

Co-operation and Co-operative Organizations Syllabus

Summer semester 2026



1 CONTACT INFORMATION

Course Responsible

Prof. Dr. Marcel Robischon
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Office hours

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Student Assistant

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2 GENERAL INFORMATION

Since 2007, the course is offered for students of the master programs Agricultural Economics, Rural Development and Integrated Natural Resource Management.

This course is designed to introduce students to the cooperative business model and to encourage them to think critically about why cooperatives emerge, the ways in which they differ from other forms of enterprise, and how the model can be used to address current social and economic issues.

The course uses different theoretical strands such as collective action, behavioural economics, industrial organisation, rural innovation and development economics, using examples to illustrate concepts and ideas. It also analyses cooperatives as strategies towards poverty alleviation and rural development.

2.1 COURSE GOAL

Upon completion of the course, the students will have the analytical skills to analyse typical problems of human cooperation and of co-operative organisations

2.2 INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of the course, the students are expected to:

LO1: be able to apply different theoretical strands: collective action, behavioural economics, industrial organization, governance, rural innovation, agroecology and development economics to analyse cooperative organizations

LO2: distinguish cooperatives from other organizations and analyse them from an economic, organizational and social perspective

LO3: understand the role of cooperatives in developing contexts

L04: professionally reproduce and combine arguments and insights from the cooperative studies literature and apply good scientific practices in order to write an own seminal paper

3 ORGANIZATION

Classes will be on Thursdays from 8:15 until 12:00 at Lecture Hall 2 in Invalidenstrasse 42.

We will use Moodle as learning platform and for communication. Please activate notifications on Moodle to receive messages posted in the Forum via email.

If necessary, we will use your HU email to reach you individually and ask you to reach us from your HU account. We will do our best to answer you in 72 hs.

The classes will combine inputs from different lecturers with participatory activities among the students. Students are expected to read the course materials in advanced, otherwise, their ability to learn and participate will be hindered.

During the classes, we will provide inputs to improve your analytical skills to produce your written paper.

4 COURSE MATERIALS

For each class, there are required (theoretical, conceptual and empirical) and optional readings.

5 COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Lecturer	Topic description	Readings
W1: 16/04	Agustina Malvido Katrin Martens	Course outline and Introduction - Orientation Overview over the course, lecturers, and topics. Access to Moodle platform. Rules for dealing with literature and handouts. Requirements for earning credits and deadlines	
W2: 23/04	Markus Hanisch	The Cooperative Model (LO 2) Presentation and discussion of different cooperative definitions and their historical development and relevance worldwide. Analysis of their different functions and roles in comparison with investor-oriented firms, NGOs, unions, and governments.	Required Krivokapic-Skoko, Branka (2002): The Concept and Classifications of Agricultural Co-operatives. Australian Centre for Co-operative Research and Development. Bathurst, Australia (ACCORD Paper, 8). https://platformcoop.de/building-the-economy-we-want/ Optional: Torgenson, R. (1997): Evolution of Cooperative Thought, Theory and Purpose. Journal of Cooperatives. Grashuis, J.; Cook, M. L. (2018): An examination of new generation cooperatives in the upper Midwest: Successes, failures and limitations. In Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics 89 (4), pp. 623-644.
W3: 30/04	Markus Hanisch	Governance in the Cooperative (LO 2) In recent literature cooperatives have been described as hybrid organizations between markets and hierarchies. The lecture introduces the analysis of the cooperative firm. Typical agency, information and contractual relationships are introduced and discussed. Problems of cooperative management and control are described and analysed in a comparative perspective. Links to transaction cost and information cost schools of thought explain what types of problems in the market give rise to different types of cooperative organizations.	Required: Michaud, Myriam; Audebrand, Luc K. (2022): One governance theory to rule them all? The case for a paradoxical approach to co-operative governance. In Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management 10 (1), p. 100151. DOI: 10.1016/j.jcom.2021.100151. Bijman, J., Hanisch, M., and van der Sangen, G. (2014). Shifting control? The changes of internal governance in agricultural cooperatives in the EU. Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics, 85(4): 641-661. Optional: Nilsson, J. (2001): Organisational principles for co-operative firms. In Scandinavian Journal of Management 17 (3), pp. 329-356. Iliopoulos, Constantine; Valentinov, Vladislav (2022): Cooperative governance under increasing member diversity: Towards a new theoretical framework. In Scandinavian Journal of Management 38 (1), p. 101192.
W4: 07/05	Agustina Malvido	The Cooperative and the Market (LO 1 & 2) Industrial organization literature suggests that, in situations of imbalanced markets, cooperatives can play important roles in securing fair prices for produce and inputs. The lecture combines theoretical and empirical	Required: Nilsson, Jerker (2025): The cooperative principles in present-day Western agrofood industries. In Int. Journal Food System Dyn. 16 (2), pp. 127-135. DOI: 10.1163/18696945-bja00004. Ajates, Raquel (2020): Agricultural cooperatives remaining competitive in a globalised food system: At what cost to members, the cooperative movement and food sustainability? In

