

The Ford Foundation in Greece, 1958-1982

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Abstract

I am working on a historical examination of the Ford Foundation's activities in Greece. I initially came across the Ford Foundation, one of the most significant US philanthropic institutions, along with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, during my Ph.D. research on the political publishing field in Greece during the "long 1960s." The Ford Foundation (FF) grants are very much present both in oral testimonies, as well as in the Greek press from the late 1960s until the early 1970s. However, until now, the issue has been assessed only at a political level or a mere journalistic one.

I mainly focus on the first period of the Ford Foundation activities in Greece, from 1958 to 1968, and on the second period from 1968 to 1982 during the tenure of Kaiti Myrivilli, the on-site director of operations and a key person for the development of Ford Foundation's program. During the former period, funding was directed primarily to (state) institutions. The latter period of the FF's operations in Greece was rather controversial, as it initiated a time of left-wing grantees during a military dictatorship perceived to having been US-led, causing heated debate and polemics.

My project goal is to reconstruct the history of the Ford Foundation activity in Greece within the context of the cultural Cold War and at the same time keep conspiracy theories and Manichaeism away from my analysis.

Introduction

I am working on a historical examination of the Ford Foundation's activities in Greece. I initially came across the Ford Foundation, one of the most significant US philanthropic institutions, along with Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, during my PhD research on the political publishing field in Greece during the "long 1960s." The Ford Foundation grants are very much present both in oral testimonies, as well as in the Greek press from the late 1960s until the early 1970s.

However, until now, the issue has been assessed only at a political level or a mere journalistic one. Both previous and current literature set questions that may be summarized as raising issues about the ties between the United States government agencies—and the intelligence services in particular—and the major philanthropic foundations. This question is contextualized within the framework of the cultural Cold War, a significant aspect of the Cold War, that is, the struggle for domination in the arts and letters by the USA and the USSR, and their allies and proxies. Nevertheless, as current scholarship is demonstrating, there was a variety of levels of autonomy in respect to philanthropic foundations. Thus, their programs should not be perceived as mere projects conceived and planned within the State Department or the CIA.¹ The Cold War frenzy led to the development of conspiracy theories that have overshadowed the complexity and multidimensionality of the issue. The work by scholars, such as Inderjeet Parmar and Giles Scott-Smith, has shed light on various aspects of the issue. Despite this international interest on the topic, there has been no published research regarding the Greek case. The Greek historiography and sociology of the Cold War have almost exclusively focused on geopolitical questions, state antagonisms, and economic considerations. It is only recently that a few notable studies have started shedding light on the Cold War as a cultural phenomenon and the genealogies, historical contingencies, and individual and institutional actions that sought to promote liberal capitalist democracy while discrediting communism. In the Greek context, the role of artists, intellectuals, and the work of organizations and institutions in the cultural warfare between the United States and the Soviet Union have yet to be more systematically explored.

The Ford Foundation in Greece

Academic reference to the issue of Ford Foundation activity in Greece is very limited. The literature for the case of Greece is mainly based on journalistic pieces relating to cultural foundations, on interviews, and on personal recollections of people that had been somehow involved.

For my study, a number of questions have surfaced from my primary findings in Greece:

- (a) What were the practices and policies of the FF in Greece? What were the similarities and differences with other FF projects of the time? And, how did these grants (re)shaped the cultural and academic sphere in Greece?
- (b) How can the FF in Greece be contextualized in the broader social, cultural, and political framework of the cultural Cold War?
- (c) What were the motives of the grantees? How did they perceive the criticisms raised against their choices?

The lack of academic reference and my search for answers led me to the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC).² The use of RAC's collections provided unique insight into Ford Foundation policies and how these policies were implemented on a national level, in this instance in Greece. Moreover, one can develop a deep understanding of the structure of the network of FF officials in the NY headquarters, their counterparts on-site, the grantees, and the intermediate links between these three main categories. Personal relationships between the different actors of the network seem to have been rather important, an aspect that is often neglected. Assessing these collections, within the theoretical framework of the cultural Cold War, in reconstructing the history of the FF activities in Greece, aims in moving beyond the Janus of moralization and conspiracy theories that often dominate debates around foundations and their practices.

