In the study of contemporary history, the period from the 1960s to the 1980s is currently one of the main areas of research. Controversies and debates revolve around a central question: did these decades mark a watershed in the history of twentieth-century Western industrialised countries? In research, the 1950s and 1960s have been referred to as the last phase of the «Golden Age», a time when political conceptions of planning had their heyday. In the early 1970s the Bretton Woods system of monetary management ended, the oil crises led to economic turmoil and, together with economic and structural changes, this brought an end to the economic boom, starting off large-scale unemployment in many societies. At least by implication, it has been claimed that these latter developments brought about a general fading of the notions of progress. However, historians still know surprisingly little about the temporal perspectives of politics during these decades. The present issue of the *Journal of Modern European History* aims to fill this gap, and also to make a contribution to the emerging field of historical time studies.


1. Research on Historical Time

At present, historical research is experiencing a «temporal turn». While in the 1990s and 2000s a «spatial turn» could be identified, it is now the dimension of time that is being thrust more strongly into focus: how was time regarded and structured? This is connected with a constructivist understanding of time. It is, of course, past time that historians study – splitting it into distinct «periods». But for a long while historical research hardly questioned the nature of time itself, taking it on trust as an objective framework which runs onwards in a homogeneous and linear manner. The first ruminations on time as a dimension can be found in the French Annales school, which took into consideration the relationship between historical segmentation of time and the longue durée or long-term view. Further, the 1962 German Historikertag addressed the theme of «the future in history». It dealt with past expectations of what seemed to lie ahead, hoping to «regain the sense of an open future». Hence, the history discussed was largely seen within the 1960s’ future-oriented frame of reference: there was a stress on the many «possible futures». In the 1970s, Reinhart Koselleck claimed that, in the course of the Satteilzeit (between the 1750s and 1850s), horizons of expectation (Erwartungshorizonte) became detached from spaces of experience (Erfahrungsräume). In the Age of the Enlightenment, Christian expectations of salvation at the Last Day were superseded by a belief in «worldly» progress. This change entailed a crucial shift to a modern understanding of time as the horizons of expectation gained a historically new quality, leading to notions of an open future, plans and utopian conceptions. As Lucian Hölscher maintained, the future was now mainly seen as something emerging from the past and the present, and expectations about the future appeared to be partly deducible from past and present circumstances. Within a linear conception of


time, «history» came to mean the process of human development. It was then that the German term «Zukunft», which had previously meant «Ankunft» (advent or coming), took on its temporal meaning of «future».

Further, recent interpretations identifying a distinct period of European «high modernity» (from the late nineteenth century right up to the 1970s) claim that in this era of high industrialism, urbanisation, rapid technological advance, and scientisation of the social sphere, modern modes of experiencing time and thinking about it became both intensified and modified. Sweeping changes in science and technology encouraged belief in an absolute, homogenous time-line. In this, time was perceived not as relative to space or to specific persons who measured it, but as a homogeneous flow with every second having identical duration. Modern rationality, science and technology also seemed to offer control over nature, so that people could plan and steer the future. Modernity was linked to such planning in an ambivalent way. The Five-Year Plans in the Soviet Union and the Nazi plans to regulate the reproduction of society on racist and pseudo-scientific principles were radical expressions of this universal ambition inherent in modernity.

In the last few years, there has been considerable historical research on the «future boom» of the 1960s. In the West, the future became a central scientific and political category. This was caused by the economic boom (which promised an enlargement of the political scope of action) and by dynamic changes in science and technology, which seemed to offer new ways of looking into the medium- to long-term future. The forward-looking focus also had to do with Cold War competition between the different political systems. «Planning» and «modernisation» shaped
the political vocabulary. The conceptions of planning dominating US and West European politics in the 1960s were closely linked to the Keynesian paradigm and to a highly positive trust in what could be achieved by following science and expert advice.\(^\text{16}\) As has been shown, Western concepts and programmes designed to modernise the so-called Third World were infused by notions of progress and centred on economic planning. Moreover, as became evident, there were many similarities between Western and Eastern modernisation concepts.\(^\text{17}\)

