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**FUNDING POLICY RESEARCH UNDER “DISTASTEFUL REGIMES”:
The Ford Foundation and the Social Sciences at the University of Brasília**

**Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak
Ramón García Fernández**

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Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE MINAS GERAIS
FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS ECONÔMICAS
CENTRO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO E PLANEJAMENTO REGIONAL**

**FUNDING POLICY RESEARCH UNDER “DISTASTEFUL REGIMES”: THE FORD
FOUNDATION AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BRASÍLIA ***

Carlos Eduardo Suprinyak

Associate professor at Cedeplar – Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)

Ramón García Fernández

Full professor – Universidade Federal do ABC (UFABC) – Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The Ford Foundation's initial effort to assist in the development of the social sciences in Brazil coincided with the early years of the military regime that ruled the country between 1964 and 1985. Given the Foundation's expressed goal of fostering research that was of potential relevance for public policy, the Brazilian political context posed a difficult dilemma. The issue came to the forefront amid discussions over a proposal for the creation of a Master's Program in Economics at the University of Brasília (UnB). Although UnB's modern institutional structure was ideally suited for the Foundation's purposes, the university had been subject to repeated military interventions in late 1960's. Moreover, its geographical closeness to the seat of Brazilian political power arose concerns that it could become an instrument in the hands of the military government. Using evidence from the Ford Foundation archives, the paper attempts to illuminate the institutional context surrounding the development of academic economics in Brazil in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in its relations to the deeper social and political currents in effect at the time.

Key words: Ford Foundation, University of Brasília, sociology of the economics profession, Kalman Silvert, Edmar Bacha.

RESUMO

Os esforços iniciais da Fundação Ford para apoiar o desenvolvimento das ciências sociais no Brasil coincidiram com os primeiros anos do regime militar que governou o país entre 1964 e 1985. Dado o objetivo expresso da Fundação de promover pesquisas com potencial relevância para a formulação de políticas públicas, o contexto político brasileiro oferecia um difícil dilema. Essa questão veio à tona durante as discussões em torno de uma proposta para a criação de um programa de mestrado em economia na Universidade de Brasília (UnB). Muito embora a moderna estrutura institucional da UnB fosse perfeitamente adequada aos propósitos da Fundação, a universidade havia sofrido repetidas intervenções militares durante o final da década de 1960. Além disso, sua proximidade especial com os centros de poder político brasileiros gerava suspeitas de que a universidade poderia se converter em um instrumento nas mãos do governo militar. Utilizando evidências dos arquivos da Fundação Ford, o artigo tenta iluminar o contexto institucional que cercava o desenvolvimento da economia acadêmica no Brasil entre o fim da década de 1960 e o início da década de 1970, em suas relações com as correntes sociais e políticas mais profundas em curso à época.

Key words: Fundação Ford, Universidade de Brasília, sociologia da economia profissional, Kalman Silvert, Edmar Bacha.

Classificação JEL: B20; A14; A23.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ford Foundation’s involvement with the social sciences in Brazil began in the early 1960’s, following the recommendations of a 1959 mission led by Reynold Carlson, Alfred Wolf, and Lincoln Gordon (Station & Welna 2002, pp. 390-1). Headed by Carlson, the Foundation’s Brazilian office in Rio de Janeiro began its operations in 1962, when a few exploratory projects were already under way. In economics, initial grants were extended to the Getúlio Vargas Foundation and to the Federal Universities of Ceará and Rio Grande do Sul (Fernández & Suprinyak 2015, p 12). Shortly thereafter, however, the Brazilian socio-political context changed drastically due to the military coup of March-April 1964, which resulted in the establishment of an authoritarian regime that would rule over the country for the next twenty years.

Given the Ford Foundation’s aspirations for its fledgling program for the Latin American and the Caribbean, the situation posed difficult challenges. Support for the social sciences (economics included) aimed explicitly at building institutional research capacity and training human resources that could be of assistance in tackling the serious socioeconomic problems inherent in Brazilian reality. As the repressive nature of the Brazilian military regime became more apparent, however, the question eventually arose: was it possible to assist Brazil without also, at least indirectly, assisting the Brazilian government? Did the Foundation’s efforts to foster the development of policy-relevant research automatically translate into support to an authoritarian political regime? During the mid- to late-1960’s, support for the social sciences in Brazil was continued and increased, as the OLAC² staff seemed to assume it was possible to keep a technocratic, politically neutral attitude without asking too many questions. However, the issue came to the forefront in the early 1970’s amid discussions for a joint grant to economics and the social sciences at the University of Brasília (UnB). The proposal proved controversial given the nature of the beneficiary: not only was UnB located very close to the new seat of the Brazilian government, it had recently suffered repeated military interventions that resulted in academic purges and significant changes in the university’s public profile. A possible grant to Brasília thus forced Ford Foundation personnel at both Rio and New York openly to consider the nature and consequences of their involvement with the military regime.

By exploring this symbolic episode in depth, our purpose is to help uncover the rationale behind the Ford Foundation’s involvement with the social sciences in Brazil, and the strategies it adopted in order to deal with the increasingly difficult moral dilemmas posed by the Brazilian context. Given the Foundation’s crucial role in the development of economics and the social sciences in the country (Miceli 1993, Fernández & Suprinyak 2015), this may prove an important step towards understanding the specific conformation of the institutional structure that has permeated academic work in these areas ever since. Besides this introduction and some brief concluding remarks, the paper is divided into three more sections. Section 2 discusses the institutional position occupied by UnB in the 1960’s, and its difficult relationship with the military government after the 1964 coup. Section 3 then discusses the general strategy adopted by the Ford Foundation for the social sciences in Latin America, and how the concern with fostering policy-relevant research was reconciled to the new Brazilian political reality. Finally, section 4 explores the heated debates among FF staff triggered by the UnB grant proposal, and how the inherently moral issues thus raised were incorporated into the Foundation’s decision-making process.

² Office for Latin American and the Caribbean.