My research focuses mainly on two separate periods. The first period of Ford Foundation activities in Greece ran from 1958 to 1968. The second period

continued from 1968 to 1982 during the tenure of Kaiti Myrivilli, the on-site director of operations and a key person for the development of the Ford Foundation's program, along with W. McNeil Lowry, who was the head of the FF's Arts and Humanities Division. During the former period, funding was directed primarily to (state) institutions. The latter period of the Foundation's operations in Greece was rather controversial as it initiated a time of left-wing grantees during a military dictatorship perceived to have been US-led, causing heated debate and polemics.

Grant Files

The Ford Foundation funded a number of significant institutions, such as Konstantinos Doxiadis' Athens Technological Organization,³ Karolos Koun's Athens Drama Society - Greek Art Theater,⁴ Vasilis Rafaelidis' Contemporary Cinema,⁵ as well as significant Greek intellectuals, such as Alexander Kotzias, Stratis Tsirkas, Costas Taktis, Theodoros Angelopoulos, and Pantelis Voulgaris.⁶ While scholarship about the grantees is far from being scarce, there have been no actual references to the outcome of these grants. Addressing this issue may lead to moving beyond moralization and personal stance towards focusing on the produced works and projects and how or if they actually fit the context of the cultural Cold War or not.

The Ford Foundation grant records at RAC provide insight on the motivation of the grantees to apply as well as of the FF to consider, to grant or, in some cases, to motivate potential grantees to apply. In some cases, one may even notice that the socio-political activities of the grantees, outside the scope of the grants received, were of interest to the Foundation, since the local representative, Myrivilli, would inform Lowry about them.

Ford Foundation Catalogued Reports

The grant record files provide us with an overview of the specific programs applied by FF during this period, enabling us to perceive the incentives of both parties, the FF and the grantees. However, it is necessary to put all these grants within a context, to historicize them, in order to comprehend them. That can be done through the close reading of catalogued reports at the RAC concerning the space, e.g. Greece, Europe,⁷ or the subject, e.g. Arts and Humanities, during the period in question. These reports proved valuable to my research. Unfortunately, I did discover that a subset of these reports are still unavailable to researchers.⁸ These specific reports—the restricted access to which is rather unlikely to protect any personal data or even state or institutional secrets, since it has been more than half a century since these policies were activated—may be important pieces for a researchers’ puzzle. Thus, I encourage that the restriction policies should be revisited to increase transparency and access.

Oral History

Another equally significant set of archival material is the Oral History Project of the Ford Foundation.⁹ This project provides unique insight into the FF, its projects, its staff, and both their often very personal relationship with particular projects, as well as with each other. Of course, testimonies vary greatly. Some are very long and detailed, with the interviewees presenting their viewpoint on their colleagues, superiors, and work very openly, while others are more tailor-made to (re)present the official history of the institution. Both are equally useful because by combining the personal histories of the interviewees with their official statements, a researcher may understand a lot more. Someone ousted from the Foundation would probably be more open to talk, bitterness, revenge or just not caring about exposing an organization or individuals he or she is not working for/with anymore. Others, who stayed until the end of their career or left on their own terms will probably present different stories that are also serving their own posthumous fame.

In Conclusion

The Ford Foundation records available at the Rockefeller Archive Center have been an invaluable source for my research. Even before I had the chance to process the material I had seen, and I was simply gathering it and browsing through documents, folders, microfilm reels, and digitized material, I realized the wealth of information that started filling the gaps. This material helped me reconstruct initial thoughts and start developing a firm historical narrative.

