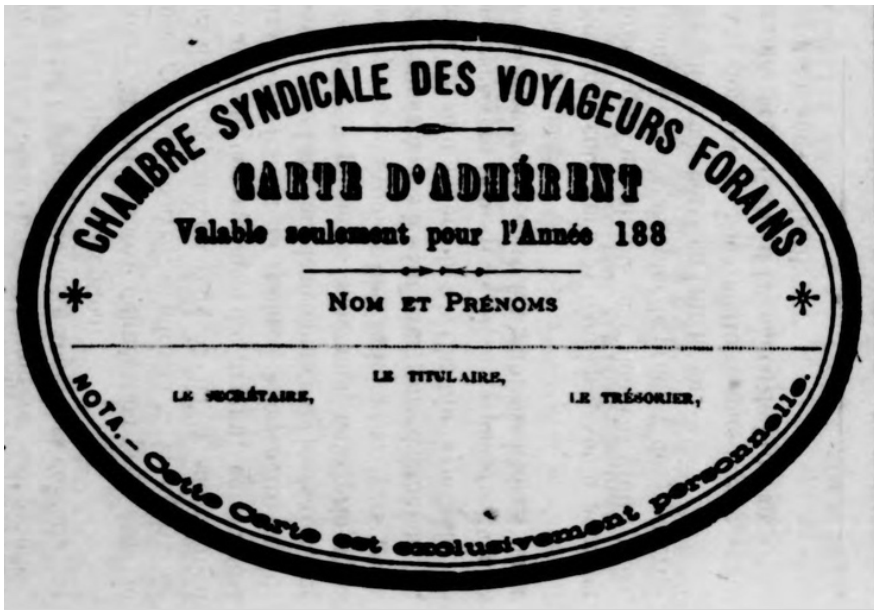


Figure 2: Membership card of the CSPVF. Source: VF, 1885, no.21.

Othering created an us-versus-them viewpoint and was used repeatedly.[73] Not only towards certain fellow itinerant showpeople but also Gypsies, as their presence was perceived as a threat to forains' morals, professional identity and social standing. Certain professional activities such as acrobatics, magic, and puppeteering were shared between Gypsies and itinerant showpeople, making it difficult to distinguish them solely based on their occupation.[74] While society at large showed little differentiation between showpeople and Gypsies, forains themselves employed similar stereotypes as the majority of sedentary society to create distance from other travellers. For instance, various high placed members of the CSPVF cautioned against gypsies, such as Melchior Bonnefois, owner of a musée-vivant, and Eugene Chabot, theatre owner and successor of Emile Pianet as editor, respectively expressed their belief that Gypsies had nothing in common with "real forains"[75], and found them to be "evil beings, who reign by terror and live on alms obtained by threat or intimidation".[76] Othering was witnessed in other associations for travelling showpeople as well, such as in the Showmen's Guild in the United Kingdom.[77]

[73] 'Othering', Steve Bruce and Steven Yearley, *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology* (London: SAGE, 2006), 22–23.
[74] Lucassen and Willems, 'The Weakness of Well-Ordered Societies', 290.
[75] VF, 1892, no.176.
[76] *Le petit parisien*, 20/02/1911.
[77] Thomas Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change: The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics among British Gypsies from Victorian Reformism to Romany Nationalism*, International Library of Sociology (London: Routledge, 1974), 78–80; Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups*, 128–30; Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, chapter 3 and 4.

Enforcing respect from society

While itinerant showpeople had carved out their identity by focussing on being honest and hardworking people, societies' perception was less favourable and lacked respect for the classe forain.[78] As a pressure group, the CSPVF strived towards a more positive representation through stressing proper word use. Professionalism, and in particular the importance of rendering a public service, were seen as an important aspect of respectability.[79] *Forains* wanted to be perceived as entrepreneurs who made valuable contributions to society as any other sedentary businessowner. Within this light the CSPVF reinforced their (self)image by renaming their association and journal in 1891 from respectively *Chambre syndical patronale des voyageurs forain* to *Union Syndicale des Industrielle Forains*, and from *Voyageur forain* to *Industriel forain*. It gave a new *cachet* to the association's identity and showed members and the public that the organization and the journal was maturing.