2. BRASÍLIA AND UNB IN THE 1960’S

In order to understand the institutional position occupied by the University of Brasília in the early 1970’s, one needs briefly to discuss the history of Brasília itself, the new federal capital that was only then completing its first decade of existence. When the Portuguese began colonizing Brazilian territory, their occupation was initially restricted to coastal areas, leading one critic to say that they acted like crabs, scratching the sand facing the sea while ignoring the countryside. The situation partially changed during the 18th century, with the occupation of the Northeastern hinterland and, in particular, of the current state of Minas Gerais, in the wake of the Brazilian gold rush. The central areas of the country and its western frontier, however, remained virtually unexplored.

The state of abandonment that thus characterized vast tracts of the territory led some visionaries to propose, already under Portuguese rule, that the capital should be relocated to a place closer to the geographical center of the country³. Although occasionally recovered throughout the Imperial era (1822-1889), it was only after the Republican Proclamation that the project was given formal expression. Article #3 of the Brazilian Constitution of 1891 determined the reestablishment of the federal capital in the highlands of Central Brazil, demarcating an area of slightly more than five thousand square miles for its exact location. However, although the idea of relocating the capital gained constitutional status – duly reaffirmed in the Constitution of 1946 – there were no concrete measures undertaken towards this end until 1955, during the presidential term of Café Filho, when the exact site for the future capital was finally chosen, and the expropriation of lands began. From that point onwards, the construction of Brasília took place in record time due to the strong commitment of President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-61), leading to its official inauguration on April 21, 1960.

The provisions for the new capital included, in the rather vague blueprints that characterized the whole project, the creation of a university⁴. Lucio Costa, the urban planner who conceived Brasília, had actually envisaged an area for the future university near the site of the most important ministries. His idea met with serious resistance from influent politicians who did not appreciate the idea of having a university, and consequently a potentially strong student movement, so close to the seat of government. Eventually, after some hesitation, Kubitschek sent a message to Congress proposing that the university be founded on the night of Brasília’s inauguration. In the whirlpool of early-60’s Brazilian politics⁵, the project was subject to heated debate and criticism. It was only 20 months (and two changes in presidency) later that President João Goulart finally signed the act creating the university on December 15, 1961, preserving the location originally specified in Costa’s project.

The time lapse, however, did not mean that plans for the university had remained frozen, since president Kubitschek had nominated a committee of six people who were in charge of the matter. Even more significant was the creation of a smaller group on July 25, 1960, whose task was to promote “further studies” on the creation of the university. Three members composed the new group. The first of them was Cyro dos Anjos, a politician who worked closely to the president, and who played a crucial role in gathering support and resources for the new university. The second was architect Oscar

³ For a more detailed assessment of the historical process leading to the construction of Brasília, see Vesentini (1987).

⁴ In our account of the early history of the University of Brasília, we closely follow Salmeron (2012).

⁵ A basic reference for Brazilian political history in this period is Skidmore (2010).

Niemeyer, responsible for designing most of Brasília’s main buildings, including UnB’s characteristic central building. Finally, Brazilian leading anthropologist and educator Darcy Ribeiro, who would become UnB’s first rector, completed the group.

Another central character in the institutional design of UnB was the leading Brazilian educator Anísio Teixeira⁶. A former student of John Dewey’s in Columbia, Teixeira was a strong advocate for a free, universal public school system for Brazilian children. Until the 1920’s, Brazil had only a few isolated faculties (essentially Medicine, Law, and Engineering), but no universities. During the mid-1930’s, Teixeira got involved in the project for a “Federal District University” (UDF), which aimed at creating a research-oriented institution financed by the city of Rio de Janeiro, the national capital at the time. Its original design clashed with the more conservative structure adopted in the few Brazilian universities founded by then, especially at the University of Brazil⁷. Arguing that universities were a federal affair, the Brazilian government closed UDF only four years after its foundation. Years later, Teixeira would become the founder of Capes, a Brazilian federal agency dedicated to fostering improvements in the training of university professors.

Given Teixeira’s record, it was only natural that Kubitscheck would turn to him for advice regarding the creation of UnB. Although Teixeira was responsible for establishing the main blueprints for the institutional organization of UnB, he was not interested in moving to the recently founded capital. He thus suggested Ribeiro as the first rector, and agreed to serve as the vice-rector, a position in which he could channel his personal prestige to support the university without leaving his Rio residence. Under Ribeiro’s direction, the new university initiated its activities in 1962 – at first in rooms borrowed from the Ministry of Education, but shortly thereafter beginning to relocate to its new campus. By that time, Ribeiro was appointed Brazilian Minister of Education⁸, prompting Teixeira to agree to replace him as rector.

Although infrastructural problems were obviously pervasive in these early stages, there was a general climate of optimism surrounding UnB, partly due to the university’s innovative (for Brazilian standards) institutional structure⁹. A richer and freer academic environment seemed inherent in some of its particular traits, especially the emphasis on research, the creation of full-time positions, the end of the system of “cátedras” (in which senior professors held an almost dictatorial power over academic decision-making), and the creation of academic institutes and departments. The military coup of March 31, 1964, however, severely affected these prospects. Due to the military takeover, Teixeira was forced to resign from the rectorate; Zeferino Vaz, a physician, replaced him in that position¹⁰. At that time, UnB suffered the first of the three military interventions it would undergo until the end of the decade. Government troops invaded the university on April 9, 1964, and a month later nine professors and four lecturers were fired. Among the casualties were well-known economists such as Ruy Mauro Marini, one of the leading Latin American thinkers on Dependency Theory (Lelis 2011; Salmeron 2012).

⁶ Teixeira’s role in the development of Brazilian education is analyzed in Monarcha (2001).

⁷ Currently the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

⁸ Darcy Ribeiro occupied the position for only four months, serving thereafter as Chief of Staff for President Goulart’s office until the end of his government. After the military coup, Ribeiro was forced into exile.

⁹ For more information on the structure of Brazilian universities prior to the educational reforms of the mid-1960’s, see Favero (2006).

¹⁰ Professor Vaz is mainly associated with the University of Campinas (Unicamp), where he occupied rectorate from the creation of the university, in 1966, until his retirement in 1978.

