



Who Should Bear the Burden?

The EU's Approach to Responsibility for
the Sustainable Development Goals

Sigrid Jerpstad

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Reconsidering European Contributions to Global Justice (GLOBUS) is a research project that critically examines the EU's contribution to global justice.



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About GLOBUS

Reconsidering European Contributions to Global Justice (GLOBUS) is a Research and Innovation Action (2016 – 2020) funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 programme, Societal Challenge 6: Europe in a changing world – Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies. GLOBUS is co-ordinated by ARENA Centre for European Studies at the University of Oslo, Norway and has partner universities in Brazil, China, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy and South Africa.

GLOBUS is a research project that critically examines the European Union's contribution to global justice. Challenges to global justice are multifaceted and what is just is contested. Combining normative and empirical research GLOBUS explores underlying political and structural obstacles to justice. Analyses of the EU's positions and policies are combined with in-depth studies of non-European perspectives on the practices of the EU. Particular attention is paid to the fields of migration, trade and development, cooperation and conflict, as well as climate change.

Abstract

This report analyses the EU's approach to responsibility for the Sustainable Development Goals. The transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 highlighted a normative contestation between UN Member States over responsibility for sustainable development. Since there historically have been no consensus at the UN on the allocation of burdens, I argue that it is important to analyse how foreign policy actors perceive their role and responsibilities for a global sustainable development agenda.

An analytical focus on norms has been important to nuance the EU's approach to the burden-sharing debate. By doing so, this report contributes to the political sociology of the EU. In contemporary studies of the EU the interest for norm-oriented action has been limited, although norms play a central role in accounting for action in classic sociological theories. My theoretical framework also utilises theories of global political justice, useful to analyse different claims about what the guiding principles of a global sustainable development agenda should be. I formulate three theoretically grounded expectations prior to conducting the empirical research, informed by the works of Pettit, Butt and I. M. Young. The first expectation corresponds with a 'non-domination' perspective on global political justice, in stressing that commitments at the international level are voluntary, while emphasising the moral obligation to prevent inequality. The second and third expectations both relate to the 'mutual recognition' perspective on global political justice. However, they propose rival expectations about historical responsibility.

Through a case study of the EU at the negotiation for the Sustainable Development Goals, I highlight which structures of responsibility at the international level the EU perceives to be just. I do so by analysing the EU's justifications, in official documents and interviews with EU policy officers. This report finds that the EU, by explicitly arguing for the moral obligation of emerging economies to increase their inter-national commitments, implicitly argue that historical responsibility should be less significant when allocating responsibilities for sustainable development.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

With the transition from the 2000 United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) there was also a transition from the idea of commitments for *some*, to commitments for *all* (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs, propose an idea of what should be universally aimed for by all 193 UN member states¹. The agenda is based on a *universal responsibility*-norm, meaning that every country in the world share in the responsibility to achieve these goals². The debate over whose responsibility it is to implement sustainable development policies have for the past 50 decades been preoccupied with the fact that developing countries have been unjustly affected by developed countries' policies (Stalley, 2018). The MDGs, in giving the developed countries responsibility for the achievement of goals which targeted social and economic development in developing countries, reflected this perspective on international injustice (Chasek, Wagner,

¹ Examples are 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere' (goal 1), 'Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns' (goal 12) and 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' (goal 16).

² Feinberg (1980) distinguishes responsibilities from duties. While both refer to obligations, a *duty* specifies a rule of action, while a *responsibility* is more open to the manner which obligation can be carried out.

Leone, Lebada, & Risse, 2016). However, while the MDGs were efficient in mobilising international support for poverty eradication at the beginning of the 21st century, these global goals represented a limited agenda (Kanie, Bernstein, Biermann, & Haas, 2017). In part for only targeting developing countries and in part for not sufficiently addressing issues of a global nature, most notably environmental degradation. The outcome document from the negotiation process for the new SDGs is titled *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (from now on only referred to as *Transforming Our World*). Here, it is emphasised that all countries are equally responsible for the attainment of the SDGs and that the new agenda also considers the impact of environmental degradation on social and economic development (United Nations, 2015b, preamble).

20 years apart, Baker, Kousis, Richardson, and Young (1997) and O. R. Young, Underdal, Kanie, and Kim (2017) assert that the concept *sustainable development* is difficult to define and implement politically. The equivocal nature of the concept also opened for multiple normative debates at the negotiations for the SDGs. Even though the resolution for the SDGs was adopted unanimously at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), the intergovernmental negotiations confronted opposing views about who should be held responsible for sustainable development in the future. The debate over which entitlements and obligations different countries have towards each remained central to the negotiation process. The European Union (EU) participated actively in the negotiation process and negotiated on behalf of its 28 member states. The EU has a long history with sustainable development and ambitious goals in this field (Bretherton & Vogler, 2012). Historically, the EU has played an important role in intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development (Panke, 2017). As of 2017, the EU is the largest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Council of the European Union, 2017). As a consequence, the EU remains central in the transition towards sustainable development policies, especially in the area of development financing. However, there has been limited research on how the EU perceive its role and responsibilities for the global sustainable development agenda.

The aim of this report is to provide a richer understanding of the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development and the EU's role at the intergovernmental negotiation for a new global sustainable development agenda in 2015. I will answer the following question: 'How

did the European Union approach responsibility for sustainable development when participating in the negotiations for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals?’

By analysing which *norms*³ the EU promoted for responsibility for the SDGs, this report contributes to sustainable development literature from the EU’s perspective. I conduct an empirical and conceptual study on the EU at the intergovernmental negotiation process which resulted in the 2030 Agenda. An important contribution of this case study is to nuance how the EU approached questions of a normative character at the negotiation. This report will clarify which ideas are behind the EU’s approach to sustainable development. Given that the EU aspires to a leadership role for sustainable development, these findings are of relevance for all interested in the interconnections between sustainable development and the EU. A recent ‘Opinion’-document adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee stated that the EU: ‘would like to propose its ambitious vision for the future, with Europe becoming the global leader on sustainable development’ (European Economic and Social Committee, 2019, p. 3).

This report also contributes to the literature on burden-sharing in international relations. This strand of literature highlight that most intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development have been preoccupied with the structural relationship between developed and developing countries (Baker et al., 1997). With the centrality of the principle Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in intergovernmental agreements, historical responsibility and the dichotomy between *developed* and *developing* countries have remained central to the allocation of burdens (Stalley, 2018). There is however, no consensus between political groupings at the UN on the moral significance of historical events and whether they should influence burden-sharing agreements today (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). The EU’s relationship with developing countries were in the past driven by a clear sense of obligation, stemming from the colonial past of some EU member states (Carbone, 2017). It is however more unclear which norms the EU adhere to in its development policy today (Sjursen, 2017b). The normative dimension of the EU’s foreign policy tends to be overlooked by scholars. With the 2030 Agenda promoting a new structure of responsibility for

³ I understand *norms* to be ‘collective expectations about proper behaviour for a given identity’ (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996, p. 54 [as cited in Stalley, 2018, p. 1]).

sustainable development, I find it important to nuance how the approach of the EU for the question of responsibility during the negotiation process for the global goals.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this report utilises both conceptions of global political justice and a political sociological perspective to analyse the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. Political sociology is '[...] the study of power and the relationship between societies, states, and political conflict' (Manza, 2011). Sjursen (2017b) argues that it is necessary to analyse the normative aspect of the EU's foreign policy to advance our understanding of the EU as a foreign policy actor. A political sociological perspective on the EU highlights how the EU can make normative assessments in its foreign policy, a perspective which is relevant for the setting intergovernmental negotiations. A political sociological perspective considers how norms are contested at the international level. I argue that it is of particular relevance to analyse contestation over different norms for the 2030 Agenda. At this specific intergovernmental negotiation process, foreign policy actors proposed ideas for what they believed all UN member states should aim to achieve in the context of sustainable development. The negotiation process therefore clearly had a normative character. By utilising a political sociological perspective, this report encourages a closer relationship between the two disciplines sociology and International Relations (IR)⁴. The analytical focus on norm-guided action originated from political sociology, and many scholars within this field considers norms to have behavioural consequences. However, this field is relatively new to studies of the EU (Kauppi, 2018). In the extensive literature on the EU in IR on the other hand, the EU is often not studied in terms of the specific norms which may influence its actions.

This report contributes to the international research project GLOBUS (Reconsidering European Contributions to Global Justice). The project combines empirical and normative research to critically examine the EU's contribution to global justice (GLOBUS, n.d.). GLOBUS begins with the notion that norms are contested in international relations. Empirical

⁴ I use the abbreviation IR to refer to the academic discipline International Relations and the lowercase-spelling international relations when referring to 'the legal, institutional and political mechanisms through which the problems of international conflict and/or political economy are addressed' (Keukeleire & De Bruyn, 2017, p. 434).

studies consider normative arguments for or against a specific approach to justice. Because there is no consensus on what justice entails at the global level, it is important to examine which obligations different actors understand to have towards each other (Sjursen, 2017a). To conceptualise the EU's approach to global political justice, the GLOBUS project has developed three different conceptions of justice: *non-domination*, *impartiality* and *mutual recognition*.

Table 1.1: GLOBUS concepts as presented by Sjursen (2017a, p. 6).

	Non-domination	Impartiality	Mutual recognition
Reason for action	Duty of beneficence	Moral duty	Endangered vulnerabilities
Rightful claimants of justice	States	Individual human beings	Groups, individuals, states
Main concern	Non-interference	Autonomy	Due hearing
Core organisational principle of global politics	External sovereignty	Rights protection	Reciprocity
Institutional form	Multilateral	Supranational	Collaborative
Legal structures	International law	Cosmopolitan law	Democratic cosmopolitan law

Whereas the primary concern of all justice-perspectives is to avoid dominance at the international level, they perceive the manner of achieving justice differently. In this report, I conceptualise the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development in a similar way.

The debate over which responsibilities foreign policy actors have towards each other is essentially a question of the just allocation of burdens. Theories of global political justice by Pettit (1997, 2010, 2014), Butt (2009) and I. M. Young (2006, 2011) are utilised in this report to analyse what a just burden-sharing agreement requires from the EU's perspective. I have formulated three theoretically grounded expectations about the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development prior to conducting the empirical research. I have emphasised certain elements of non-domination and mutual recognition which were useful

for addressing the burden-sharing debate in international relations⁵. The first expectation builds on Pettit's theory and the non-domination-conception. It places emphasis on voluntary commitments while also referring to moral obligations at the international level. The other two expectations build on the mutual recognition assumption that justice requires a differentiated approach. However, the expectations interpret responsibility differently. The second expectation builds on Butt's theory and perceives responsibility to entail compensation for historical events. The third expectation builds on I. M. Young's theory. Responsibility from this perspective primarily involves addressing contributions to current structures of injustice.

Research design

I conduct a qualitative, single-case study of the EU's role at the SDGs negotiation. This research method allows for an in-depth examination of the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. The chosen method also allows me to conceptualise the EU's approach within a theoretical framework. I utilise a theory-guided case design, where theoretical propositions guide data collection and analysis. For my analytical strategy I analyse *justifications*, where the purpose is to identify and interpret the EU's normative reflections about the allocation of burdens for sustainable development. *Pattern-matching* is my specific analytical technique, which involves that the data material is compared to theoretical propositions. I conduct interviews with EU policy officers who participated in the SDGs negotiation on behalf of the EU and analyse official EU documents. Since my aim is to describe the EU's *collective* position, the triangulation of sources has been important to control for consistency in the data material. The documents provide an accurate description of the official EU position for the SDGs negotiation, while the respondents can elaborate on the EU's approach to specific normative questions.

Outline

This report is structured in the following manner: Chapter 2 conducts a literature review to establish the current academic debate on burden-sharing in international relations. This chapter also reviews literature on sustainable development and the EU's history with sustainable

⁵ Since I address the question of which responsibilities states have towards each other, I excluded *impartiality* as a theoretical expectation. See section *Expectations for the empirical research* for a more detailed explanation for this methodological decision.

development. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical underpinnings of this report and explains why both a political sociological perspective and a theory of global political justice is viable for studying the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. This chapter also presents three theoretically informed expectations for the empirical research.

In Chapter 4 I present my methodology. I account for my research method and analytical strategy as well as the data selection and data collection for this report. I also highlight some ethical considerations which were reflected on through the research process. In addition, this chapter describes how a collective EU position was developed for this specific intergovernmental negotiation process. I present my findings in Chapter 5 and detail if the theoretical expectations are substantiated. In Chapter 6, I first engage in a discussion on the main findings of this report and their wider implications. I then clarify how this report contributes to the literature on burden-sharing, the political sociology of the EU and to the GLOBUS project. In closing, I present my conclusion and point to certain challenges and unsettled issues which require further research.

Chapter 2

Literature review

I have divided the literature review into four sections. The first section introduces the literature on the burden-sharing debate in international relations. The second section reviews existing literature on the origins of the SDGs and the intergovernmental negotiation process which resulted in the 2030 Agenda. The third section presents literature on the EU's history with sustainable development. The fourth section summarises the limitations of previous research on the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development.

Burden-sharing norms in international relations

The concept *burden-sharing* refers to which norms should guide the 'costs of common initiatives or [how] the provision of international public goods should be shared between states [...]' (Thielemann, 2003, p. 253). The UN is the main framework to deal with challenges in international relations, while the UNGA is 'the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN' and the only forum where all 193 UN member states have equal representation (United Nations, n.d.-a). Historically, there have been no consensus at the UN on what the guiding principles for what a just burden-sharing agreement should be (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). I therefore find it important to provide an analysis of what different foreign policy actors perceive as the just allocation of obligations at the international level. An important contribution of this report is to provide insight about how the EU addressed this debate at the negotiation for the SDGs.

Before I presents my own findings however, I will introduce the existing literature on burden-sharing norms in international relations. I find the burden-sharing debate to have three defining characteristics; (1) the *developed/developing country-dichotomy*, (2) the significance of historical events and (3) the role of emerging economies.

