

International Conference on the Role of Foundations during Economic Crises

Day Two Overview

The second day of the two-day International Conference concluded on Friday, July 6th. The active participation of over 80 Greek and international foundations and non-profits, as well as numerous social organizations, led to lively debates and discussions and draw extensive conclusions regarding the strategy and programs that foundations should implement in order to offer substantial help and hope to a society deeply affected by the crisis.

The second day of the conference was mostly dedicated to discussing the meaning of the idea of philanthropy and its role in responding to the crisis, a topic that was the main point of the speech delivered by **Sam Tsemberis, Managing Director and Founder of the “Pathways to Housing”** program. Sam Tsemberis discussed the problem of homelessness and the critical role of philanthropic institutions in efforts to address it, and presented examples of successful actions implemented in the US.

The main theme of the first workshop of the second day was *Programmatic priorities and the emergence of grass roots philanthropy*. **Jennifer Humke, Program Officer, Digital Media & Learning, MacArthur Foundation**, presented the institution’s top priority, namely to conceive and implement a new vision for 21st century learning. According to Humke, innovative digital media plays a critical factor in promoting positive changes in education, even during the course of a crisis. **Chris Lawrence, Director of the Mozilla Hive Learning Network NYC**, also focused on innovation, analyzing its vital role in creating programs, which aim to promote creative education, expression, and the enrichment of younger generations. Finally, **Isabel Jonet, President, European Federation of Food Banks**, spoke about *Entrajuda* an organization in Portugal, which was launched in 2001 with the purpose to educate nonprofits in management and organization through the mobilization of civic society. *Entrajuda* simplifies and maximizes the philanthropic process by mobilizing volunteers, partners and benefactors.

The afternoon debate on challenges and funding opportunities was moderated by **Robin Niblett, Director, Chatham House**. **Pier Mario Vello, Secretary General, Fondazione Cariplo**, pointed out that philanthropy is a social platform, which foundations may employ to develop their actions, and emphasized that the economic crisis has not altered essentially the role of foundations, but made it even more vital. The debate’s other participant, **Markus Hipp, Executive Director, BMW Foundation**, explored foundations’ relationship with citizens, the private sector and the state, pointing out that “foundations help to renew and complement the welfare state, through innovation and entrepreneurial thinking”.

The main theme of the second workshop was the specific ways in which European and US foundations responded to the economic crisis. This broad theme provided an opportunity to discuss a number of different issues, such as making grants across borders as an effective way of maximizing capacity, how effectively can a foundation import best practices, and whether a global world means also the globalization of problems and solutions. **George McCarthy, Director, Metropolitan Opportunity, Ford Foundation** and the workshop’s moderator spoke about the fact that economic crises present foundations with significant challenges, but also with unique opportunities and emphasized the importance of having a strategy in such critical times. He used the Ford Foundation’s work in Detroit as an example of the challenges that foundations face during economic crises. **Iñigo Sáenz de Miera Cárdenas, Director General, Fundación Botín** and **Ivan Vejvoda, Vice President / Programs, The German Marshall Fund of the United States** also focused on the challenges facing their respective foundations as a result of the economic crisis and discussed specific strategies and approaches implemented for the purpose of adjusting to a changing economic and social environment.

In the last workshop of the conference, five of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation's grantees, **Greek National Opera, PRAKSIS, SOS Children's Villages, Together for Children, Initiative for Heritage Conservancy** and **Museum of Greek Children's Art**, discussed their work within this socioeconomic environment, the significant impact of the crisis on the organizations and their work, and the programs that have been implemented with the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

In presenting the conference's closing remarks, both **Dimitris Vlastos, President, Bodossaki Foundation**, and **Luc Tayart de Borms, Managing Director, King Baudouin Foundation** outlined the difficulties that the economic crisis has imposed both upon foundations and non profit organizations.

Finally, in closing the conference, **Vasili Tsamis, Chief Operating Officer, Stavros Niarchos Foundation**, summarized some of the issues discussed over two days of presentations and workshops, and emphasized that the conference had offered the audience many questions for contemplation and plenty of food for thought. He also announced the Foundation's decision to organize the conference again in the summer of 2013.