

AGST Newsletter



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Dr. Bálint Balázs, Senior Research Fellow and Managing Director
Environmental Social Science Research Group (ESSRG), Budapest, Hungary



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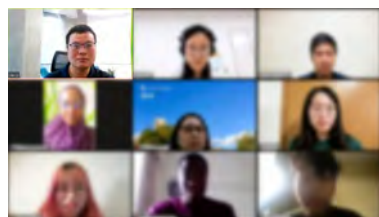


Prof. Jie Li (Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Associate Professor) offered the course "International Human Resource Management (IHRM)" in May and June 2023 on invitation of Prof. Tomoki Sekiguchi. As class supervisor this year, we have Prof. Miyako Imamura. In the same way as the past two years, this year the classes were delivered through Zoom, and with the pandemic passes, we will hopefully have classes on site next year. This seminar-style class will cover key concepts concerning human resource management in an international context.

International Human Resource Management

by Dr. Li Jie

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University



With three years of running, the course becomes quite mature with its structure. The students have the opportunity to read, present, and discuss a variety of articles related to IHRM, such as globalization, culture, language, expatriate, talent acquisition, performance management, labour unions, and training. After that, Prof. Li will give helpful comments to sum up the presentation and discussion. In addition, Prof. Li will introduce some useful theories, and provide some typical practical cases to read and discuss. In the last session, students will present their own research proposal and receive feedback from professors and other students. In light of Prof. Li's focus on quantitative studies, Prof. Imamura could be an invaluable resource for those who wish to conduct qualitative studies. Having studied Human Science and worked in Thailand for years, she has an understanding of working cultures and regional studies, which can provide a unique perspective on HRM.

In addition to the course title, the class itself is diverse and international. Students from GSE as well as Graduate School of Global Environmental Studies (GSGES) and Graduate School of Agriculture (GSA), and also an exchange student from Peking University enriched our discussion greatly. Furthermore, this year's students are from China, Africa, and Vietnam, so everyone has a good international perspective. Throughout the course, we have been introduced to cross-cultural thoughts, which should help us in our future research and personal lives.

Xing Li

Master's student, Graduate School of Economics

Inclusive Rural Development

by Prof. Maria Fonte

The American University of Rome

& Dr. Chizu Sato

Wageningen University

The first segment of the Inclusive Rural Development course commenced in May 2023, facilitated by Professor Maria Fonte from the American University of Rome and hosted by Professor Shuji Hisano. Professor Fonte has extensive research and teaching experience on topics in the field of Rural Sociology and Agricultural Economics; with her own research activities mainly focusing on agriculture, agro-food systems and rural development in industrial and post-industrial economies.

With an attendance of twelve (12) students (research, master's and doctoral), along with two assistant professors across various disciplines and backgrounds, the course engendered an atmosphere that critically assessed the meanings we

assign to the terminologies of "Rural" and "Urban".

Professor Fonte approached the presentation of her lectures with the method of historicising how academia and practitioners of development conceptualise rurality and its relation to the urban. By doing so, her approach required us as students to map and contextualise the theoretical foundations of rurality and the ascension of the urban sphere in academic discourses; also evident in her approach was how these discussions were grounded in real-life across different nation-states, inspired by global events.

Students were tasked with reading prescribed articles for the course, after which they were expected to present an analytical summary based on what they had learnt. An observation I made during these presentations was that either before or after presenting some students would express doubt in their interpretation of these articles. However, in every event that they did, they were met with grace and understanding by Professor Fonte. Professor Fonte's actions served as a reminder that we were in a learning environment that was meant to educate and foster the principle of continuous learning; even in the face of uncertainty, a valuable lesson communicated was that it was better to try rather than to concede defeat without effort.

At the end of this first segment of the course, what became evident was that Professor Fonte's aim was communicated clearly. It was for us as students and researchers to employ self-reflexivity when we encounter the rurality and how it is positioned in discourses of modernity and urbanity; to look beyond the statistical nature of how these terms are defined and understand that social and spatial understandings of these concepts exist. Thus, we need to question and critically assess how they are used and defined in our various disciplines.

It was a pleasure to have Professor Fonte as an instructor for this course, among her brilliance and her extensive experience on the topic, her kindness and openness to understanding others resonated with the participants of the course.