The diversity of the available research material provides insight into different aspects of the FF, its operations, the mentality of its trustees and staff, as well as of their onsite counterparts. The perception of the FF activity both within the US, on a global scale, and at the local level, such as in Greece, is rather intriguing. At the same time, the FF may have been considered, by different institutions or in different countries, to be soft on communists and radicals and simultaneously a US government trojan horse. In fact, the Ford Foundation was a complex institution which had an even more complicated relationship with the government and its various agencies. This complexity also goes for the relationship amongst its trustees and, if one neglects all these different power games, a researcher is bound to jump to oversimplistic conclusions and fail to view important aspects of the issue. The cultural Cold War, within the context of which we need to address and assess this particular issue, needs historicizing but not Manichaeism.

¹ CIA Relations, 1952-1958, Box 57 Folder 522, Ford Foundation records, Francis X. (Frank) Sutton papers (FA1141), RAC.

² The help of everybody at the RAC, and especially Bethany Antos, Norine Hochman, James Allen Smith, as well as Patricia Rosenfield, were instrumental for my research and I feel the need to thank every single one of them. I visited shortly the RAC in October 2017 for the first time, but this report concerns my research trip that took place in August 2018. The latter was possible due to an RAC research stipend.

³ Athens Technological Organization, (05900009), 1958 October 17-1962 April 16, Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC; Athens Technological Organization (06000216), 1960 May 31-1962 May 30, Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC; Athens Technological Organization (06300115), 1962 September 01-1963 August 31, Reel R0677 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC; Athens Technological Organization (06500163), 1965 April 06-1974 November 16, Reel R4137 (Microform), Reel R4139 (Microform), Reel R4140 (Microform), Reel R4141 (Microform), Reel R5578 (Microform), Reel R5579 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC; Athens Technological Organization (06800723), 1968 August 01-1979 December 31, Reel R2401 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC; Athens Technological Organization (06800802), 1968 August 16-1969 August 15, Reel R1904 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC.

⁴ Greek Art Theater (Athens Drama Society) Ford Foundation release - \$115,000, 1972 July 21, Box 5, Folders 242-243, Ford Foundation records, Press Materials (FA1322), RAC; Athens Drama Society - The Greek Art Theater (06800752), 1968 June 01-1975 May 31, Reel R2243 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants A-B (FA732A), RAC.

⁵ Company for the Development of Cinematography in Greece Ford Foundation release - \$104,500, 1972 July 21, Box 3, Folder 139, Ford Foundation records, Press Materials (FA1322), RAC; Company for the Development of Cinematography in Greece (07200082), 1971 July 01-1973 June 30, Reel R1751 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants C-D (FA732B), RAC.

⁶ United States Educational Foundation in Greece, Ford Foundation release - \$35,000 grant, 1970 January 2, Box 12, Folder 592, Ford Foundation records, Press Materials (FA1322), RAC; United States Educational Foundation In Greece (06900245), 1969 March 05-1970 March 04, Reel R1938 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants U-Z (FA732I), RAC; United States Educational Foundation In Greece (06800826), 1968 August 29-1969 August 28, Reel R1906 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants U-Z (FA732I), RAC; United States Educational Foundation In Greece (06800616), 1968 July 03-1970 July 02, Reel R1900 (Microform), Ford Foundation records, Grants U-Z (FA732I), RAC; 919. Grants in 1973 to Greece, 1974 January 3, Box 19, Folder 781, Ford Foundation records, Press Materials (FA1322), RAC.

⁷ Report on the 1979 Southern European Fellowship Program Competition for Greek Candidates (Reports 009432), Ford Foundation records, Catalogued Reports, Reports 9287-11774 (FA739D), RAC.

⁸ For example, "Higher education and educational activities in Greece" (Reports 003812), Ford Foundation records, Catalogued Reports, Reports 3255-6261 (FA739B), RAC.

⁹ Ford Foundation records, Oral History Project (FA618), RAC.