Objectives of the course

The aim of this course is to introduce students to a wide range of theories and practices within the field of economic anthropology/sociology examining the understanding of economic life – a field in which scholars from history, geography and political science have also made valuable contributions.

Central to this course is the question whether prospects and claims of profit and material gain should be the only consideration through which to understand how economies are shaped within societies. In other words, is Homo Economicus? This question has dominated much of the scholarly debate in economic sociology/anthropology of the past half a century, which this course will critically revisit.

Beyond this broad framework, this course will familiarise students with key anthropological and sociological texts on land, labour, finance and enterprise. It will also introduce students to diversity of political-economic and socio-economic structures in different parts of the world. It is not required that students have formal training in economics prior to taking this course, nor are expertise of quantitative techniques mandatory. It is expected however that students have familiarity with the basic economic concepts and categories.

Unit 1: Economic anthropology/sociology as a field. This section will map out the field of economic anthropology and sociology and familiarise students with the basic tenets of the field.


Following chapters of the book:
Chapter 2: Economy from the Ancient World to the Age of Internet (p. 18-36)
Chapter 3: The Rise of Modern Economics and Anthropology (p. 37-53)
Chapter 4: The Golden Age of Economic Anthropology (p. 55-69)
Chapter 5: After the Formalist-Substantivist Debate (p. 72-96)

Unit 2: Neoliberalism, institutionalism and the ‘embeddedness’ question.
This section will introduce students to the key sociological literature on neoliberalism, and will go on to discuss the distinction between ‘new’ and ‘old’ institutional economics which has dominated the academic discourse on economic anthropology and sociology since the 1960s.


   [Chapter 1: Harriss et al ‘introduction’]
   [Chapter 9: W.G. Clarence-Smith ‘cocoa plantations in the third world’]


   [Chapter 3: Beckert ‘embeddedness,’ pp. 38-55].


Unit 3: Divergent order(s) of capitalism around the world. This section will familiarise students with diversity of socio-economic organisation within and outside South Asia.


**Unit 4: The ‘other’ economies and societies: Ethnographies and case studies.** This section familiarises students with some of the classical ethnographies noted for their economic orientation.


**Unit 5: Human economy and the question of unequal development.** This section will introduce students to the concept of ‘human economy’ and alternative economic thoughts, and walk them through the key emerging literature within this discourse.

   Following chapters:
   Chapter 6: Unequal Development, p. 100-118
   Chapter 8: One World Capitalism, pp. 142-162

   Following chapters:
   Chapter 13: Informal Economy, p. 142-154 (Keith Hart)
   Chapter 17: Gift, p. 180-186 (Alain Caille)
   Chapter 18: Moral Economy, p. 187-198 (Chris Hann)
   Chapter 21: Solidarity Economy, p. 225-235 (J-L Laville)
   Chapter 23: Local Development, p. 248-261
Unit 6: Land, labour, money and enterprise. These are the three key elements within economic anthropology/sociology. This unit involves reading of significant case studies, ethnographies and historical analyses on land, labour and enterprise.


