

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Jean Monnet Sustainable Development Goals Network

Roundtable 2 Report

Over three days from June 10-12, 2019, members of the Jean Monnet Network on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Asia Pacific convened in Singapore for the Network's second Research Roundtable and first Policy Dialogue. Representatives from the EU Centre at RMIT were joined by Network members from the Centre for European Studies at the Australian National University; the University of Glasgow, the National Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury; and our hosts from the EU Centre in Singapore. The Research Roundtable and Policy Dialogue were designed not only to strengthen collaboration amongst researchers and partners of the EU across the world, but to also incorporate an evidence-based model for implementing the SDGs using a place-based approach. The core questions tackled during these three days were: 'How will the EU contribute to the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia Pacific region?'; 'What is the EU's role more generally in the United Nations Agenda for Global Transformation?'; and 'How can we better understand the challenges faced in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?'

Day 1

Opening Provocation

The first day of the Roundtable began with an opening provocation from **Professor Ben Cashore** of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Cashore argued that a 'good governance norm complex' is undermining achievement and action on persistent global problems. Cashore noted the continuing tendency of policy-makers to seek out and encourage market-based solutions to 'super wicked' global problems, despite evidence that such solutions rarely work—and often exacerbate existing problems.

Cashore suggested that it is widely assumed that good governance can and will emerge under certain conditions, including the availability of resources, effective law enforcement, and technical knowledge, which will then lead to government legitimacy, improved livelihoods, economic growth and better environmental outcomes. Cashore argued that the overly sanguine assumption that these elements are synergistic is empirically false; in fact often, these aspects are inherently contradictory.

When it comes to the SDGs, there are inherent trade-offs in achieving economic, social and environmental goals where the good governance norm complex reinforces market-driven mechanisms that prioritise economic goals over social or environmental ones. Furthermore, it is arguable that the target and indicator system underpinning the SDGs shifts inherently complex political and moral questions to the realm of the technical.

Figure 1: Cashore's Typology of Problem Conceptions

Table 1: Four Environmental & Resource Policy Problem Conceptions

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		Utility dominates	Utility does not dominate
Management techniques developed to address a specific type of problem	<p>Type 1: collective action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective action dilemmas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rubber necking ○ Harvesting more fish than the reproduction rate • Management tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ develop policies that change behaviors consistent with long-term economic interests • Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to the specific features of problem in question. • Whack-a-mole: ignored • Dominant discipline: economics 	<p>Type 4: priority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Super wicked' problems • Irreversible environmental tragedies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Species extinctions ○ Catastrophic ecological effects of climate change ○ (Utility is the cause, not the solution) • Management tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop durable policies that prioritize the environment over human needs. ○ Focus stakeholders on problem solving rather than compromise • Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To the specific features of the problem in question • Whack-a-mole: accepted as collateral damage • Dominant disciplines: law, history, philosophy (historical strands within political science) 	
Management techniques developed to address any kind of problem	<p>Type 2: optimization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Welfare <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Utility maximization is the goal • Management tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify policy options that improve social welfare by conducting (pareto optimal) cost-benefit analysis • Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To any problem (e.g. carbon pollution, sea level rise, species extinctions, community stability loss of orangutan habitat) ○ If social welfare can't be enhanced, then the rational answer is that the problem in question shouldn't be solved • Whack-a-mole: incorporated into model (requires a range of impacts to be assessed) • Dominant disciplines: economics 	<p>Type 3: compromise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispute resolution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Achieving balance among environmental, social, and economic goals is the goal • Management tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Multi-goal policy analysis ○ Multi-stakeholder dialogues/dispute resolution techniques¹ • Application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To any problem (e.g. carbon pollution, sea level rise, species extinctions, community seal level rise, loss of orangutan habitat) ○ If solutions will have negative impacts on other goals, such as community stability, social cohesion, employment, environment, biodiversity, economic growth, the problem in question may not be fully addressed • Whack-a-mole: incorporated into model (requires range of impacts to be assessed) • Dominant disciplines: Sociology, psychology, political science anthropology, 	

Cashore argued that this is in part due to the dominance of Ostram’s ‘cost/benefit’ framing of policy problems, which in turn relies on a dramatic but widely held misinterpretation of the idea of the ‘tragedy of the commons.’ This draws attention to the willingness—even where parties are negotiating to preserve a threatened resource—to find a path which accommodates all interests rather than focusing on the problem of preservation itself. Such an approach can, and often does, lead to the loss of that critical resource. In these circumstances, the process of negotiation and reconciliation of competing interests leads to the underlying dynamic of threat being neglected.