The developed/developing country-dichotomy

The debate over which burden-sharing principles should apply at the international level has largely been determined by the *developed-/developing country-dichotomy* and conflicts over North-South financial commitments (Abeyasinghe & Huq, 2016; O. R. Young et al., 2017). All EU member states will in most instances be described as *developed* countries. With the consequences the *developed/developing country-dichotomy* has for the allocation of responsibilities, I argue that it is important to study how the EU perceives its own responsibilities.

Abeyasinghe and Huq (2016, p. 200) claim that 'country categories are key to the idea of differentiation'. It is widely recognised that *developed countries* have greater economic conditions than *developing countries*. However, formal definitions of *developed* and *developing* countries do not exist in the UN system and the idea of there being *developed* and *developing* countries is contested. Baker (1997) claims that the dichotomous country classification reinforces an already existing polarity between countries. The dichotomy also influences which issues are addressed in multilateral forums. The main concern of many developing countries is (their lack of) economic development. With the *developed-/developing country-dichotomy* as the point of departure for burden-sharing, developing countries often expect financial commitments by developed countries to address the economic inequality (Sachs, 2014, p. 210). At the same time, developing countries expect developed countries to take responsibility for environmental degradation, which developing countries are disproportionately affected by (Sachs, 2014, p. 210). Baker et al. (1997, p. 29) emphasise the central role of the *developed/developing country-dichotomy* in the context of sustainable development; 'sustainable development has been concerned with the structural relationship between developed and developing countries since the concept sustainable development appeared on the international political agenda'. While there is disagreement on the dichotomous country classification, the literature in general agrees that one group of countries should receive special attention because of their vulnerable position in the system of states. It is well established within the UN

system that the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)⁶ are the most vulnerable countries in terms of achieving sustainable development, with climate change being an aggravating effect (Bruckner, 2012).

The significance of historical events

While notions of historical causality of current problems often influence the identification of obligations, there is no consensus on the moral significance of historical events at the UN (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 26). I argue that it is important to further examine what different foreign policy actors perceives roles and responsibilities at the international level ideally to be, especially considering that there is no consensus on the significance of historical events. The literature on climate justice however, largely agrees that past emissions of Green House Gasses (GHGs) matter (Gardiner, 2004, p. 579) and that developed countries primarily should be held responsible for them (Blomfield, 2013). Stalley (2018) introduces the CBDR-principle as a commonly accepted burden-sharing norm in intergovernmental negotiation processes. CBDR has been part of international agreements for several decades. The principle originated in the process leading up to the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment, the intergovernmental process which introduced global environmentalism as a major issue in international politics (Stalley, 2018, p. 5). However, the principle was extensively defined as a guiding principle for sustainable development for the first time in the outcome document from the Rio Conference on Sustainable Development in 1992, *The Rio Declaration*:

In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

(United Nations, 1992, §7)

⁶ Abeyasinghe and Huq (2016, p. 190) describe the LDCs as the group of countries disproportionately and unfairly affected by climate change burdens. Within the UN system the LDCs are described as 'low-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. They are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets' (United Nations, n.d.-b).

Stalley (2018, pp. 12-13) details how CBDR rests upon three emerging ideas in international environmental politics:

1. The belief that the international economic system has contributed to injustice by favouring developed countries.
2. The acknowledgement of the collective responsibility of all countries to protect global resources.
3. Awareness of the shared vulnerability of all countries to transnational environmental threats.

CBDR is a principle which on the one hand aims to find solutions to global environmental problems. On the other hand, it addresses how developed countries are unjustly affected by the current economic system while simultaneously being most vulnerable to environmental degradation. Stalley (2018, p. 3) proclaims that CBDR is largely a developing country-approach to burden-sharing. The reason being that the principle assigns responsibility for global environmental challenges primarily to developed countries. The responsibility stems from developed countries' historical contribution to global warming as well as their unique capacity to address environmental issues⁷.

The role and responsibilities of emerging economies

Hockstetler and Milkoreit (2015) argue that emerging economies challenge the *developed/developing country-dichotomy* in international relations to the extent that CBDR should be replaced as the key burden-sharing norm in international politics⁸. The authors claim that the way emerging economies justify their obligations at the international level can be considered a paradox. On the one hand, emerging economies claim that (unlike developed countries) they do not have a historical responsibility to aid developing countries. Thereby, emerging economies

⁷ Referring to Skocpol (1985), *capacity* is the ability of a government to administer its territory effectively and implement political initiatives. Capacities depends on factors such as the availability of financial resources and the stability of official institutions.

⁸ Within the UN system, emerging economies refer to a group of 'mainly middle-income developing and transition countries that are integrated into the global financial system'. (United Nations, 2018, p. 139) The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) are often referred to as the main emerging economies. However, the term refers to all countries which have gained influence in the economic, political or other domains regionally and/or globally in the last two decades (Keukeleire & De Bruyn, 2017, pp. 419-420).

utilise *normative* arguments to describe their own responsibilities (Hockstetler & Milkoreit, 2015, p. 212). On the other hand, emerging economies claim that developed countries have responsibility for reducing their emissions and contribute to international development initiatives in order to be held accountable for past emissions. In this case the emerging economies utilise *rational* arguments to describe the responsibility of developed countries (Hockstetler & Milkoreit, 2015, p. 212). It is important to note that not all countries often categorised as emerging approach the responsibility-debate in this manner. The dilemma for many emerging economies in particular, is whether to be treated as serious actors in international politics as *developed* countries or receive more financial support as *developing* countries (Milani, Pinheiro, & De Lima, 2017). Multiple scholars argue that emerging economies create an opportunity to overcome the dichotomous thinking in the current system of international relations (Hockstetler & Milkoreit, 2015; Keukeleire & De Bruyn, 2017; Sjursen, 2017b). Emerging economies falls between the *developed* and *developing* country-classifications, stemming from their increasingly significant role in international relations.

I argue that it is important to inquire into how the EU addresses the increasingly influential role of emerging economies in the context of sustainable development. As a consequence of the impact of emerging economies in international relations, Keukeleire and De Bruyn (2017, p. 419) argue that the EU's position in the international system is challenged. Emerging economies contribute to the burden-sharing debate, and often adopt a different position from the EU. Variations of regional groupings are perceived to play an increasingly important role at the UN (Laatikainen, 2017; Panke, 2017). Within the UN system, the EU can be characterised as a regional organisation. This signifies that the EU's function within the UN is to cooperate inter-organisationally and that the EU has an autonomous existence outside the UN (Laatikainen, 2017, p. 116). 'The Group of 77 (G77) and China'⁹ is a *cross-regional political group*, which exists only to pursue their members' collective interests at the UN (Laatikainen, 2017, p. 116). This group represents many of the developing countries and emerging economies at the UN. The contestation between the EU and 'the G77

⁹ China participates in the G77 yet does not consider itself a member. All statements on behalf of this group is therefore issued in the name of the G77 and China. I will use apostrophes when referring to this group, to highlight that 'the G77 and China' act as a cohesive bloc at the UN.

and China' is perceived as a traditional divide within the UNGA (Keukeleire & De Bruyn, 2017, p. 419). The two negotiation blocs have historically pursued different objectives, also in intergovernmental negotiations about sustainable development. In addition, it is primarily the emerging economies who challenge the EU on climate change. Emerging economies tend to prioritise economic growth and often do not accept restrictions for the sake of environmental protection (Keukeleire & De Bruyn, 2017, p. 419). At the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (also known as the Rio+20), many developed countries (led by the EU), argued that a green economy was critical to achieve sustainable development. The EU sought to renew political commitment towards what was perceived as a 'key issue of sustainable development'. (Kamau, Chasek, & O'Connor, 2018, p. 31) The 'G77 and China' however, expressed concern that political initiatives for the green economy would have consequences for the international commitment for the *social development* aspect of sustainable development (Kamau et al., 2018, pp. 35-36).

A new agenda for sustainable development

This report contributes to the literature on the SDGs, which have inspired a new and emerging field of research. While the majority of the literature on the SDGs have a practical purpose by focusing on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda¹⁰, I argue that it is important to study the *ideas* behind the SDGs and their implications. The current research also does not go into detail on the standing of the different actors who participated in the process¹¹. The ideas behind the SDGs are of significance because the new agenda propose a vision of action on sustainable development for all UN member states. The wide array of issues discussed during the two-year process opened for many normative debates. Given that the SDGs is an emerging field of research it remains unclear from the existing literature how key actors addressed various debates in the intergovernmental negotiation process. One contribution of this report is therefore to detail the EU's approach to the normative question of responsibility for sustainable development. This report contributes towards the fundamental normative debate

¹⁰ For a notable contribution, see the Stockholm Resilience Centre Report titled *Transformation is Feasible. How to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals within the Planetary Boundaries* (Randers et al., 2018).

¹¹ For notable exceptions, see the introductory article on the EU and the SDGs by Langan and Price (2016).

about which ideas should be behind a global agenda for sustainable development, from the perspective of a foreign policy actor who actively participated in the negotiation for the SDGs. By addressing how the EU approached the question of responsibility for sustainable development, the aim of this report is to spark an academic debate about what justice requires for the EU from a global sustainable development agenda. I will first present the existing literature on the origins of the SDGs.

The origins of the Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs rest on the concept *sustainable development*, an idea of development which links environmental concerns to the social and economic aspects of development. The concept was first introduced in the Brundtland report from 1987. The report defines sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (The Brundtland Commission, 1987). Kanie et al. (2017, p. 8) finds that separate environment and development agendas has with the concept sustainable development evolved into a greater recognition of the interdependence between environmental, social and economic systems. The authors also highlight that sustainable development has created an awareness about intergenerational equity (Kanie et al., 2017, p. 8). However, O. R. Young et al. (2017) highlight that the concept has proven difficult to implement politically. Baker et al. (1997, pp. 5, 28) suggest that the ambiguity of the concept makes it both theoretically problematic and of high political significance. While the SDGs propose new ideas about priorities for international cooperation on development issues, the specific commitments the global goals require might remain unclear. I argue that it is of significance to discover which roles and responsibilities foreign policy actors perceive sustainable development to imply given the ambiguity of the concept.

The origins of the SDGs can be perceived as an outcome of two events; the 2000 UN Millennium Summit and the Rio+20. The SDGs replaces the MDGs as the set of goals which will guide global and national policies, for the 15-year period between 2015 and 2030. There is scholarly agreement that the SDGs differ from the MDGs in many aspects and that the 2030 Agenda represents a significant shift from the MDGs in terms of responsibility (Chasek et al., 2016; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Kanie et al., 2017; O. R. Young et al., 2017). The 8 MDGs addressed the social and economic development aspects for developing countries. Similar

to the SDGs, the MDGs contained goals on poverty eradication (goal 1) and environmental sustainability (goal 7) (United Nations, 2000). However, the MDGs are perceived to represent a more limited agenda (Chasek et al., 2016; Kanie et al., 2017). A key criticism of the MDGs was that the global goals did not give countries ownership for their own development (Dodds, Donoghue, & Roesch, 2017, p. 6). For this reason, the MDGs have been described as a *North-South aid agenda* (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). The MDGs were aimed only at developing countries while developed countries were expected to provide financial support for their implementation. Fukuda-Parr and McNeill (2015) suggested prior to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda that the shortcoming of the MDGs needed to be replaced with greater consideration of the structural processes of responsibility to overcome the features of an *aid agenda*.

The *universal responsibility* norm which became a key characteristic of the 2030 Agenda led Chasek et al. (2016, p. 8) to argue that the SDGs have addressed many shortcoming of the MDGs, and represents a 'paradigm shift away from outdated global development assumptions of the past'. At the same time, many developing countries feared during the negotiation process for the SDGs that development funding would be reduced if the MDGs were to be replaced with universally applicable goals (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 18). They also feared that the SDGs would distract developed countries from their commitment to achieve the MDGs (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 18). It was at the 2012 Rio+20 Conference the UN member states agreed to begin negotiations for the SDGs. The purpose was to increase intergovernmental cooperation on sustainable development (Dodds et al., 2017). Rio+20 followed up on the 1992 Rio Conference on Sustainable Development (Chasek et al., 2016, p. 6). The 1992 Conference adopted an agreement which institutionalised several principles related to environment protection, including CBDR (Stalley, 2018).

Negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals

Since *Transforming Our World* had to be approved by Heads of State and Government it was crucial to form consensus among all UN member states (Chasek et al., 2016, p. 14). Consensus was realised at the New York Sustainable Development Summit 25-27 September 2015, where the

UNGA unanimously adopted the resolution for the SDGs¹² (United Nations, 2015b). The negotiation for the SDGs occurred in two phases, thus following a different decision-making procedure than previous UN negotiations for adopting resolutions¹³ (Kamau et al., 2018, p. 13). It is important to note that considerations of two parallel inter-governmental negotiation processes in 2015 had an influence on the proceedings; (1) The Twenty-First Session of the Conference of the Parties in Paris (COP21) and (2) the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD) (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 5). Like the intergovernmental process on sustainable development, both processes originated at the 1992 Rio Conference. The FfD was especially important for the SDGs negotiation (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). This conference was held two months prior to the Sustainable Development Summit. The purpose was to aid the implementation of the SDGs by making agreements on financial commitments for development purposes (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). The outcome document from the conference, the *Addis Ababa Action Agenda* (from now on only referred to as The AAAA) contain multiple cross-references with *Transforming Our World*. This necessitates that the two negotiation processes are considered simultaneously (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017). While *Transforming Our World* refers to moral sources of obligations such as the emphasis on 'leave no one behind', The AAAA focus on the political-institutional and financial obligations of the 2030 Agenda (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 20).