Vaz, who had a long and successful career at the University of São Paulo, but no previous connection to UnB, tried to work as a buffer between the military and the university. The evolution of the Brazilian political context, however, did not favor his conciliatory efforts, leading to his replacement in mid-1965 by the philosopher Laerte Ramos de Carvalho, who had close links with the hard-line faction of the military government. After only a few weeks in office and repeated clashes with part of the academic staff, Carvalho asked for another police intervention at UnB – the only such episode requested from inside the institution. The new intrusion took place on October 11, leading Carvalho to fire 16 professors in its aftermath, and inducing a further 223 resignations in protest and solidarity. The profound significance of these events for the history of the university should become apparent once we consider that UnB’s academic staff at the time totaled 305 professors (Lelis 2011; Salmeron 2012).

As the decade wore on, the political atmosphere in Brazil became increasingly polarized. Gen. Castello Branco’s presidential term ended in early 1967, and his successor, Gen. Costa e Silva, belonged to the hard line of the military regime. The turning point, however, was 1968, when political opposition gained strength: besides the international effects of the Parisian revolt, guerrilla movements intensified, and the death of a high-school student in Rio de Janeiro led to massive student demonstrations in all the Brazilian big cities. At the national level, the push towards re-democratization was defeated with the publication, in December, of the Institutional Act #5. No political dissent was tolerated from then onwards, and police repression became harsher (Skidmore 1988). Located at the heart of political action, UnB had already tasted a preview of what was to come: on August 29, military forces invaded the university for the third time in four years, in an episode that resulted in 60 arrests and one student being shot in the head by the police.

3. FUNDING POLICY RESEARCH

Throughout the 1960’s, a group of North American private foundations started promoting the development of Latin American Studies as part of their assistance portfolio, offering support for different activities aimed towards developing the social sciences in the region and creating networks between Latin American scholars and US institutions (Parmar 2012). Although the Ford Foundation was not alone in its involvement with such initiatives, the resources channeled through OLAC were by far the most fruitful in the development of the social sciences in Latin America. As part of its general strategy for the region, an overarching purpose molded the Ford Foundation’s involvement with the Brazilian social sciences in general, and with economics in particular, from the very beginning: to assist in the development of institutions that could be useful for devising and implementing public policies that addressed the specific problems of Brazilian society.

Different people, in different contexts, each conceived the strategies more conducive to this end in their own way, but no one ever seriously questioned the general goal. An early example of this attitude can be found in a 1963 document proposing the creation of a graduate training and research program at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC). When discussing the research agendas to be pursued, the document sets the background by mentioning the Alliance for Progress and the current joint efforts between Brazil and the United States “in a program for improving living conditions and stimulating

economic and social progress in North East Brazil”¹¹. After listing several topics worthy of attention – such as natural resources, agriculture, human resources, and public health – the document concludes with an appeal to the importance of systematic and coordinated research in order to accomplish developmental goals:

The above-mentioned lines of research indicate just a few of the needs for the development of the North East, with an attempt to schematize the most urgent ones. We believe that if such research were to be done through an organization, as in the case of the IPE [UFC’s Institute for Economic Research], there would be greater results in terms of consistency, coordination of efforts and proper understanding, developing over a long period of time¹²

The document played on themes that were greatly important in the Ford Foundation’s prospects for the Brazilian social sciences. The connection between foreign aid and the developmental problems of the poorer areas of the country (such as the Northeast), in particular, was a recurrent element in project assessments. A request for grant action from June 1964 that built on UFC’s proposal expressed this rationale with unusual clarity. After, once again, mentioning recent efforts by the Brazilian government and the Alliance for Progress in the area of developmental policy, the document identifies one of the main impediments to successful implementation:

Manpower skills are scarce in all forms, but conspicuously absent is a cadre of professionally trained people to undertake studies and provide actionable programs in economic development. The Northeast agencies cannot meet their staffing requirements; they compete with each other for the same limited pool of individuals, most of whom are recent university graduates with ample motivation but mediocre training. [...] Without access to such skills, efforts to plan and implement economic development tend to produce impressive program façades that are hollow in content.¹³

The document goes on to stress the low level of undergraduate training in Northeastern universities, and the exodus of the most talented people in the region to the South and Southeast, attracted by better professional opportunities. In light of all this, it was very clear what should be the pragmatic purpose of FF assistance: “[...] the central problem is the need to provide some postgraduate training which is geared to the lower starting level of the Northeast universities, for graduates expected to remain in the Northeast to staff the various regional and state agencies”¹⁴.

The agreement finally signed in July between UFC, the Ford Foundation, USAID, and SUDENE, the Brazilian state agency in charge of the developmental problems of the Northeast, formalized the close connection between the Foundation’s initial involvements in the region and the training of researchers that could take part in the Brazilian government’s effort to overcome some of its structural maladies. Among the items specified in the agreement, one is particularly revealing in this respect. Besides other commitments related to infrastructure, fellowships, and research development, the University of Ceará agreed to “require every student to work in his field with a university, a private

¹¹ Martins Filho (1963)

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Unidentified author (1964).

¹⁴ Ibid.

developmental, or government agency located in the Northeast for a period equal to at least twice that which the student had received graduate training under a fellowship at the University of Ceará or abroad”¹⁵.

Although the Ceará case provides striking illustration of the proximity between the Ford Foundation and the Brazilian state institutions in charge of formulating and implementing public policy, it was certainly not an isolated event. The 1964 proposal for the creation of a graduate program at the University of São Paulo foresaw a course offering on “Programming for Economic Development”, which should cover “techniques for the preparation of programs, project elaboration, selection of alternatives, and program implementation”¹⁶. The Foundation had also been cooperating directly with the Minas Gerais state government since 1965, in a joint project with the State Secretariat of Agriculture, Purdue University, and the Rural State University of Minas Gerais. The project involved the creation and development of an Economic Analysis and Agricultural Policy Section within the Secretariat, a think tank of applied researchers with advanced training in agricultural economics¹⁷. Although recurring problems eventually led to the abandonment of the initiative, and with it of all attempts to collaborate directly with government agencies, the episode demonstrated that the Ford Foundation’s choice of partners was constrained more by institutional adequacy than by overall purpose¹⁸.