Week	Lecturer	Topic description	Readings
		inputs to discuss the role of cooperatives in different markets.	Organization 27 (2), pp. 337-355. DOI: 10.1177/1350508419888900. Optional: Sexton, R.J. (2012). Market Power, Misconceptions, and Modern Agricultural Markets. <i>American Journal of Agricultural Economics</i> 95 (2): 209-219.
W5 14/05		Holiday	
W6: 21/05	Dan Wu	Field Trips Preparation Over the coming weeks, we will explore four case studies from cooperatives and cooperative associations. To familiarize ourselves with the case studies and address organizational matters, we will hold an interactive workshop	
W7: 28/05		Visit: SuperCoop SuperCoop is a member-owned cooperative supermarket in Berlin, located in Wedding. It sells everyday groceries with a focus on fair, organic, and regional products, and members help run the store by contributing a few hours of work each month.	Address: SuperCoop Berlin eG Oudenarder Straße 16 13347 Berlin
W8: 04/06	Katrin Martens Benjamin Danemann	Cooperatives as (rural) catalysts for change? Focus on energy cooperatives Cooperatives play important roles in rural areas. They link actors to markets, explore alternative income opportunities and provide a series of crucial infrastructure and mixed services for rural dwellers. As such they may play the role of hubs in knowledge management and information brokerage. The lecture explores the roles of traditional and “new” cooperatives out from the perspective of economic geography and the science of knowledge	Required: Bock, B.B. (2012). Social innovation and sustainability; how to disentangle the buzzword and its application in the field of agriculture and rural development. <i>Studies in agricultural economics</i> 114 (2): 57-63. Yildiz, Ö., et al. (2015). Renewable energy cooperatives as gatekeepers or facilitators? Recent developments in Germany and a multidisciplinary research agenda. <i>Energy Research & Social Science</i> , 6, 59-73. Optional: Bauwens, T., Huybrechts, B., & Dufays, F. (2020). Understanding the diverse scaling strategies of social enterprises as hybrid organizations: The case of renewable energy cooperatives. <i>Organization & Environment</i> , 33(2), 195-219.
	Agustina Malvido	Research process and the use of AI tools (LO 4)	
W9: 11/06		Visit Genoforum Genossenschaftsforum e.V. in Berlin is a nonprofit organization that promotes the cooperative idea, especially in housing and urban development. It connects research and practice, and it also hosts exhibitions, workshops, and events in its Werkraum in Tempelhof.	Address: GESCHÄFTSSTELLE UND COOPERATIV WERKRAUM DES GENOSSENSCHAFTSFORUM e.V. Eythstr. 32, 12105 Berlin
W10: 18/06		Visit Bauerngarten Bauerngarten Berlin is a community garden project where Berliners can rent a prepared bio-vegetable plot and grow, harvest, and enjoy	Address: Botanischer Volkspark Pankow Blankenfelder Ch 5, 13159 Berlin