Kanie et al. (2017, p. 12) writes that; 'the SDGs encourage an integrative and systematic approach to global problems that might in the longer term develop more widely shared norms of sustainability around which states can craft policies'. Participatory observation data from the SDGs negotiation emphasise how highly political issues hindered the ability to reach consensus between political groupings, in particular between the EU and 'the G77 and China' (Chasek et al., 2016). It was not until the last days of negotiating some issues were resolved. The existing literature indicate that the allocation of responsibilities was a contentious issue (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017; Dodds et al., 2017). Since demands on accountability at the international level presuppose that responsibilities are clearly identified in advance (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 26) I

¹² Resolutions are according to Panke (2014, p. 1051) and O. R. Young (2017, p. 42) not legally binding. They are however high-profile agreements, which can function as focal points for future international hard law and legitimise certain actions and delegitimise others.

¹³ See Dodds et al. (2017, pp. 70-125) for a detailed account of the negotiation proceedings.

argue that it is important to examine what different foreign policy actors perceives a just burden-sharing agreement for a global sustainable development agenda to require.

The non-binding character of *Transforming Our World* means that the realisation of the 2030 Agenda has to rely on the moral commitment and political will of the actors involved, as well as the financial and institutional capacities they command (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 14). However, the agreement on the SDGs should not be dismissed as insignificant to international relations. Jolly, Emmerij, and Weiss (2009) understand the most important legacy of the UN to be the policy ideas it has put forward, which in many instances have influenced global political initiatives. In the absence of the possibility to negotiate a legally binding agreement, the normative debates often take centre stage. The ideas which ends up in the outcome documents of inter-governmental negotiations, give direction to new political initiatives at the international level. The MDGs were a result of a similar non-binding process as the SDGs. These global goals were efficient means to mobilise international support for poverty eradication.

Sustainable development and the EU perspective

In the following subsections I will first detail how the EU functions as a political actor in intergovernmental negotiations. I will also present literature which introduces sustainable development from the EU's perspective on and literature which highlight the relevance of the EU for research on sustainable development.

The EU as a political actor in intergovernmental negotiations

The EU is an *integration project* which seeks to integrate European interests and norms at the regional level, and promote common European interests and norms at the global level (Sjursen, 2017a). The EU is a collection of 28 sovereign states with their separate national political fields. Hence, the EU as a foreign policy actor must often consider conflicting interests between its member states (Kauppi, 2018, p. 6). At the same time, the EU consists of transnational institutional fields such as the European Parliament, the European Commission (from now on only referred to as the Commission) and the Council of the EU (Kauppi, 2018, p. 6). In most cases of intergovernmental negotiations – and what was also the case for the SDGs negotiation, the EU member states agree on a common position from which they negotiate (Panke,

2017, p. 33). Historically, the EU was represented at the UNGA through its member states only. However, the Lisbon Treaty (implemented in 2009) reorganised the EU's representation within the UN system (Delreux, 2014). The Treaty facilitated representation of a collective EU position at the UNGA. An EU delegation (under the authority of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the Vice President of the Commission), has since represented the EU at the UNGA. The reorganisation entails that the EU as an entity is more independent to diverge from various member state positions (Galariotis & Gianniou, 2017, p. 62; Panke, 2017, p. 39).

The EU's collective position for the SDGs negotiation was developed through an inter-institutional agreement between the EU's executive and legislative branches, the Commission and the Council of the EU (Panke, 2017). The Commission is independent of national governments and represents the interest of the entire EU. The Commission is one of the EU's executive branches, with four main functions; to propose EU policies and legislation, to ensure that the EU treaties and laws are respected, to budget for and implement EU policies and to represent the EU in relevant international forums (European Union, 2018). The Council defines the EU's main priorities, and is represented by the national governments of the EU member states. The Council shares a legislative function with the European Parliament and shares an executive function with the Commission (European Union, 2018).

The EU's history with sustainable development

Both in recent and older literature the EU is seen as an ambitious actor in the field of sustainable development. Langan and Price (2016) find that the EU has expressed a long-standing commitment for sustainable development initiatives. The European Commission for example, has been one of the most vocal supporters of the SDGs (Langan & Price, 2016, p. 432). Furthermore; 'the concept of sustainable development itself is said to be a European construct, one which demonstrates the EU's normative power in development agendas' (Langan & Price, 2016, p. 432). Bretherton and Vogler (2012, p. 153) claim that the EU historically has aspired a leadership role in this policy area, and especially for the environmental aspect of sustainable development. Given the leadership aspirations of the EU, Keijzer (2017) understand the EU to be a *norm-maker* for international development policies. Keukeleire and De Bruyn (2017, p. 419) find that the EU actively promotes multilateralism at the global level, and show a strong interest in participating in intergovernmental

negotiations on international development issues. For example, the EU was an important partner to the UN in the development of the MDGs, and consciously aligned its financial commitments and development objectives with that of the MDGs (Holland, 2008). While the literature in this section evidence that the EU has participated extensively in intergovernmental negotiations on sustainable development, limited research has been conducted on the EU's role at the SDGs negotiation. I argue that this is a paradox given how the EU perceives itself to be one of the founders of the concept.

Baker (1997, p. 91) argues that the sustainable development debate in the EU has evolved as the EU has attempted to reconcile its historical commitment to economic development with a more recent initiative to protect the environment. Carbone (2017, p. 311) detail how until the late 1990s, the relationship between the EU and the developing world were embedded in a postcolonial framework. The 1957 Treaty of Rome and the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht forms the constitutional basis of the EU. In the years after the Treaty of Rome was implemented, the EU's relations with its former colonies (in for example Sub-Saharan Africa) were partly driven by a sense of obligation and historical responsibility for Europe's colonial past (Carbone, 2017, p. 294). Today, the EU's relations with its former colonies varies from agreement to agreement, which makes it more unclear which obligations the EU adhere to in its development policy (Carbone, 2017). Carbone (2017) claims that the EU's attempts to promote its interests and project a European vision of development has been problematic for the last two decades. The author perceives an especially problematic aspect of the EU's relations with developing countries to be that boundaries between foreign and development policies increasingly become blurred (Carbone, 2017, p. 312). Given how most of the EU member states today are not former colonial powers, the EU might not view itself in light of its colonial past in the same manner as before. This might affect the burden-sharing norms the EU promotes at the international level.

The relevance of the EU for research on sustainable development

The centrality of research on the EU in the context of a global sustainable development agenda is highlighted in *The Politics of Sustainable Development. Theory, Policy and Practice within the European Union* (edited by Baker et al., 1997). This was first book to analyse the concept sustainable development within the EU. In the introductory chapter it

is argued that further research is needed on sustainable development from a developed country perspective (Baker et al., 1997). Earlier research on sustainable development had a disproportionate focus on the global or developing country-perspective, whereas the EU's approach to sustainable development remained largely unexplored (Baker et al., 1997). It is emphasised by Baker et al. (1997) that the EU, as a major regional economic power and an increasingly important actor in international politics, plays a leadership role and sets the precedent regarding how sustainable development is operationalised and implemented politically. Baker et al. (1997) established the importance of examining the EU's attitude to sustainable development after the 1992 Rio Conference. I find it important to examine the EU's approach to sustainable development in the recent negotiation process on the SDGs. Especially considering how the EU will be important for implementing the 2030 Agenda because of its position in the world economy and its leadership aspirations for sustainable development.

Limitations of previous research

The literature review has provided insights into three strands of literature which are relevant to the empirical study. The literature review has also highlighted some limitations to existing research. In this section I will highlight three limitations which this report will address. First, given the indication in the literature review that *responsibility* was a contentious issue at the SDGs negotiation, there is a need for empirically grounded research which examines this debate in further detail. Second, given the normative character of the responsibility-debate in international relations, there is a need for research which further examine the positions of foreign policy actors and identify what they perceive to be just principles for burden-sharing at the international level. Third, the literature review highlighted a need for more empirically grounded research on the EU in the context of sustainable development. I will address these limitations through a single-case study of how the EU approached the burden-sharing debate at the SDGs negotiation. An important empirical contribution of this report will also be to detail the EU's position for this particular negotiation process, which is not found in the existing literature. To provide clarity about the EU's position at the SDGs negotiation is a prerequisite for conceptualising the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development.

Chapter 3

Theory

The three sections of this chapter will describe the theoretical underpinnings of this report. The first section describes why it is useful to study the EU's role at the SDGs negotiation from a political sociological perspective. The second section explains why a theory of justice is applicable for an analysis of EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. The third section presents three distinct theories of global political justice with corresponding expectations for the empirical research.

The political sociology of the EU

The theoretical framework of this report builds on a political sociological perspective on the EU. Sociology is relatively new to studies of the EU (Kauppi, 2018, p. 3). In classic sociological theories *norms* play a central role in accounting for action. In contemporary political sociology, the interest for norm-oriented action has been limited in studies of the EU. The EU has traditionally been studied within a political science or IR-perspective, where the EU's foreign policy often is understood exclusively in terms of its *interests* (see the works within the realist tradition by Hans Morgenthau, Hedley Bull and Kenneth Waltz among others). Classic IR approaches have been criticised for excluding norms when accounting for foreign policy actors' behaviour (Risse, 2000). Checkel (1998, p. 324) explain that a problem with classic IR approaches is not their understanding of international relations *per se*.

Rather, it is what these approaches omit from their explanations, namely how also norms influence state interests. Within IR it is often the constructivist tradition which highlight the centrality of norm-guided action. However, my approach does not correspond with constructivism in IR, criticised by Checkel (1998, p. 325) for omitting a theory of agency. One aim of this report is to contribute to a closer link between the IR discipline and political sociology. By utilising a political sociological perspective, this report encourages a renewed focus on norms and political action for analysing the EU's foreign policy.

In *Toward a Reflexive Political Sociology of the European Union*, Kauppi (2018) assert that bringing a sociological perspective to studies of the EU encourages a more reflexive approach than traditional political science and IR approaches. He presents three arguments for this claim. First, while political science and IR often studies the EU as a political project, a political sociological perspective is dedicated to research on *political action*. Kauppi (2018) understands political action to be the practices of the political actors. A reflexive sociological theory assumes that there is always choice and agency in political processes¹⁴. Second, while a precondition for political sociology is that action is informed by norms and ideas, action is also perceived to be conditioned through institutions, and constrained by various social, economic or other factors. Action is *institutionalised*, meaning that organisational structures and procedures regulate action. Individuals might have internalised institutional norms to be competent representatives of the institution, and adjusted their behaviour to the specific role they have within the institution. Third, political reality is *relational* within the field of political sociology. The political sphere consists of interdependent people, groups and institutions. The formal level of analysis must therefore be linked to the interactions and practices of the involved actors. In short, a reflexive sociological theory studies the practices of political actors for a particular event or process and political actions are perceived to be influenced by norms and restrained by institutions. I argue that a political sociological perspective is appropriate given that research often does not make it clear which exact norms foreign policy actors adhere to. To understand the EU as a polity, a crucial aspect is to study how the EU perceives its own role in international relations (Kauppi, 2018). By analysing which obligations the EU understands to have towards

¹⁴ This claim is inspired by the classical sociological work *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

other actors in international relations, this report also addresses how the EU perceives its own responsibility for sustainable development. And by analysing the specific norms and principles the EU is promoting at the global level, this report contributes to a greater understanding of the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy.

The empirical study of human morality were introduced as the core task of classic sociology (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016, p. 1). The insights about the normative dimension of action is largely influenced by the sociological tradition of Weber and Habermas. The assumptions about the EU as a foreign policy actor in this report builds upon Weber's *action theory* and Habermas' *theory of communicative action*. While the level of analysis in Weber and Habermas' theories is the individual level, their theories can also be applied at the level of organisations (the meso-level). This includes studies of the EU. Norms are often implicit to how political actors behave, because they adhere to the specific norms of their institution or organisation (Risse, 2000). Because actors have institutionalised norms it is possible to study norm-guided action at the organisational meso-level. The following subsections will introduce the theories of Weber and Habermas and elaborate on the importance of analysing the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy.

The interpretative sociological tradition

While Weber belongs to classic sociology, his theories are still influential in contemporary sociology. Weber is regarded as the founder of the paradigm referred to as *action theory*. He belongs to the interpretative sociological tradition, which studies human behaviour and interaction. In *The Nature of Social Action*, Weber discusses what he understands to be the aim of sociology, which is:

[...] the science whose object is to interpret the meaning of social action and thereby give a causal explanation of the way in which the action proceeds and the effects which it produces. By *action* in this definition is meant the human behaviour when and to the extent that the agent or agents see it as subjectively meaningful [...] In neither case is the *meaning* to be thought of as somehow objectively *correct* or *true* by some metaphysical criterion.

(Weber, 1978, p. 7, my emphasis)

Weber defines action as all human behaviour where the individual attaches meaning to their actions and the norms they adhere to. Weber's understanding diverges from the positivistic sociological tradition, where it is believed that objective knowledge about society might be observed (Blaikie, 2010). In his influential book *Economy and Society* (originally published in 1922), Weber conceptualises rational action as belonging to either ideal type; *purposive-rational* (zweckrational) or *value-rational* (wertrational) (Weber, 1968, pp. 24-25). The former ideal type refers to action which is success-oriented. Here, other individuals simply serve as means to an end for the individual (Weber, 1968, pp. 24-25). The latter ideal type refers to action which is determined by a conscious belief in the value of a certain behaviour for its own sake, independently of its prospects of success (Weber, 1968, pp. 24-25). *Value-rational* action also refers to behaviour the individual perceives to be *fair*. It is the latter ideal type which inspires this study.

This report presupposes that the EU is capable of making normative assessments in a negotiation setting. Like Sjørnsen (2017b, p. 445) I presuppose 'the basic sociological insight that norms and values serve as the foundation of any social order and that they have behavioural consequences', an approach influenced by Weber's action theory. A key assumption in this report is that the EU continuously considered arguments in favour or disfavour of certain norms when participating in the negotiation for the SDGs and for determining what it perceived to be a just approach to the question of responsibility for sustainable development.

A Habermasian approach to morality

In his influential book *The Theory of Communicative Action* (originally published in 1981), Habermas brings Weber's theory of action a step further. Like Weber, Habermas is critical of theories which understand action as purely rational. Habermas seek to develop a broader conception of rationality from the conception *communicative rationality* (Joas & Knöbl, 2009, p. 229). In his perspective; 'an actor is only rational when he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticised, is capable of justifying his actions by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations' (Habermas, 1984, p. 15). Dissimilar to Weber, Habermas does not assume that norm-guided action stems solely from what the individual attaches meaning. Rather, individuals adhere to norms that has been decided through deliberation and adjust their behaviour to meet group expectations (Habermas, 1984, p. 86).

