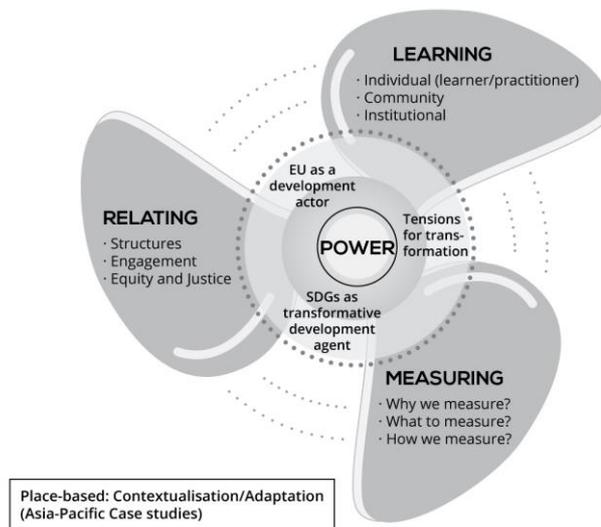# The Concept of the Propeller (Draft)

The Propeller is a conceptual lens through which we are examining the role and contribution of the EU as a development actor in the achievement of the UN SDGs.

The Propeller is based on our initial decision to adapt Jeffrey D. Sachs' five categories of SDGs (Sachs 2015), and our more recent conversations on the potential of Benjamin Cashore and Steven Bernstein's (2019 draft) Good Governance Norm Complex framework, to inform our analysis. The Propeller model enables us to examine the SDGs as an integrated and inter-connected set of goals, rather than 17 separate goals.

Sachs (2015) proposes five categories in which to cluster the 16 substantive SDGs. The categories are based on what Sachs sees as the goals' core objectives, relating to:

1. The direct provision of mainly public services (SDG 3 Health, SDG 4 Education, SDG 6 Water and Sanitation, SDG 7 Energy, SDG 9 Infrastructure).

2. Complex intermediate-level goals (SDG 8 Decent work).

3. High-level economic goals (SDG 1 Poverty, SDG 2 Hunger, SDG 10 Inequalities).

4. Transformational goals for environmental sustainability (SDG 2 Hunger, SDG 11 Cities and Settlements[1], SDG 12 Consumption/Production, SDG 13 Climate Change, SDG 14 Oceans, SDG 15 On Land).

5. High-level social goals (SDG 4 Education, SDG 5 Gender, SDG 16 Peace)

SDG 17 is considered a 'means of implementation' goal and thus not substantive. While Sachs' five category framework is useful for understanding the core objectives of the SDGs, it still presents them as separate goals, which is not useful for our examination of the EU as a development actor in achieving the SDGs.

Cashore and Bernstein (2019 draft) on the other hand pose a challenge to the current approach of implementing the SDGs. They argue that the nature of the 'wicked' problems we are trying to solve requires a change in approach, moving away from the current dominant way of responding, i.e., mainly through technical solutions. Rather, we need to reframe how we approach and frame the issue(s), focusing not only on the issue itself but paying attention to context and the systemic connections not only with other aspects of a particular Goal, but with the wider agenda of 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.

The SDGs are indeed a transformational agenda, but we also recognise that transformation is not merely the end-product of the SDGs. It is essential that the conceptualisation and implementation of projects are in themselves transformational too. We are all equally transformed as we contribute to transformation.

Place-based

The Propeller is place-based. In addition to examining the role of the EU as a development actor in the achievement of an integrated UN SDG framework, we want to situate the EU as a regional structure's response to a global framework from a distinctly local and place-based context. Our argument is that achieving the UN SDGs must be ultimately tangible within a specific place. This is the reason for also identifying and examining specific case studies to help illustrate not just the role of the EU as a

development actor but the actual on-ground outcomes of the proposed development initiatives.

At the same time, we recognize that this is not a one-way or top-down process but a dynamic and reciprocal one. Place-based realities equally influence both development actors and the very essence of these global goals.

Power and its ubiquitous presence

The Propeller reminds us to question, critique and highlight the reach, proximity and presence of power in all acts of relating, learning and measuring. This power may take various forms – centralised, distributed, concentrated, diffuse, deterritorialised, dispersed, etc. (see the power theories of: Weber 1947; Dahl 1961; Lukes 1974; Foucault 1983; Giddens 1982; Gaventa 1980; Mann 1986; Clegg 1989). Its effects may range from glaring inequalities of bureaucratic process, to a more subtle *"normalizing force that works its way through people's lives, shaping their very being in a way that seems to defy spatial definition."* (Allen 2004: 22-23).

- *Considering the EU and its colonial legacy in the Asia-Pacific region, can you identify the multiple layers of power dynamics within your case study?*

The Propeller's three fins

There are three fins to the Propeller that characterize the three dynamic elements in this transformational system.