In contrast, Cashore outlined a typology of political problems (see Figure 1 above), arguing that ‘Type 4’ super-wicked problems remain beyond the reach of current governance and problem-solving approaches and are in fact reinforced or even worsened by the dominant ‘good governance norm complex.’ With respect to the UN Agenda and its Goals, the question becomes how stakeholders, including Governments, business, researchers and civil society, can work together to recognise that the challenge is not only technical but also moral, prioritizing decision-making which errs constantly on the side of the collective good rather than sectoral interests. In that respect, the current approach of voluntary compliance and reporting, and global peer pressure, gives little confidence that the UN can escape the good governance norm complex. A copy of Professor Cashore’s presentation will be made available on the EU Centre’s [SDG Network website](#).

For Cashore, the motivating question for all researchers engaged in the world’s most pressing problems must be *why* we continue to go backwards. How can global governance grow into structures and processes which deliver constructively on global ambitions? Cashore provides a starting point in this endeavour from a case study in Peru. This example drew on the four problem concepts outline above and framed their implications as ‘influence pathways’:

- a) A ‘rules’ pathway which focuses on rules and agreements in shaping policy responses;
- b) A ‘norms’ pathway which relies on shared values and cultural practices as a means of engendering ‘right’ or appropriate responses;
- c) A ‘markets’ pathways which presumes that economic incentives and disincentives will produce the necessary behavioural change; and
- d) A ‘direct access’ pathway which seeks to influence action through capacity-building, both financially and technically, thus shifting power relations and leading to new coalitions (see Humphreys et al, 2017).

Cashore and his co-authors drew on this work to develop a policy learning protocol that can assist where there is broad agreement about policy outcomes, but uncertainty around appropriate or relevant interventions. The protocol assists stakeholders to focus on generating greater knowledge rather than being absorbed in interest-based, zero-sum approach to assessing collectively the likely impact of a particular policy instrument (see Humphreys et al, 2017).

Roundtable participants observed that the challenge of good governance is at the heart of the Global Transformation Agenda. It points to the importance of understanding how the framing of each part of the Agenda around a particular Goal and its Targets presents a potential trap. That trap is framed by focus on a specific issue or cluster of issues without sufficient attention to context and systemic connections not only with other aspects of a particular Goal, but with the wider agenda for change. How underlying assumptions are identified, issues and opportunities are understood, and attention to technical and moral aspects is framed, is crucial to the likelihood that constructive action can be developed.

This perspective reinforced the underlying value of debate about Sachs' grouping of Goals according to the nature of work to be undertaken, coincidence of responsibility, and breadth of impact. This framework offers useful insights in comparing initiatives undertaken in different settings.

The focus in this project on the EU and its role offers distinctive opportunities for exploring how to overcome the challenge of the good governance and effective work to achieve transformation of structures and processes which undermine the United Nations' ambitions. The EU's priority on the rule of law, and its inherently internationalist outlook, together with the explicit commitment to a set of values that are incorporated into the governing Treaties, position it uniquely to offer global leadership in establishing successful multinational governance. No other regional entity or even nation professes such a strongly cooperative and internationalist perspective on how our planet might evolve. How can this project illuminate or otherwise the success of the EU in supporting the achievement of the UN's agenda for transformation, specifically in Asia Pacific?

Case Studies

Following Professor Cashore, **Professor Bruce Wilson**, Director of the EU Centre RMIT, introduced the case studies that form a major part of the SDG Network's research agenda. Beginning with **Case Study 1**, Wilson discussed EU-Australia collaboration in implementing the SDGs in Laos. Wilson noted that that Laos is a small, land locked country with several ethnic minorities and poor infrastructure. The Laotian government has localised the SDGs into the National Socio-Economic Development Plan, and Laos provides a particularly unique site for EU-Australia SDG cooperation. Wilson focused in particular on the 'Basic Education Quality and Access in Laos' (BEQUAL) program that was supported by the EU to 'reform the education sector', under which the Australian government collaborated with the Laos Ministry of Education and Sports, supported by EU funding. The purpose of this program was to better the quality of and access to primary education for children in Laos PDR, not least the population of minorities and those in remote locations.

