

Interrogating the Trente Glorieuses. Models of Statehood in Postwar Europe

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Prominent interpretations characterize the thirty years after the end of World War II as the *trente glorieuses*, the glorious three decades in which a strong state secured widespread prosperity, defused social conflicts, and stabilized democratic political systems. This perspective on twentieth century political and economic development has recently been affirmed by authors who identified the “end of the boom” as the beginning of a new era. The oil price shock of 1973 marks, in this view, the beginning of a revolutionary structural transformation. The 1970s signify the end of a symbiotic relationship between social market economy and democratic statehood.

Such perspectives on contemporary history are based on a highly normative understanding of politics and the economy. The *trente glorieuses* or the decades of the boom represent here a period in which the relationship between state, economy and democracy had been ideally arranged. This view was first developed by contemporaries of that period. Government experts like Jean Fourastié who were involved in discussions about a new economic order in Western Europe after 1945 were convinced that a modern society depended on rational state capacities which would ensure both, the individual’s economic prosperity and political freedom. These theorists and experts saw a strong state as an important precondition for a new model of Western democratic society. Nevertheless, similar conceptions proved

also appealing to non-democratic political regimes throughout Europe. Comparable ideas about statehood and economic development were discussed in Spain, Greece, East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Franco elites even adopted West German concepts of statehood to promote national programs of modernization.

Understanding the trente glorieuses not as a political-economic reality but as a specific model of statehood with specific ideological underpinnings opens a new way of looking at this period. At this conference we want to reevaluate the political and intellectual preconceptions on which the post-war decades are based and investigate their diffusion and circulation in democratic and non-democratic European contexts. Focusing on the whole of Europe and not merely on a stylized Western European model will allow us to broaden our understanding of this time period and highlight concrete understandings of statehood, the economy and democratic government. Examining the status, the adaptations and variations of the trente glorieuses model and its synonyms across different political and social contexts in Europe after 1945 will allow us to reflect on the construction of this time period in historical, political and economic thought.

In our view among the central questions should be:

1. To what extent and how was the term trente glorieuses (or its synonyms) and the characterization linked to it employed not only in the countries of Northern Europe but also in Southern and Eastern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s? Which intentions lay behind the employment of such models?
2. Which concrete models of statehood, democracy and the economy were espoused by state and social elites in different European polities? Did these groups exchange their views and experiences transnationally?
3. To what extent and under what conditions did the trente glorieuses become, in the period "after the boom", a narrative model that described a golden age in the past? What does this mean for the concepts of political economics that we employ today to make sense of current conflicts and dynamic developments in Europe?

The conference will be held at the German Historical Institute in Rome on 12-14 December 2018. The conference language will be English. For further information please contact [philipp.mueller\(at\)his-online\(dot\)de](mailto:philipp.mueller@his-online.de).