

# Respectful difference

Michael Zürn

Thanks to preparations for the Bremen Collaborative Research Center's "Transformations of the State" and my contribution to the founding of the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, I am not wholly without experience in "on-the-spot" collaboration with colleagues. Nowhere has such cooperation proved as varied and fruitful as at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. A brief ramble through the WZB terrain in which I have cooperated will show how true this has been. I'll start from the part of the WZB closest to me and will move outwards from there.

Obviously, I have worked closely with colleagues from my own Global Governance research unit, but in reviewing the list of publications, I am astounded by how much quality work has been produced. I have published, in collaboration with almost 20 former and present colleagues, diverse works concerning topics including the politicization of international and European institutions, the growth of transnational and international authorities, the fragmentation of the international order, the legitimization of deficits in international politics, the institutionalization of accountability in international organizations, and on historical institutionalism in international relations.

The Global Governance unit is a part of the broader research area studying international politics and law. With Anna Holzscheiter and Mattias Kumm, we

operate within the framework of a German Research Foundation (DFG) research group addressing conflict and cooperation between international institutions. Key questions we consider include: Is the international institutional landscape fragmenting? Is cooperation between mechanisms and institutions working? Where are decisions made? What political authority stands to benefit in the event of conflict? For example, we consider whether victory can be claimed by the champions of free trade – represented by the World Trade Organisation – or those focusing on the protection of health – institutionalized in the World Health Organisation? Questions like these fall clearly in the purview with the Center for Global Constitutionalism, too. With the groups of global health researchers led by, Anna Holzscheiter and Tine Hanrieder, I share an interest in issues like global governance as the legitimacy of international guidelines and the role of transnational orders of knowledge.

Visitors to the WZB are impressed by the camaraderie evident in our canteen, where research units and research groups regularly gather around the same table. This is often seen as an expression of fragmentation at the institute. But it could also be an expression of the team spirit within these units. Some years ago we introduced the tool of bridging projects with the specific aim of reaching across unit boundaries. Through this initiative, I was privileged to work with my colleagues Ruud Koopmans from the research unit Migration, Integration,

Transnationalization, and Wolfgang Merkel from the research unit Democracy and Democratization. The three of us are often viewed as inseparable, but paradoxically, our close collaboration has highlighted the differences between us.

We investigated the new transnational cleavage between liberal cosmopolitans and nationalist communitarians. Precisely because it is a new societal cleavage, we found ourselves at different points on this continuum, and, accordingly differed in research design and the interpretation of findings, and in normative deductions. The bridging project thus became a lesson in the sociology of knowledge. If we had worked alone, we may have completed the project in half the time, which, in some sense may have been beneficial. Increased speed would have allowed us to produce explanations for situations such as the Brexit referendum, the rise of the AfD, and Donald Trump's electoral victory much closer to real-time developments, as well as accelerate the production of our Cambridge publication, *The Struggle over Borders*. The slower group approach has made this work ready only in time for the WZB jubilee. However, our collaboration has produced different – namely better – results than any of us would have obtained on our own sacrificing some speed for greater quality.

Quantitatively and qualitatively oriented sociologists and political scientists are sometimes worlds apart. However, good explanations necessarily require various methods be combined. With Macartan Humphreys from the Institutions and Political Inequality research unit and Steffen Huck from Economics of Change, I share the view that good expla-

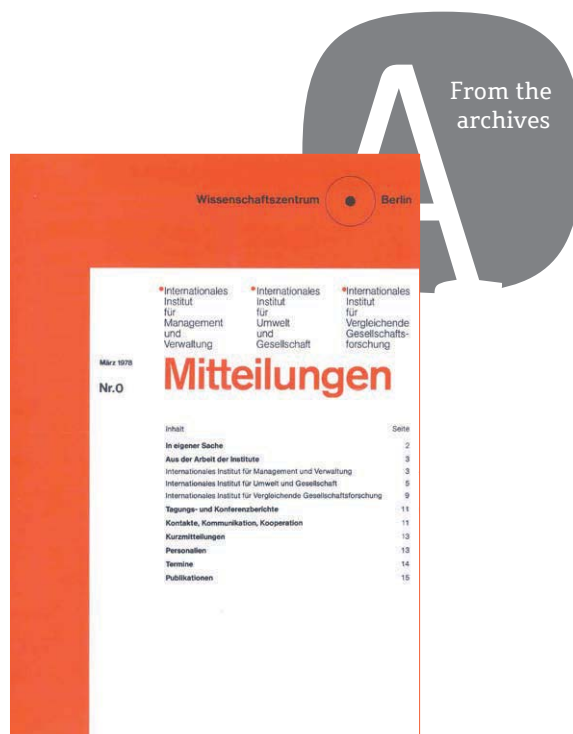
nations of important societal developments in the social sciences have become ever rarer because of the methodological demands of sub-communities. Our bridging project “Experimenting with Causality,” both suffers and benefits from this variety of perspectives and can prove successful only if difference and respect go hand in hand.

The study of social sciences in Berlin has chalked notable success with the award of the excellence cluster Contestations of the Liberal Script, which I coordinated with Tanja Börzel from the Free University. The project tries to overcome disciplinary boundaries. And as the WZB aims at bridging gaps between disciplines, it is a good fit for this endeavour. I particularly appreciated working together with Dorothea Kübler (research unit Market Behavior), Steffen Huck, Macartan Humphreys, and Matthias Kumm (Center for Global Constitutionalism) in preparing the application for the excellence cluster.

Our stroll through the WZB has yet to reach the managerial level to meet our two educational sociologists, Jutta Allmendinger and Heike Solga. Interaction with them has been intense, fruitful, and always enjoyable. We have a common interest in and commitment to science policy. Both Heike Solga and myself have, for example, been members of the Senate of the German Research Foundation and Jutta Allmendinger and I were involved in the founding of the Center for Civil Society Research. I have not yet been involved in a joint project since, Edgar Grande, has been in office, although I had been previously.

These colleagues and this spirit of cooperation make it a privilege to be at the WZB. My thinking and my work would today be very different had I not spent fifteen years here. I am proud to be a WZBer. There have been other opportunities, but nothing could have topped it. The spirit of respectful difference, the willingness to learn from one another, and the conviction that it is precisely these colleagues I want to learn from, have repeatedly ensured that the WZB is where I want to be; and that I am so happy to be here.

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## Double zero

March 1978 saw the start of a success story. Barbara Stolterfoht – later, among other things, minister in Hessen – was at the time in charge of public relations at the WZB. She developed the format of the quarterly reports on research. Over a number of relaunches, the WZB-Mitteilungen has remained true to itself: Readers and subscribers (currently a good 7.000) learn about projects, issues, and findings at first hand. We have meanwhile reached issue 163. The project clearly needed a good run-up: the archives contain the first issue dated “March 1977.”

*Title page WZB Mitteilungen No. 0/II, March 1978, WZB Archive.*