Communicative action refers to behaviour which is not aimed at achieving a specific goal (Habermas conceptualises the opposite of communicative action as *strategic action*). Communicative action is a mode of behaviour which is open to a discussion about the most suitable collective approach to the specific situation.

Habermas asserts that actors are constantly trying to 'negotiate a common definition of the situation' (Habermas, 1984, p. 95). Habermas proclaims that every situation is embedded in a normative context which requires deliberation. He assumes that interacting individuals wish to achieve a genuine understanding for their arguments. Interacting individuals must discuss different *validity claims* in an effort to evaluate if the claims presented by other individuals are truthful (Joas & Knöbl, 2009, p. 230). Thereby, individuals make a normative evaluation of the situation. Habermas' proposes that there are three types of validity claims (Joas & Knöbl, 2009, pp. 230-233). First, *a validity claim to truth*, is an assessment of whether or not a statement about an issue can be understood to be empirically correct. Second, *a validity claim to normative correctness*, presupposes that what is normatively correct must first be negotiated. From this perspective it is possible to either obey or oppose the validity claims of other actors and to declare the existence of different norms. Third, *a validity claim to truthfulness*, signify that a claim express the *subjectivity* of the speaker and must be considered as such.

Many scholars have utilised Habermas' theory of communicative action to analyse the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy. His approach has been deemed appropriate for researching norms at the meso-level (Risse, 2000; Sjørnsen, 2017b). A key assumption in this report is that the different actors at the SDGs negotiation proposed different validity claims to the question of responsibility for sustainable development, to truth, to normative correctness and to truthfulness. I consider the justifications for the EU's moral claims when the EU is attempting to negotiate a common definition of the situation. This report therefore has a Habermasian approach to morality.

The normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy

Scholars view the EU's foreign policy in terms of both an interest dimension and a normative dimension. It is the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy which will be examined in this report. Keukeleire and De Bruyn (2017, p. 419) claim that the foundation for the EU's international role is its regional integration, its trade power

and its position as one the strongest economic power in the world¹⁵. Thus, the authors place emphasis on the *interest dimension* of the EU's foreign policy, the strategic or economic interests which may account for action in international relations. As the previous section highlighted, some scholars emphasise the influence on norms in the EU's foreign policy. Kauppi (2018) refers to the *normative dimension* of the EU's foreign policy when he contends that norms can account for the EU's behaviour. The emphasis on norm-guided action in this report is not to underestimate that interests might have influenced the EU's approach at the SDGs negotiation. However, I have an analytical focus on the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy in this report. Arguments relating to the EU's *strategic* or *economic* interests do not fall within the normative reflections debate this report examines. A study of the interest dimension of the EU's foreign policy would for example imply identifying which security or trade relations the EU sought to pursue at the SDGs negotiation. It is necessary to separate the two dimensions to analyse the normative aspect of the EU's foreign policy.

Orbie (2012, pp. 24-25) concludes that; 'the EU, in particular the Commission, claims to have a distinctive view on development issues, inspired by European values'. Sjursen (2017a, p. 2) describe how many EU scholars perceive the presence of a normative dimension to be a distinct trait of the EU's foreign policy. In literature, the EU is often described as an actor with a tradition of promoting norms at the international level. This separates the EU from other foreign policy actors:

Analyses of the EU's foreign policies often rest on a dichotomy between interests and power on one hand and norms and values on the other. Based on this dichotomy, the EU is frequently portrayed as a unique international actor and a champion of global values.

(Sjursen, 2017b, p. 459)

Manners' often cited article *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?* was a pioneering article in portraying the EU as a uniquely normative actor in international relations. Manners proposes that the ability to make normative evaluations distinguishes the EU from other foreign policy actors. He argues that; 'the concept of normative power is an attempt to suggest that not only is the EU constructed on a

¹⁵ According to a recent GDP ranking (United Nations, 2018).

normative basis, but [more] importantly that this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics' (Manners, 2002, p. 252). Recent contributions to literature have also described the EU as a distinct actor in international relations, for example in the context of sustainable development. Like Manners, this distinctiveness is perceived to stem from promoting and adhering to norms. Langan and Price (2016, p. 432) for example, assert that; 'the concept of sustainable development itself is said to be a European construct, one which demonstrates the EU's normative power in development agendas'.

The claim that the EU is a distinct actor in international relations because it adheres to norms have been questioned in recent studies. In contrast to Manners, Sjursen (2017b, p. 459) does not assert that the EU have a normative power which makes it distinctive from other foreign policy actors: 'If the EU truly were a distinctive actor in global politics, this distinctiveness would have to be linked to a specific set of norms and principles, rather than to adherence to values and norms per se'. In consequence, it is not the normative dimension itself which makes the EU a distinct foreign policy actor. Normative disputes are a persistent feature of international relations (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 1). In addition, norms are an integral part of all foreign policies (Sjursen, 2006). It is therefore valid to question the analytical usefulness of Manners' perspective. Furthermore, Wiener (2014) proclaims that in the absence of a global community where all actors have agreed to follow certain norms, there are bound to be contestation over which norms should be guiding. In international relations, *contestation* stems from the critical reflection *about* norms and involves expressing disapproval of certain norms (Wiener, 2014, pp. 1, 83). Checkel (1998, p. 338) asserts that there is a lack of theory development about the normative dimension in international relations. My understanding of the EU as a foreign policy actor builds upon the assumption that it is not sufficient to characterise the EU as a normative actor. In accordance with Sjursen (2017b), I argue that it is necessary to advance our understanding of the normative dimension in the EU's foreign policy by identifying which norms and principles are specific to the EU, and therefore distinguishes the EU from other foreign policy actors. I will nuance Manners' claim about the EU as a distinct normative actor in international relations through analysing the EU's normative reflections in context of responsibility for sustainable development.

The EU and the normative debates at the negotiation for the Sustainable Development Goals

I argue in the context of the negotiation for the SDGs it is relevant to examine the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy. Laatikainen and Smith (2017) claim that foreign policy actors increasingly act as cohesive blocs at the UN, which has a profound impact on contestation over norms. In addition, the SDGs propose an idea of what all UN member states should aim for. Consequentially, this specific inter-governmental negotiation process clearly had a normative character. It is now widely accepted in literature that norms matter in intergovernmental negotiations (Risse, 2000; Sjursen, 2006). Laatikainen and Smith (2017) argue that multilateral negotiation processes (unlike bilateral negotiation processes) often involve issues where foreign policy actors do not pursue a specific national interest. Therefore, norms may account for state behaviour to a greater degree. What remain unclear about the SDGs negotiation from the literature review (see section *Limitations of previous research*) are which norms different foreign policy actors adhered to. Farrell (2017, p. 18) refers to the SDG negotiations specifically, in arguing that; 'Against this background of global multilateral diplomacy, it is more difficult to clearly attribute influences and changes to specific actors or to identify how individual actors shaped the negotiation outcomes'. Here, Farrell explains how it is difficult to establish the positions of different foreign policy actors in inter-governmental negotiations and identify their underlying motivation for promoting certain norms and principles without examining these features specifically. In this report, I therefore find it important to analyse the EU's approach to normative questions at the SDGs negotiation.

Applying a theory of justice to the question of responsibility for sustainable development

In this section, I will introduce why it is appropriate to bring in a theory of justice (and more specifically the GLOBUS perspectives on global political justice), in analysing the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. Global political justice is 'concerned with the institutional background structure of political decision-making and the standing of actors' (Mikalsen, 2017, p. 1). The main concern of a theory of global political justice is the institutional arrangements that causes injustice at the global level. Here, justice has both a global aspect and a political aspect, which I will elaborate on in the following sub-sections. Bringing in a theory of justice to my theoretical framework

(alongside the sociological perspective which emphasise the normative dimension of action) is useful to address the normative debate in international relations over responsibility for sustainable development. As the conceptions of justice utilised in this report illustrate, the responsibilities foreign policy actors understand to have towards each other can be interpreted in vastly different manners.

Theories of justice address the risk of dominance at the international level. In Eriksen (2016, p. 4) *dominance* is defined as 'subjection to the arbitrary wielding of power', while *injustice* refer to 'subjection and rule without justification'. It is necessary to allocate burdens in international relations to prevent dominance of the most vulnerable states, groups or individuals. A theory of justice is useful to study which burden-sharing agreement different foreign policy actors perceives to be just. The contestation over burden-sharing principles directly ties in with the issue of actors proposing different visions of what justice requires. As evidenced in section *Burden-sharing norms in international relations*, the responsibility-debate in international relations is highly politicised. Because there is no consensus among UN member states on what justice requires in the context of sustainable development, it is crucial to further examine which obligations foreign policy actors understand to have towards each other (Sjursen, 2017a). This report will study how EU view its own responsibility for sustainable development – thereby also how the EU perceives a just allocation of burdens. The objective of this study is not to suggest how responsibility should be distributed at the international level. This study addresses a normative debate in international relations without participating in the normative debate. I intend to address how the EU as a foreign policy actor addresses the normative question of burden-sharing.

Global justice

Baker et al. (1997, p. 18) state that 'it is now widely recognised that much of the implementation of policies aimed at shifting economies to a sustainable development path will have to take place at the international level'. It is now well-established that there must be a theory of justice for the international level. Political issues are global in nature, which have changed the discussion on justice in political discourses (Eriksen, 2016). The scholars which comprise my theoretical framework - Pettit, Butt and I. M. Young, assert that obligations of justice must take place at the international level. All three scholars seek to create a philosophical account of justice and create convincing theories that

relate to contemporary issues of global justice. I. M. Young (2006, p. 102) proclaims that some structural social processes connect people across the world without regard to political boundaries. In addition, Butt (2009, p. 111) claims that since all interactions between states contributes to relations of injustice, it makes global justice an important starting point to address questions of justice and injustice.

Within the GLOBUS project, the EU is perceived as an especially relevant actor to examine in the context of *global* justice. In a GLOBUS research paper, Sjursen (2017a, pp. 2-3) claim that the EU may be perceived as an unfinished political experiment in establishing a system of rights and duties which transcends state borders. At the international level, the EU aspires to promote certain norms and contribute to resolve problems occurring outside of its own region. Sjursen (2017a, pp. 2-3) argues that these factors make the EU especially relevant for studying emerging issues of justice and injustice beyond the domestic level. The main field of inquiry of this report is how the EU perceives a just allocation of obligation for a *global* sustainable development agenda.

Political justice

While Pettit, Butt and I. M. Young all theorise about the *political* aspect of justice, theories of justice are often theories of *distributive justice*¹⁶. The just distribution of resources have often been the focus of literature on the relationship between developed and developing countries (Sachs, 2014). A theory of political justice asks what kind of political structures must be in place to ensure just distribution between countries. This theory does not exclude that justice may require a redistribution of resources from developed to developing countries. However, instead of discussing what a just distribution of resources should be, a theory of political justice begins with the assumption that what is just is contested (GLOBUS, n.d.). The philosophical theories of justice utilised in this report all works from the assumptions of a *non-ideal theory* of justice. Non-ideal theories aim to discover what justice requires for contemporary instances of injustice and address injustice within the current political system (Butt, 2009, p. 7). From this perspective one first needs to confront different ideas about justice, before creating changes in the direction of a more just system (Butt, 2009, p. 19). Non-

¹⁶ For an influential contribution to a theory of distributive justice, see Rawls' *The Law of Peoples* (1971).

ideal theories are opposed to *ideal-theories* of justice, which challenge the foundations of the current political system in the search for justice.

Within the GLOBUS project, the EU is perceived as an especially relevant actor to examine also in the context of *political* justice. In a GLOBUS research paper, Sjursen (2017a, p. 3) asks; ‘what ideas and conceptions of justice, if any, underpin the external policies of the European Union?’ As Carbone (2017) emphasised in the literature review, it has been unclear in recent years which norms the EU adheres to in its foreign policy. I therefore find Sjursen’s question to be of high relevance.

Expectations for the empirical research

The GLOBUS project has developed three distinct conceptions of global political justice: *non-domination*, *impartiality* and *mutual recognition*. Each perspective provide different understandings of what justice requires. The conceptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Each conception highlight important elements of justice and they can be utilised for different purposes. I find the GLOBUS-conceptions well suited to identify and analyse foreign policy actors’ ideas and arguments. The conceptions ‘pay particular attention to the normative arguments that are presented in support of or in opposition to the different approaches to justice’ (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 1). I choose to frame my expectations about the EU’s approach to responsibility for sustainable development on the perspectives *non-domination* and *mutual recognition*. From the perspective of justice as non-domination, a main concern is for states to regulate how they interact with each other to ensure their equal status in the system of international relations (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 7). From the perspective of justice as mutual recognition, states need to find solutions which are suited to each separate context instead of relying on universal solutions (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 9). In the following subsections I will elaborate on these perspectives on justice and account for what I understand non-domination and mutual recognition to entail in the context of the EU’s approach to responsibility for sustainable development. I will also formulate three separate expectation for the empirical research based on these conceptions. Before I do, I will offer some broader reflections on why I selected these perspectives on global political justice for my theoretical framework.

Non-domination and mutual recognition are useful conceptions to analyse different approaches to the question of burden-sharing at the international level. Works by Pettit (1997, 2010, 2014), Butt (2009) and

I. M. Young (2006, 2011) were selected specifically for my theoretical framework. I formulate rival expectations based on their dissimilar theories to nuance the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. I chose Pettit's theory because he proposes a different approach to justice than the other two theories. His theory corresponds with GLOBUS' non-domination-conception. I choose Butt and Young's theories because of their competing perspectives on the significance of *historical* events in assigning responsibility for *contemporary* events. I interpret their theories as mutual recognition-conceptions, because both theories acknowledge that justice requires a differentiated approach (I will elaborate on this claim in the subsection titled *Justice as mutual recognition*).

