

The Rockefeller Foundation Fellows in Social Sciences (1920s-1970): Transnational Networks, Construction of Disciplines and Policy making in the Age of Globalization

By Ludovic Tournès

Professor, Department of History
University of Geneva
Switzerland

ludovic.tournes@wanadoo.fr

© 2012 by Ludovic Tournès

Introduction

My research is a part of a collective research project entitled “Rockefeller Foundation Fellows in the Social Sciences (1920-1970): Transnational Networks, Construction of Disciplines and Policy Making in the Age of Globalization.” (coordination: Ludovic Tournès, University of Geneva/Michael Werner, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris). This project analyzes the role of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) in the shaping of the social sciences between the 1920s and 1970s, especially through its fellowship program. It is based on a study of fellows, the goal of which is to reconstruct their professional careers and trajectories in the long run, before, during, and after their fellowships. The worldwide geographical scope of the project gives us the opportunity to go beyond national borders and to draw a global map of the transnational networks of social scientists in the construction and development of which the RF played a prominent role. In following the fellows’ careers, we also study the way social sciences were used, both at the national and international levels, as intellectual tools in the elaboration of public policies, especially through the channel of expertise. This program fits into the growing field of transnational history, applying its methods to the intellectual and institutional history of fellows, who have been largely neglected by historians of philanthropy, most studies having focused on grants given to institutions.

1) The Work Achieved during the Trip

a) Completing the Database

The first goal of the trip was to advance the completion of the database of RF fellows in the social sciences. The research group is currently creating a database of more than one thousand RF fellows in the international social sciences between 1920 and 1945. This base is a collective work with Justine Faure, (University of Strasbourg), Morgane Labbé (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales), Frédéric Attal (Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan), Isabella Löhr (Heidelberg Universität), and Marie Scot (Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris). Each of us had been assigned two hundred fellows, whose cards were to be consulted in order to augment information already gathered and organized in Paris between December 2011 and June 2012, from the 1950 and 1970 RF Fellowship Directories, and also from a 1943 RF document called "European fellowships" (see RF 1.1/100/43/391).

My first week at the RAC was dedicated to consulting the fellowship cards and the fellowship files. Two hundred fellowship cards were consulted in three days. A lot of additional information not found in many individual notices in the fellowship directories, such as birth date, nationality, and professional positions at the moment of the fellowship award, were located. One more day was used to consult the personal files (when they existed) in order to find information lacking in the cards. The last day of my first week was used to realize, with the help of fellowship cards, detailed biographical notices of fifteen fellows on my list which were considered as being particularly interesting in regard to their intellectual and institutional itineraries. All researchers in our group were to select from their two hundred fellows, a few interesting ones who deserve particular attention, so as to combine the quantitative approach of the database and the qualitative analysis by focusing in more detail on some fellows' lives and careers.

The information coming from the cards and files has been entered, therefore, the next stage of our work will be to complete as many of its items as possible (because part of the information is lacking in many cards and files) with various biographical dictionaries or other sources available in Europe. Then we will “clean up” the database and undertake a quantitative analysis of it which will allow us to determine further research directions on the life and careers of all these RF. When completed (in the spring of 2013) the database could be easily put online, either on the RAC website or on the RF centennial website.

b) Studying the Relationship between RF Fellows and the League of Nations

I spent my second week working on the files pertaining to the cooperation of the RF with the League of Nations, especially in order to assess the role of RF fellows in this cooperation. In a former trip in 2008, I had gone through these files, but limited my research to the institutional aspects of the cooperation between the RF and the League. This time, I wanted to go deeper into the analysis of the interpersonal relations and the transatlantic intellectual networks that existed during the interwar years.

As a matter of fact, more than thirty RF fellows from many European countries were involved in the activities of the League, mainly in the International Studies Conference (ISC) created by the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation. The latter was a “technical” (i.e. nonpolitical) body of the League created in 1926 and located in Paris. The ISC, whose goal was to promote the scientific study of international relations, was one of its most important realizations. From 1932 onwards, the RF became involved in its funding, but it also mobilized its network of former and current fellows in order to participate in the work of the Conference, especially in the field of international economics, which after 1935 became the core of the latter’s activities. What I discovered through the analysis of the files of the ISC was not only that the fellows participated in the work undertaken in different fields of international economics, but that they were also in many cases, involved in the creation of

national committees of the ISC (and, in fact, played a key role in them), for instance in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Denmark, Norway, and so on. The role of the fellows in national committees consisted not only in undertaking research on certain topics, but also in coordinating the work of the national committees in view of preparing the plenary sessions of the ISC which took place in 1935, 1937 and 1939.