A new trend has come up in historical studies since the 1990s. This is the «memory boom», which conducts research on the culture of memory and on public commemoration in a historical context. This research is based on the assumption that the past is constantly present in our everyday experience.\(^\text{18}\) The trend grew out of the 1980s’ and 1990s’ general social and political revival of interest in the past, in part spurred on by remembrance of the Holocaust.\(^\text{19}\) Aleida Assmann has recently characterised it as the «late modern time regime». Defining a «time regime» as «a complex of cultural presuppositions, values and decisions that guide human intentions, actions, emotions and interpretations», she argues that the time regime of modernity – marked by its emphatic orientation towards the future and the notion of breaks between past, present and future – was plunged into crisis in the 1980s. According to Assmann, in the late modern time regime, past, present and future have been linked again, which constitutes the memory boom.\(^\text{20}\) At heart, she is offering us a legitimisation of memory work. This reaffirms the fact that, through periodisation, contemporary history itself structures and creates temporality.\(^\text{21}\)

In their enquiries into all this, present-day historians do not see time as an absolute parameter in which historical events can be ordered, but accept that it is culturally coded and historically changeable.\(^\text{22}\) Time does not simply tick on, but needs to be understood as a social and cultural construct that individuals, groups or institutions experience. Their perception of it is influenced by their own attitudes to the past, their expectations, and the social conventions they live by. In this sense – and here the argument links to Koselleck – past, present and future are not spheres rig-

\(^\text{16}\) See D. van Laak, «Planung, Planbarkeit und Planungseuphorie», 16.2.2010, http://docupedia.de/zg/Planung (3.1.2015), which, implying a «shaping» of things, defines planning as «active and creative anticipation of the future» («gestaltender Vorgriff auf die Zukunft»); Metzler, Konzeptionen; O’Hara, Dreams.


\(^\text{20}\) Assmann, Zeit, 19.

\(^\text{21}\) See Bevernage / Lorenz, «Introduction», 22–26; Sabrow, Zeit, 36–37.

2. Perspectives and Questions

This issue aims to shed new light on processes of reconfiguring the past, the present and the future in politics from the 1960s to the 1980s. The articles employ new approaches to political history known as «New Political History», taking a wider perspective than that based simply on nation states and «high politics». They look at actors in the political field – governments, political parties, experts, and new social movements. Thus, they do not focus on the rhythmic fluctuations of (parliamentary and presidential) democracies, which depend on cycles of elections, but explore political dealings with time in a broader way. Actors in the political field are not solely led by time perceptions, but propose a view of how societies should progress through history, advancing specific images of temporal order. The articles emanate from the thesis that the different dimensions of time are interconnected, but they focus particularly on the future dimension. They examine political time horizons (from short to long), perceptions of time (linear, cyclical, accelerated, and retarded) as well as temporal orders, also exploring forward-looking visions and ways of embracing the future (Zukunftsaneignungen) that range from optimism to pessimism. The present issue applies this specific time approach to the exploration of the political history of the 1960s to 1980s. Thereby, it aims to make a contribution to five crucial research perspectives, each leading to specific questions.

Firstly, the articles address the ongoing discussion as to whether there was an «end of confidence» in the 1970s. Can we identify a break in the political belief in progress at that time, replacing optimism with «a more pragmatic or even more
pessimistic view of the future?" Thus, the articles explore the visions of the future and notions of progress that shaped the plans and policies of actors in the political field. They ask if notions of progress really disappeared or changed their meaning in the 1970s and 1980s, opening the way to new political conceptions like «sustainability». Can we identify a switch from linear notions of time and progress to steady-state thinking and cyclical perceptions? How did ways of thinking about the future influence conceptions of planning? What role did the advice of experts play? Did time horizons shrink due to diminished expectations of the future?

Secondly, the issue deals with the temporality of crises. As mentioned, the oil crises and the structural changes of the 1970s and 1980s led to economic problems, which affected both the West and the East. Much has been written about the «crisis» of the 1970s and the attendant «crisis management». Some authors diagnose an «intellectual crisis in political economy» that nevertheless allowed room for new ideas and scopes of action. Others point to fears of «ungovernability» that circulated, even playing some role in socialist states. A crisis, by definition, has a temporal structure, as it refers to a decisive moment in a specific process. «Thus a state of crisis is inseparable from the experience of time». Perceptions of crisis have not necessarily been accompanied by cultural pessimism: they have often been linked to an optimistic belief in the malleability of society (Gestaltungsoptimismus). The authors examine whether actors in the political field in the 1970s felt the presence of a «crisis» in time perception and, if so, how they understood it. Further, they explore what uses invocation of the crisis was put to, even asking whether crisis was perhaps «constructed» to legitimise specific ideas.

Thirdly, this approach reflects the roles that uncertainty and a sense of acceleration played in perceptions of time. We can point to the concept of "securitisation", which promises to provide answers on why societies perceive certain issues as relevant in terms of security.

