

PhD Thesis Seminar

'Making sustainable Europe: The *growth* of sustainability in EU policymaking, 1992–2026'



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Time: 18 September 2026, 14:15 – 16:15

Place: 1461–516

Sustainability has become one of the defining political aspirations of our time. Few political actors have embraced it more strongly than the European Union, which has repeatedly cast itself as a global frontrunner of the sustainability transition. Yet today, even as the European Commission insists that Europe must 'stay the course', it is simultaneously weakening parts of the regulatory framework intended to make that transition materialise. How can Europe stay the course while seemingly changing it?

This is one of the puzzles that this thesis takes as an entry point into the political economy of sustainability. Rather than treating sustainability as a self-evidently good or politically neutral ideal, it examines how the concept has been constructed, mobilised, and institutionalised in EU policymaking since the early 1990s.

Drawing on public and archival documents as well as interviews, it traces how sustainability became a central normative horizon of European integration and how its meaning has changed alongside transformations in European and global political economy.

The thesis thus examines what the EU has meant by sustainability and how particular forms of governance and economy have been made compatible with the promise of a sustainable future, and what this may tell us about the futures that sustainability makes possible.