From the perspective of justice as impartiality, states need to submit themselves to common laws or the authority of collective institutions and adhere to universally applicable standards of justice (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 8). Impartiality is left out as an expectation for my empirical research for two reasons. First, impartiality suggests that justice demands supranational institutions. The burden-sharing debate for the SDGs happened in the context of UN intergovernmental negotiations, where burdens were to be distributed between *countries*. Thus, the focus of the debate was which responsibilities sovereign states had towards each other. Second, impartiality tends to favour bindings agreements. The UNGA did not intend a binding agreement for the SDGs. In general, a debate over *responsibilities* is more prone to moral consideration than international law (Feinberg, 1980). This was also the case for the debate over responsibilities at the SDGs negotiation. In *Transforming Our World*, legal sources do not play a significant role in the matter of justifying the allocation of obligations (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 20).

In my operationalisation of the conceptions I have a narrower interpretation of non-domination and mutual recognition than what the first GLOBUS research papers introduce (Eriksen, 2016; Sjursen, 2017a). Through my narrower interpretation, I acknowledge that there could be other forms of non-domination and mutual recognition in the EU's approach, which is lost by my interpretation of the conceptions. However, I choose to emphasise certain elements of non-domination and mutual recognition which are relevant for my field of inquiry. For example, the GLOBUS conceptual scheme emphasises legal structures. This is omitted from my expectations. Legal structures are more relevant in the context of declarations, which unlike resolutions intend

to be binding at international law. The main concern of the GLOBUS conception mutual recognition is to evaluate the just proceedings of a negotiation process¹⁷. However, evaluating negotiation proceedings is outside the scope of this study.

Justice as non-domination

To achieve justice as non-domination, interaction between states would be structured in a manner where powerful states do not dominate other states. Non-domination refers to 'the condition of pursuing ends of one's own choice without violating the freedom of others' (Mikalsen, 2017, p. 9). Pettit is preoccupied with the unequal power-relations at the international level and how this can result in political injustice (Pettit, 1997, 2010, 2014). He understands there to be a risk of *domination*¹⁸ in international relations when states possess different levels of power – leading some states to be 'at the arbitrary will of others' (Pettit, 2010, p. 38). Pettit understands non-domination to be 'the social status of being relatively proof against arbitrary interference by others and of being able to enjoy a sense of security and standing among them' (Pettit, 1997, p. 8). This perspective on justice builds on the assumption that the rightful claimants of justice are states. This implies that the sovereignty of states should be respected and that states should not interfere unnecessarily into the affairs of other states (Eriksen, 2016, p. 11). Justice from this perspective means ensuring that it is; 'possible for countries to relate to one another in a reasoned manner, seeking a non-alien influence on another's positions and holding out the possibility of an unforced, cooperative solution to many problems' (Pettit, 2010, p. 83). Because there is no significant role for claims of justice beyond the state from the perspective of non-domination, I understand the responsibility countries have towards each other in reaching internationally agreed objectives to be *voluntary*.

Freedom is important from the perspective of non-domination. One aspect of freedom is that all states should enjoy similar choices (Pettit, 2014, p. 163). Pettit (2010, p. 70) describes the ideal of non-domination:

¹⁷ For an empirical study notable contribution, see the GLOBUS Research Paper by Walker (2018).

¹⁸ Like Eriksen (2016) I use the term *dominance* to refer to the concept of arbitrary rule in general and the term *domination* when referring to Pettit's theory in particular.

Peoples that are already organised under non-dominating, representative states should pursue a twin goal: first, arrange things so that they each enjoy the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination in relation to one another and to other multi-national and international agencies; and second, do everything possible and productive to facilitate the representation of less fortunate peoples in non-dominating states and to incorporate them in a non-dominating international order.

While non-domination emphasise that supportive action towards other countries is voluntary, it is also emphasised that countries can have moral grounds for addressing development or other concerns inside the borders of other countries. This corresponds to the reason for action from the non-domination perspective, *duty of beneficence*. This duty does not refer to a legal obligation. Rather, it is 'the actor's own sense of responsibility to assist those who find themselves in need of assistance through no fault of their own' (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 7). From the perspective of non-domination, emerging global challenges (such as climate change) might require states to cooperate more closely because of the recognition that individuals outside one's own states are oppressed by current policies (Mikalsen, 2017, pp. 6, 17). Interactions between states can also cause states to be oppressed, which results in inter-state injustice. In the absence of injustice, there is (like I mentioned in the previous paragraph) no significant role for claims of justice beyond the state from the non-domination-perspective. However, I understand from the perspective of non-domination that if a state promotes supportive action towards other countries, this state might perceive it as fair if countries with similar capacities do the same. From the perspective of justice as non-domination, this action will be justified by the *moral obligation* to even out political inequalities at the global level.

From the perspective of non-domination, the first expectation is that the EU approached responsibility for sustainable development by emphasising that it is voluntary to assist other countries in reaching internationally agreed objectives. At the same time, the EU would state that there are nonetheless moral obligations for countries which possess similar *capacities* to support other countries in a similar manner to prevent inequalities at the global level. To find evidence of this approach, the EU's justifications would be that it is the responsibility of each state to meet the agreed to goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda and that countries with similar capacities as the EU have the same

moral obligations to address global challenges within the non-binding framework of the SDGs.

Justice as mutual recognition

The predominant concern for justice as mutual recognition is that policies might require *differentiation*. Mutual recognition focuses on the need for tailored policies towards specific individuals, groups or states to ensure global justice. When abstract and theoretical principles are to be implemented they will always be contested, von Lucke (2017, p. 32) claims. Mutual recognition highlight the importance of a differentiated approach suitable to the specific context. While multilateralism is perceived as the principal institutional form from a non-domination-perspective and the supranational institutional form from an impartiality-perspective, a collaborative institutional is seen as the principal institutional form from a mutual recognition-perspective. In order to achieve justice as mutual recognition 'there is a need for procedures that treat people differently in order for them to be free' (Sjursen, 2017a, p. 6). What differentiates mutual recognition from non-domination is that obligations should not be voluntary. On the contrary, differentiated obligations are perceived as prerequisite for ensuring global justice.

Given the emphasis on differentiation, the solution to global political justice from a mutual recognition-perspective might appear simple. However, to adjust policies to different context for a global sustainable development agenda, there is also a need to differentiate between the *responsibilities* of foreign policy actors. To nuance the academic debate on burden-sharing, I choose to develop two separate expectations which both requires differentiated responsibilities. One expectation stems from Butt's *Rectifying International Injustice* (2009). The other expectation derives from I. M. Young's *social connection model of responsibility* (I. M. Young, 2006, 2011). Both theories address to which extent the present generations can be held responsible for the actions of earlier generations. While Butt and I. M. Young propose rival expectations for the question of historical responsibility, both expectations build on the assumption that 'if we are to treat each other as moral equals, we will realise that fairness requires that we take responsibility for, and pay the costs of, some of our actions' (Butt, 2009, p. 39). The two theories and their corresponding expectations are presented the following subsections.

Daniel Butt: rectifying historic injustice

In *Rectifying International Injustice* Butt (2009) argue that some actors in international relations today benefit from historic injustice. *Rectification* signifies from his perspective 'the general aim of seeking to ensure that one's moral duties arising from historic injustice are fulfilled' (Butt, 2009, p. 23). In his *backward-looking* account of justice, he stresses how past events affect present structures of injustice. Butt claim that it is difficult to consider the history of international relations without becoming aware of the scale of historic injustice (Butt, 2009, p. 97). One example of the pervasive feature of injustice is European colonialism. Butt proclaim that the question we need to ask, is if the current generation would be better off had historic interaction between colonial powers and their colonies been characterised by consensual and non-exploitative relations (Butt, 2009, p. 111). Contemporary global injustice stems from not taking responsibility for historical events which contributes to this injustice. Butt (2009, p. 4) disagrees with perspectives where historical events are portrayed as not having obligations in the present. From his perspective, the failure to rectify historic injustice means that the unjust relationship between those who benefitted from historical events and those who were exploited will be a feature of international relations also for future generations (Butt, 2009, p. 132).

Because there is an *enduring effect* of historic injustice in the present, the countries who benefits from these historic events have both a *moral* responsibility and an *outcome* responsibility for these events (Butt, 2009, p. 183). *Responsibility* from this perspective is for the community responsible for ongoing occurrence of injustice to fulfil its rectificatory duties towards the communities affected by the injustice (Butt, 2009, p. 17). Injustice calls for compensation for those exploited by it (Butt, 2009, p. 127). *Compensation* requires that the group in question is still suffering in some sense from the act of injustice and that action will be taken to counterbalance some of the benefits to their losses (Butt, 2009, p. 102). An assessment of what responsibility states have towards each other must therefore consider all instances of historical injustice (Butt, 2009, p. 4). From Butt's perspective, a question we need to ask when we are to assign responsibility is; 'which historical acts counts as acts of injustice and how should we respond in present day to such acknowledges injustices?' (Butt, 2009, p. 11). Butt perceives developed countries to have considerable responsibility to compensate developing countries for historical injustice (Butt, 2009, p. 17). From his perspective, an important

aspect of rectificatory justice in response to historic injustice is to address the distribution of current benefits and burdens (Butt, 2009, p. 33).

From this perspective, the second expectation is that the EU approached responsibility for sustainable development by emphasising that the EU has a responsibility to compensate those affected by the historical inequalities the EU and its member states might have contributed towards. To find evidence of this approach I must find the EU's argumentation that the EU has a special responsibility towards states who are negatively affected by historic events which may contribute to justice in the present day, such as European colonialism.

Iris Marion Young: the social connection model of responsibility

While I. M. Young agrees that claims of historical injustice should be addressed, the responsibility certain actors have for historical events are interpreted in a different manner than Butt. Whereas Butt's theory can be characterised as a *backward-looking* approach to justice, the theory of I. M. Young can be considered a *forward-looking* approach to justice. In her book *Responsibility for Justice* she asserts that it is not necessarily the actors who contributed to historical injustice who should be assigned responsibility for contemporary issues (I. M. Young, 2011, p. 175). She proposes that the current system of international relations must be reorganised so that the outcome of our *current* policies will cause less harm. For I. M. Young, the privilege of certain actors in the present political system demands for a special moral and political responsibility to recognise their position and to contribute towards alleviating the structures of inequality (I. M. Young, 2011, p. 175). *Responsibility* from this perspective requires for those who contribute to structural processes producing injustice to share in the responsibility for such injustice, thus resulting in present obligations (I. M. Young, 2011, p. 175). The responsibility for current structures of inequality weighs heavier than rectificatory duties for contributions to historic injustice from this perspective. I. M. Young argue that one should not blame actors for their role in past events, or assign responsibility based on contributions to historical injustice. For I. M. Young, this is justified, because current structures will have future effects on levels of injustice.

In *Responsibility and Global Justice* I. M. Young (2006) presents her *social connection model of responsibility*. Here, obligations of justice stems from structural processes, which she understands in relational terms; 'these differing structural positions offer differing and unequal opportunities

and potential benefits to their occupants, and their relations are such that constrained opportunities and minimal benefits for some often correlate with wider opportunities and greater benefits for others' (I. M. Young, 2006, p. 112). In the following citation, she elaborates on her approach:

Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms. All the persons who participate by their actions in the ongoing schemes of cooperation that constitute these structures are responsible for them, in the sense that they are part of the process that causes them. They are not responsible however, in the sense of having directed the process or intended its outcomes

(I. M. Young, 2006, p. 114)

Here, I. M. Young claim that all who participate in the current system of international relations have a responsibility for the injustices they currently produce. The opposite of her approach is what she describes as a *liability-model* of responsibility. This approach assigns responsibility to those who are causally connected to the circumstances and is more in line with the model of responsibility advocated by Butt (I. M. Young, 2006, p. 116). I. M. Young promotes a social connection model of responsibility, where 'all those who contribute by their actions to the structural processes producing injustice share responsibility for such injustice' (2006, p. 122). I. M. Young claims that this model is better suited to address the widespread structural inequalities in the world today. I. M. Young (2006) declares that because it often is impossible to discover which actors caused a specific structural outcome, it is neither useful nor just to seek compensation from specific actors.

From this perspective, the third expectation is that the EU approached responsibility for sustainable development by emphasising that certain actors have a special responsibility to alleviate unjust political structures. To find evidence of this approach I must in the EU's argumentation find that it is the actors who contribute to contemporary structures of injustice who recognise their responsibilities for addressing inequalities in the context of a global sustainable development agenda

Chapter 4

Research design and methodology

In this chapter I will discuss the methodological choices for this report. In choosing a research design, a key concern was to allow for both an in-depth empirical study of the EU at the SDG negotiation and to conceptualise the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development within a theoretical framework. In the first section I present my research method (a single-case study) and my research strategy (which is guided by theoretical propositions). In the second section I account for the specific analytical strategy utilised in this report, which involves analysing the justifications of the EU. In the third section I provide an overview of the sources utilised in this report, which is a combination of official EU documents and interviews with EU policy officers. In the fourth section I discuss some ethical considerations for this particular research design and the validity of my findings.

Single-case study

I consider a single-case study the most appropriate research method for the specific qualitative research in this report. Yin's classical book on the use of case studies defines the chosen research method as: 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident' (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Furthermore, Yin states that a case study inquiry:

[...] copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangular fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis

(Yin, 2014, p. 17)

There are many variations of case studies, some with a comparative or causal explanation-aim. It is important to note that this report does not intend to obtain a complete overview of the EU's role in the negotiation process nor address any explanatory or evaluate research questions about the EU's approach to sustainable development. Additional information needs to be collected through other sources and means to for this purpose. This study aims to provide an in-depth study of one empirical case. Thus, the case study in this report can more precisely be defined as a single-case study.

