

The new image of benefaction in the 21st century

The English edition of professor Matoula Tomara-Sideris' book on the history of benefaction in Modern Greece is coming out soon

The phenomenon of Greek communities abroad in the 18th, 19th and 20th century constitutes an exemplary cradle of benefaction and highlights its significance in the formation of modern Hellenism. Benefaction flourished in the communities through the action of outstanding entrepreneurs of the diaspora, who lived and served the community structure and community life. It is ascertained indeed, that their function shares common characteristics regardless of specific conditions such as place, time, means and purpose.

In the present, historic reality generates conditions which render benefaction deeds a necessity. Nevertheless, the way benefaction function is materialized in the 21st century society bears unique historical and operational features.

In the past, the benefactor used to personally undertake the accomplishment of a social work, substituting collectivities, in a period that the point at issue was the establishment of sovereignty and socio-cultural project of the rising bourgeoisie.

Benefaction in the era of globalization

In the 21st century, in the era of globalization, which tends to the elimination of national borders, and the bourgeoisie is firmly dominant, in conditions of decline of social cohesion, deep crisis of the welfare state has emerged.

Moreover, in modern times, the scales of both social needs and benefaction practice have changed. Foundations have been established, which modify the modus operandi of benefaction, while in parallel they impart an addi-

tional role to it, which focuses on the investment and production of new social capital. These shifts in the historical field mainly resulted to the emergence of the ideology and practice of **foundational benefaction**, which fast developed into a large, planet scale benefaction. This new form and scale of benefaction is operationally implemented through the action of Foundations. For instance, the work of Foundations established by Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Pierre Omidyar, Jeff Skoll, Larry Page, Sergey Brin in the U.S.A., and by many others all over the continents, such as the Indians Anji Reddy and J. R. D. Tata and recently the Taiwanese Chang Yung-Fa, constitutes a planet scale and range benefaction.

Thus, benefaction function today is mainly mediated and carried on by col-

lective bodies (Foundations). This form of benefaction function, which on a global level started in the early 20th century, today is characterized by the scale and dimensions of the granting capacity. Thus, there is a distinction between Foundations and Mega-Foundations, in which Foundations with a property over one billion dollars are categorized. For instance, in 2015 Bill Gates Foundation exceeded 37 billion dollars in available funds. Both forms of Foundations adopt as their declared aim to intervene in society for its welfare. In this sense, they do not constitute a negation, but a historical evolution of the essence of benefaction.

Harmonized with their times, contemporary prosperous Greeks continue an active presence as benefactors, regardless of the change in the way their beneficent function is realized – that is, the fact that beneficent function is not mainly accomplished through personal initiative, but through the work of the Foundations they have established as a prominent tool. Foundations bearing names such as Onassis, Niarchos, Bodossakis, Latsis, Vardinoyannis, Goulandris, Leventis, Laskaridis, Costopoulos etc. materialize the ideology of benefaction, functioning as sui generis collective money-bearing subjects, which contribute to the development and social cohesion, while in parallel they secure their founder's posthumous reputation. Eloquent illustrations of the modus operandi of foundational benefaction are the following:

The Onassis Foundation was established in 1975. It supports Greek studies in universities, research centers, elementary and high schools in various countries abroad (e.g. U.S.A., Australia, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, Egypt, Turkey, etc.). It provides scholarships to Greek postgraduate students and candidate Ph. doctors, as well as to foreign university professors and researchers. At the same time, it supports the cultural and academic activities of the Onassis Foundation branch in New York. In the health sector, it fully covers the needs of the Onassis Cardiac Surgery Center of Athens. In 2010, the Onassis Cultural Center was inaugurated in Athens. It is a cultural center which hosts and supports numerous activities and artists.

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She is the author of several books, among which:

“The population of Lefkada in the 19th century”, “Historical Demography: From demographic processes to collective mentalities and Behaviors”, “Benevolence and personality: Benefactors of Cairo Greeks”, “Alexandrian families: Horemis-Benakis-Salvagos (which was awarded in 2006 by the Academy of Athens)”, “The Greeks of Cairo (KERKYRA Publications-economia PUBLISHING, 2007) and “Women, Gender, and Diasporic Lives (Lexington Books, 2009).



The Stavros Niarchos Foundation was established in 1996. It supports education, health, sports, arts and culture, as well as social welfare. In 2016, the Stavros Niarchos Cultural Centre has been inaugurated. It includes the National Library, the National Opera, while it hosts artistic, educational and entertaining activities.

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The Bodossakis Foundation was established in 1972. It supports the promotion of education; and of health care for the financially deprived classes, and the protection of the natural environment. It provides scholarships for postgraduate studies in various fields, in Greek or foreign universities.

The “Fondation Latsis Internationale”, established in Geneva in 1975, awards since 1983 the Latsis Prize to four academics, one Greek and one European researcher for their contribution to European science and technology. The “Fondation Latsis Internationale” is associated to the Ioannis S. Latsis Foun-

ation, which was founded in Athens in 2005. It finances projects supporting education (eg. Latseio School, Psychico College), health (e.g. a wing in the Thriassio Hospital of Eleusis), social welfare, environment, culture. For the promotion of the naval and business history of Greece, in 2007 it created the floating museum “Neraida”.

The Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation was established in 1997. It supports education and provides scholarships to Greek students for studies abroad, as well as to foreign students for continuing their studies in Greek Universities. It supports health and cultural heritage. In collaboration with UNESCO it undertakes initiatives on a national and European level, implementing the “We care” project. In addition, Marianna Vardinoyanni herself is the soul of the Association of Friends of Children with Cancer “Elpida” (Hope) which has created hospitalization and care units for these children.

The Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation was established in 1979. Its main aim is to support arts. In 1979, it founded the Museum of Modern Art in the island of Andros. It also provides scholarships for artistic studies. Besides, it created the model home for the aged “Athens Home” and contributed to the advancement of “Athens Old People’s Home”.

The A.G. Leventis Foundation was founded in 1979. It supports educational, cultural and charity aims in Cyprus,

Greece and worldwide. It also supports care for the environment, scientific and medical research, preservation of the archaeological monuments and the exhibition of Cypriot antiquities collections in Museums all over the world.

The Aikaterini Laskarides Foundation was founded in 2007. It aims to the promotion of the Greek letters, the Greek culture and the Historic and Naval research on a Greek and global level (e.g. China, Holland etc.).

The Ioannis F. Costopoulos Foundation was established in 1979. It supports cultural events, education programmes and research projects for the promotion of the Greek culture, the letters and arts within and beyond the Greek territory.

In particular, in the modern era of globalization, Foundations embody benefaction ideology functioning as “collective organic intellectuals”¹, not only in the scale of Greece, but in the scale of humanity. Through their Foundations, the Greek contemporary benefactors (them also) support health, education, research, social care, innovation, natural environment, cultivation of knowledge and art. That is, they function as organizers of culture and society in a national and ecumenical scale. For instance, besides its contribution in Greek initiatives and enterprises, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation has also supported international organizations and initiatives (for children, education, MoMA of New York and numerous other cultural and education organizations², the Alexandria Patriarchate, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania etc.).

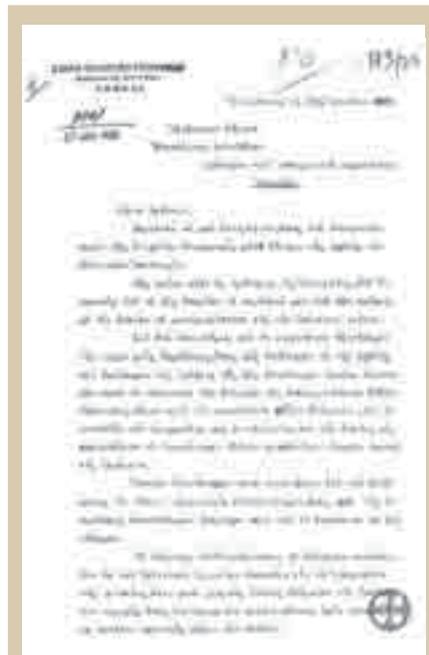
From this point of view, foundational benefaction is a significant subject of the future. And this, from two sides at least: as a subject of the future of culture, since financing, framing and orientation of knowledge and art are determined in a large degree by the choices and acts or omissions of these Foundations. Also, as a subject of the future of the social bond, which is under great stress and redefined in the environment of globalization, and especially in the conditions of the present Greek crisis raging since 2009.

Actually, present foundational benefaction represents an historical derivative and today’s dominant form of col-

lective, organizational or institutional benefaction. Its actors are collective entities supported by powerful financial structures – banks, industries, corporations... The beneficent act reaches then a higher level regarding the scale and the tools supporting its materialization.

From personal to institutional benefaction

Thus, contemporary benefactors through their Foundations, which operate as collective organic intellectuals, utilize the tool and power of the organization, so as to accomplish what the individual benefactor used to ma-



The letter of Georges Frangoudis to PM E. Venizelos, June 27, 1930 (Benaki Museum)

terialize in the past. It is a historical development of the previous stage, serving similar purposes, by new means, though. Indeed, Foundations represent an impersonal mechanism which is programmed to materialize the will of the one (even absent) “personal other”. Any specific will of the Foundation does not refer to the general aim, but to the managerial choices in reference to the particular work at the time.

Foundations reinforce civil society which functions as an intermediate space between the state and the citizen, supporting the willing participation of the individual in society and

cultural reality. For instance, reinforcement of civil society has become a part of the strategic goals of the Bodossakis Foundation⁴. In this perspective, in cooperation with Athens Municipality, it materializes the programme “Social Dynamo” for strengthening of organizations and groups of the civil society, with learning, support and networking as a linchpin. In parallel, through the “Giving for Greece” initiative, the Bodossakis Foundation intends to the creation of a wider network of social contribution for securing of a better future for Greece. In the same spirit, since 2013 it operates as an administrator of the programme “We are all citizens”. Through this programme, an amount of 7.3 million euros is given for the materialization of seventy-six works all over Greece, of which 100.000 people are benefited, who belong both in the general population and in socially vulnerable groups.

Foundations cover collective needs exceeding the state potential. For example, in the pretext of the economic crisis and the influx of refugees in Greece (situations which had not been predicted), the Stavros Niarchos Foundation materialized the “Initiative against the Greek Crisis” programme, in two phases to the tune of 100.000.000 each (Phase A: 2012-2015 and Phase B: 2015-2016)⁵. These resources are distributed as such: Social care 66%, Health and Athletics 24%, Education 8%, Arts and Culture 2%. In a similar direction, in the period of crisis, from 2009 and then, the Bodossakis Foundation has supported more than 300 organizations who deal with distribution of messes, medicare of non-insured social groups and dealing with poverty.

In parallel, Foundations undertake a complementary role to that of the state in reference to social economy. That is, through contemporary Foundations, preconditions for the development of social entrepreneurship are boosted. It is an alternative form of entrepreneurship, based on social economy through the re-investment of the largest part of earnings and the creation of new job positions for the citizens. The idea of social entrepreneurship on a global level expanded very fast⁶ as a successful practice of a social economy of solidarity. **bf**