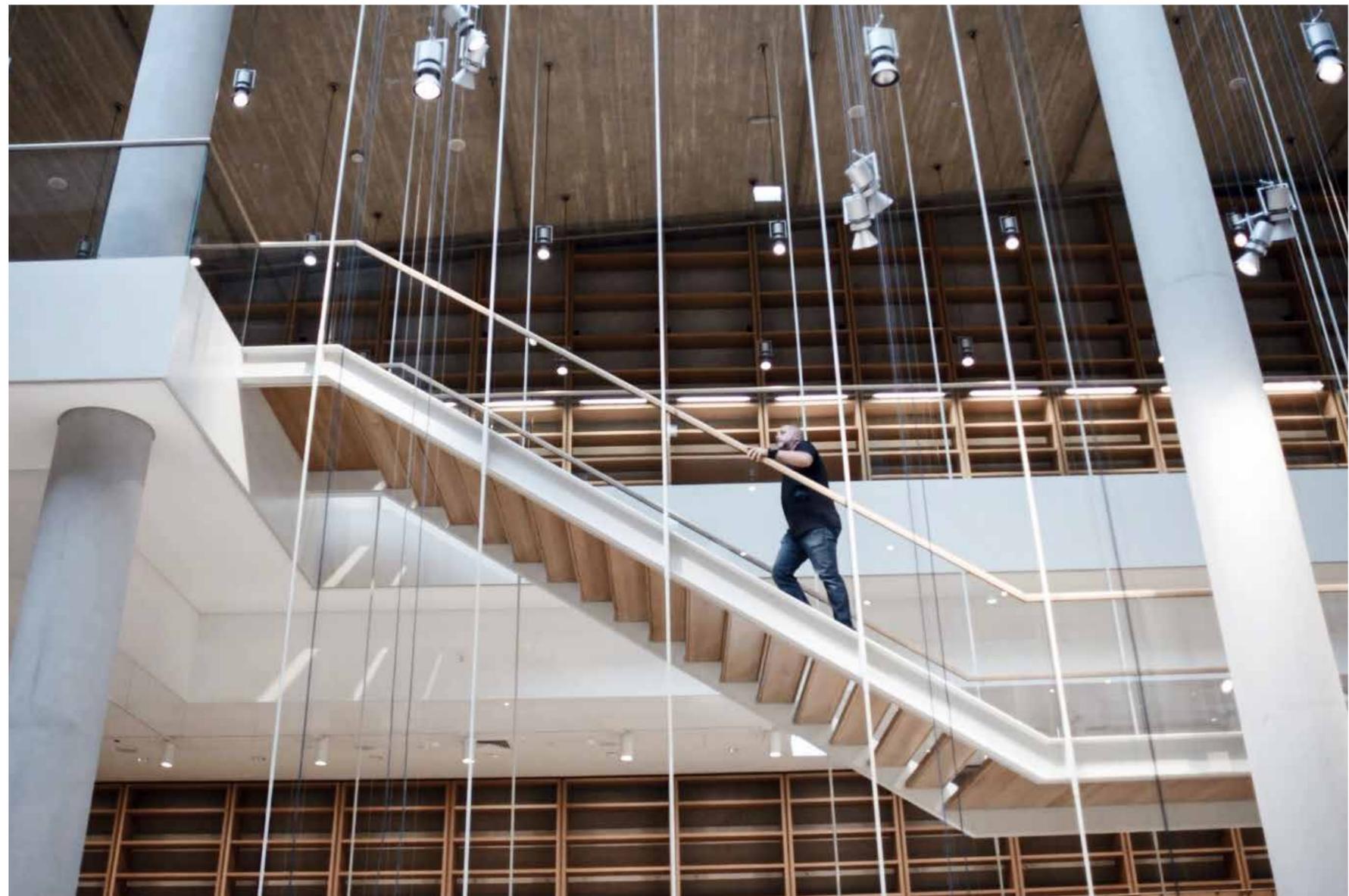


The Stavros Niarchos Foundation has benefited thousands of good causes and millions of people's lives worldwide. An ethos of openness and collaboration are at the heart of its approach.



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PHILANTHROPY BEYOND BORDERS

“Can you believe that this all started out as a drawing on a napkin?,”



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...asks Andreas Dracopoulos, as he takes in his surroundings. “It was over a lunch we had with Renzo Piano at the Morgan Library in New York, which he also designed. And his beautiful but simple sketch on that very first meeting was exactly how this project came out. Perfection out of simplicity.”