Samantha Nelson

Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Economics

This summer, Dr. Chizu Sato from Wageningen University conducted the second module on Comparative Rural Development Studies, which provided students with an insight into responsible research and explored how different analytical frameworks could be used to improve rural development. Rural development profoundly impacts the livelihoods and well-being of people worldwide. However, traditional approaches often fail to capture the complexity of rural communities, leading to the exclusion of marginalized groups and perpetuating inequalities. Thus, students were encouraged to self-reflect throughout the course to critically analyze their ontological and epistemological assumptions about rural development research. By understanding the lens through which they view the world, Dr. Sato hoped students could acknowledge their biases and embrace more inclusive and empathetic approaches.



Each session started with a pre-session activity, a short lecture, and an interactive workshop. Afterward, we engaged in collective and individual post-session reflections. The sessions were designed to shed light on what remains hidden in traditional rural development studies and equip students with the tools to challenge conventional methodologies by exploring analytical frameworks from poststructuralist, post-capitalist, more-than-human, and feminist political ecology traditions.

The interactive class allowed students to explore alternative approaches to frame sustainable rural development, challenge essentialisms, and recognize intersectionality. By acknowledging the agency and interconnectedness of non-human entities, students gained insights into holistic and eco-centric perspectives.



This module challenged students to adopt responsible research practices and integrate diverse analytical frameworks. Through group activities and individual reflections, they gained the ability to explore innovative solutions for rural development collectively. Throughout the class discussions, students better understood power dynamics, economic systems, ecological interdependence, and gender dynamics.

In general, Dr. Sato's class has been thought-provoking. As a way to pursue a more empathetic and inclusive world, she encouraged everyone to self-reflect, challenge the status quo, and incorporate different perspectives.

Renee Grace Salditos Tila
Doctoral Student, Graduate School of Economics

Report from GSE

Global Course certificate

In March 2023, two undergraduate students received the Global Course certificate. The Global Course is an undergraduate certificate programme offered at the Faculty of Economics that aims to train the next generation of active global citizens.

To get the Global Course certificate, students must complete their bachelor's degree, study abroad for at least one semester and obtain credits from a university that has a student exchange agreement with Kyoto University, earn credits with high grades from courses taught in foreign languages at Kyoto University, and have an adequate level of English.

For more information about the Global Course, please visit this page <https://agst.jgp.kyoto-u.ac.jp/global-course>

AGST Top Global Course

It is a pleasure to announce that six students completed the AGST Top Global Course on September 25, 2023. They come from the Graduate School of Letters and the Graduate School of Agriculture. This brings the total number of students that have completed the programme to 70 since it was launched in March 2017. More information about this programme can be found [here](#).



The 16th Next-Generation Global Workshop (NGGW), under the theme of “Migration and Quality of Life: Harnessing the Potential for Social Prosperity”, took place on 29-30 September. Held annually by the Kyoto University Asian Studies Unit (KUASU), the NGGW has been serving as a stage for early career scholars to share their research findings and receive professional comments from experienced experts, both from all over the world. After 3 years of online Zoom meetings, the workshop this year took place offline at department of letters, Kyoto University.

The 16th Next-Generation Global Workshop (2023/9/29-30)

As a symbolic feature of modern life, the phenomenon of increasing mobility has impact on a wide range of issues regarding social transformation and people’s well-being. Focusing on the issue of migration, the workshop this year received around 80 applications from all over the world. During the two days’ workshop, 26 of them presented their research in 8 sessions, simultaneously proceeded in two lecture rooms. The presenters are from countries including India, the Philippines, Singapore, Germany, U.S., Japan, etc. Research topics covered diverse dimensions of issues regarding the migration, such as war, labor, marriage, law, ethnicity, religion, identity, etc.



At the Walking Tour to Yoshida Shrine

14 veteran scholars participated the workshop as advisors. They were assigned into the 8 sessions according to their research field. During the workshop, advisors gave comments based on the paper submitted by presenters. The advisors are from various universities and research institutes of Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Italy and other countries or areas.

After the first 4 sessions on the first day ended, the participants set out together for a walk out site the campus. They first climbed up the Yoshida Mountain to the Yoshida Shrine, and then visit the Mausoleum of Emperor Go-Nijō near the north gate. After the walking, participants went back to the building of department of letters to join in the welcome banquet provided by the organizing committee.