36 Ibid; Esposito / Reichardt, «Revolution», 27.
and 1980s, politics was much more shaped by expanded understandings and new conceptions of security due to perceptions of dangers and risks (such as terrorism and environmental risks). The authors also point to scientific concepts of security and diagnoses of uncertainty that surfaced in the 1970s. The philosopher Hermann Lübbe diagnosed an accelerating dynamic of change due to technological innovations that were leading to a «dwindling certainty about the future». Along with others, he believed that acceleration brought with it a «shrinking of the present». This thesis of social acceleration has become a central topos in sociology. In the 1980s, the sociologist Ulrich Beck spoke of an emerging «risk society». From the 1970s onwards, he and Anthony Giddens pointed out that Western societies have been coping with consequences of modernity such as globalisation, individualisation and pressing ecological problems. In a «second» or «reflexive» modernity, experiences of contingency and uncertainty have increased. In the study of contemporary history, it is not useful to adopt sociological theories and hypotheses without questioning them, but we should put them in their historical context. Hence, this issue examines to some extent how far the contemporary theses of social acceleration and increasing uncertainty shaped the perceptions of actors in the political field, and ask what function and impact these perceptions may have had.

Fourthly, the authors recognise that the dimensions of time and space are interconnected. Recently, historians have pointed out that awareness of increasing global interdependence intensified in the 1970s. How did it affect perceptions of time and concepts designed to modernise and develop the so-called Third World? And fifthly, interpretations of a «second modernity», of «high modernity» and the late modern time regime assume a more or less radical break in time continuity since 1998; H. Rosa, Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne, Frankfurt a. M. 2005.


the 1970s. This leads us back to the underlying question: how far did political actors in the 1970s feel they were dealing with a distinct break? How far did the temporal orders propagated by politics change?

3. Results

In the space provided, we can only present case studies showing characteristic aspects of our approach. By focusing on West Germany, Britain and the Soviet Union, the authors are able to point out similarities as well as differences in contrasting national settings. On the one hand, time perceptions and visions of the future in British and West German politics were indissolubly linked to the political culture of «the West» as a seemingly united bloc in the Cold War system. Forecasting and planning knowledge, initially mainly provided by US «Cold War Science» institutions like the RAND Corporation, circulated widely within Western industrialised societies, leading to the development of transnational networks of planning experts. On the other hand, perceptions of time and conceptions of the future in these nations derived from their own traditions and frameworks. German understanding of time, for example, was deeply affected by the National Socialist past, and West German conceptions of planning were responsive to the East German planned economy. British notions of both the past and the future were influenced by memories of its former Empire, giving rise to pessimistic narratives of British «decline».

Martina Steber’s article compares concepts of time in the Christian Union Parties of West Germany (the CDU and CSU) and the British Conservative Party. She shows that in both countries, politically conservative concepts revolved around keeping past, present and future in balance, thus assuring continuity in an era when conservatives were acutely conscious of rapid technological, social and cultural change. Both groups of conservative politicians were affected by the forecasting and planning ideas of the 1960s, but the German Centre-Right parties maintained that these had to be balanced both with freedom and with the «value basis» they believed society was based upon, while the British Conservatives were more concerned with «the freedom of the individual». For both, time concepts changed to crisis perceptions in the 1970s. The Germans understood the crisis as international and social, whereas in Britain it was interpreted in national and economic terms. On the basis of this, the Thatcherites constructed a radical alternative to the present and thus opened up a new time horizon.


In his case study of British governmental time, Glen O’Hara identifies four different time dimensions: structural, economic, ideological and practical. He also shows how, in the 1960s, quantifiable long-term projections and planning lay at the very heart of British government, both in the Conservative cabinets and, even more so, in Wilson’s Labour administration. The planning was accompanied by a great deal of media promotion. However, from the mid-1960s onwards the big ambitions began to dissolve, undermined by a sequence of economic problems, which brought «time compression» and crisis perceptions to the fore. O’Hara points out that these economic problems and the specific structure of British capitalism (exposed to world currency markets) brought economic planning in Britain more into disrepute than in other West European countries, leading to a collapse of the once dominant temporal principles.

