

Introducing the project and the outcomes

By Dr Wesam Hassan

Over the past year, I have been working closely with undergraduate and postgraduate students to rethink how sustainability can be taught and researched through economic anthropology. Rather than approaching sustainability as a fixed policy goal, I designed an internship-based research programme, after obtaining a grant from Eden Centre, that treated it as a contested process shaped by moral economies, political power, and everyday economic practices. Four students who attended the course I teach on economic anthropology in AT 2024 were recruited as interns: Zoe Barrett, Farah Alaradi, Balthazar Gras, and William Daniels, to work as junior researchers and curriculum co-designers for one week theme on sustainability in economic anthropology, drawing on their disciplinary backgrounds in anthropology, law, philosophy, and social sciences to develop critical perspectives on sustainability grounded in lived realities rather than abstract indicators.

The internship was structured around four interconnected research themes developed and led by the students themselves: degrowth (Zoe Barrett), Sustainability and Law (Farah Alaradi), digital commons (Balthazar Gras), and The Commons (William Daniels). Each student conducted independent research, produced teaching materials, and translated their work into one lecture, interactive exercises, and public-facing outputs. Throughout the programme, we worked one-to-one and collectively through mentoring meetings that functioned as spaces for intellectual experimentation: testing ideas, questioning dominant narratives of economic growth, and tracing how sustainability is entangled with value, labour, infrastructure, and governance. I adopted an approach that capitalises on the *students-as-scholars* to enable the students to move beyond consuming knowledge to actively producing it, while gaining practical experience in collaborative research and pedagogical design.

The programme culminated in the workshop “What Is Sustainability For? Co-Designing Sustainability Education with Students,” where Farah, Zoe, and Balthazar led interactive activities that reflected their respective thematic research projects. Their presentations offered participants concrete examples of how sustainability can be interrogated through anthropological concepts such as moral economy, social reproduction, and political economy. The workshop demonstrated how student–faculty collaboration can diversify sustainability teaching, foster interdisciplinary dialogue, and generate innovative pedagogical practices. More importantly, it illustrated how partnering with students creates space to rethink sustainability not as a technical solution, but as an ongoing process of debate, negotiation, and imagination, placing students at the centre of knowledge production, teaching, and public engagement.