First, that the actors and structures are not static but are in a dynamic reciprocal relationship with each other, which we hope to examine as the *relating* element of the Propeller.

Relating

The importance of relating, connecting, creating alliances, and forming solid relationships built upon trust and respect has been explored many times in the literature over the past four decades, particularly in the context of community-based programs (e.g. Alexander, Andrachuk, & Armitage, 2016; Alloo et al., 2007; Bargh, Douglas, & Te One, 2014; Blom, Sunderland, & Murdiyarso, 2010). It is these relations, connections, alliances, and reciprocal relationships built upon trust and respect that are the glue of a successful SDG outcome – particularly in times of disaster or disturbance.

Your case studies may examine some of the following dimensions of relating.

- *How does relating happen within your case study, and what structures of relating (e.g. networks, tiers of governance, hierarchies, processes) do these actions sit within?*

- *From the global to the local, which platforms and places is the EU relating, forming alliances, building connections, and influencing outcomes?*

While the elements of 'relating' must surely be viewed holistically, it can be useful for analysis to initially decouple these elements into analytical categories.

- *Which analytical categories of relating are relevant to your case study (e.g. economic, sexual, family, cultural, political, spiritual)?*

Eurocentric ways of knowing and doing 'relating' or engagement have dominated the implementation of SDG projects, particularly within colonised spaces of the Asia-Pacific. But increasingly, other ways of relating are being acknowledged in sustainable development (e.g. Indigenous, feminist, LGBTIQ+, virtual, etc.)

- *Are alternative or different ways of being, knowing and doing 'relating' demonstrated by your case study?*

The manifestation of 'relating' may be social advancement and wellbeing, equity and social justice; or environmental regeneration or protection; or economic health and stability (or a combination of all).

- *What outcomes are being seen or felt from the various forms of 'relating' happening in your case study?*

Learning

Second, that the processes involved in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of the initiatives to achieve the SDGs must be viewed and conducted as essentially learning-based processes.

At the heart of this learning dimension is what has been already problematized by Cashore in terms of the understanding and therefore the proposed solutions to achieve sustainable development.

- *The case studies aim to examine how this understanding of the concept of sustainable development has been contextualized and adapted, and how the EU as a development actor has contributed to a specific understanding of this concept that has resulted in current practice within the Asia-Pacific region.*

The current practice of education and learning within a development context is often and arguably narrowly focused on the formal education system. However, there is a growing recognition that if the SDGs are to be a truly transformational agenda, then we need to begin to recognize the inter-connected nature of formal, non-formal and informal learning, in schools, vocational colleges, higher education institutions but also within workplaces, communities and civil society organizations.

- *What role has the EU played in this more inclusive educational system that embeds the very notion of lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning within the Asia-Pacific region.*

Measuring

And third, that the outcomes of these interventions must be 'measured' and valued differently, if we truly believe in the transformational and transformative aims of the SDGs. As new development models are embraced i.e. social, environmental and relational development rather than continuous growth new ways of measuring will be required.

The case study chapters will specifically explore three dimensions of measuring, namely, why, what and how we measure. It aims to shine a light on the specific role of the EU as a development actor with the Asia-Pacific Region.

Why are we measuring? Measuring is often undertaken at the end of an activity or intervention to report on what has occurred. However, the transformation agenda of the SDGs demands adaptive frameworks for measuring that provide relevant, responsive and timely data that can inform and support emergent ideas and answer the question what have we learnt?

- *Are news ways of measuring used or could be considered for your case study?*

What are we measuring? In development, commonly used measuring devices are upward and downward accountability. Upward accountability is usually a quantitative account of how funds have been spent or resources used. This form of

accounting contains information that is predefined by the donor (public or private) using a set format and does not allow nor invite additional information from the local level. Conversely, downward accountability recognises that donors should be accountable to their beneficiaries. Downward accountability raises issues of power imbalance where matters of differential power need to be addressed.

- *What measurement frameworks facilitate genuine downward accountability?*

How are we measuring? Traditional methods of measurement will need to be revised as sustainable development interventions result in multiple outcomes and impacts and occur in different timeframes and across scales. Furthermore, as impacts are likely to be defined, valued, and experienced differently by people more inclusive approaches to measuring will be required to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes. This highlights the importance of place-based measuring and learning.

- *What forms of measuring describe social, environmental and relational development, and the relationships and interconnections of people and place?*

These three elements of relating, learning and measuring are not separate but are held together and propelled by the EU as a development actor, the SDGs as an integrated and transformational agenda, and that development is not just a technical problem but has moral and political dimensions as well, that is not just located, but contextualized and adapted within place.

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