During the Professor Pitch Talk session in the afternoon on the second day, the advisors provided short talks on their own studies. Young scholars as the audience in the session found themselves getting inspiration from the cutting-edge researches of the Professors.

In the wrap up session at the end of the second day, many participants left positive feedbacks. One of the advisors listed 10 strengths of NGGW, including ‘the impressive arrangement work’, ‘efficient international exchange of knowledge’ and its ‘international and particularly Asia impact to the academic society’. Some presenters regard the ‘mode of knowledge exchange’ carried out by the workshop as ‘really helps us to think more clearly of our own topic as well as allow us to engage with others’ work and collaborate across oceans’. Participants also provided many precious advices for an even more success workshop in the future.

After the workshop taken place, presenters will revise their papers based on the comments they received from the advisors. Submitted papers will be registered as proceedings in KURENAI, an open access platform to Kyoto University’s research and educational achievements.

NGGW has annually provided generations of young scholars with a series of skill development opportunities, from preparing presentations, participating in international conferences, to submitting papers to English-language journals. The organizers hope that these experiences will help participants learn to harness their full potential and build successful academic careers.



Group Photo of the 16th NGGW participants

Ji Chenjia
Researcher of Kyoto University Asian Studies Unit (KUASU)

In May the division of Natural Resource Economics held a special lecture by Dr. Bálint Balázs, the Managing Director and Senior Research Fellow of the Environmental Social Science Research Group (ESSRG) in Budapest. Divided into eight sessions, Dr. Balázs provided those participating with an in-depth look at the various types of sustainability transitions (within the agriculture sector) taking place in Eastern Europe, as well as how the current systems in place were derived from the region's long-standing history and relationship with its agricultural produce.

Styled as more of an engaging discussion versus an intensive pen-to-paper lecture, the key themes raised throughout the course branched into many different aspects; all of which held equal weight and relevance to the topic at hand. Some examples include: modern food systems, traditional food systems, various biodiversity strategies, food localisation, food sovereignty, and food citizen science. Transitional networks around seed distribution and underutilized crops were also a key recurring topic of conversation. Most sessions often concluded with new ways of creating more strategies for a holistic food biodiversity.

For the last session, participants were tasked with a short presentation on the readings they had each personally selected. This was a refreshing way of interacting with the material because in addition to having the space to review the readings critically, most participants also cited examples from their home country that they felt were relevant. Dr. Balázs' passion for a sustainable future, his home country Hungary and Eastern Europe, and open dialogues, made for an extremely enjoyable intensive lecture.

Personally, the most important takeaway from this experience was that there are indeed far more similarities than differences between our continents. While naturally the implementation of these sustainable transitions requires time and its effects will not be felt overnight, there are in fact various systems and strategies that can be adopted to tackle the issues at hand. Furthermore, having these discussions also allowed the participants (and myself) to reflect on the existing efforts made as well as the areas for improvement within our own countries' policies and efforts.

Ryhan Binte Mohd Yazid
Master's Student, Graduate School of Agriculture

Sustainable Food Systems: A View from Eastern Europe

by Dr. Bálint Balázs
Environmental Social Science
Research Group



Introduction to Machine Learning for Agricultural and Food Economics

by Prof. Xiaohua Yu
University of Göttingen



In July, Prof. Xiaohua Yu, a Chair Professor in Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at University of Göttingen, taught a fruitful course on Machine Learning. The lecture was attended by half Japanese students and half international students. For the first time in several years since the coronavirus pandemic, the lecture was held in a face-to-face format, and there was a lively atmosphere with active exchanges of opinions among professor and students.

The main purpose of the lecture was an introduction to machine learning. Some of the students who attended the lecture had studied

machine learning to some extent from the beginning and had a basic knowledge of the subject, but the majority of the students, including myself, were not familiar with machine learning. Since the end of last year, the emergence of Chat GPT provided by OpenAI has brought about a significant change in daily learning and research. Coding to perform data analysis is now no longer a personal skill, and it is keenly awarded that how to utilize AI is an urgent issue. This lecture was an apt opportunity to learn about machine learning. I was very impressed that Professor Yu clear statement at the beginning of the class that if we do not master machine learning, we will be left behind.