The prospect of influencing public policy, directly or indirectly, also animated the enthusiastic support offered to the Brazilian Institute of Economics (IBRE) at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation throughout the 1960s. In a memorandum from August 1967, discussing a possible grant extension to IBRE, Wener Baer stated he was “convinced that if the Ford Foundation wishes to exert its influence on Brazilian economic research, teaching, and even policy making, it should maximize the influence it has on the IBRE section of the Vargas Foundation”¹⁹. A few days later, Stacey Widdicombe confirmed his assessment. Besides eminent economists such as Arnold Harberger and Albert Hirschman, the Vargas Foundation’s grant extension had the support of Brazilian government officials such as João Paulo dos Reis Velloso, head of the Planning Ministry’s Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), who pointed out “the difficulties the government had in putting top quality researchers full-time onto studies of long-term economic development”²⁰. USAID representatives were equally positive, urging that “IBRE researchers maintain communication with appropriate Brazilian government officials so the results of the study would have a direct influence on policy problems as soon as possible”²¹. Widdicombe thus concluded that, among other things, given “IBRE’s preeminent position in Brazil and the quality of its research program, together with its demonstrated ability to have its research results reach policy makers in both private and public sectors”²², the Ford Foundation should treat the grant extension as a top priority.

¹⁵ SUDENE et al. (1964).

¹⁶ Delfim Netto & Vieira (1964).

¹⁷ Thomas (1968).

¹⁸ Schuh (1969; 1970).

¹⁹ Baer (1967).

²⁰ Widdicombe (1967).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The Foundation’s attitude towards so-called “policy-oriented” research does not seem to have changed significantly after the military takeover of 1964. The “Annual Report for the Year 1966” presented by the University of São Paulo’s Institute for Economic Research (IPE) expresses confidence in the possibility of producing policy-relevant outputs, while steering clear of the government’s larger political agenda:

The IPE does not aim [solely to] the creation of a team of technicians, specialists and advisors with the instrumental analytic know-how but also the organization of a group of studious [sic] people which will try to give their collaboration to the State of São Paulo and to the Federal Government, as well as to the other State Municipalities, becoming equidistant of private interests as well as of conveniences or political pressures²³

Baer’s abovementioned memorandum conveys a similar message, stressing how IBRE had managed to work with the government without forfeiting its intellectual integrity and prestige:

Although some of the past leaders of IBRE were men of rather conservative persuasion, they never let their ideological convictions interfere with the selection of the best technical personnel. The universal respect which IBRE has enjoyed is shown by the fact that both pre-March 1964 and post-March 1964 governments have made use of the Vargas Foundation’s services [...]. The new leadership of Kerstenetsky and Chacel has gone a long way towards winning over even the skeptics. For example, the contacts with the people of Rio’s CEPAL office have increased substantially. Also, many of the students now in the Vargas Foundation’s graduate school are former student leaders, some of whom sat in jail for a few months after the events of March-April 1964²⁴

However, the Ford Foundation’s New York office began to question these assumptions as the combined presidential terms of Gen. Costa e Silva (1967-69), the military junta that briefly succeeded him, and Gen. Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974) put in evidence the increasingly repressive and authoritarian nature of the Brazilian regime. One of the first to alert to the potentially dangerous implications of the closeness between FF grantees and the Brazilian government was Kalman Silvert, the Latin Americanist political scientist who served as a program advisor for the Foundation at the time. In a memorandum to William Carmichael dated September 15, 1969, Silvert responded to a recent report by Baer on the growing difficulties associated with the IBRE grant²⁵. Reflecting on the likely consequences of “service-oriented” research, he pondered:

How can a narrow and technocratic definition of national need be squared with the more profound national need to have the best possible social science information? To what extent do certain institutional ties, financing patterns, and organizational schemes militate in themselves against true competence?²⁶ [emphasis in the original]

²³ Camargo et al. (1967).

²⁴ Baer (1967).

²⁵ For a more detailed assessment of this issue, see Fernández & Suprinyak (2015).

²⁶ Silvert (1969).

In a memorandum from the same period recommending assistance for the joint economics and sociology program at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Baer and David Maybury-Lewis also mention some of the problems accruing to that institution due to actions by the Brazilian government. A sociological research project on “Values and attitudes of workers in the Zona da Mata of Pernambuco” was “discontinued after the events of 1964 when workers would no longer answer questions freely”²⁷. The university’s dependence on SUDENE for the release of its research funds was also problematic, leading to constant attempts to control the nature of the activities developed:

Even when SUDENE releases the money it continues to try and control its utilization. It feels that research consists of collecting survey data and it is not interested in analysis. Furthermore, it takes the attitude that the institute should function simply as its survey area²⁸

Even the most accomplished of the FF’s Brazilian grantees in the late 1960s, IPE-USP, was not exempt from similar problems. Reporting on a visit made to the institute on December 1969, Baer showed exasperation with the recent departure of two prominent figures – Afonso Celso Pastore and Carlos Antônio Rocca – who should assume leadership roles at IPE, but decided instead to accept “more lucrative and prestigious government offers”²⁹. Adding insult to injury, Pastore had invited five of the best M.A. students at IPE to go work with him at IPEA, and was trying to convince Miguel Colasuonno, the institute’s director, to accept the research work done for IPEA as their M.A. thesis. Reflecting on Colasuonno’s institutional position, Baer stated, “Up to now his institutionally loyal friends were rather weak intellectually and the intellectually strong people were opportunists who in the first years of IPE tried to undermine the institution and at present will use it when it suits their purpose”³⁰.

However, even if the warning signs were becoming increasingly apparent by the turn of the decade, many of the Ford Foundation people still believed firmly in the overall appropriateness of funding policy-oriented research. As late as December 1969, David Bell still advocated the integration of the Pernambuco program within the general developmental strategy for the Northeast pursued by the Brazilian government³¹. In a memorandum dated November 18, 1969, William Carmichael defended the spreading of FF support among several institutions on the grounds that

the chances for productive contractual research relations between university centers and governmental entities (such as the Ministry of Planning) appear to be substantially enhanced by the fact that the government can turn to several different institutions of varying emphases [...] and geographical orientation³²

Besides its joint work with the Minas Gerais State Secretariat of Agriculture, the Foundation, at the time, also supported the Center for Training and Research in Economic Development, an organ of the Federal Ministry of Planning that offered a training program for government officials. As part of the general move of government bureaucracy to the new capital, CENDEC was scheduled to relocate to Brasília in

²⁷ Baer & Maybury-Lewis (1969).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Baer (1970).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bell (1969).

