Introduction to
The Concept of the Propeller (Draft)
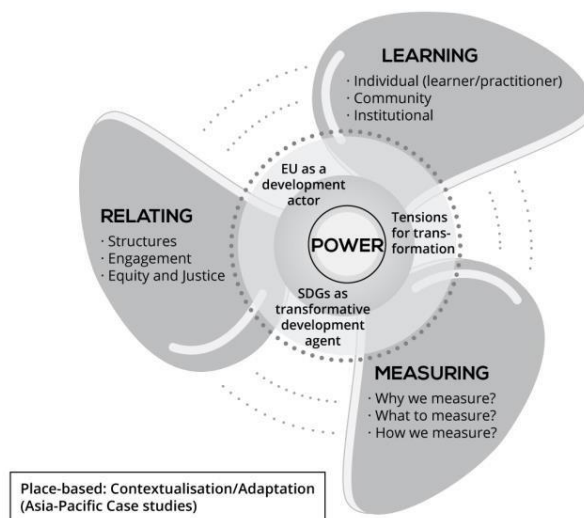
The propeller model was initially proposed as a lens through which to examine the role and contribution of the EU as a development actor in the achievement of the UN SDGs in the Asia-Pacific region. It was the product of a series of conversations among members of the Jean Monnet Sustainable Development Goals Network, working on an EU-funded project exploring the implementation of the SDGs in the Asia Pacific region. The model built on their initial decision to adapt Jeffrey D. Sachs' five categories of SDGs (Sachs 2015), and later conversations on the potential of Cashore et al.'s (2019) Good Governance Norm Complex framework to inform the analysis of the group's examination of the SDGs as an integrated and interconnected 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 Settlements1, 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 et al. (2019) 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).

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.

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

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).

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 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.

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.

There are three dimensions of measuring, namely, why, what and how we measure.

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?

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.

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.

These three elements of relating, learning and measuring are not separate but are held together and

propelled by the EU as a development actor, by the SDGs as an integrated and transformational agenda, and by development as not just a technical problem but one with moral and political dimensions as well (**power**), that is not just located, but contextualized and adapted, within **place**.

References

Alexander, S. M., Andrachuk, M., & Armitage, D. (2016). Navigating governance networks for community-based conservation. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, *14*(3), 155–164.

Allen, J. (2004). The whereabouts of power: politics, government and space. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, *86*(1), 19–32.

Alloo, F., Antrobus, P., Berg, R. J., Emmerij, L., Escobar, A., Esteva, G., … Van Gennip, J. (2007).

Reflections on 50 years of development. *Development*, *50*(SUPPL. 1), 4–32.

Bargh, M., Douglas, S. L., & Te One, A. (2014). Fostering sustainable tribal economies in a time of climate change. *New Zealand Geographer*, pp. 103–115Blom, B., Sunderland, T., & Murdiyarso, D. (2010). Getting REDD to work locally: lessons learned from integrated conservation and development projects. *Environmental Science and Policy*, *13*(2), 164–172.

Cashore, B., & Bernstein, S. (2019). *Bringing the environment back in: Overcoming the tragedy of the diffusion of the commons metaphor (Draft as of September 19th)*.

Clegg, S. R. (1989). Frameworks of Power. London: Sage Publications.

Dahl, R. A. (1961). *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Foucault, M. (1983). The Subject and Power. In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (pp. 208–226). United States: University of Chicago Press.

Gaventa, J. (1980). *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley.*

Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Giddens, A. (1982). *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory.* Berkeley and LA: University of California Press.

Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A Radical View.* London: Macmillan.

Mann, M. (1986). *The Sources of Social Power. Vol. 1.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sachs, J. D. (2015). Goal-based development and the SDGs: implications for development finance. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, *31*(304), 268–278.

Weber, M. (1947). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization.* London: Oxford University Press.