That napkin sketch must have been quite something indeed. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center to which it gave birth is breath-taking. Hailed by critics for its visionary design, Renzo Piano’s Athenian masterpiece is the new home of the Greek National Library and National Opera. Solar-powered and sustainable to its core, its buildings are surrounded by a 400-meter seawater canal for sailing and canoeing and a 42-acre public park.

“Renzo designed this place with the people in mind,” says Andreas, who today heads the foundation created to fulfill his great-uncle’s vision – see *Stavros Niarchos: pioneer global citizen*. “You can see how he was thinking – the openness of the space, and how it’s used. Athens desperately needed a new park like this, somewhere people could come together. Visitor numbers are way ahead of expectations. They really feel it’s their place, that it belongs to them. That makes us so happy.”

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Athens’ spectacular new landmark, designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, incorporates the Greek National Library and National Opera, public park, gardens, and a canal.

Photo credits: © Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center



The Stavros Niarchos Foundation's (SNF) desire to deliver ownership to the Greek people went far beyond creating inclusive spaces where almost all the activities are free of charge, however. Having invested more than €600m in establishing the Cultural Center – its largest ever single gift – the foundation then donated it to the Greek state.

“When that was first announced, I got asked a lot if I was crazy,” says Andreas, with a smile. “But for us, it’s not crazy at all, it makes perfect sense. We want the people to be the actual owners of this place. And the state exists to be a servant of the people. That’s the true spirit of *dimokratía* – where the people are the ultimate owners.”

Although the SNF has passed ownership of the Center to the people, it hasn’t by any means stepped back from it. “Our co-operation with the state is really strong. We fund a lot of the programs that happen in the park, for example, so that they’re free to use. We realize the state is really short of funds because of the economic crisis, so we’re helping out.”

“Collaboration is at the heart of what we do,” says Andreas. “As a foundation overall, we try to complement, by giving. We aren’t trying to replace the state. Society’s problems – in Greece and elsewhere – are much too big for the govern-

ment, or private sector, or for philanthropists to tackle alone. Collaboration is the only way forward and philanthropy can play a bridging role, providing ideas and funding.

Supporting the arts and cultural life is only one dimension of the SNF’s extraordinary work. It also makes grants in education, health and sports, and social welfare. And its activities stretch far beyond its native Greece. Since its establishment in 1996, it has committed more than US\$2.5bn to non-profit organizations in 124 countries worldwide.

“We are very much an international foundation,” says Andreas. “We happen to do a lot in Greece because of our heritage and more recently because of the crisis. But half of our grants are international. Our philanthropy really is borderless.”

The diversity of the SNF’s life-saving and life-enhancing grants is remarkable. With more than 4,000 awards made to date, help has been given to victims of hunger, AIDS, cancer, blindness, Alzheimer’s, spinal conditions, neglected diseases, and autism. Beneficiaries also include public libraries, museums, schools, universities, and research institutes, as well as film festivals, theatre companies, and intercommunity programs.

The SNF’s vast array of supported causes reflects its highly accessible grant application process, which is open to any non-profit organization in its chosen fields. “The key criteria for our making an award are simple,” explains An-

dreas. “Do the applicant’s activities have a positive effect on society at large and are the people involved ethical, efficient, and professional?”

“If the answer to these questions is ‘yes’, we have to be able to prove to ourselves why we could ever decline the request. I’m sure that we’ve made some mistakes but I’d always much prefer to give too much than to deny a worthy cause. We would rather be seen as naïve than arrogant in our philanthropy.”

As well as its diverse grantmaking, the SNF is also helping to promote new thinking among its peers. Every June, it organizes the International Conference on Philanthropy, held in Greece. The event brings together representatives from other foundations and institutions, as well as academics and scientists, to discuss best practices and developments within the field.

“Organizations too often think that they have the answers,” says Andreas. “Our conference takes a different approach, however. We aim for participants to leave us buzzing with questions. If we don’t pose questions, how can we identify the problems that really need to be solved? It’s the Socratic way.”