³² Carmichael (1970).

January 1971³³. Until that moment, the Ford Foundation had not been directly involved with any institutions based in Brasília, and this new proximity to the seat of the military government was bound to raise some eyebrows among those who were not so keen on having their images associated with an authoritarian regime. In the event, however, it was not the support granted to CENDEC that brought this issue to the forefront of discussion, but rather a different project: the social sciences and economics program at the University of Brasília.

4. BRASÍLIA, SOCIAL SCIENCES

Discussions about a possible double grant to the economics and social sciences departments at the University of Brasília (UnB) began in the early months of 1971. The representatives of the Ford Foundation in Brazil saw UnB as an attractive beneficiary because, given its recent foundation, the university had a more modern institutional structure when compared to its Brazilian counterparts. In particular, it already adopted the model of academic departments, thus bypassing the outdated and cumbersome “cátedras”³⁴. The expansion plan for the economics department, submitted to Carmichael in June by Edmar Bacha, the leading economist at UnB at the time, already stressed the flexibility of the university’s institutional arrangement:

The structure of the University of Brasília is of the departmental kind since its creation, so that we have already accumulated some experience on the peculiarities of this form of organization. [...] From an institutional point of view, there is [...] a great dose of flexibility that would favor initiatives geared towards creative work in the fields of teaching and research.³⁵

Many among the Rio office staff echoed Bacha’s assessment. In a memo from June 11 recommending support for the economics department, Baer emphasized that UnB’s flexible structure made it possible to absorb high-level PhDs returning from abroad, who could exercise their influence on teaching and research “without having to overcome the barriers of vested academic interests”³⁶. However, the grant proposal was appealing for other reasons as well. Baer was particularly impressed by the quality of the staff being assembled. Besides Bacha, who was unquestionably the brightest star, the department had already hired Flávio Versiani and Charles Müller, and had further commitments from Dionísio Dias Carneiro and Francisco Lopes. All of them had studied towards a PhD degree in North American universities – the first three at Vanderbilt, and Lopes at Harvard. Besides their graduate training abroad, another feature also united the prospects at UnB’s economics: most of them had originally studied at the Vargas Foundation, launching their academic careers therefrom. This points to another role UnB was expected to perform. As the conditions surrounding the Ford Foundation’s grant to FGV quickly deteriorated, Brasília became a very attractive plan B. In Baer’s words:

³³ Nicholson & Graham (1970).

³⁴ For more details on the influence of “catedráticos” in the traditional Brazilian universities, and the problems this occasioned for the Ford Foundation, see Fernández & Suprinyak (2015).

³⁵ Bacha (1971).

³⁶ Baer (1971).

An investment in Brasília would not represent a scattering of our resources. Since under the present circumstances Ford Foundation support for the Fundação Getúlio Vargas is coming to an end, we can consider support for Brasília as a substitute. As a matter of fact, Bacha, Versiani and Lopes [...] all were trained at the Fundação Getúlio Vargas. However, the latter has made little efforts to effectively reabsorb them³⁷

In Baer’s eyes, yet another element counted favorably to the Brasília case. When listing the points that explained his positive recommendation, he stated, “Considering the movement of the political center of the country to Brasília, a strong Economic [sic] Department can have many influences on the various economics policy making organs in Brasília”³⁸. Further ahead, he mentioned that the department

also expects to develop special courses which could serve staff members of several governmental organs. Cooperation with CENDEC is expected to grow. As CENDEC’s staff increases more specialized manpower will be available to give courses in the department and certain courses of CENDEC will be given by members of the department³⁹

This, of course, was completely in line with the Foundation’s explicitly stated strategy of maximizing the policy relevance of the research it sponsored. Others in the Brazilian side of the command chain accordingly shared Baer’s judgement. Of particular interest is a memo written by Gregory Treverton on July 16, recommending a combined grant for economics and social sciences at UnB. After a brief background report on the university’s history, in which the military interventions of 1965 and 1967 were mentioned in passing, Treverton argues that, since the appointment of a new rectorate in 1971, the university had “regained momentum”, as “the signs of recovery were abundant”⁴⁰. This opened new possibilities for FF involvement with the institution:

The Economics and Social Science departments, decimated in the mid-60’s, have been re-built almost entirely by well-trained young people. As the federal government accelerates its move to Brasília, there will be increased possibilities for University faculty to become involved in policy-oriented research⁴¹

Treverton believed this particular setting justified a modification in the strategy usually followed by the Ford Foundation in Brazil. In the case of Brasília, with a modest amount of support, “the programs are likely to be able to move from building departmental strength to conducting problem-oriented research quickly”⁴². Thus, the focus should not be on the “traditional institution-building approach”⁴³, but rather on the “transition to task-research”. Treverton recognized that the “proximity of the federal government to UnB is not without risks for the University”⁴⁴. As the government apparatus moved increasingly to Brasília, there was a danger that “the government and the academic community

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Treverton (1971).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For a more detailed description of the so-called institution-building approach, see Fernández & Suprinyak (2015).

⁴⁴ Treverton (1971).

will come to look upon UnB as the ‘government’ university”⁴⁵, but the willingness of qualified scholars to join the ranks of the university was a sign of confidence in its institutional stability. Overall, the type of collaboration with government bureaucracy that UnB’s position made possible could go a long way towards fulfilling the goals that the Ford Foundation had long established for its Brazilian program. Again in the words of Treverton:

The movement of the federal government to Brasília has been accelerated, and the government will increasingly require policy-oriented research which the UnB can provide, particularly in economics and social science. The transfer to Brasília of the IPLAN portion of the Institute of Planning, including its training organ, CENDEC, symbolized the growing importance of governmental activities in the new capital; the cooperation between CENDEC and the Department of Economics at UnB is indicative of the potential for University impact on these policy activities. In a relatively short time, the University of Brasília will be in a position to assume a role similar to the one fumbled by the Vargas Foundation in Rio de Janeiro: that of an independent academic training and research institution which also has natural links to policy-making institutions⁴⁶

