



Seminar

## SUSANNE A. WENGLER

EURIAS Fellow, SCAS.

Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Notre Dame, IN.  
Concurrent Faculty, Keough School of Global Affairs, University of Notre Dame, IN

### *Setting the Table: How Capital Transformed Russia's Food System*

Tuesday, 29 January, 2019, 2:15 p.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall  
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala  
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## ABOUT SUSANNE A. WENGLER

Susanne A. Wengle has been Assistant Professor at the University of Notre Dame since 2015, with a PhD from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research examines how market institutions and regulations evolve; hence, what “politics” make them possible, but also how their effects change the political conditions in which they were formulated. She is the author of *Post-Soviet Power: State-led Development and Russia’s Marketization* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), on the political economy of newly created electricity markets in Russia. Wengle has conducted research and published on other aspects of Russia’s post-Soviet transformations, namely, on agriculture, welfare provisions, and the politics of expertise. One recent publication explores the transformation of Russia’s rural economies: “Local Effects of the New Land Rush: How Global Capital Inflows Transformed Rural Russia,” *Governance*, 31:2 (2018). Other publications include “Engineers versus Managers: Experts, Market-making and State-building in Putin’s Russia,” *Economy and Society*, 41:3 (2012), and “The Monetization of l’Goty: Changing Patterns of Welfare Politics and Provision in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60:5 (with M. Rasell, 2008).

The empirical focus of her current project is agriculture and food production in Russia and the United States. At SCAS, she will be working on a book manuscript that examines and compares the evolution of industrial food systems in the United States and Soviet/post-Soviet Russia, tentatively entitled “Setting the Table.” Both economies have for much of the twentieth century pursued the goal of turning farms into factories. Rather than assessing successes and failures, the book asks what was abundant and what was scarce, and for whom. The answers to these questions yield a new way to think about inequality and distribution in these two late modern economies.

## ABSTRACT

Russia’s agrifood system has undergone profound changes over the last fifteen years. Large capital investments in rural economies and in processing industries have led to significant increases in production and productivity, and to dramatic changes in how food is produced and processed. Agrifood corporations have emerged as new and important actors – as land-owners, as producers, and for the global integration of Russia’s economy more generally. The transformation of the country’s food system aligns with several political priorities of the Putin regime and was, in many ways, made possible through a cornucopia of public support measures.

The presentation outlines key dimensions of this transformation and proposes a conceptual framework that captures their relevance. In particular, it will focus on an unprecedented influx of capital to the agrifood system that has taken place over the last fifteen years, its causes and consequences. The presentation highlights how constitutive relationships between various actors have changed with capital inflows and the rise of agri-food corporations, including the relationship between former collective farms and rural communities, the relationship between domestic and international producers, and finally, the relationship between producers, the livestock they raise and the environment in production takes place. This evidence suggests a conceptual framework of post-Soviet change that goes beyond a stylized “transition” from plan-to-market narrative, and brings into focus the reconfiguration of myriad relationships that the introduction of markets as organizing principles of social life entails.