In Laos, the need for taking a place-based approach when it comes to SDG implementation is significant. Laos, for example, faces particular domestic challenges: the work that needs to be done to create a favourable business environment to boost the economy, the overemphasis on growing the economy rather than social and environmental goals, and a lack of recognition of education's potential contribution to the achievement of other SDGs. Overall, the core argument made by Wilson was how contextual (place-based) conditions of a given country should be considered in efforts to implement the SDGs.

Dr Mary Johnson, a Research Fellow at RMIT University, then discussed her own work on **Case Study 2**, focused on Mindanao in the Philippines. The ACIAR Mindanao Agriculture Extension Project envisioned strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacity of farmers so that they could be involved in local action to achieve the SDGs. The strategies employed were to first, facilitate farmer access and training for technical innovations, and second, to bolster local action to accelerate SDG implementation, improve social capital and community capacity. Equipping farmers with the tools to improve food crops generated extra cash flow and improved the availability of nutritious food. The third and final method was to collaborate with local extension agencies to understand local farmers' needs.

Dr Johnson reflected that there was a need for self-sufficient farmer groups where facilitators and trusted farmer leaders were present to guide the farming community, agreeing on the necessity of place-based approaches. Similarly, Dr Johnson noted that contextual factors like extreme weather patterns and dramatic decreases in foreign aid to agriculture in developing countries were significant factors impeding the achievement of the SDGs in this region.

Case Study 3 was presented by **Dr Emma Shortis**, Research Fellow at the RMIT EU Centre. Dr Shortis discussed an emerging SDG case study in Gippsland, Australia. Dr Shortis outlined the regional development challenges facing Gippsland, noting the political and cultural disconnect from global environmental ambitions such as the Paris Accord (an explicit target of the SDGs) and that there is very little engagement with the SDGs in Gippsland. Given this, how might the SDGs be implemented in Gippsland—what do the SDGs mean in this context? While it's possible that some of the SDGs and their targets may be on track in Gippsland (such as, for example, SDG7 Affordable and Clean Energy), there is little discussion or commitment to large-scale transformation. How can an actively, deliberately disconnected region connect to global transformation agendas?

Research Framework

After the presentation of case studies, Network members turned their attention to the Network's Research Framework, returning to an ongoing engagement with the work of Jeffery Sachs and how a 'cluster' framework might be applied to understanding and interpreting the SDGs. Below are brief summaries of each discussion.

Cluster 1: the provision of essentially public services: health, education, utilities and infrastructure

Leader: Dr Lay Hwee Yeo

Dr Yeo proposed focusing on the role of 'education' in this cluster, and the possibility of evaluating EU programs in ASEAN focused on Higher Education. Dr Yeo noted the tendency to 'import' education frameworks directly from the EU to Asia, which means making the same mistakes and replicating the same obsessions. There is also the question of the role that EU funding plays in pushing Asian integration (for example, through the provision of scholarships). More broadly, this research is interested in expanding notions of 'sustainability' beyond the environmental.

Cluster 2: complex 'intermediate' goals such as 'decent work' that involve close collaboration between public and private sectors, and civil society

Leader: Associate Professor Sharif As-Saber

Associate Professor As-Saber led a discussion focused on the question of 'decent work' through the specific example of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry in Bangladesh. Questions revolve around the role of unions and the voices of workers; the nature of 'alliance capitalism'; competing definitions and understandings of 'decent work'; and the possibilities and promise of a global RMG platform. Further elaboration can be found in the Cluster 2 Concept Note and in Associate Professor As-Saber's presentation.

Cluster 3: complex high-level goals such as eliminating poverty and hunger by 2030

Leader: Dr Serena Kelly (represented by Dr Mat Doidge)

Cluster 3 is focused on the historic, current and potential future role of the European Union as a development actor. It is also engaged in questions about the nature of the EU's public engagement with the United Nations and whether this has any discernible influence on SDG

engagement. A pilot project focused on representations of the EU and the SDGs in New Zealand and Pacific media outlets is laying the foundation for more research in this area. Further information is available in Dr Doidge's presentation.