Week	Lecturer	Topic description	Readings
		their own organic produce. It operates at several sites around the edge of Berlin and focuses on sustainable, communal gardening.	
W11: 25/06	Marcel Robischon	Cooperatives from an agroecological perspective	
W12: 02/07	Margitta Minah	Farmer organisations in transition and developing economies (LO 3) In recent years, farmer organisations have received renewed attention in the development context. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda, it is expected that farmer collective action can promote social, economic, and environmental targets. This lecture provides insight to the theoretical and empirical debates on the role and challenges of farmer organisation in transition and developing economies.	Required: Bizikova, L., Nkonya, E., Minah, M. et al. A scoping review of the contributions of farmers' organizations to smallholder agriculture. <i>Nat Food</i> 1, 620-630 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-020-00164-x Shiferaw, B., Hellin, J., and Muricho, G. (2011). Improving market access and agricultural productivity growth in Africa: what role for producer organizations and collective action institutions? <i>Food Security</i> , 3(4), 475-489. Bijman, Jos, and Gea Wijers. (2019) Exploring the inclusiveness of producer cooperatives. <i>Current opinion in environmental sustainability</i> 41, 74-79. Optional: Wanyama, F. O., Develtere, P., and Pollet, I. (2008). Encountering the evidence: cooperatives and poverty reduction in Africa. <i>Working Papers on Social and Co-operative Entrepreneurship</i> WP-SCE 08-02
W13: 09/07		Colloquium: Research proposal presentations (students)	
W14: 16/07		Colloquium: Research proposal presentations (students)	

6 ASSIGNMENTS

The students are expected to write a research proposal by selecting a subject, compiling a research question and a way to answer it, and making use of the theories and hypotheses developed in this course or other literature.

Students will receive inputs regarding the content of a research proposal and writing tips.

The research proposal related to their final written paper should have 500-800 words (under no circumstance more than 1,200 words). Deadline to upload the proposal on Moodle will be duly announced. Based on the guidelines provided in the course, each student will give feedback to another student on their proposal.

After that, students will present their topic and research proposal on an oral colloquium in line with the guidelines and rules for research proposals and oral presentations (8 minutes), receiving feedback from the lecturers.

Attention: writing a research proposal, giving feedback to a peer, and presenting an oral colloquium are pre-requisites to write the research paper. Those steps will not be graded but have to be fulfilled according to the guidelines provided and deadlines, otherwise the research paper will not be accepted.

7 FINAL ASSESSMENT

In line with the inputs received in the course and guidelines and rules for written papers, students will write a **research paper** and upload it in Moodle. For individual papers, the page limit is 10-15 pages pure text (with a maximum of 40 lines of 60-70 characters), i.e., without counting table of contents page, references, and annexes. For joint paper (two students) the page limit is 20-30 pages pure text (with a maximum of 40 lines of 60-70 characters), if relevant, each author can indicate their individual contribution.

Papers will be graded considering the following criteria:

1. Definition of a research problem
2. Formulation of clear research questions, objectives and/or hypotheses
3. Set up an appropriate methodology
4. Presentation of a critical literature study
5. Application of lecture contents (concepts, theories, examples)
6. Construction of paper
7. Language and style
8. Figures and tables
9. References
10. Overall impression

Before uploading your paper in Moodle, you have to register in Agnes to take the exam (in our case, it is a written research paper). If you do not register in time in Agnes, we cannot grade your paper!

8 ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Classes will be on Thursdays from 8:15 until 12:00 at Lecture Hall 2 in Invalidenstrasse 42. Although attendance is not mandatory, we strongly advise you to come to class to stay on board. We will provide group activities where we expect you to participate actively, which will contribute to your learning.

9 COURSE FEEDBACK

In due time, we will ask you for feedback and we would greatly appreciate your honest thoughts and suggestions on the course. At the end of the course, you will have the opportunity to evaluate the course. us as well.