Moreover, the general public often referred to showpeople as *saltimbanques* (street performers) and it appeared on official documents, such as the mandatory booklets they had to carry in the Paris region. The term had a negative connotation and was associated with charlatanism.[80] Its use was disliked by itinerant showpeople who found it "chocking" and "improper".[81] The CSPVF submitted written requests to the police commissioner to address this issue, resulting in a change in 1886.[82] This small victory prompted them to encourage their members to report any similar problematic language usage, in order to take appropriate measures. Preventing the use of negative phrases, slander and stigmatisation from the public, authorities and press was a continuous fight.

[78] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*, 31.
[79] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*, 141–42.
[80] 'Saltimbanque'. Pierre Larousse and Claude Augé, *Nouveau Larousse illustré: dictionnaire universel encyclopédique*, vol. 7 (Paris: Larousse, 1898), 509; 'Bateleur'. Pierre Larousse and Claude Augé, *Nouveau Larousse illustré*, vol. 1, 774; 'Charlatan'. Pierre Larousse and Claude Augé, *Nouveau Larousse illustré:*, vol. 2, 704.
[81] VF, 1884, no.8.
[82] VF, 1884, no.8; VF, 1886, no.30

Media outlets played a significant role as sites of public encounter, fostering debates and discussions on a wide range of topics.[83] Gypsies and itinerant showpeople where one of these topics, giving media outlets an important say in how they were portrayed to, and perceived by, society.[84] Forains were aware of the significant influence periodicals and newspapers wielded and actively tried to control their image in the press. On way to positively engage with the press was by inviting journalists (and the general public) to attend meetings, which often resulted in little articles that put the CSPVF and their purpose in the spotlight.[85] Or they involved the press through promotional stunts. The female animal tamer Nouma-Hawa, for example, visited the editorial office of the newspaper Genevois in 1894, bringing a lion cub with her.[86]

In addition, forains themselves actively partook in the media by staying informed about the articles that appeared in the press, and by engaging, for better or worse, with journalists and editors through published letters and counter-letters.[87] It was often the inner circle of the CSPVF and those with an esteemed reputation within and beyond the fairground community that addressed letters to their wrongdoers or highlighted concerns in name of all forains. In 1902, for example, the newspaper *Le Petit républicain du Midi* published an article on the diminishing importance of the *foire de la Sainte-Michelle* in Nîmes, after which Emile Pianet had the opportunity to publish a long follow-up article with additional explanations on its demise and related problems.[88] Journalists taking a positive stance were praised and seen as defenders and allies to the CSPVF's cause, and whenever the press, no matter their socio-political background or readership count, gave good and positive publicity, they were explicitly thanked in the VF's pages to maintain good relationships with these media outlets.[89] The langue used in, at least some, newspapers illustrates that journalist and the

[83] Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell, 'Introduction: Encountering the Press', in *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, ed. Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1–2.
[84] David Cressy, *Gypsies: An English History*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 'The Eye of the Press' (ebook); Jodie Matthews, 'Mobilising the Imperial Uncanny: Nineteenth-Century Textual Attitudes to Travelling Romani People, Canal-Boat People, Showpeople and Hop-Pickers in Britain', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 37, no. 4 (2015): 365.
[85] VF, 1890, no.117; VF, 1892, no.164; VF, 1894, no.245; La Dépêche de Brest, 28/07/1893.
[86] Gil Blas, 15/01/1894.
[87] Brake and Codell, 'Introduction: Encountering the Press', 1–2.
[88] Le Petit républicain du Midi, 31/08/1902; Le Petit républicain du Midi, 16/09/1902.
[89] VF, 1889, no.104; VF, 1884, no.16; VF, 1887, no.41; Jean-François Tétu, 'L'illustration de la presse au xixe siècle', *Semen. Revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours*, no. 25 (2008).

general public's view could change and no longer necessarily were typified as vagabonds or gypsies, and had more in common with sedentary society as they thought. Marcel France wrote, seemingly with some surprise: "It [the forain community] is, so to speak, less bohemian; it has its unions, its travelling schools […]. It even has its own professional journal […]".[90]

Yet, public correspondence between the CSPVF and the press also included mechanisms that created an us-versus-them perspective.[91] Othering was, mainly in the VF, used as an outlet to create distance from people negatively impacting their public image. Devaluing journalists and their writings, and depicting them as honourless, incompetent, or morally inferior was a common practice. One of the syndicate's members, most likely the editor, called several journalists "reptiles of the press"[92] who sold "[...] their feathers for an evening spent in a brothel, in the company of drunkards of their own sort [...]".[93] The attribution of negative character traits to their opponents stood in high contrast with respectability's focus on good manners, morals, modesty and high working standards; and with showpeople depicted themselves as honourable and morally sound.[94]