Cluster 4: transformational goals for environmental sustainability, addressing specific topics such as climate-related change, carbon, urbanisation, food, energy and ecosystems

Leader: Dr Emma Shortis

Cluster 4 covers 'transformational' environmental goals; but what does 'transformational' actually mean in this context? Why are some goals considered 'transformational' and others not? How is it possible to 'transform' the human relationship with and impact on the global environment without also transforming economies and societies? Dr Shortis proposed that these questions might be addressed through the specific case study of Gippsland, Australia, which includes the specific context of EU-Australia collaboration through the Smart Specialisation project.

Cluster 5: high level social objectives, related to gender equality, reducing violence and increasing inclusion, and promoting global citizenship

Leader: Rachel England

Cluster 5 calls for collaboration and social partnerships. But what form should these social partnerships take, and who should they include? Discussion of this cluster opened with the important recognition of a major failure of the entire SDG project: the complete lack of indigenous voices, perspectives, or even recognition. For this reason, Rachel proposed a different framework for approaching this cluster based not on social partnerships but on the concept of 'reconciliation,' on which she had done a significant body of work. Those present agreed this was important work, and worth pursuing further.

Professor Bruce Wilson will update the cluster descriptions developed in Briefing Note 3 in light of discussions above and share with Network.

Day 2

Day 2 began with participant reflections. While participants of course expressed differing views and takeaways, the consensus was on the complex scope of the SDGs and how essential social partnerships are to achieving the Goals. Participants recognised the ambition and scope of the SDGs, and that the project's clusters were a useful way to organise the goals in taxonomies, distilled to 5 clusters from 17 Goals and 169 Targets. Discussion then focused on the possibility of actually achieving the SDGs and the EU's role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

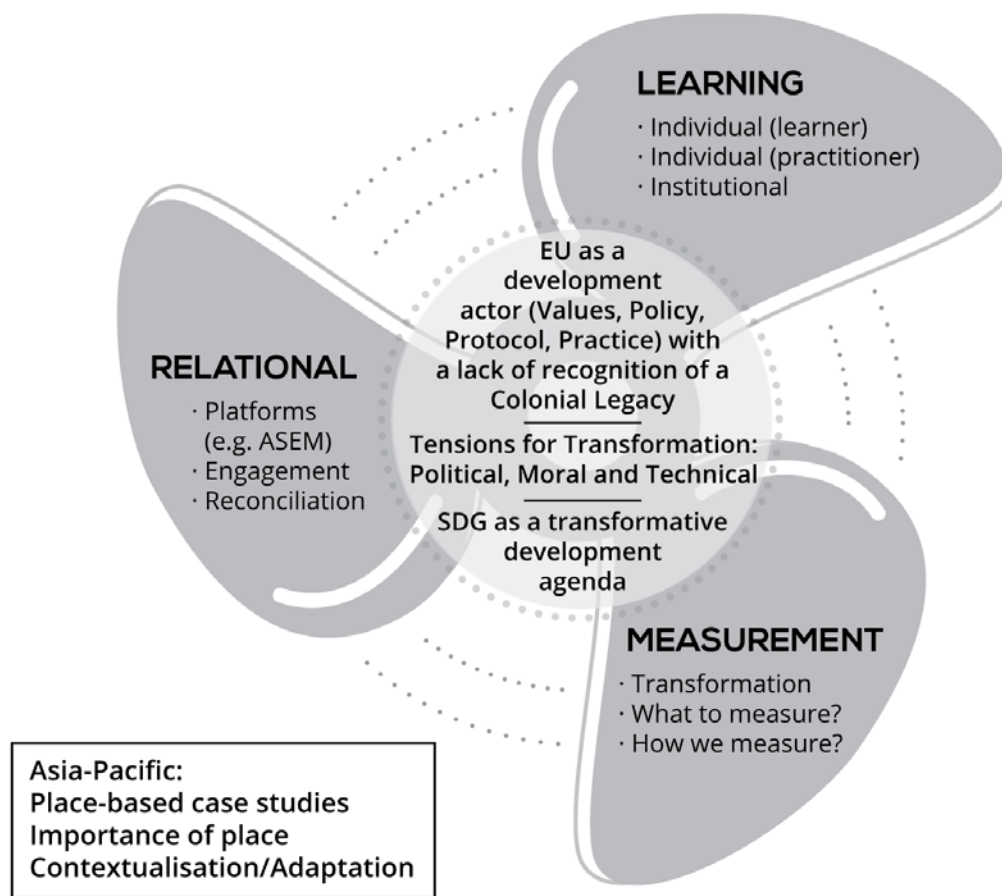
Discussion covered the nature of the EU as a multilateral body that promotes a rules-based order, and how it might focus on political dialogue forums such as ASEM and ASEF to promote the importance of the SDGs. Non-governmental organisations are also instrumental in aiding the EU in its efforts to implement the SDGs. Such organisations should work in tandem with each other to accelerate implementation.