The case in this study is the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development at the negotiation for the SDGs. The reason for choosing this particular case is to contribute both empirically and conceptually to understand the EU's normative reflections about its foreign policy after the transition in the UN development agenda from the MDGs to the SDGs. I find that a single-case study, which allows for an in-depth examination of the chosen topic, is well-suited for this purpose. Following the prerequisites for case studies, this study is limited in time and scope. The time frame is limited to the months the SDG negotiation took place, from March 2013 to September 2015. The EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development must be seen in light of how the EU understands the responsibility of other foreign policy actors. A case study also allows for describing the EU's approach with sensitivity of the context it was voiced in, thereby providing a contextualised understanding for the EU's approach. The sources utilised for this case study are limited to documents and interviews describing the *collective* EU position for this particular inter-governmental negotiation process, thus limiting the scope of this study. One could argue that for example conducting interviews with representatives from different EU member states could have stressed internal disagreements about what the joint EU position should be.

However, that would be outside of the scope of this report, which studies the *official* EU approach.

A theory-guided case design

Since there are different interpretations between foreign policy actors of what a just burden-sharing agreement entails, the research question at hand foremost require an analysis of the EU's normative reflections on this issue. To address the normative debate in a meaningful manner, the empirical data needs to be conceptualised (Halliday, 1994, p. 25). This report has a deductive research strategy and utilises a theory-guided case design. The aim of the deductive research strategy is; 'to find an explanation for an association between two concepts by proposing a theory, the relevance of which can be tested' (Blaikie, 2010, p. 85). A case study in particular benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2014). In this report, I utilise the empirical data to deductively test the implications of a theory. This design allows me to test the three distinct theoretical propositions about the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. It is important to note that although this study utilises a deductive research strategy, I ended up with the specific theoretical propositions because of an iterative research process. After familiarising myself with the empirical data through the first reading of the primary source documents, I decided which theories would be most relevant for structuring the empirical data.

Analysing justifications

As an analytical strategy I analyse *justifications*, a variation of idea-analysis described in Bratberg (2017). I presuppose the existence of normative ideas in the EU's argumentation. Since the objective of this study is to analyse which ideas the EU has about a just burden-sharing agreement in the context of sustainable development, I find this analytical strategy useful. An idea-analysis is defined as the qualitative analysis of the presence of ideas and political messages in a text, where the researcher's interpretation is central to the process (Bratberg, 2017, p. 57). I understand the arguments the EU put forward in the data material to be conscious choices of which ideas it wishes to put forward about the issue responsibility for sustainable development. *Ideas* are essential to understand political actors and the decisions they make (Bratberg, 2017, p. 57). Partly inspired by Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio (2016), I understand a justification analysis to be an analysis of arguments which refers to a particular and normative interpretation of the common

good. *Justifications* implies that an actor takes a moral stand on an issue and justifies its position towards other actors involved (Ylä-Anttila & Luhtakallio, 2016, p. 2). I find it useful to have an analytical focus on justifications, since the EU - by arguing for a specific burden-sharing agreement, takes a moral stand on which obligations a sustainable development agenda requires from different foreign policy actors. This stance may also reflect the EU's position on more abstract ideas about global political justice.

Utilising this analytical strategy, I will identify and interpret which ideas are dominating in the data material, to find evidence of normative reflection about responsibility for sustainable development. I will specifically look for arguments relating to on how the EU views; a) who should be responsible for sustainable development and b), what the guiding principles of a just sustainable development agenda should be. As a specific analytic technique to categorise the empirical data, I utilise *pattern-matching*. The technique requires development of rival theoretical propositions - articulated in operational, terms prior to conducting the empirical analysis (Yin, 2014, p. 143). I use the theories of Pettit, Butt and I. M. Young to structure both data collection and analysis, three theories which I find to be mutually exclusive. After the first round of data collection, I went back to the indicators I developed for the three expectations and specified them. Then, utilising the pattern-matching technique, I interpreted my empirical data and made comparisons to the previously formulated theoretical expectations. This allowed me to systematically study the EU's justifications.

Sources

This study combines an analysis of official EU documents with semi-structural interviews with EU policy officers. The EU developed a common position for the SDGs negotiation. The selected primary sources allow me to study the collective EU approach. The issue of responsibility for sustainable development is also embedded in a specific context. To gain a better understanding of the negotiation process - which was conducted in a different manner than the more traditional UN inter-governmental negotiations, the primary sources are seen in light of relevant secondary literature. The triangulation of sources has also been important to control for consistency between the primary sources. Three important secondary sources are Dodds et al. (2017), Chasek et al. (2016) and Kamau et al. (2018). The outcome document from the SDGs negotiation (*Transforming Our World*) and outcome documents

from other relevant UN negotiation processes (*The AAAA*, *The Millennium Declaration* and *The Rio Declaration*, among others) are also important sources of information. In the following subsections, I will give a detailed account of the primary sources utilised in this report.

Analysis of official EU documents

The analysis draws on nine official EU documents where the mandate for the EU's collective position at the SDGs negotiation is found. The documents were selected specifically for this purpose. The documents allow me to consider the EU as a united actor for this specific negotiation process. The references to 'the EU's approach' in the following chapters can therefore be understood in light of reflecting the EU's mandate for the SDGs negotiation. The documents include *Commission Communications*, *Council of the EU Conclusions* and *EU Priorities at the United Nations*. In the *Communications*, suggestions for a common EU approach to the SDGs negotiation are presented by the Commission. The suggestions are to be evaluated by the Council of the EU and presented in *Conclusion-documents*. The *Communication-documents* cannot be understood to reflect the collective EU position before they are adopted by the Council. All the *Communications* utilised in this report were welcomed by the Council. This strengthens my belief that the EU had a collective position for this negotiation process. The documents from the two EU branches in most cases contain similar reflections about sustainable development and often have overlapping statements. The Council of the EU also clearly stated its priorities for the 70th session of the UNGA - in which the Sustainable Development Summit took place, in a separate document (*EU Priorities at the United Nations and the Seventieth United Nations General Assembly*). This document provides an overview of the EU's priorities for the upcoming session of intergovernmental negotiations, for its own negotiators and for other foreign policy actors. While only one paragraph of this document is devoted to the SDGs negotiation specifically, I find it to be an important primary source of how the EU approached the SDGs negotiation process. Especially considering that it was the document adopted by the Council of the EU closest to the final intergovernmental negotiation round, which implies that the collective EU position was most firmly established.

One aim of analysing political documents is to gain insight about the ideas different actors put forward (Bratberg, 2017, p. 9). Through a qualitative analysis of the chosen documents I can interpret the ideas

the EU presents and analyse its justifications. The documents also offer insight into how the official EU position was developed over several years and are therefore crucial for my understanding of how the EU approached the negotiation process. While the respondents for my interviews might stray from the official EU position in some of their statements, the documents are more secure source of the collective EU position. I began the process of document analysis with data collection. The documents are publicly available from the Commission and the Council of the EU online document registers¹⁹. I repeatedly read the documents to discover which ideas about responsibility for sustainable development the EU presented. Since normative ideas and statements might be both implicit and explicit in a text, a close reading of the documents has been crucial to not miss any important details about the EU's approach. I paid special attention to what was implicit in the documents. Topics the EU omitted commenting on provided useful insight about what the EU attaches meaning. After the close reading of the documents I interpreted the findings and compared the data against my theoretical framework.

Interviews with EU policy officers

The interviews were conducted with seven representatives from the EU delegation to the UN responsible for negotiating the SDGs on behalf of the EU²⁰. The delegation consisted of policy officers from the Directorate-General for the Environment (DG-ENVIRONMENT) and from the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG-DEVCO). While the two Commission departments usually are responsible for separate policy-areas, co-responsibility for the negotiation required the two departments to unite their approach. DG-DEVCO is (among several other objectives); 'responsible for formulating European Union development policy and thematic policies to reduce poverty in the world, to ensure sustainable economic, social and environmental development' (European Commission, 2019). DG-ENVIRONMENT on the other hand 'aims to protect, preserve and improve the environment for present and future generations' (European Commission, 2018). The different objectives of the two department

¹⁹ Commission documents are found in the following online document register: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/index.cfm?fuseaction=search>. Council of the EU documents are found here: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/public-register/>.

²⁰ The delegation was also responsible for preparing the Communication-documents. The EU delegation followed the mandate found in the official EU documents.

could have been problematic given that I seek to analyse the collective EU position in this report. However, the empirical data indicate that the separate objectives of DG-ENVIRONMENT and DG-DEVCO was not an issue at SDGs negotiation.

While the mandate for the EU's collective position at the negotiation is found in the official EU documents, the interviews conducted for this study were nonetheless important because they elaborated on the EU's position for this negotiation process. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 3), 'the qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations'. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to give the respondent an opportunity to share their reflections about the EU's position openly, while also asking more specifically about the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. During the interviews I asked specifically about my main object of study, which is how the EU approached responsibility for sustainable development at the SDGs negotiation. I asked direct questions such as: 'from your perspective of [the EU], which actors are responsible for achieving sustainable development today?' This question gave the respondents an opportunity to reflect on which roles and responsibilities the EU sees for specific actors in international relations. At the same time, the semi-structured nature of the interviews also gave the respondents an opportunity to share their reflections about the EU's approach openly, without leading questions. I did for example also ask; 'what do you perceive as the most effective way of achieving sustainable development?' I also asked control questions which directly related to my expectations, with the objective of achieving a nuanced understanding of the EU's approach. Following-up on the question of the most effective way of achieving sustainable development, I confronted the respondents with how developed countries' claims about historical responsibility compared to the EU's perspective on responsibility for sustainable development. Together, the questions posed during the interviews provided specific, rich and relevant answers to my questions, which Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 192) see as a quality criterion for an interview. I also gave the respondents an opportunity to share additional information in the closing section of the interview.

Before I present an account of the ethical considerations of the overall research process, I will first detail some of the choices I made for the interview process. For practical reasons four interviews were conducted over the phone and three interviews at the offices of the Commission in Brussels. The transcriptions do not emphasise language errors or pauses in conversations. I am primarily interested in the respondents' normative reflections, not the way these thoughts were presented in an interview situation. I do not see the relatively low number of respondents as an issue. The policy officers I interviewed for this report were very close to the negotiation process and present for one or both inter-governmental negotiation phases. Thus, they were able to provide a rich and detailed account of the negotiation process from the EU perspective. One might also object that the Sustainable Development Summit was four years ago at the time of publication of this report. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 52), I used relevant landmark events as contextual cues to aid the respondents in remembering past events. I began each interview by asking; 'How did you feel when the final resolution was passed at the UNGA, in September 2015?'

While the respondents might have forgotten certain details from the time, a detailed account of the negotiation process have not been the primary objective of this report. Instead, this report studies the EU's overall approach to the SDGs negotiation and its normative debates. The triangulation of sources enables me to check the respondents' statements against the official EU documents and the secondary sources. Some may perceive the choice to have a low number of respondents, to conduct some interviews over the phone and to not focus on certain details in the respondents' answers or the transcriptions as a negative feature of the research design. However, I do not regard these choices as a hindrance to analysing the EU's overall approach to the question of responsibility for sustainable development.

Ethical considerations and validity

The ethical dilemmas which could arise from my particular research design has been an ongoing concern while preparing and carrying out this study. For example, ethical considerations were made in relation to the respondents' personal data. Informed consent to participate in the research project were obtained in writing prior to conducting the interviews. I also sent a description of the purpose and procedures of this project in advance. In the closing section of each interview, I asked if the respondents had any remaining questions about the study. To

maintain their privacy, the respondents are anonymised and they are exclusively referred to by their assigned numbers in this report. Furthermore, all the data material from the interview process (which includes recordings, transcriptions and field notes) are stored in a computer folder protected by a password and will be deleted upon the completion of this project.

Researcher position

Another ethical consideration was my own role as a researcher. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, pp. 96-97) proclaims that '[...] the role of the researcher as a person, of the researcher's integrity, is critical to the quality of the scientific knowledge and the soundness of ethical decisions in qualitative inquiry'. During the interview process, I had to consider how the knowledge produced was *relational* and socially constructed between myself (the interviewer) and the respondents (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 63). Asymmetrical power-relations often become an issue in the interview process. A concern from my site when it came to conducting interviews with highly resourceful individuals who spoke on behalf of the EU, was that there would be a difference in knowledge about the field of inquiry. The respondents had first-hand knowledge and first-hand experience about the SDGs negotiation, a contrast to my own lack of extensive prior knowledge of the negotiation process. Therefore, a requirement on my side was to improve my knowledge on the topic in advance.

My position as a researcher might also influence my judgement about what the EU attaches meaning. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 278) emphasise how a researcher performing qualitative research must strive for reflexive objectivity. *Reflexivity* in social science research involves a recognition of the impossibility of complete researcher detachment from the research subject and a recognition of the reflexive nature of social research (Blaikie, 2010, p. 54). It also involves sensitivity about my own prejudices and subjective position prior to conducting the research, which might influence my interpretation of the statements made by the respondents. Prior to conducting this research, I did not have extensive knowledge about the EU or the EU's role in negotiating the SDGs. This allowed me to maintain a critical distance to my research subject, the EU. I did however enter the research process with an eagerness to learn more about the SDGs and how they originated. I offered to send the report to my respondents after submission, an offer which all respondents accepted. Knowing that this

report will be read by my respondents have made me continuously consider if my interpretation about the EU's position resonates with the perspective of respondents.

Validity

Validity has been an ongoing concern through every stage of the research process, from data selection and collection and to my attempt to give a valid account of the main findings in this report. *Validity* 'has in the social sciences pertained to whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate' (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 282). The theoretical framework of this report are builds on the already established GLOBUS-conceptions of justice. This increases *construct validity* – which relates to if the correct operational measures for the concepts being studied have been identified (Yin, 2014, p. 46). I have utilised the conceptions in a special context, which is the question of responsibility for sustainable development. Developing indicators which match both the original concept and are adjusted to the specific empirical case increases validity and illustrates how the existing framework can be utilised for a new field of inquiry. This report does not attempt empirical generalisation but rather contribute to *analytical generalisation*. The theoretical framework which I use to analyse the EU's approach to the question of responsibility at the international level, might be useful for similar empirical studies in the future.