Stanley Nicholson, the head of the Rio office at the time, subscribed to the assessments made by Baer, Treverton, and other consultants, and thus recommended priority treatment to the UnB grant, an initiative that offered “promise of substantially improving their capability for carrying out problem-oriented research in areas of present Foundation interest”⁴⁷. When the proposal reached New York, however, the reactions were much less enthusiastic. In an August 11 memo to Carmichael, Nita Manitzas stated she was “profoundly uneasy” regarding Nicholson’s request. Her main reservation, she continued, was “one of principle”, directly related to the Ford Foundation’s role in helping to rebuild an institution that had been damaged by the Brazilian government itself:

When a government does damage to a national enterprise, is it the business of the Foundation to help the same government rebuild the edifice? On balance, my answer would be negative, on two particular grounds. On the one hand, it puts us institutionally in a position where we may publicly appear to sanction – or, at least, disregard – what happened earlier. On the other hand, and at the level of personal ethics, we may be breaking faith with those who were the original architects of the Brasília program and are no longer able to work there⁴⁸

Moreover, Manitzas was also deeply skeptical about the desirability of producing “policy-oriented” research within the current Brazilian political context. Regarding the possible consequences of such endeavors, she argued:

In a closed political system, where governmental choices are not subject to constant scrutiny, revision, public debate, and public accountability, the research that government solicits from social scientists may serve little to open up the range of policy choices available to the society as a whole. On the contrary, its function may simply be to corroborate and rationalize [...] the ideological choices of the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Nicholson (1971a).

⁴⁸ Manitzas (1971).

government elite; the range of choices will not be broadened and public dialogue will be fed, at best, with partial information. [...] Social science that is harnessed to the needs of a closed political elite will, in the longer term, not be very good social science, because it will be limited in its choice of social theory, its range of alternative ideological construction and, eventually, its freedom to select from the full range of important research themes⁴⁹

Manitzas thus saw the much-advertised proximity to the federal government not as a virtue, but rather as a very dangerous feature in the Brasília case – a potential source of “subtle forms of self-limitation and self-censorship”, and of contributions to the “work of ideological construction and indoctrination” carried by the government. She also saw reason for caution in dealing with UnB’s staff, since “social scientists who agree to work at Brasília have already had to make a certain accommodation, or compromise”, and “the likelihood of further accommodation is therefore all the greater”⁵⁰. The solution to this dilemma lay in rethinking the expected results of the FF’s involvement with the social sciences in Brazil. Using Frank Bonilla’s words, Manitzas urged the Foundation to “keep clear that problem relevance does not need to mean government links and that governmental interest in research output is not necessarily a good indicator of discipline relevance or productivity”⁵¹.

Nicholson responded to Manitzas’ assessment reinforcing his belief in the soundness and appropriateness of the Brasília grant. The Brazilian social science community – described by Nicholson as “pragmatic” and “concentrating more on people than institutions” – approved of the prospects of UnB as a research institution, while the government was “increasingly requiring social science research which is both policy-relevant and intellectually acceptable”⁵². Moreover, according to him, the academic activities developed by the current staff “do not suggest intellectual dishonesty or co-option”, and the Foundation support would help them “remain independent of less palatable government contracts”⁵³. Nicholson concluded by appealing to his direct knowledge of the Brazilian context, saying that it was “easier to have confidence in that judgment on pragmatic grounds than on the matter of principle”.

In light of the conflicting opinions, Carmichael asked Kalman Silvert for his assessment of the matter⁵⁴. Silvert responded on August 23, with a memo entitled “Brasília, Social Science”, in which he dealt at some length with several questions related to “the proper relationship of the Foundation to the incumbent Brazilian government”⁵⁵. The desirability of closer connections with the policy-making process, he began, should definitely not be taken for granted; after all, part of the problems recently experienced in the Vargas Foundation “came precisely from their close connections to government”⁵⁶. In order to assess the appropriateness of particular forms of involvement, it was not enough simply to assume that any opportunities for working with the government were good. “When labelling an action as ‘desirable’ in a situation redolent of ethical controversy,” said Kalvert, “one should take care to

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Nicholson (1971b).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Carmichael (1971).

⁵⁵ Silvert (1971a).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

establish his criteria of judgment, or at least the limits of that judgment”⁵⁷. The risks of government intervention and academic accommodation were inherent in the Brazilian current scenario. As evidence, Silvert adduced the testimony of Gláucio Soares, a social science professor at UnB:

Glaucio told me that he and his colleagues are very diffident and cautious in teaching introductory and other lower-level courses. The classes are large, the professors do not know all the students, they are certain informers are sitting in the classrooms, and so they are bland in their approach. Glaucio told me he does not feel the same inhibitions at the graduate level. So far as his writing is concerned, Glaucio says that he stops his analyses of political sociological affairs in the mid-1950s or, in any event, safely before the happenings of 1964. In discussing his role as citizen rather than social scientist, Glaucio is even more explicit. He is behaviorally apolitical. We had discussed this matter in St. Louis before he took up his Brasilia post, and Glaucio then told me he expected to exercise his full rights as a citizen. He referred to that discussion when I saw him, and said that he was wrong.⁵⁸

Kalvert was baffled at the vague use of expressions such as “policy-oriented”, “problem-oriented”, and “task research” by the Brazilian staff. The important issue, to him, was “the relationship between research and its consumer”, and this led inevitably to ethical and ideological problems. If the Foundation assumed Brazil was in the hands of an authoritarian regime it did not wish to assist, but at the same time found it worthwhile to support the development of the social sciences hoping for better times in the future, the conclusion was straightforward: the less immediately “relevant” the research, the better⁵⁹. In conclusion, Silvert quoted a long passage from one of his own articles⁶⁰ in order to illustrate the larger problems involved in discussing “scientific relevance” in the context of authoritarian regimes:

A truly competent social science investigating truly significant social subjects can in the long run be useful only to rational societies. Social science is thus by this definition irrelevant in the long run to irrational social orders. I will not enter into the argument as to whether an authoritarian society can be a rational one. Empirically, Latin American authoritarianisms have been able to consume “rational” approaches [...] only in the short run. [...] In intermediate runs they have all fallen over their internal mythmaking. It is small wonder that empirical sociology is invariably the first victim of authoritarian government in Latin America. [...] Social science cannot be relevant to anti-scientific governments of the stripe we have seen in Latin America. When we know enough of the social process so that social scientists can be relevant for the establishment of static totalitarianism and thereafter pass into oblivion, we will have arrived at the black utopias of Huxley and Orwell. That kind of relevance is suicide. [emphasis in the original]⁶¹