Attention then returned to conceptualising the SDGs themselves. The SDGs are a grand, large scale project which requires partnerships. The potential power in forming alliances to achieve mutual goals was a point of agreement.

Participants noted the urgency of abandoning ‘policy mobility’; that is, the implementation of a certain policy in which has worked in one part of the world to another. Recognition that implementing a place-based approach that considers and addresses local constraints and barriers to development projects is essential.

Network members developed a Venn diagram covering different dimensions of the processes that should be considered in reviewing implementation of the SDGs in the various case studies (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: The SDG ‘Propeller’



The ‘propeller’ prompts questions about how the EU becomes involved in projects as a development actor, how it engages with other development actors, the kinds of measurement metrics that should be applied (knowing what to measure and how), how learning occurs, as well as identifying the different kinds of relational platforms that can foster reconciliation.

More generally, an important theme of Day 2 was the prominent role of the EU. The EU has been active in the SDG process since 2015, and the fact that the EU has been so involved in efforts to implement the SDGs says something about the values of the EU. This in turn raises questions about the importance of relationships, and the kind of future that is implied by the global agenda for transformation. Implementation of the SDGs carries with it a fundamentally important ethical dimension.

Conclusion

Participants agreed that the cluster framework continued to serve a useful purpose, as a way of conceptualising the broader transformational agenda of the SDGs. The clusters, however, are not the sole or even the main focus of the Network's agenda, which remains engaged specifically with the role of the EU. The unique nature of the EU as an institution based explicitly on values also allows for a focus on global transformation and the moral/political imperative of 'Type 4' problems in particular, as outlined by Cashore. Participants agreed to continue exploring the possibilities of Cashore's typology, which might underpin or frame the work of the clusters and their associated case studies.

Outcomes

The final session of Day 2 then turned to the question of planning, and how the discussions and questions above will manifest into the Network's deliverables, as outlined below.

Events

5 Grad/ECR Workshops

- 2 in 2019
- 3 in 2020 (one aligned with final Research Roundtable)
- Note that Glasgow is planning workshops in Delhi in October and in the Philippines next year; opportunities to collaborate?
- Possible topics: methods & measurement; global transformation; SDG17; neighbourhoods; repeat of Workshop 1
- RMIT team will fix some dates and co-ordinate with Glasgow

1 Research Roundtable

- Melbourne, February 2020 – week beginning 24th
- Part of an "SDG Week" which will also include a Policy Dialogue; ECR/Grad Workshop; and seminar on SDG11

2 Policy Dialogues

(+1 in Brussels; ASEM/ASEF)

1 Conference

- September 2020

Publications

12 Policy Briefs

- 17 will be delivered; one for each Goal.
- Could these also be turned into a resource for Secondary Schools, for example?
- Translations?

1 Conference Report

24 Articles

4 Monographs

Proposals:

- Laos – Bruce Wilson and Robbie Guevara
- Ready Made Garments – Sharif As-Saber
- EU & Development – Mat Doidge and Martin Holland
 - o Update of 2012 volume
- ASEM – Bruce Wilson, Lay Hwee Yeo and Emma Shortis
 - o EU as values-based
 - o Relationships
 - o Global Transformation (structured within Network research framework)
- Place-Based (the propeller) – Mary Johnson and Robbie Guevara
 - o Edited collection; case studies
 - o Reconciliation work
- Edited Volume from final conference papers

Participants agreed that those named on above proposals should prepare a one-page summary.

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