The aim of this report is to *analyse* the EU's position, by specifically addressing the EU's approach to the normative question of responsibility for sustainable development. In accordance with Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 97), it has been important to publish findings which are as accurate and representative of the field of inquiry as possible. At the same time, I acknowledge that the knowledge produced for this report is subjective. The aim of this report is not to uncover any objective truth about the EU but to analyse what justice requires from the EU's perspective. This report therefore positions itself within the interpretative research paradigm (see subsection *The interpretative sociological tradition*). This led me to make careful choices for the data collection process. The official EU documents contains finely selected language and does not highlight internal disagreements in the process of developing a joint EU position for the SDGs negotiation. However, I find the document to be a trustworthy source of information for my purpose, which is to analyse the official EU position for this negotiation process.

Chapter 5

Analysis

In this chapter I will present my findings from the empirical research. I have divided the analysis chapter into four sections. The first three sections present evidence which might substantiate the three previously formulated expectations and provide an answer to the research question. In the last section, I offer some concluding remarks about the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development.

The reference to a specific interview session or document corresponds with the following lists of respondents and documents:

Table 5.1: List of respondents

	Department	Date	Location
I-1	DG-DEVCO	17 October 2018 at 09.30	Oslo (phone interview)
I-2	DG-ENVIRONMENT	22 October 2018 at 10.00	Oslo (phone interview)
I-3	DG-ENVIRONMENT	16 November 2018 at 11.15	Oslo (phone interview)
I-4	DG-ENVIRONMENT	04 December 2018 at 10.00	Oslo (phone interview)
I-5	DG-DEVCO	09 January 2019 at 11.00	Brussels
I-6	DG-DEVCO	09 January 2019 at 12.00	Brussels
I-7	DG-ENVIRONMENT	10 January 2019 at 14.00	Brussels

Table 5.2: List of primary source documents

Document number	Date	Type of document	Title
D-1	4 March 2013	Commission Communication	<i>A Decent Life for All: Ending Poverty and Giving the World a Sustainable Future</i>
D-2	25 June 2013	Council Conclusions	<i>The Overarching Post 2015 Agenda</i>
D-3	16 July 2013	Commission Communication	<i>Beyond 2015: Towards a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach to Financing Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development</i>
D-4	12 December 2013	Council Conclusions	<i>Financing Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development Beyond 2015</i>
D-5	2 June 2014	Commission Communication	<i>A Decent Life for All: From Vision to Collective Action</i>
D-6	16 December 2014	Council Conclusions	<i>A Transformative Post-2015 Agenda</i>
D-7	5 February 2015	Commission Communication	<i>A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development After 2015</i>
D-8	26 May 2015	Council Conclusions	<i>A New Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development After 2015</i>
D-9	22 June 2015	Council Conclusions	<i>EU Priorities at the United Nations</i>

‘A moving scale of responsibilities’

To substantiate the first expectation, which is based on the GLOBUS-conception non-domination, the EU’s approach will need to be that countries with similar capacities as the EU should also make the same commitments as the EU towards the global sustainable development agenda. I here recall my non-domination-expectation presented in Chapter 3, where the main argument is commitments at the international level are voluntary but to prevent inequalities, countries with similar capabilities share the same moral obligations. The empirical material that substantiates this expectation are organised thematically in the three following subsections.

The responsibility of emerging economies

The normative question of responsibility divided foreign policy actors at the intergovernmental negotiation for the SDGs. *Responsibility* was a contentious issue between two of the major political blocs at the UN, the EU and 'the G77 and China'. *Transforming Our World* declare that; 'the Sustainable Development Goals and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities' (United Nations, 2015b, §5). Embedded in the 2030 Agenda is goals with a *universal* aspiration. According to respondent I-5 the universal responsibility-norm was promoted by the EU from the beginning and eventually became a key feature of the agenda. Incorporating the idea of universal responsibility into a global sustainable development agenda was from the EU's perspective perceived as the grandest achievement of the negotiation process (I-7). For the EU it was essential to replace the MDGs – which has been criticised for lacking a focus on the economic and environmental aspects of development with a more comprehensive and universal agenda (I-1, I-3). Promoting the universal responsibility-norm was crucial to the EU's approach at the SDGs negotiation (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-7). The EU wanted the universal responsibility-norm to be a guiding principle for the 2030 Agenda, because it wanted the global goals to refer to internal commitments for all countries.

Transforming Our World and *The AAAA* leaves room for state sovereignty and respect for national circumstances in allocating responsibilities (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 13). The EU largely agrees with this approach, in stating that; 'we need to frame appropriate and ambitious commitments for all, taking account of levels of development, national contexts and capabilities' (D-6). At the same time, the EU wanted to 'ensure that the agenda and the outcome not only included issues that developing countries had, but also to clearly include ambitions, objectives and measures in regard to challenges for developed countries and emerging economies' (I-2). For the EU, a just burden-sharing agreement requires emerging economies to commit to address global challenges in a similar manner as the EU. The increased responsibility of emerging economies derives from changes in the multilateral system (I-2, I-3). Emerging economies are now perceived to be 'major new players of the world economy'. In a Communication, the EU states that 'The effect of unsustainable patterns of current economic development are still largely determined by developed countries and

increasingly by emerging economies, while poorer countries are disproportionately impacted and have the least resources to cope with negative effects' (D-1). In this citation, the EU stresses how emerging economies increasingly have an impact on global economic development. This affects emerging economies' responsibility towards poorer countries, which they increasingly share with developed countries. For the EU, advocating for the universal responsibility-norm at the SDGs negotiation was a way of addressing the responsibility of emerging economies (D-6). The EU highlighted that in the absence of a legally binding agreement, emerging economies should nonetheless recognise their responsibility for sustainable development. The EU's emphasis on the responsibility of emerging economies clearly substantiates the non-domination-expectation.

The EU states that commitments should be framed as the shared responsibility of all countries to address global challenges (D-6, D-8). Therefore, it is by their increased *capacities* emerging economies have a greater role in implementing a global sustainable development agenda. The idea of allocating responsibilities according to capacities substantiates my non-domination-expectation. From this perspective, a just approach to responsibility for sustainable development is for countries of similar capacities to have similar responsibilities. In the following citation, the EU proclaims how it envisions a greater role of emerging economies in addressing global challenges, in light of their increased economic capacities:

For us it was very important to reflect the changing nature of the world economy and changing roles and responsibilities of different groups and countries [...] Whether it would be possible to reflect the new equilibrium and a new impact that come also from emerging economies and the new major players in the world economy (I-2).

The perspective of allocating responsibilities based on countries' respective capacities, leads the EU to suggest that there is a 'moving scale of responsibilities' for sustainable development:

What we are trying to get out of is this binary vision. We're not trying to get out of our responsibilities we're just trying to say that there's a scale. A moving scale of responsibilities. And that we need to adapt to that (I-1).

I find that a 'moving scale of responsibilities' illustrates the EU's overall approach to responsibility for sustainable development. Additional to the EU's approach is an emphasis on developed countries' and emerging economies' shared responsibility for the LDCs. The LDCs are particularly vulnerable to unsustainable policies because their dependency on natural resources aggravates their vulnerability to degradation and depletion (I-3, D-1, D-5). In the following citation, the EU claims that both developed countries and emerging economies should consider their impact on the LDCs:

In an increasingly interlinked world, all countries need to take systematically into account the impact, both positive and negative, that their policies can have on other countries. To this end, all developed, upper-middle income countries and emerging economies should commit to set up systems to assess the impact of adopting new policies on poorer countries (D-7).

In this statement the EU refers to the moral obligations for countries of similar capacities to adopt policies to aid the LDCs. For the EU, a recognition of the LDCs vulnerable position leads to a special moral obligation, since they are not necessarily capable of addressing certain sustainable development issues within their own territories. The EU highlights how this particular group needs special attention by the global community. Considering that the EU addresses the situation of the most vulnerable countries, I could have interpreted this statement as justice as 'mutual recognition'. From this perspective, justice requires differentiation. This necessitates an active dialogue with the affected parties and adjusting policies to the unique situation of the most vulnerable groups (Eriksen, 2016, p. 18). However, from the EU's statement, I understand the statement to be a justification for emerging economies to take greater responsibility for actions which might affect the LDCs negatively. The increased capacities of emerging economies justify how they share in the developed countries' responsibility toward the LDCs. This claim highlights how the EU sees a greater responsibility for emerging economies for a global sustainable development agenda, which stems from a moral obligation to prevent inequality at the global level. This further goes to substantiate the first expectation.

Financing sustainable development

Transforming Our World declares that; ‘each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development but national development efforts need to be supported by an enabling international economic environment’ (United Nations, 2015b, §63). In addition, *The AAAA* states that a global sustainable development agenda; ‘must be underpinned by equally ambitious and credible means of implementation’ (United Nations, 2015a, §2). An important aspect of the 2030 Agenda’s means of implementation is accumulating sufficient financial resources. The literature review highlighted how the burden-sharing debate in international relations comes back to financial commitments very often (see section *Burden-sharing norms in international relations*). It is evident from the empirical data that this also was the case at the SDGs negotiation. Financing sustainable development was a highly contested issue between developed and developing countries which lasted until the final stages of the negotiation process (despite the financial agreements made at the parallel negotiation process the FfD).

The EU is repeatedly clear in its commitment to fulfil the financial commitments specified in *Transforming Our World* (D-3, D-4, D-8, I-6). The EU assured the global community that the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs would not change the EU’s preparedness to support developing countries financially (I-5, D-8). For example, the EU agreed on new financial commitments for Africa through *The AAAA*. In a Communication, the EU states:

International public financing remains an important and catalytic element of the overall financing available for developing countries and more will be needed over the next 15 years to implement this ambitious agenda [...] The EU and its Member States provide more than 50% of all ODA and will maintain a strong collective commitment (D-7).

This citation evidence how the EU perceive it as its moral responsibility to contribute financially in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Following up on this commitment, in 2016, the EU and its member states collectively accounted for close to 60 per cent of total ODA, making the EU the largest donor of ODA globally (Council of the European Union, 2017). *Transforming Our World* specifies how *developed* countries should uphold their commitment to achieve the target of 0.7

per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) for ODA to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA of GNI to LDCs²¹ (United Nations, 2015b, Goal 17). *The AAAA* 'reiterate that the fulfilment of all ODA commitments remains crucial' (United Nations, 2015a, §51). Given that emerging economies are now approaching similar economic capacities as the EU, the EU perceive it as unjust that there are no explicit expectations for emerging economies' financial commitments stated in *Transforming Our World*. In multiple interviews it emerged that the EU perceive it as unfair that developing countries demand strong language on financing from developed countries to ensure their continued commitment whereas emerging economies are not asked to commit in the same manner (I-1, I-2, I-3). An example of this injustice from the EU's perspective, is how China often willingly contribute ODA, but on their own terms. According to respondent I-1 the China did so at the Sustainable Development Summit. At the same time, China disapproves of being bound by the same financial commitments as developing countries also in the context of the 2030 Agenda. While emerging economies' strong growth rate in recent years does not necessarily indicate that they start from the same position as the EU in development terms, they have nonetheless strengthened their position in the world economy. China's rate of growth for its real Gross Domestic Product²² (GDP) between 2016 was 8.3 per cent and India's growth rate was 7.4 per cent (United Nations, 2018, p. 154). The EU's GDP growth rate in the same period was 0.6 per cent (United Nations, 2018, p. 151). While emphasising that it is fair how the richest countries contribute the most, the EU also state how the increased economic capacities of emerging economies implies that their responsibilities in some instances are the same as the EU (I-2). I find that this substantiates the first expectation based on the non-domination-conception, by again referring to capacities for the just allocation of responsibilities.

The EU claim that emerging economies should provide their 'fair share' in their financial commitments for the sustainable development agenda; 'emerging economies and countries that have reached countries who have reached Upper Middle-Income status should provide their

²¹ The 0.7 per cent target of ODA to a country's GNI refers to the best-known financial target in international aid (OECD, 2018).

²² GDP is measured in US dollars and the indicator enables data to be internationally comparable across countries for any single year. GDP refers to 'the expenditure on final goods and services minus imports: final consumption expenditures, gross capital formation, and exports less imports' (OECD, 2019).

fair share of international public finance, in line with the financial resources they command' (D-3). A specific way for emerging economies to take responsibility for sustainable development is to increase their financial commitments towards the LDCs (I-2, I-3). Two Communications (D-1, D-7) stresses the necessity of financial commitments by emerging economies towards the LDCs. '[The 2030 Agenda] should ensure that all high-income countries as well as upper-middle income countries and emerging economies are providing their fair share to support poorer countries in reaching internationally agreed objectives' (D-7). A similar claim is made in a Conclusion; 'emerging economies and Upper Middle-Income Countries should also increase their financial support to developing countries and to LDCs in particular and should set targets for doing so within the time frame of the post-2015 agenda' (D-8). For the EU, minimal control and resource sharing should guide relations with developed countries and emerging economies. For cooperation with LDCs however, the EU acknowledge that a contextualised approach through bilateral relations might be most appropriate given LDCs particularly vulnerable character (D-4, I-6). Here, the EU returns to its claim about the moral obligation of emerging economies towards the LDCs, financially and through other means. This further substantiates the non-domination expectation.