When such efforts, in particular going into dialogue with the press, proved unsuccessful and attacks against their profession and identity were severe, the CSPVF resorted to filing defamation lawsuits. Journalists from the local *Journal du Loiret,* for example, called forains "doomed to irredeemable vice", "walk[ing] the detestable path of crime" and portraying them as dangerous, right before the start of the Orléans funfair in 1891.[95] Approximately 100 itinerant showpeople convened to discuss the issue and collectively decided to pursue legal action, raising funds within their community to cover the costs.[96] The judge decided on a small fine and the in-extenso publication of the trial's outcome in favour of the forains in the *Journal du Loiret* and the *Industriel forain.*[97]

Although they had wished for a more substantial penalty, the court's decision still provided the forains with a sense of recognition and validation within society. Nevertheless,

[90] Le Petit Haut-Marnais, 18/06/1906.
[91] 'Othering', Bruce and Yearley, *The Sage Dictionary of Sociology*, 22–23.
[92] VF, 1887, no.54.
[93] VF, 1887, no.54.
[94] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*, 68.
[95] *Journal du Loiret*, 31/05/1891; VF, 1891, no.141-143.
[96] VF, 1891, no.142.
[97] VF, 1891, no.143; *Journal du Loiret*, 13/01/1892.

it is important to note that they did not always succeed in filing complaints, and its outcomes varied. It also did not mean that all people actively changed their notions about forains. The editor of the *Loiret*, for instance, exhibited minimal change in sentiments, calling the Pianet brothers "[…] ridiculously infatuated with themselves […]" and being involved with "[…] a sheet of which they pompously title themselves director and editor-in-chief […]".[98] The relationship with this journal stayed strained.[99] Addressing unfair treatment was challenging for individuals, let alone confronting the mistreatment of the *classe forain* as a whole. However, through the CSPVF's resources and the support of high ranking union members, they found it more feasible to address such issues systematically.

However, there were less cumbersome ways to carve out a spot for themselves in society and showcasing their respectable demeanour: participating in society's consumerism and leisure culture. In the United Kingdom forains and gypsies distinguished themselves from one another through material culture, and in particular the wagons they used.[100] If this was the case in France is unclear, but the wagons of wealthy entrepreneurs could take on luxurious proportions and some also possessed houses in the countryside, such as the famous animal tamer François Bidel (fig. 3).[101]

[98] *Journal du Loiret*, 13/01/1892.
[99] VF, 1892, no.157; VF, 1892, no.158.
[100] Toulmin, *Fun without Vulgarity*, chapter 4.
[101] Le Petit Haut-Marnais, 18/06/1906.

Figure 3. François Bidel, member of the CSPVF, in his luxurious wagon. Source: Figaro Illusté. 1897. 'Forains et Saltimbanques', 1897, no. 92.

Forains also participated in other ways. During the 1890s, Europe and America experienced a 'bicycle craze'. It was a signifier of modernity, and became a fashionable leisure activity, particularly among the upper and middle-classes due to the high cost of bicycles.[102] *Forains* also embraced the arrival of the bicycle. In 1893 the *Forain-cycle,* a bicycle club for itinerant showpeople, was created and announced in the press.[103] While this initiative was linked to the CSPVF through its members and had its address at the CSPVF's headquarters, it did not as such form an official part of it. However, *forains*' interest in bicycling was no coincidence and illustrates how much they tried to be part of society. The club's goal was twofold: proving they were "people like everyone else"[104] and using it as a gateway to other associations that could help promote their professional interests. Nonetheless, the club did not appeal to all showpeople, and was rather exclusive (there were 22 participants on the first ride) as people needed to have the time and means for it. While the formation of this club was rather exceptional, and its impact very minimal, it does nonetheless illustrate the agency that

[102] Smith, *Respectability as Moral Map*, 116; Harry Oosterhuis, 'Cycling, Modernity and National Culture', *Social History* 41, no. 3 (2016): 233–48.
[103] VF, 1893, no.210; VF, 1894, no.247; *L'Intransigeant* 1894, no.4995; *Le vélo*, 1893, no.500.
[104] VF, 1893, no.210.

showpeople possessed and the various ways in which they attempted to engage with each other and with society as a whole.

