

International Political Economy of Agriculture (Autumn/Winter 2026)

Instructor: Shuji Hisano

- Target year: 1st year students or above
- Number of credits: 2 credits
- Year/Semester: 2026 | in the autumn/winter semester
- Days/Periods: 13:30-16:30 on alternate Mondays
- Class style: Lecture (reading seminar)
- Language of instruction: English

Overview and purpose of the course:

This course provides a comprehensive and critical view on the development and current state-of-affairs of agriculture and food governance at the global, national, and local levels, by referring to various theoretical frameworks and concepts of international political economy and agri-food sociology and geography, especially with a focus on the unequal power relations between various actors. We will discuss issues and prospects of agriculture and food governance from the perspectives of “sustainable and just development”.

Since this course is designed also for a group of students who are supervised by the instructor and therefore continuously attend the course over several years, it would be better to share the themes of the course in the previous years before introducing the theme in 2025.

In 2021, our focus was on the concept of “food as a commons” which has (re)emerged as a transformative narrative and framing to challenge the mainstream paradigm of food as a commodity, to broaden our imagination to explore and practice the alternative paradigm of food and food systems.

In 2022, we read the Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies together to learn the origins, concepts and methodologies of critical agrarian studies, a field of research that unites scholars from various disciplines concerned with understanding the process of agrarian change: the processes, implications, and limitations of pervasive capitalist penetration into the agricultural sector and rural livelihoods and landscapes. In each 2-period class, we picked up three to four chapters of the Handbook which consists of 72 chapters in total.

In 2023, we turned our eyes to urban food governance as a space and means of transforming food systems globally as well as locally/regionally. Although it is in rural areas where our food is mainly produced, scholarly and policy attention is gradually drawn to urban and city-regions as an important arena for making and implementing food policy. We learnt the histories, concepts, and practices of urban food governance through case studies of plans, policies, and programmes implemented in different contexts.

We have often come across the question of how alternatives emerge and are constructed; and if and in what way they can demonstrate and realise their transformative potential (e.g. challenging and transforming the dominant food regime towards more just and sustainable food systems and bringing about social change at large). Therefore, in 2024, we deepened the understanding, broadened the horizon, and enriched the imaginary of “alternatives and futures” of our agri-food systems through learning diverse practices, theories, and politics around the two most significant concepts of agri-food transformations: alternative food networks (AFNs) and agroecology.

While studying diverse alternative approaches, we have found it necessary to understand and theorise emerging governance processes and mechanisms that involve very diverse actors (including local, everyday actors) and other elements of society (e.g. localised practices, grassroots networks, disruptive norms, innovative ideas) as well as more-than-human others (e.g. complex and multilayered ecosystems). For this purpose, in 2025, we read together a book about “everyday governance” and “assemblage” perspectives as a means of improving the sustainability of agriculture and food systems.

As consistently highlighted in the textbooks reviewed over the past several years, agri-food policies and practices are shaped by how the nature of agrarian and food questions and the perspectives on transforming agri-food systems are framed and communicated through media, campaigns, and education. In this semester, therefore, employing discourse/narrative/media analysis as methodologies, drawing upon sociology and ethnology as disciplinary approaches, we will examine how food sustainability and responsibility are communicated and thereby shape our food practices, and acquire methodological and theoretical perspectives for politicising these issues.

Course objectives:

Through this course, students will acquire critical and interdisciplinary approaches to social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental issues surrounding agriculture and food, and gain insight into fundamental social science issues such as “structure and agency”, “commodification and alienation”, and “power of discourse”.

Course schedule and contents:

Every year, textbooks used in this course are different, but we use either introductory books with high international recognition for textbooks so that even beginners of agri-food studies or international political economy and sociology can learn effectively, or handbook-style books with a theoretically and conceptually elaborated introduction chapter and well-structured chapters that cover the most important issues and problems and include rich case studies. In the past years, we read the following books together:

- [2019] Jason Konefal & Maki Hatanaka, eds., *Twenty Lessons in the Sociology of Food and Agriculture*, Oxford UP, 2019.
- [2020] Jessica Duncan, Michael Carolan & Johannes S.C. Wiskerke, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Sustainable and Regenerative Food Systems*, Routledge, 2020.
- [2021] Jose Louis Vivero-Pol, Tomaso Ferrando, Olivier De Schutter & Ugo Mattei, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Food as a Commons*, Routledge, 2018.
- [2022] H. Akram-Lodhi, Kristina Dietz, Bettina Engels and Ben M. McKay, eds., *Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2021.
- [2023] Ana Moragues-Faus, Jill K. Clark, Jane Battersby, Anna Davies, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Urban Food Governance*, Routledge, 2023.
- [2024] Colin Ray Anderson, Janneke Bruil, M. Jahi Chappel, Csilla Kiss, and Michel Patrick Pimbert, *Agroecology Now! Transformations Towards More Just and Sustainable Food Systems*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- [2025] Jérémie Forney, Dana Bentia, Angga Dwiartama. *Everyday Agri-Environmental Governance: The Emergence of Sustainability through Assemblage Thinking*. Routledge, 2024.

In this semester, we will read the following book.

- Martina Topić-Rutherford and Marija Geiger Zeman, eds. *Food and Sustainability: Communication, PR, and the Culture of Responsibility*, Emerald Publishing, 2026. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83708-038-0>

[Week 1 | Oct 5] Introduction: Power of Sustainability and Promises of the Culture of Responsibility (Martina Topić-Rutherford; Marija Geiger Zeman)

[Week 2-3 | Oct 19] Chapter 1: Purity and Danger/Male and Female/Economy and Environment: Communication of Binaries Related to Food and Gender (Mirela Holy) | Chapter 2: Creativity and Gender in the Cooking World: A Sociological Overview of (Un)creative Media Representation of Professional Chefs (Marija Geiger Zeman; Zdenko Zeman; Geran-Marko Miletić)

[Week 4-5 | Nov 2] Chapter 3: 'It Bugs Me': Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern (Melissa Beattie) | Chapter 4: Food as a Visual Practice: Fashion Design and Communication in Vegan Food Trends (Petra Krpan)

[Week 6-7 | Nov 16] Chapter 5: 'Go Easy with Bread, Eat Potatoes Instead' – Food Rationing Behavioural Change Campaign of the UK Government (1940–1954) (Martina Topić-Rutherford) | Chapter 6: Savouring Truth: Exposing Disinformation in the World of Alternative Meats (Courtney D. Boman; Erika J. Schneider)

[Week 8-9 | Dec 30] Chapter 7: How Public Relations Can Provide a Socially Responsible Lens for Collective Management of Water Risks (Matthew S. VanDyke) | Chapter 8: What's the 'Right' Thing to Do? How Ethical Expectations for CSR Influence Company Support (Lucinda Austin; Barbara Miller Gaither; Seoyeon Kim)

[Week 10-11 | Dec 21] Chapter 9: Gen Z Insights on Food Waste Reduction, Yellow Sticker Shopping, and Sustainability Communication (Anca Anton) | Chapter 10: Building Sustainable Futures: Food (In)security and Sustainability as Flourishing in Higher Education (Megan K. Schraedley)

[Week 12-13 | Jan 18] Chapter 11: Fibs, Fiction, and Facts: The Visual Construction of Ocean Sustainability Within the Context of the Climate Crisis (Grace Omondi; Anders Nilsen) | Chapter 12: Developing a Public Relations Element in Climate Change University Curricula: Challenges for Higher Education (Michal Chmiel)

Basic rules in class

- One or two students are assigned to prepare a summary presentation of book chapter(s) or journal papers, including questions, reflections and some points for discussion
- The summary part of the presentation should not be too detailed
- Handout (a summary, questions and discussion points) needs to be circulated via email 2-3 days beforehand
- A student who will be assigned to the next class is appointed to be a facilitator, who introduces presentation(s), manages time, collects and organises questions and points for discussion, and facilitates discussion
- All the participants are required to join the discussion actively
- Anybody can present anything additional but closely relevant to the chapter(s), with or without a handout

Course requirements:

No prerequisite knowledge or skill is required other than English language ability sufficient to interact actively in class.

Evaluation methods and policy:

Grading will be carried out on the basis of active class participation (70%) and assignment presentation/report (30%).

Study outside of class (preparation and review):

Students are required to read the assigned articles and book chapters for each class, as well as other relevant reading materials, so that they can actively participate in discussions.