Unlike Western politics, Soviet politics could claim a fixed goal – communism – and a plan to attain it, as there was already a linkage to the future. Stefan Guth’s article on the USSR focuses on the construction of the «scientific-technical revolution», which was understood to be a precondition for communism and made a framework for Soviet future-thinking. Thus Guth also sheds light on the crucial relationship between political planning and scientific-technical experts. He demonstrates that the Kosygin reforms marked the emergence of a statewide commitment to forecasting in the USSR, showing significant parallels with the West. Techno-science and prognostics acquired a considerable momentum of their own, which challenged the Party’s prerogative over the future in various ways – not least because Soviet prognostics interacted with Western counterparts. In parallel to changed perceptions in the West, sceptical attitudes towards technological progress spread among members of the Soviet technical intelligentsia from the late 1960s onwards. They were worried not only about the nuclear arms race, but also about ecological problems and global overpopulation. The idea of progress remained, but under new terms: the experts proposed solving problems by means of a second, ecologically conscious scientific-technical revolution that would reconcile progress and preservation. However, positivist progressivism was eroding, and this had, Guth claims, existential significance for the USSR, because the regime had made the scientific-technical revolution a central part of the whole Soviet project. The holistic character of Soviet thinking about the future was thus its most serious limiting factor.

As Guth’s article shows, the present issue also explores transnational and international exchange processes. Elke Seefried sheds light on links between the international political arena (epitomised by the United Nations) and national actors (in West Germany) by scrutinising the origins of the modern sustainability discourse from the 1970s to 2000. Her article claims that the dominating political
notions of progress and modernisation of the 1960s, which had been bound up with the economic growth paradigm and linear temporal thought, were questioned in the early 1970s. These notions were partly reconceptualised to incorporate long-term ecological and social issues and an awareness of global interdependency. Based on this, «sustainable development» and «sustainability» became political concepts oriented to the future, which, due to their vagueness, appeared to balance economic, ecological and social goals in both short-term and long-term perspectives. Sustainability partly replaced concepts of ecological security that circulated due to the Chernobyl disaster. The discourse on sustainable development and sustainability oscillated between crisis perceptions and a new semantics of modernisation, showing that political notions of progress were being recodified.

The articles indicate that a massive orientation towards the future characterised the political history of the 1960s in Britain, West Germany and the USSR alike. This went hand in hand with a historicisation of the past as the post-war age seemed to be definitely over. Further, actors in the political arena were guided by a perception of accelerated technological and social change which, they thought, made it imperative to look ahead. At the same time, politics now seemed to possess both the knowledge and the instruments to look into the middle-to-long-term future and to shape it. This perception went along with new methods of forecasting and a prevailing faith that the shape of the future could be made malleable by political intervention (Machbarkeitsdenken). However, the articles show that, around 1970, in different timeframes and different settings, notions of time and future changed tremendously, and the temporal orders once propagated crumbled. Planning and steering ideas as well as Western modernisation theory were questioned, and crisis perceptions began to dominate. This was not only due to economic problems but also to exaggerated expectations that had been placed on forecasting and planning – indeed on the future in general. Further, critiques of modernisation concepts stemmed from ideas of global interdependency that had been encouraged and strengthened by world models for global planning (such as The Limits to Growth). In the West, a questioning of the planning paradigm was also induced by new social movements. 50 Notions of progress that were bound up with economic growth and technology came under fire. However, there was no single «crisis of the 1970s», nor an overall perception of crisis but, rather, varying shades in a changing understanding of time and the future. 51 The crisis narrative was also used as a strategy to legitimise a call for radical change (as in Thatcherism). In parts of the political spectrum and amongst the future-experts too, «progress» became linked to concepts of

bringing economy, ecology, the social and the role of the individual into some sort of balance. The present and, bound up with it, the past became more relevant, but, at least in the West, the future did not disappear as a space that could be shaped by politics.

The parallels between West and East are of interest. Of course, their respective political structures, ideologies and cultures differed deeply, yet the articles point to commonalities. On both sides, and amongst circles of both politicians and experts, long-term and large-scale planning projects for the future were questioned around 1970, and new concepts of growth and progress were formulated. Naturally, certain planning conceptions and practices continued but the expectations put on them had diminished. From the late 1970s onwards, in each of the differing national contexts, new time horizons and visions of the future opened up – an aspect that needs further research. Sometimes these went with a rather vague, ecologically softened technological optimism. Sometimes – as exemplified in Thatcherism – they were coloured by a strong faith in market forces aimed at strengthening national competitiveness in a globalised world. It is an open question if the latter had its own (market-based) agenda of steering the future. With the end of the Cold War, such «neo-liberal» projects caught on in Eastern Europe, so that the old questions – how to envisage the future and what politics could do to steer it – were posed afresh.

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