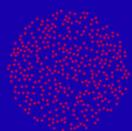


**Workshop**

**Framing Maturing and Ageing  
across the Iron Curtain:  
Health-Narratives at the Intersection  
of Knowledge Production, Aesthetics  
and Governance**

**22-23 October 2026, Sofia  
Call for Abstracts**



**LEVIATHAN  
PROJECT**



European  
Research Council  
Established by the  
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Despite the insurmountable differences that the two opposing political models drew for themselves during the Cold War years, numerous global processes were crossing the established boundaries between them. One of these processes is undoubtedly demographic in nature, marked by changes in the age structure of the population and lengthening lifespan. *The World Assembly on Ageing*, held in Vienna in 1982, aimed to propose a joint plan of action by analysing a range of challenges faced by the older population across both so-called “developed” and “developing” countries. These included issues related to social and economic security, health and nutrition, employment, living conditions, and – last but not least – human dignity.

At the same time, specialised fields such as gerontology and geriatrics began to address ageing as a natural and lifelong biological process. Some sought to “decode” its secrets, to alleviate – or at least slow down – its perils, or to unlock the potential of ageing individuals as full-fledged contributors to society. Yet, much like “maturation,” “growing old” is also a culturally framed category that develops within particular historical contexts, shaped by specific social values, ideological agendas, and everyday moral expectations.

This workshop aims to explore the ways in which age-related processes were (re)presented through various mediums – written narratives, ego-documents and oral history, visual imagery and iconography, professional lingo, or popular slang – and across different spaces, including medicine, law, journalism, popular culture, and the arts. We place particular emphasis on health norms and prescriptions for a ‘healthy life,’ and on how these intersect with wider axiological frameworks, bodies of knowledge, and biopolitical strategies.

We are interested in visions that permeated, affirmed or contradicted the notions of what “normal” maturing – both physical and social – and ageing felt or looked like during the Cold War. What discursive place did issues related to health, wellbeing, longevity, and productivity occupied compared to the categories of “childhood” and “youth”? How were narratives of *care* and *responsibility* constructed within different political, economic, and ideological contexts across Europe in that respect? Were “maturing” and “ageing” unambiguously constructed or were they an arena of varying, conflicting or even contested ideas, social expectations and practices? What were the parameters of their public presence, and were there any identifiable sites of marginalisation or censorship? And finally, to what extent did discrepancies emerge between official model roles and lived experiences?

We invite participants interested in discussing related matters, focusing on – but not limited to – the analytical *topoi* of the body, reproduction, risk, and utopia. Other perspectives and research questions are also welcome, particularly those addressing issues of gender and intersectionality. Through an exploration of diverse representations of “maturing” and “ageing” during the period, we aim to reflect on the interpretative and analytical approaches to different types of sources, critically engaging with the modes of their production, aestheticisation, and the governance of ageing as a socially embedded phenomenon.

The two-day workshop will take place on 22–23 October 2026 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The event is organized by the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, as part of the ERC Synergy Project “Leviathan.” Applications will be accepted until 22 May 2026 via e-mail and should include an abstract (max. 350 words) and a short academic CV. The selection results will be announced on 5 June 2026.

The workshop is intended as an opportunity for initial exchange and relaxed discussion. Extended abstracts (approx. 1,000 words) will be circulated in advance to facilitate preliminary questions and provide contextual background. The latter should be submitted by 8 October 2026.

Each participant is responsible for the copyright of the materials they submit and present. The working language of the workshop is English.

For any further questions, please contact the responsible organizer Dr. Denitsa Nencheva at [denica.nencheva@iefem.bas.bg](mailto:denica.nencheva@iefem.bas.bg)

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