

Informing.

The (in)discreet gaze of the authorities on politics, economy and society between the 19th and the 20th centuries

International Conference
Pisa, 14-15 December 2023

Call for papers

The conference, promoted by the Society for the Studies of the History of Institutions, arises from the first strands of two research projects developed at the University of Pisa (The challenges of contemporary statehood. Government, citizenship, and conflicts between powers) and the University of Naples Federico II (SECRET. Spies in European Culture between Reality and Tales).

The general objective of the conference is a first systematic reflection on the European institutional history regarding the complex and varied "information" activities carried out by many institutional actors, between the Napoleonic age and the aftermath of World War II.

The notion of "information" deployed here has been chosen deliberately in order to represent a broad interpretative category, one that brings under scrutiny the many information gathering and production activities, of a very different nature, which characterized the actions of the authorities. Consider, for example, the work of intelligence and prevention - both abroad and within the national territory - but also that of reconnaissance, analysis, and study not linked to the needs of foreign policy and/or the protection of public order, but relating to economic-productive, social, cultural, and political phenomena.

As is well known, in 19th-20th century Europe the expansion of state action and the consequent strengthening of the bureaucratic-administrative systems led to the proliferation of information produced and gathered by public authorities, both centrally and peripherally. The new systems set up with this purpose in mind favoured more pervasive government prerogatives but were not always capable of exhaustively deciphering and reconstructing the less formalizable aspects of social physiology. The tension between codified models and the inescapable discretion of official information constitutes one of the hermeneutic keys on which the conference aims to shed light, bringing out elements of complexity and possible conflict between the different levels of the governance process. From this point of view, particular attention should be paid to the weight that unformalized practices and processes also had in the more general framework of the information endeavours of the authorities. We would welcome studies dedicated to individual national cases or of a comparative nature, in order to highlight differences, similarities, hybridizations, and mutations, at least on a European scale. A common element in the contributions will be the identification of specific types of documentary sources to be analysed, obviously considered in their evolution within the chosen time frame.

Along these lines, contributions will be welcomed that seek to investigate aspects such as:

- The functions of information, police, and control exercised by public authorities, also concerning the new citizenship classification policies.
- The collection, production, and analysis of information by institutions, between the centre and periphery, on economic-productive, social, cultural, and political aspects.
- The evolution of security culture and "secrecy" and the institutional tools devised and refined to implement it more effectively.
- The management of the information collected, both at the governance level and in media communication, and the development of related bureaucratic knowledge.

The proposals can be submitted in Italian, English, or Spanish, by sending to Alessandro Breccia (alessandro.breccia@unipi.it) an abstract of about 400 words, accompanied by contact email address and a very brief biographical profile, by 20 April 2023. The outcome of the selection will be communicated by 7 June 2023.

The most significant contributions will be published in an edited volume. The speakers' living expenses will be covered by the organizing institutions.

Scientific and Organizing Committee:

Marcella Aglietti (Università di Pisa); Alessandro Breccia (Università di Pisa); Giacomo Demarchi (Università di Pisa); Laura Di Fiore (Università di Napoli Federico II); Antonella Meniconi (Presidente Società per gli studi di Storia delle Istituzioni); Marco Meriggi (Università di Napoli Federico II); Giovanna Tosatti (Società per gli studi di Storia delle Istituzioni).