“Stavros Niarchos didn’t just appreciate different countries and cultures. For him, the best way to express his global citizenship was through philanthropy. The classical Greek meaning of philanthropy is ‘the love of mankind.’ And that is the true spirit of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.”

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For Stavros Niarchos, the best way to express his
global citizenship was through philanthropy
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ANDREAS DRACOPOULOS: MY LIFE

“I was born and grew up in Athens. I left here when I finished high school to go to the US. I studied economics at the Wharton School of Business and then moved to New York to work for Salomon Brothers. After that, I basically joined the family business. I was directly working for my great-uncle, Stavros Niarchos. We became very close, especially in the last few years of his life.

When I first moved to the US, I was thinking maybe I'd spend a few years there, like many people do, and then go back to Greece. But I've ended up staying. Our three young kids were born in New York City and go to school there. I'm very lucky because of my circumstances, both personal and through the foundation, I can spend a couple of months in the summer in Greece, which I think is also very important for my kids.

Being bi-cultural is so valuable in today's ever more globalized world. The earth is more connected than ever before thanks to technology. So we really need more people who understand other cultures, different ideas. It's a bit scary how almost the opposite seems to have happened in the last couple of years, but hopefully it's just a short-term blip.

My work with the foundation is like running a large business. I'm busier today than I've ever been. There's no profit-and-loss account at the end of the day but you worry the same as if it were a business. The reward in this case comes from seeing the benefits of what we're doing, of how value is added to society. I believe there's no higher form of dividend than that.

We are very proud of how the foundation has been built up from one person's legacy to what it is today. We feel a deep responsibility not to rest on our laurels but to continue to work hard, helping provide society at large with the prospect of a better tomorrow.”



STAVROS NIARCHOS: PIONEER GLOBAL CITIZEN

The family flour-milling business had seen better days. The Great Depression had taken a scythe to crop prices, and to millers' profit margins. Not long out of Athens University, Stavros Niarchos had an innovative idea. The business could control its costs much better, he argued, if it also owned the vessels that delivered its raw grain. Thanks to the economic crisis, ships were going cheap. He persuaded his uncles to buy a small fleet of aging but seaworthy ships. A great voyage was underway.

When World War II broke out, Niarchos went off to do his patriotic duty, naturally in the Greek Navy. He leased his fleet to the Allies for the duration. Not much of it would return intact at the end of hostilities. He didn't mind too much, though. The insurance check that he received would buy new ships – bigger, better ships. Niarchos believed that the future of international commerce would favor those who owned the largest craft. And he was right.

As the world got back on its feet, demand for oil tankers in particular boomed. In 1956, Niarchos proudly launched the 47,750-ton Spyros Niarchos, at that time the world's biggest tanker to date. His innovative vessels helped propel the shipping tycoon onto the cover of Time magazine. His desire to own the mightiest vessels and the largest fleet created a legendary rivalry with his fellow Greek shipping magnate, Aristotle Onassis.

“Everyone still remembers Onassis and my great-uncle for the way they competed against each other,” says Andreas Dracopoulos. “Some have even described them almost as enemies, but that's really not how it was. What they had was a healthy and respectful rivalry, always striving to outdo one other. But as my great-uncle once told me, he and Onassis often met up at night in New York, and hit the town together.”

Shipping entered treacherous waters in the



Photo credits: Pierre Boulat/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

1970s. Soaring oil prices unleashed economic chaos worldwide. A massive oversupply of ships only deepened the industry's funk. Family pride kept many ship-owners from taking the necessary steps, and their businesses sank beneath the waves. Niarchos, however, had seen the writing on the wall. Well before the crisis reached its nadir, he had sold off most of his tankers. By the early 1980s, he had shifted much of his great wealth into the then-deeply unfashionable stock market, just as the biggest bull run ever was about to begin.

There was more to Niarchos than business innovator, however. He was also a pioneer of global citizenship. His parents were Greeks who had emigrated to the US. “My great-uncle definitely saw himself as a citizen of the world and lived that way,” says Andreas. “While he loved Greece, he also loved to experience the rest of the

world and its many cultures. He travelled constantly and had homes in many different places.”

“My great-uncle worked hard his whole life and was incredibly successful. But he was also a lucky man and was humble enough to recognize that. He very much wanted to give back to society, not just in Greece but around the world. His vision for achieving that was to have a foundation. It’s as much his vision as what he left us that allows us to do all this work today.”