The socio-economic effect of the CSPVF's identity

The wide array of tactics employed by the CSPVF did not result in a nationwide change of society's perception of itinerant showpeople, yet it would be wrong to say that the creation of the CSPVF had no impact on forains' social standing, at least for its members, or did not solidify their identity as reputable citizens. More visibility and respect for the *classe forain* had also economic implications from which forains as well as municipalities benefitted. This was noticeable on several fronts, in particular on a local scale. City and police officials found their way to the journal: reading it and using it for various announcements and requests (e.g. about upcoming fairs or needing specific attractions).[105]

The relations between municipalities and forains changed. Some began to preferer and prioritize attractions operated by syndicate members, such as the mayor of Beauvais in 1885. Convinced of their morally sound conduct, he was willing to give CSPVF members preference and exclude other applicants.[106] Communication and dialogue improved as well. Poulain, the mayor of Nantes, for example, contacted the CSPVF in 1903 concerning the city's fairs. In his letter he posed several questions such as "Will the fairground entrepreneurs agree to come to the winter fair knowing that the circus would be excluded? Is a spring fair, in April, with a circus, likely to succeed? Won't this date disturb the fairground entrepreneurs from their usual rounds?".[107] His intention was not to prescribe the timing and format of these festivities but rather to seek input from the forains, recognizing their value and expertise.

Yet these effect were not noticeable everywhere and change did not follow a linear path.[108] Crevoisier, the owner of a *tir national*, experienced this first-hand in Pont-Saint-Esprit in 1885. To smooth over an issue and prove his good conduct to the mayor he showed his CSPVF booklet but this was met with scepticism and mockery.[109] Large contrasts stayed the

[105] VF, 1885, no.20; VF, 1888, no.61; VF, 1891, no.152; VF, 1900, no.553-554.
[106] VF, 1885, no.20.
[107] VF, 1903, no.742.
[108] e.g. VF, 1885, no.18; VF, 1887, no. 41; VF, 1888, no.58; VF, 1889, no.90; VF, 1891, no. 137.
[109] VF, 1885, no.26.

norm, as proves the consternation in the early twentieth century about the law on ambulant professions and nomads that came into practice in the 1910s. Itinerant showpeople were not in agreement with how the law was formulated, and tried yet again to distance themselves from other travellers but were not able to introduce any major changes.[110] Small or local victories were experienced, but it would remain a continuous struggle well into the twentieth century for forains to uphold and maintain their identity of professional and reputable citizens.

Forains' groups identity and agency becomes more evident when we direct our view to specific economic challenges, such as the prices of railway transportation. During the late nineteenth century the French railway network kept systematically expanding to connect cities and rural areas, and would become an important means of transportation.[111] Itinerant showpeople made extensive use of the railway network to travel from funfair to funfair. According to the CSPVF, there were in 1892 approximately 20000 forains who made use of it.[112] While small and large attraction-owners used the railway, it was mainly the *grande banque* that heavily relied on it. The Pianet brothers for example transported no less than 25 wagons using the railroad.[113] The administrative procedures and costs involved were a significant concern for the syndicate's members.[114] Leading figures such as Emile Pianet, who had a vested interest and an extensive knowledge of the railway-network, were an asset and played a significant role in facilitating communication and cooperation with the railway companies.[115]

The French railroad was operated by several companies such as the *Chemin de fer de Nord, d'Est, d'Ouest, d'état, de Midi, d'Orléans* and *de P.L.M.*. The latter two, in response to written requests from the CSPVF, were the first to adapt their prices in the middle of the

[110] VF, 1911, no.1146; Le Petit Parisien, 20/02/1911; Christophe Delclitte, 'La catégorie juridique «nomade» dans la loi de 1912', *Hommes & Migrations* 1188, no. 1 (1995): 23–30; Emmanuel Filhol, 'Le discours républicain sur les «nomades» (1908-1912): les cas d'Étienne Flandin et de Marc Réville', *Ethnologie française* 48, no. 4 (2018): 687–98.

[111] Robert Schwartz, Ian Gregory, and Thomas Thevenin, 'Spatial History: Railways, Uneven Development, and Population Change in France and Great Britain, 1850–1914', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 42 (2011): 59 and 64–65.

