

Tributes to Dr. Ellen Wiegandt

It is with deep regret and sorrow that we announce the sad and untimely death of Dr Ellen Wiegandt on February 5, 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Dr. Ellen Wiegandt, lecturer in the Political Science unit of the Graduate Institute, died on February 5 after a sudden and difficult illness. Ellen Wiegandt had for a number of years taught courses at the Institute, where she was also an active and distinguished researcher heavily involved in numerous projects connected with the environment, frontiers, and the populations of mountainous regions. She is survived by her husband, Prof. Urs Luterbacher of the Graduate Institute, two sons, Jeremy and Samuel, a brother, Ralph, and her parents, Jane and Herbert.

Ellen Wiegandt received her Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan; her doctoral research was on the peasantry of the Valaisian Alps. For the next three decades, she carried out research and published widely on the demography, the local politics, and, more recently, the reactions to changes in the physical environment of these and other groups of mountain dwellers.

Starting in the later 1980s, Dr. Wiegandt began to be interested in a host of issues connected with the environment. She did research, and also served as programme coordinator, for projects on the human dimensions of climate change. This led to important work on water resources, transboundary relations, and glacier retreat. These efforts were widely recognised by academic institutions, nongovernmental organisations (Dr. Wiegandt was a winner of the Moppert Prize for sustainable development), major publishers, and, most recently, the European Commission (she coordinated the social science part of its ACQWA project).

For many years, Ellen Wiegandt was an instructor at the Institute. Her courses on various environmental subjects were always well-attended, not only because of the subject matter but because of the clarity, the lucidity, and the devotion she brought to these courses, week after week. It is no exaggeration to say that an entire generation of students had their outlook on environmental issues strongly influenced by what they learned from Ellen Wiegandt.



Ellen in June 2008, addressing our class as part of our 40th reunion "River and the Environment" panel.

In spite of the many demands on her time, Ellen was a generous colleague. She always had time, not only for her co-instructors and research collaborators, but for others who wanted to talk about politics, or culture, or any number of other topics. She read widely, thought clearly, listened attentively, and argued passionately. Although her office was probably the smallest at the Pavillon Rigot, it always seemed among the warmest and most inviting.

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