In the class, Professor Yu first introduced the fundamental meaning of using machine learning and how machine learning is applied in research. In the remainder of the class, we actually conducted machine learning using Python. First, Professor Yu instructed the way to analyze data in Python using conventional econometric methods such as the OLS, and then were taught how to analyze the data using machine learning models. We did analyses using Ridge regression, Lasso regression, random forest regression, and ANN model, and learned how to interpret the results. It was a little complicated to fully understand what the results stands for, because there were many words that we had never heard before, such as specificity and sensitivity. I would like to spend more time studying and deepening my understanding of machine learning.

I would like to appreciate Professor Yu for opening the door to learn more about machine learning and making me eager to understand it better. I would like to make use of what I learned in this lecture to my research.

Meishi Koh
Master's Student, Graduate School of Agriculture

AGST Spotlight Interview

Dr. Bálint Balázs

Senior Research Fellow and Managing Director
Environmental Social Science Research Group (ESSRG),
Budapest, Hungary

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In the Spring semester of 2023, the Division of Natural Resource Economics in the GSA invited Dr. Bálint Balázs to come to Kyoto to teach an intensive lecture course entitled “Sustainable Food Systems: A View from Eastern Europe.” This was his first time teaching in person at the GSA, although he taught the same course online in the Spring semester of 2021.

Q1: Briefly describe your organisation, the Environmental Social Science Research Group (ESSRG), and your current research activities there.



Dr. Balázs: The Environmental Social Science Research Group (ESSRG) is a non-profit organisation I co-own with my two senior researcher teammates working in Hungary to foster transdisciplinary multi-actor research on several disciplinary interfaces and knowledge systems for the past 15 years. Our three main research streams extend to agri-food studies, biodiversity and nature connectedness (<https://www.essrg.hu/en/>

projects/). To achieve our social justice and ecological sustainability goals, we foster a collaborative and cooperative research methodology that includes many communities and stakeholder groups while paying special attention to those often overlooked. Action research, community building, participatory planning, and conflict management are among the primary skills we need in our research work at the intersections of science, policy, and society. We believe in increasing society's potential for transformative learning by making space in the current systems of knowledge generation for participatory action research, responsible research and innovation, and citizen science.

Q2: Please let us know how you became acquainted with Prof. Motoki Akitsu at the GSA.

Dr. Balázs: I got to know Motoki Akitsu from international rural sociology conferences, and I learned about his research for a few months from 2001 to 2004. Soon, I realised that my agri-food research interests and his enthusiasm for current Hungarian issues match very well. In 2014, as a Japan Foundation scholar, I came for one month to study local

food system developments in Kyoto. Akitsu kindly hosted me at the Graduate School of Agriculture, Kyoto University.

Q3: How was your experience teaching Kyoto University students? What impressions did you get from them?

Dr. Balázs: This was an excellent intensive course on sustainable food from an Eastern European perspective. I felt so lucky that my daughter, Juli, accompanied me on this trip. We examined dominant concepts and ideas generated in a Western setting in reverse, for example, how these scholarly concepts (local food, sustainable food) might be challenged, broadened, and applied critically and more meaningfully elsewhere, using Eastern European or non-Western perspectives. Students have done an incredible job of deciphering the significance of such translation, and they have already established a learning community across the Graduate School of Agriculture (Natural Resource Economics) and the Graduate School of Economics (East Asia Sustainable Development Studies Programme). During this course, they provided perspectives from Thailand, the Philippines, Nigeria, Singapore, Peru, and Japan, which were contested with Central and Eastern European past, present, and future. The primary question is how we may live a prosperous life without growth and produce and eat food more in harmony with nature and our true human nature. I am incredibly grateful to the staff and students working on this topic and exploring various food practices from Central and Eastern Europe.

Q4: Do you have any advice for Kyoto University students interested in building more sustainable food systems?

Dr. Balázs: As a father of three kids, I often feel desperate about the unprecedented challenges food systems face worldwide and how vulnerable consumers and producers are at both ends of the value chain. The transformation will require facing and navigating even more challenging complexities to rebuild food systems more sustainably. Most importantly, anyone seeking to build sustainable food systems locally or globally must gain insights into policy pathways and enabling conditions underpinning the implementation. Food systems development is a balancing act, and we should never lose our footing to find better ways to incentivise agroecological farming systems and make healthy diets the most accessible and affordable choice simultaneously.



Makoto Kuroda
Assistant Teaching Staff,
Graduate School of Agriculture