[112] VF 1892, no.164.

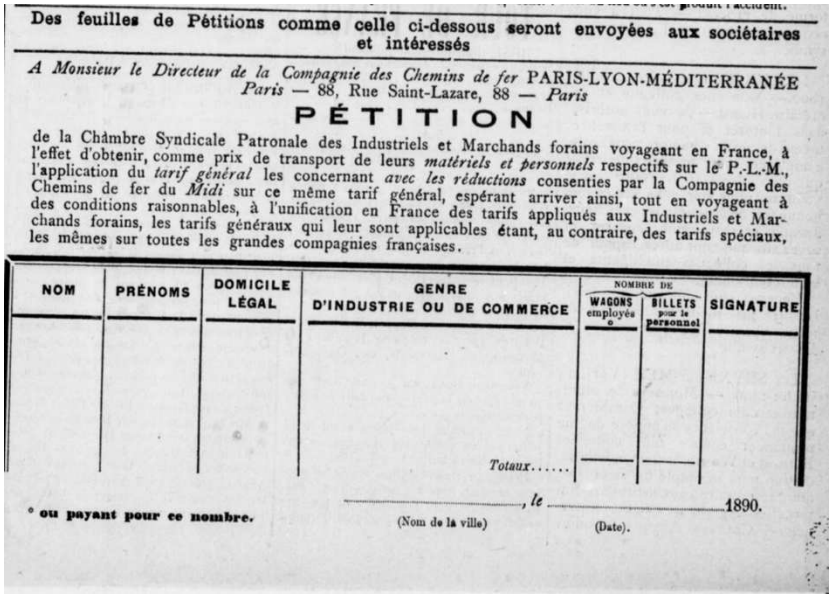
[113] La Dépêche: journal quotidien, 04-02-1887.

[114] E.g.: VF, 1881, no.1. The word "chemins de fer" is present 2515 times across 773 issues while the word "voyageur forain" is present 4837 times and is overrepresented due to it being part of the syndicate's and journal's name. Application: AntConc.

[115] VF, 1903, no.751; VF, 1890, no.118; VF, 1892, no.164.

1880s: *Orléans* gave a 50% reduction for forains travelling with a minimum of two wagons and six people, while the *P.M.L*. provided the same reduction for troupes of minimum 20 people.[116] These adaptations, in particular the latter, primarily benefited the larger and affluent entrepreneurs, leaving smaller ones disadvantaged.

When direct correspondence proved ineffective, alternative approaches were pursued to exert pressure on the railway companies. This included correspondence or meetings with relevant authorities such as legislative commissions or the *Chambre des Députés*, as well as attending railway conferences or petitioning (figure 4).[117] Their persistent inquiries yielded success, resulting in tariff revisions by other railway companies by the end of the 1880s. The *P.L.M,* for example, now gave reductions for troupes travelling with a minimum of six people. These ongoing changes held significant importance for forains as a whole, but in particular for less fortunate itinerant showpeople who travelled with less people and material.



Des feuilles de Pétitions comme celle ci-dessous seront envoyées aux sociétaires et intéressés

A Monsieur le Directeur de la Compagnie des Chemins de fer PARIS-LYON-MÉDITERRANÉE
Paris — 88, Rue Saint-Lazare, 88 — *Paris*

PÉTITION

de la Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Industriels et Marchands forains voyageant en France, à l'effet d'obtenir, comme prix de transport de leurs *matériels et personnels* respectifs sur le P.-L.-M., l'application du *tarif général* les concernant *avec les réductions* consenties par la Compagnie des Chemins de fer du *Midi* sur ce même tarif général, espérant arriver ainsi, tout en voyageant à des conditions raisonnables, à l'unification en France des tarifs appliqués aux Industriels et Marchands forains, les tarifs généraux qui leur sont applicables étant, au contraire, des tarifs spéciaux, les mêmes sur toutes les grandes compagnies françaises.

NOM	PRÉNOMS	DOMICILE LÉGAL	GENRE D'INDUSTRIE OU DE COMMERCE	NOMBRE DE WAGONS employés *	NOMBRE DE BILLETS pour le personnel	SIGNATURE
			Totaux.....			

* ou payant pour ce nombre.

....., *le* .....1890.
(Nom de la ville) (Date).

