

International Conference

An Era of Value Change. The Seventies in Europe

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German Historical Institute

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In Western historiography the Seventies are generally considered as a turning point in European history. In Germany they currently tend to be seen as the starting point for the present times, "after the boom" of the Sixties, rather than an epoch in itself. In Italy the perception of political and economic crisis, exacerbated by the experience of terrorism, led to a widespread view of the Seventies as an era of "crisis", representing an analytical key for the history of Republican Italy and its failure. These interpretations focus mainly on political and macro-structural dynamics and reflect the national self-perceptions of the decade, determined by a retrospective view, teleological in nature, and the combined influences on Western historiography, following the initial canonization of the history of the decade, of sociology, the economy, and political science. In fact, during the Seventies and subsequent years some American and European scientists postulated the affirmation of the global society of individuals, with all its risks, and debated the combined crisis of democracy and legitimization of states under advanced capitalism. At the same time, some political scientists and sociologists (Ronald Inglehart, Carlo Tullio Altan, Helmuth Klages, etc.) regarded the crisis in the relationship between civil society and political society as the effect of a change in values in the individual views of citizens. They proposed that the features of the social and cultural transformations underway, and the crises in the systems of representation in individual states and in the traditional political forces, could all be traced back to this change.

The theory of an unprecedented change in values in industrialised Western Europe, recently taken up by German historiography as an explanation for the social and cultural changes of the Seventies, was a starting point for the hypothesis of this conference. The main objective will be to verify this initial hypothesis, which is whether and how, aside from national self-perceptions, the Seventies represented a moment of transformation and discontinuity in the history of European society, and with what national peculiarities this was manifested on the social, cultural, and political-institutional levels. There will be an attempt to assess whether it is possible to combine the diversity and even contradictions that have emerged in the studies of the scholars taking part into a coherent interpretation of European history, comparing events and processes, micro and macro history, national traits, and the experiences of different social groups, generations, and genders.