

# The WZB at 50 – a brief chronicle

## 1969

### Founding

The “Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin gemeinnützige Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung” (“Berlin Social Science Center nonprofit LLC”) was set up in early 1969 on through a bipartisan initiative of members of the Bundestag. The social sciences were held to have great potential for advising society and politics and the time was ripe for an international beacon project in isolated West Berlin. There was also strong challenges faced as students accused the new institution of being too intimate with business and industry with its operations too opaque.



On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1969, the articles of association were signed at a notary's office on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin.

## 1970–1975

### Work Begins

In August 1970, the “International Institute for Management and Administration” began its work in a villa in the Berlin suburb of Grunewald. It was followed by the “International Institute for Comparative Social Research” and the “International Institute for Environment and Society.” In loose confederation, the three institutes scattered across West Berlin constituted the nascent WZB, the Berlin Social Science Center. From the outset, the research undertaken had an international focus with many of the researchers coming from abroad – most notably from the United States.



The location was idyllic: the first WZB institute and the central administration started life in a villa in the Berlin suburb of Grunewald.

## 1976–1987

### Consolidation and Sea Changes

The institute grew along with its structures and established positions for research administration and public relations. In 1980, the first president took up office, and relations with universities grew closer. After the 1982 change of government in Bonn, the WZB had to justify its existence anew. A structural commission proposed fundamental reforms to WZB research.



There was still nothing to be seen of the WZB: the Reichsversicherungsamt (Imperial Social Insurance Agency) building on Reichpietschufer, whose rear wing was soon to give way to a new building.

## 1988/89

### From Periphery to Centre

The WZB, which in May 1988 moved into common premises in the former Reichsversicherungssamt building in Berlin-Tiergarten with postmodern extensions, took on a new, more granular and flexible structure. The former institutes were transmuted into research units, research professorships, and research groups, with new topics such like technology and organization, inequality and social cohesion, and public health added to the research agenda. In 1989, the peripheral site on Potsdamer Platz became, a central location, predestined to observe and shape German reunification and for the opening of Eastern Europe.



The British architect James Stirling designed the postmodern extension of the building.

## 1990–1999

### Openings

The WZB continued to grow. In 1995, the wing at the National Gallery end of the site was expanded and raised. There were setbacks experienced, despite outstanding evaluation of the institute by the Science Council in 1997. Substantively, the research horizon was continuously broadened. Globalization entered the agenda, democracy research and economics were given greater attention, and the Internet was explored as a cultural space.



Old stairs, new floors: an interior view of the WZB.

## Post 2000

### The Future has Begun

The WZB is now crossing borders – between disciplines and beyond them. Bridging projects link different research units to garner differing perspectives to common problems. Collaboration with students from the University of the Arts opens new doors on academic issues. The research group Science Policy Studies has moved to the EUREF Campus, where research on questions of transport and future mobility offers practical applications. In conjunction with the Berlin universities, the WZB founded the Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society and construction on the physical plant has continued. A recently begun addition will provide more space and possibilities for research and communication.



A crane for the WZB: extension works 2018/19.

You can find a detailed chronicle of 50 years  
WZB at: [wzb.eu/chronik](http://wzb.eu/chronik)