At the New York office, James Gardner also shared many of Silvert’s concerns. The appropriateness of Foundation involvement should be judged case-by-case, with a view to decide whether a particular course of action would “expand or restrict human choice”⁶². Needed were a set of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The quotation is from Silvert (1970).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Gardner (1971).

criteria that could go beyond the vague concept of relevance, and appraise the morally troublesome question: “relevance to what, and to whom?” To Gardner as well, the emphasis of the Brazilian team on UnB’s capacity for performing “problem-oriented” research sounded like a ruse designed to deviate attention from the longer-term institutional commitments inevitably implied by the Brasília grant – which made a careful assessment of the nature of the relationship between the Ford Foundation and the Brazilian government even more imperative.

On the Brazilian side, it was Frank Bonilla, program advisor for the social sciences, who had originally expressed more reservations towards the Brasília grant. Instigated by Nicholson to elaborate on his position after returning to New York, he bluntly expressed his views about the nature of the Brazilian regime, and its consequences for academic pursuits:

I don’t see how anyone can at this point doubt the determination of the regime to wipe out any real opposition and to keep semi-opposition, such as the part of the social science community that has been permitted to survive, neutralized and off-balance but with a semblance of life. You can ask the political analysts to do a little more work on just how this is being achieved, but to doubt that this is going on strikes me as self-delusion. You reproach me for overstating the case with respect to political prisoners. I estimate several thousand; your embassy source says the number is short of one thousand. My estimates come from a variety of documented sources and rough projections from newspaper accounts. Merely considering the number of places where intense political police activity has been reported [...] convinces me the number of people being held has to be at least two or three thousand. But why quibble about these numbers? This is a lawless and murderous government trading on the fear, complacency and passivity of those for whom facing up to such truths means a confrontation with unbearable choices.⁶³

In a situation such as the one prevailing in Brazil, said Bonilla, “few alternatives will assuage guilt or leave no residue of moral ambiguity”. Before insisting on the many avenues for useful research that remained open, it was important to be “aware of the extent to which these openings may be doors to an even deeper entrapment, captivity or mindless subservience”⁶⁴.

The most consequential analysis of the circumstances came once again from Silvert, in an October memo to David Bell entitled “Distasteful Regimes and Foundation Policies Overseas”⁶⁵. Authoritarian regimes, said Silvert, were not all characterized by the same levels of totalitarianism and atrociousness. Extreme cases provide easy grounds for decision against Foundation involvement, due to both “moral repugnance” and “inability to undertake ordered and programmatic work”. The difficulty, of course, lay in the mixed cases. Regimes that were more repressive in nature, such as Greece and Brazil, tended to “engage in systematic torture and prolonged imprisonment without trial”⁶⁶. However, in spite of these “abhorrent practices”, such regimes do manage to achieve certain accomplishments that many observers see in a positive light – economic stability, expansion of public works, and increased employment, among others. How should the Foundation behave when faced with such conflicting evidence? To Silvert, the situation posed an intricate moral dilemma:

⁶³ Bonilla (1971).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Silvert (1971b).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Closing our eyes to evil elements on the grounds that we are helping these governments only to do their focussed [sic] good is a very dangerous practice. In the first place, such actions make us all accomplices in policies with which we may not agree. Secondly, we court grave difficulties in other countries with which we work. And, thirdly, we invite future troubles when those regimes crumble – and most of them are somewhat insecure. But, most important of all from an intellectual and ideological point of view, such grantmaking is undisciplined; it tends to rest on ultimately unexamined premises, and thus on hunch rather than organized “hard” data⁶⁷

The solution, according to Silvert, lay in a systematic attempt to evaluate and classify different types of authoritarian regimes within a framework of openly pragmatic morality. Decisions should be reached after an “overt attempt to estimate trade-offs”. Such an analysis was “relativistic” in nature, and required “careful assembly of data and the willing assumption of reasonable risks”⁶⁸. After recalling a previous agreement according to which the Foundation should not work where there was “no reasonable room for some freedom in the play of ideas and men”, he pondered, “if a country cannot be entirely participant and democratic, does that mean that it is unmitigatedly authoritarian?” A clearer answer to this question was crucial in order to assure that Foundation consultants did not have to “re-invent ethics and policy in every situation of normative strain”⁶⁹.

Silvert’s cost-benefit brand of moral pragmatism eventually carried the day. The clearest expression of this was a long memorandum sent to Nicholson by Peter Reichard on November 24, with the express purpose of “establishing an analytic framework with which to assess the propriety of the Ford Foundation’s involvement in Brazilian social science”⁷⁰. After arguing that the moral implications of the case were not sufficiently unambiguous to justify the Foundation’s complete withdrawal from Brazil, Reichard presented the following scheme for analyzing the issue on “programmatic” grounds:

1. Positive Factors (Potential)

Do the Foundation’s programs contribute to:

- a) The direct attainment of “welfare” or “humanitarian” goals?
- b) The survival of a “critical spirit” or “some pluralism”?
- c) The modification of “certain marginal aspects of the Brazilian social process”?

2. “Trade-off” the two sets of factors and ask if the net result is positive.

3. Negative Factors (Risks)

Do the Foundation’s programs contribute to:

- a) The accrual of “some marginal benefit” to the authoritarian government?
- b) Cooption?⁷¹

According to Reichard, one still needed to supplement these criteria – extracted from documents produced by Foundation consultants regarding the Brasília grant – with two others: “1) the fact of social science inputs to government policies; and 2) the need for an opportunity-cost analysis to supplement

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Reichard (1971).

⁷¹ Ibid.

the ‘trade-off’ exercise suggested in the memoranda”⁷². Through a careful consideration of all factors along these lines, the Foundation could reach a more solid position regarding its involvement with the social sciences in Brazil.