The detailed study of the fellows is extremely interesting in regard to transnational history, because it not only adds a stone to the history of economic expertise in the interwar period—in which the RF was deeply involved—but it also clearly demonstrates that the RF played a great role in transforming the technical bodies of the League of Nations into a global—or at least Euro-American—crossroad of research and reflections undertaken in many countries in order to overcome the crisis, and also to promote the opening of boundaries in international trade, which was one of the most important of Wilson’s fourteen points. It thus shows that the RF contributed to the realization of what Wilson failed to achieve during his presidency. In conclusion, the role of RF fellows in the economic works undertaken by the League during the interwar years can be interpreted in two ways, which are not in contradiction with one another: on the one hand, it is a sign of the coming of age of America as an intellectual superpower, because most of these fellows came to study economics in American universities; on the other hand, it shows the dynamism of the new generation of researchers in the social sciences that emerged during this period in Europe. In both cases, the RF appears clearly as a major go-between in the production and utilization of knowledge about globalization.

2) Practical Interest of this Project for Philanthropists

Apart from the fact that this collective project aims at being an significant contribution to both the history of philanthropy and transnational history (this aspect will not

be dealt with in this report), I would like to underscore, at a more practical level, that such a research project can be of interest for professional philanthropists in two ways:

First, the construction of the database shows that the RF fellowship directories of 1950 and 1970 are not only incomplete, but also contain a lot of false information. Much information found in the 1950 directory or the 1943 “European fellowship” list is not mentioned in the 1970 directory and vice versa. Collecting and comparing all the entries was long and fastidious work, but it allowed us to correct a great deal of mistakes concerning the fellows. Moreover, we were able to discover in our research in the directories and the fellowship cards, more than one hundred fellows who were not in the 1970 directory, that is, ten percent of our 1,000 fellows. Considering that the 1970 directory contains more than 9,500 entries in the social sciences, medical sciences, biological sciences, nursing, etc.; extrapolating the ten percent proportion of “hidden” fellows would mean that a careful analysis of all the fellowship cards and files of the RF archives could lead to adding 950 fellows to the directory. Therefore, the directory needs an update, in which it would be easy to add the revised entries of social science fellows in our database, and, if similar research was to be undertaken by other researchers on other disciplines, revised notices for the remaining fellows of the directory.

Second, this work could be useful to demonstrate the importance of fellowships in the programs of American foundations. Fellowships have declined in foundation programs for over forty years, in part because they appeared as being extremely complex to organize, implement, and evaluate. As their impact was considered too uncertain, many foundations ceased to give money for fellowship programs. On the other hand, historians of philanthropy have, for the most part, neglected fellowship programs to focus on big institutional grants. Thus there is a lack of a detailed and long-term analysis of the fellowship policy of foundations. I insist on the “long-term” aspect, since this kind of program cannot be assessed

correctly if one focuses on the immediate result of a fellowship policy. Indeed, in many cases, the impact of a fellowship becomes evident ten, twenty or thirty years after the fellowship.

What is shown by such a prosopographic database on RF fellows in the world is:

a) Return on Investment

The return on investment of the fellowships is probably much more important, as regards the sums involved, than that of big institutional grants.

b) Rockefeller Foundation's Long-Term Relationship with Fellows

The RF established with its fellows a long-term relationship which in many cases was still active years after the return of the fellows to their native countries. This is illustrated by the fact that they often received additional fellowships and grants for further research projects, or served as RF advisors or contacts in their countries.

In 1954, Dean Rusk, then President of the RF, stated that “no theme is more persistent in the records of the Rockefeller boards than their concern for the younger scientist and scholar of unusual promise—and no investment seems, in retrospect, to have been more rewarding than the funds applied to their advancement.” (Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report*, 1954, p. 6). Studying in the long-term the lives and careers of fellows in the social sciences could help convince philanthropists that this judgment is still valid.

Editor's Note: This research report is presented here with the author's permission but should not be cited or quoted without the author's consent.

Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Erwin Levold, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.