Figure 4: Petition form for the unification of prices among French railroad companies. Source: VF, 1890, no.119.

With each new agreement they reached, the CSPVF's members wasted no time to immediately embark on new negotiations. These relentless efforts persisted well into the early twentieth century and encompassed different objectives, including securing additional

[116] VF 1885, no.20; VF1886, no.29; VF 1886, no.33.
[117] VF, 1887, no. 41-43; 1892, no164; VF, 1892, no. 162. VF, 1902, no.683-684; VF, 1892, no. 162.

reductions, unifying tariffs across different railway companies, and resolving issues with unloading their wagons at the train station.[118] The creation of a special taskforce in the early 1890s further exemplifies their relentlessness to improve travel conditions for forains. This commission consisted of six people, all belonging to the *grande banque*: Bidel (menagerie owner), Corvi (theatre owner), Lauret (owner of an anatomical museum), Adrien Pezon (menagerie owner), Emile Pianet (menagerie owner), and Alphonse Rancy (circus owner).[119] Together, they not only delved deeper into the grievances faced by their members but also actively disseminated crucial information by explaining procedures (where and how to obtain reductions) during meetings and in the VF, even publishing a railroad guide only available for members.[120] Across several decades the CSPVF succeeded in negotiating price reductions and special tariffs for the transportation of their personnel and material, proving that even as a small syndicate, mainly focused on the *grande banque*, it did manage to ameliorate the conditions under which most itinerant proprietors could carry out their work.

Conclusion

Faced with various socio-economic challenges due to the sharpening of regulations and the changing entertainment landscape, French itinerant showpeople joined together in the first *Chambre Syndicale Patronale des Voyageurs Forains* (CSPVF) in 1882, with similar syndicates following across Europe. The CSPVF consisted of a diverse group of smaller and larger itinerant entrepreneurs, yet it were the economically powerful ones that dominated the membership lists and had key functions within the organization. Their media outlets, such as *Le voyageur Forain*, make their voices visible vis-a-vis their professional needs, grievances and agency and provides valuable insights into the socio-economic dynamics of the nineteenth century.

Showpeople had a keen awareness of their professional and collective identity, which fuelled their aspiration for recognition and resolving the social stigmatization and economic exclusion that was often imposed on them. In pursuit of addressing their needs, the CSPVF

[118] VF, 1890, no.116-122; VF, 1891, no.146; VF, 1891, no.148; VF, 1892, no.157; VF, 1892, no.162; VF, 1892, no.164; VF, 1903, no.726; VF, 1903, no.732.
[119] VF, 1890, no.129; VF, 1891, no.145.
[120] VF, 1891, no.148; VF, 1905, no.807; VF, 1890, no.118; VF, 1891, no.146; VF, 1891, no.144; VF, 1891, no.146; Émile Pianet, *Tarifs généraux et spéciaux concernant les transports par chemins de fer du matériel forain* (Morand, 1898).

employed a combination of characteristics and tactics that extended beyond the conventional boundaries of patronal associations. They drew from the repertoire of labour unions, trade organisations and pressure groups. Recognizing the pivotal role of respectability in enhancing their social standing, public image and economic position, forains implemented several strategies that formed the cornerstone of how members projected themselves and behaved within the confines of the syndicate and towards the broader public. They resorted to self-censorship, othering, press-exposure management, written or face-to-face negotiations, legal action, petitions, strikes and participating in consumer society.

Their successes varied and were irregular throughout time and space. While society at large did not change their perceptions of forains, regardless of the CSPVF's systematic responses to unfair treatment, progress and change was accomplished on the local level, in particular with city and town administrations. In addressing the practical and economic challenges they faced, in particular concerning the railway network, forains demonstrated their agency and relentlessness, and managed to secure price reductions and special tariffs, which were beneficial for both large and small entrepreneurs. Despite the CSPVF's small size and elitist connotation, it managed to carve out their identity and was to some extend capable of ameliorating the socio-economic conditions under which itinerant showpeople pursued their profession. Nonetheless this remained a continuous battle throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Associations similar to the CSPVF continue to exist today via the *European Showmen's Union* and various national and regional associations. It is also thanks to these networks and mutual cooperation that itinerant showpeople from Belgium and France currently try to safeguard the living fairground culture and showmen's art through an *UNESCO intangible heritage* submission.