One conclusion that emerged from this analysis was that, if the Ford Foundation decided to stay, this effectively amounted to saying that it would “help an authoritarian government do what the Foundation regards as ‘good’”. Although keeping some distance from the government seemed “appropriate as a matter of tactics and image”, the decision to support Brazilian social sciences depended on an assessment of the desirability of the policies the grantees could help implement. Thus, it would be “inconsistent to say that we are in principle opposed to what may be the most efficient way of accomplishing these objectives (direct Foundation involvement with the government)”⁷³. Another important conclusion referred to the distinction between the “repressive” and the “developmentalist” features of the regime:

The former do not merit our support and the latter [...] do. [...] Hopefully this distinction is not the first step down the slippery slope. Even if one accepts the oft-made argument that economic growth is a greater “good” in the present Brazilian context than is political liberty, and further that authoritarianism has been essential to current economic growth [...], it does not follow that one is forced to support the torture, the death squads, etc. which have no relation to economic advance⁷⁴

Finally, Reichard also proposed his solution to the conundrum over the policy-orientation of research. “The distinction”, said him, “between policy-oriented research and non-policy-oriented research is not particularly germane to the problems we face”, since all of the Foundation’s grantees “contribute in varying degrees of directness to government policies, and if they did not it is questionable whether supporting them would be worthwhile”⁷⁵. To Reichard, it would be more useful to differentiate between “independent and coopted social scientists”. This was not intended to separate those who worked for government from those that did not, for “an independently-minded person might in fact work directly for the government in pursuit of goals he approves”. Pragmatically, what mattered was distinguishing “policy inducing” from “policy effectuating” work, the former “far more likely to be the product of independent thought than the latter”⁷⁶.

When he applied his “analytical framework” specifically to the Brasília case, Reichard found largely in favor of the grant. There was no evidence that the Brazilian academic community would regard it as a “breach of faith” on the part of the Foundation. Although UnB had larger access to government funding than other institutions, the grant did not come at the expense of other potential Brazilian beneficiaries. The staff at the departments concerned seemed to be rather competent, and the prospects for future hiring promised to improve them even further. Finally, in spite of the risks associated with the “policy-oriented” rationale, “other Brazilian academics do not appear to regard working at the University as a sign of ‘accommodation’, and the backgrounds of the social scientists involved do not

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

suggest a lack of intellectual integrity”⁷⁷. Two weeks later, Nicholson once again requested priority treatment to the UnB grant, arguing that “the questions raised by Nita, Kal, and Jim are, I believe, squarely addressed and the results of our analysis still indicate a strong case for a small initial grant to the Institute”⁷⁸. This time his request went through with little resistance, thus clearing the way to the University of Brasília officially becoming a Ford Foundation grantee in 1972.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a February 1972 letter to Stanley Nicholson, reflecting on the discussions held over the previous year regarding the UnB grant, Frank Bonilla thus summarized the implications of the initiative to the Ford Foundation’s involvement in with the social sciences in Brazil:

I agree that a grant to Brasília will not scandalize the Brazilian social science community or expose the Foundation to sharp attack immediately. It will be seen as a natural and expected step in the rehabilitation of the university and prove the government’s ability to achieve this by providing many conditions for work not available elsewhere except, of course, for freedom. Since no one else has much freedom, this may not seem important. Nevertheless a grant will also be a victory for the government in obtaining apparent international certification that certain conditions for inquiry and scholarship are present in Brasília when we know they are not. A new grant there has symbolic significance. I see no way around that.⁷⁹ [emphasis in the original]

Not all the people involved shared Bonilla’s bleak assessment. Reflecting on his early days at UnB 25 years later, Bacha recalled the highly politicized nature of academic life at the time. Since Delfim Netto (USP) and Mário Henrique Simonsen (FGV) were both connected to the military regime, Bacha felt that UnB represented “an alternative”. In his words: “We were oppositionist economists, and these centers were where oppositionist economists found not only a place, but also a voice, and in this sense were part of the whole process. Being in Brasília, in particular, direct action with MDB⁸⁰ congresspeople could be more acute” (Bacha 1996, pp. 234-5). Back in Stanford, however, it was not the intentions and character of anyone on the UnB staff that concerned Bonilla, but rather the immense risks inherent in the situation:

We have no reason to impute to those in Brasília greater or lesser courage or integrity than any other of the grantees. We have to recognise, however, that they will need more of such qualities and other forms of concrete assistance to work through the dangers and opportunities posed by the proximity to government. I see government repression reaching into the lives of students and scholars in my classroom here! Why insist on minimizing the difficulties faced by those who are at the center of the storm?⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Nicholson (1971c).

⁷⁹ Bonilla (1972).

⁸⁰ Acronym for Brazilian Democratic Movement, the oppositionist party during the military regime.

⁸¹ Bonilla (1972).

Even facing these prospects, the Foundation decided to move forward and add the University of Brasília to its roster of beneficiaries. Formally anchoring this decision was a framework for pragmatic decision-making that translated thorny ethical and ideological issues into an exercise in cost-benefit analysis. Given that the “potential” in terms of sustaining critical thinking and improving social conditions seemed to outweigh the “risks” of cooption and indirect contribution to an authoritarian regime, and since there were no other potential beneficiaries that could raise the opportunity cost of the enterprise, the Foundation could finally rest assured of the soundness of its policy. The episode demonstrated the remarkable flexibility of the so-called “institution-building” approach. Whether problem-oriented or policy-inducing, it seemed always possible to reconstruct the nature of the Ford Foundation’s activities in Brazil in a way that corresponded to its officially stated mission – given, of course, the appropriate assumptions. UnB went on to fulfill its expected role, quickly establishing itself as one of the leading institutions for academic economics in Brazil. The executive committee instituted in 1972 for the fledgling National Association of Centers for Post Graduate Economics (ANPEC)⁸² gathered representatives from four programs: IPE-USP, IBRE-FGV, CEDEPLAR, and UnB. As the Vargas Foundation moved away from ANPEC in 1973, UnB increasingly occupied, as predicted, the institutional void thus created, and the Ford Foundation’s project of an “independently-minded” academic institution with “natural links to policy-making” finally stood ready to test.

⁸² For a more detailed assessment of the institutional development of ANPEC, see Fernández & Suprinyak (2015).

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