Capabilities over Common But Differentiated Responsibilities

Opposing views on which burden-sharing principles should guide the 2030 Agenda was one of the most controversial issues at the inter-governmental negotiations. The burden-sharing debate was largely about including or excluding the CBDR-principle from *Transforming Our World* (I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6). The CBDR-debate was especially contentious between the EU and 'the G77 and China' (I-1, I-5). Participatory observation data from the process evidence that neither group was satisfied with the way CBDR was framed in the drafts to *Transforming Our World* (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 94). CBDR was an issue that lasted throughout the entire negotiation process and a compromise on the principle was not reached until the very end of the negotiation process (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 94). The imprecise nature of CBDR makes it difficult to determine which allocation of responsibility the principle entails. Nonetheless, CBDR and §7 from the *Rio Declaration* was reaffirmed in *Transforming Our World*. This entails that countries are assigned differentiated responsibilities based on their contribution to environmental degradation and their disproportionate

amount of financial and technical resources to resolve environmental issues (United Nations, 1992). In §12, *Transforming Our World* declares; 'We reaffirm all the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, as set out in principle 7 thereof' (United Nations, 2015b). However, according to Chasek et al. (2016, p. 14), the formal reference to CBDR in *Transforming Our World* still makes it unclear what the principle refers to – environmental degradation or sustainable development. As a consequence, CBDR might also be a contentious issue for the implementation phase of the 2030 Agenda.

The EU strongly opposed including a CBDR-reference in *Transforming Our World* at the SDGs negotiation. The EU did not want CBDR to be a guiding principle for a global sustainable development agenda, or to be referred to in any of the 17 SDGs (I-1, I-5, I-2). 'The G77 and China' on the other hand, proposed that CBDR should play a central role in the new agenda. The EU perceives it as unfair that CBDR prescribes responsibility based on a dichotomous country-classification. The EU justifies its opposition to CBDR by again referring to the changing role of emerging economies. CBDR '[...] as it was originally worded in 1992, is no longer fully reflecting on the one hand the economic realities of this world nor is it appropriate to be applicable to all sustainability challenges we currently have' (I-2). According to respondent I-6 the EU opposed the principle because it presupposes that the world is composed of developed and developing countries, a dichotomy the EU believes is used in a divisive manner in international relations. In the following citation, the EU justifies why CBDR is not an appropriate burden-sharing principle for a global sustainable development agenda:

[CBDR] is very much anchored in this static vision of developed versus developing countries. The interpretation of who are developing countries is, to be frank, slightly outdated because for instance it would include you know, China, India. It is very much a principle that is not adapted to the contemporary world (I-1).

CBDR is not perceived to be an appropriate burden-sharing principle from the EU's perspective because emerging economies now strongly impacts the world economy. In another citation, the EU elaborates on why the principle was so controversial for the EU:

Well, I think it goes back to the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities [...] For us it was very important to reflect the changing nature of the world economy and changing roles and responsibilities of different groups of countries. So that was really one of the most controversial items (I-3).

A principle which distinguish between the developed and developing countries is problematic for the EU when it comes to assigning responsibility for a global sustainable development agenda. The EU seeks to overcome the perceived issues of CBDR by promoting a universal responsibility-norm for burden-sharing at the international level. Despite pressure from emerging economies and developing countries, universal responsibility in the end became a guiding principle for the 2030 Agenda. For the EU, universal responsibility is a norm which allows emerging economies to fulfil their obligations for the global sustainable development agenda while also overcoming the developed/developing country-dichotomy in international relations. The contested nature of universality at the SDGs negotiation is evident in the following citation, which also justifies EU approach for its opposition to CBDR;

There was also the whole issue of universality which was a controversial issue. And this is also on the same level as Common But Differentiated Responsibilities. Whether the goals apply to the world, or do they only apply to developing countries? And we had always said 'these are universal goals, they apply to every country every stage of development'. They apply to the EU and European countries just as much as to central-African countries for example. In a different way and in a different context but the goals are still there. The targets will sometimes be different in different regional contexts etc. But the goals are universal. They are a universal aspiration. That was hugely important but it was strongly contested by some countries in particular (I-4).

I find that the EU's emphasis on the universal responsibility-norm and its opposition to CBDR substantiates my first expectation based on the non-domination theory of justice. By emphasising that all countries are responsible for their own development, the EU argue that there should be no special category of countries responsible for the sustainable development agenda. From the EU's perspective, sustainable development highlight challenges of a global nature, which requires the shared

commitment of all countries – irrespective of country classification. To nuance burden-sharing at the international level while maintaining universal responsibility as a guiding principle, the EU proposes to assign responsibility based on capabilities. Referring to Sen (1985), *capabilities* include both the potential and power an actor has to achieve a preferred outcome. In the context of sustainable development, capabilities embrace both the ability and willingness to contribute to sustainable development (whereas the concept *capacities* mainly include abilities). The EU's approach can be summed up in the following manner: 'To deliver on the post-2015 agenda, all countries should put in place appropriate policies that will allow them to implement the SDGs according to their respective capabilities' (D-7).

Historical responsibility

In the two following sections I will analyse the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development by utilising one forward-looking and one backward-looking approach to justice. In this section I will see if the second expectation based on Butt's backward-looking approach to justice is substantiated. To substantiate this expectation, the EU's approach will need to be characterised by a preparedness to take responsibility for historical inequalities its member states might have contributed towards. I here recall Butt's argument that those living in developed countries possess significant rectificatory duties to many of those in less developed countries because historical injustice have lasting effects on structures of injustice (2009, p. 17).

Historical responsibility and sustainable development

Historical responsibility was a contested issue at the SDGs negotiation. The discussion related to whether past emissions should matter in allocating responsibility for the environmental aspect of the 2030 Agenda and if the idea of historical responsibility should extend to other areas of development. As stated by respondent I-4, a particularly controversial topic was how to combine the MDGs with goals on environmental sustainability. The 2030 Agenda seeks to complete what the MDGs did not achieve. *Transforming Our World* state that the MDGs provided an important framework for the new global development agenda (United Nations, 2015b, §16). However, the SDGs are not perceived to be a direct continuation of the MDGs. One important change is the recognition of how social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of our planet's natural resources (United Nations, 2015b, §33). This insight stems from the

1992 and 2012 Rio Conferences. *The Future We Want* emphasised the need to 'further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognising their interlinkages, so as to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions' (United Nations, 2012, §3). I understand the discussion on historical responsibility at the SDGs negotiation to be a high-stakes discussion for the EU. The EU is a regional organisation with mostly developed countries as member states. It is evident that the EU historically have contributed to historical injustice from the privileged role its member states have had in the world economy. In addition, seven of the EU member states have a colonial past.

The EU does not argue at the EU have a special responsibility based on the historical inequalities its member states might have contributed towards. The EU actively spoke against assigning responsibility based on historical inequalities for the 2030 Agenda (I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-7). It was evident from the interviews that the respondents did not want to talk about historical responsibility when reflecting on the EU's role in international relations. In the official EU documents, historical events are not referred to as a manner of allocating responsibility for sustainable development. In many instances in the primary sources the EU omits referring to historical responsibility where it arguably would be natural to mention. For example, in the following citation:

Commitments must be made by all, reflecting the universality of the agenda as well as the different and evolving capacities and changes in the global economy. The EU and its Member States are ready to play their part in full, including through international engagement and domestic implementation. We also expect other partners – including new and emerging actors – to contribute their fair share. We need to frame our commitments based on a shared responsibility to address global challenges (D-8).

In accordance with Butt's theory, it would be natural for the EU to mention that commitments towards other countries may also stem from contributions to historical inequality. Also, in the following citation, the EU omits referring to historical responsibility; 'You have China, India, other parts of the world who have very polluting industries, including agriculture, mining or whatever [...] I mean times have changed' (I-3). Here, the EU does not mention how developed countries historically have had the highest GHG emissions. Rather, the EU emphasise the

responsibility of emerging economies. It is evident that the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development does not substantiate the second expectation based on the theory of Butt in *Rectifying International Injustice*, where responsibility is viewed in terms of fulfilling rectificatory duties (2009, p. 17). According to respondent I-6 the EU disagrees with the 'the G77 and China's' claim that developed countries (and countries with a colonial past in particular), have a special responsibility to aid developing countries. The EU does find its colonial past and historical contribution to GHG emissions to entail rectificatory duties in the context of the 2030 Agenda. This leads the EU to proclaim that 'the G77 and China' do not fully recognise that challenges of a global character are the responsibility of all countries (I-6).

The SDGs aspires to be; 'integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental' (United Nations, 2015b, §5). According to respondent I-5 the EU do not view the claim of historical responsibility as unjust per se but does not find it to be an appropriate concept in the context of the 2030 Agenda. As stated by another respondent (I-4) it was natural to refer to historical responsibilities in the context of the MDGs, where the purpose was for developed countries to address social and economic development in developing countries. A dilemma for the EU in deciding its position for the SDGs negotiation was how to integrate issues of a global character (which most notably is environmental degradation) with the more local and less definable challenges of social and economic development (I-4). It would also be easier to assign responsibility for historical events if the 2030 Agenda was a clear-cut environmental agreement (I-4). It is possible to quantify GHG emissions and assigning responsibility to the actors who were responsible for these emissions (which corresponds to a *liability model of responsibility*). However, the EU claims that quantifying obligations would not be possible for a broader sustainable development agenda, which includes less definable and measurable areas of development (I-4). In general, it is difficult to evaluate which actors are responsible for the broad and diverse issues a sustainable development agenda includes.

Historical responsibility and the CBDR-principle

The discussion over the CBDR principle at the SDGs negotiation was largely about if historical inequalities should matter when allocating responsibility for sustainable development. CBDR assigns responsibility based on historical contributions to environmental degradation. CBDR

was not only controversial for the EU in relation to the discussion on the responsibility of emerging economies (see section *Capabilities over Common But Differentiated Responsibilities*). The principle from the 1992 Rio Declaration was also controversial for the debate over historical responsibility. At the SDGs negotiation, there was disagreement between the EU and 'the G77 and China' specifically on whether or not a reference to CBDR should be included in the 2030 Agenda. Developing countries did not want to move away from the idea of historical responsibility embedded in the CBDR-principle. Developed countries on the other hand, argued that CBDR was not a suitable burden-sharing principle for the SDGs. A reference to historical events and their implications for current obligations are implicit in *Transforming Our World* and *The AAAA* through the inclusion of CBDR.

The EU did not want a reference to historical responsibility to be part of the SDGs. For the EU, the issue of combining a development agenda with an environmental agenda for the SDGs was one of the reasons the EU opposed CBDR as a guiding principle for the 2030 Agenda. The EU claims that a principle which addresses historical responsibility is not appropriate in this context. In multiple instances, the EU claims that CBDR originally only was intended to address environmental degradation concerns, as it was in the 1992 *Rio Declaration* (I-2, I-3, I-5, I-7). As stated by respondent I-3, the burden-sharing principle is perceived as problematic by the EU when it is expanded to the areas of social and economic development. A wider interpretation might suggest that the responsibility to address one aspect of sustainable development- the environmental aspect, also might entail historical responsibility for social and economic development (I-3). An example the EU provides, is that developing countries might claim that the EU has a responsibility to ensure education or health services in developing countries stemming from their contributions to historical inequality, by referring to the CBDR-principle (I-3). As stated by respondent I-4, the EU's underlying approach is that; 'developed countries have to want to help developing countries but cannot be responsible for everything'. By this citation, the EU clarify that while there are certain responsibilities to aid developing countries, there obligations do not extend to all areas of development. According to respondent I-3 it was important for the EU to recall *all* the 27 principles of *The Rio Declaration*, not emphasising or expanding on certain ones. Principles in *The Rio Declaration* include but are not limited to; respecting state sovereignty in development issues and giving special priority to the needs of developing countries, especially the

LDCs (United Nations, 1992, §2 and §6). The EU summarises its approach to the Principles of the Rio Declaration in the following manner:

The EU will continue to respect the Principles of the Rio Declaration of 1992. Given that the scope of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is limited to global environmental degradation, the concept is not useful to address the wider challenges of the post-2015 framework. At the same time, the EU stands ready to engage with its partners on the concrete implications and applications of universality and differentiation for all countries for the full scope of the framework [...] (D-5).

While the EU sought to respect all Principles of the *Rio Declaration*, the EU did not want to widen the interpretation of CBDR beyond the original definition in *The Rio Declaration* when it comes to a global sustainable development agenda. For the EU, CBDR represents a limited agenda. The 2030 Agenda needs to be founded on more encompassing norms to represent a broad sustainable development agenda. These findings further go to not substantiate the second expectation. While CBDR assigns *differentiated responsibilities* – important for the conception mutual recognition, it does so in a manner which diverges from Butt's backward-looking approach.

Responsibility for current structures of injustice

To substantiate the third expectation, the EU's approach will need to be characterised by a claim that current structures of injustice determine responsibility for sustainable development. I here recall I. M. Young's argument that the best way of taking responsibility for historical injustices is to organise policies in a manner which prevents deepening inequality at the international level.

The EU's present-day responsibilities

As stated by respondent I-6, for the EU, the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs created a complete change conceptually and philosophically when it came to responsibility. *Transforming Our World* does not explicitly assign blame to specific actors for historical causes of structural problems such as climate change and pollution (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 20). Neither does the outcome document imply that historical events have implications for responsibility (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 20). Instead, foreign policy actors adopted a resolution with forward-looking obligations (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 23). As evidenced in

section *Historical responsibility*, historical responsibility was a contentious issue at the SDGs negotiation, especially between EU and 'the G77 and China'. While 'the G77 and China' argued that developed countries have a special responsibility toward developing countries, the EU perceives responsibility in a different manner. As claimed by respondent I-1, emerging economies' emphasis on historical responsibility is a matter of proposing a different world view than the EU, a world view which maintains the distinction between developed and developing countries. An implication of upholding this dichotomy is to uphold historical responsibility as a manner of assigning responsibilities in international relations.

For the EU, contributions to historical injustice does not necessarily equal present obligations. As stated by respondent I-7, it is by taking responsibility for sustainable development today the EU shows consideration of the historical inequalities its member states might have contributed towards. The Millennium Declaration stated poverty eradication as one of its primary objectives (United Nations, 2000, §11) and for the EU, poverty eradication remains one of the biggest global challenges today (I-6). As stated by respondent I-4, one way of preventing inequalities today is therefore to fulfil the unfinished objectives of the MDGs. Special attention to the LDCs should be a priority for the SDGs to fulfil these objectives. 'Fragile and conflict-affected states require special attention and sustained international engagement to achieve sustainable development', a Conclusion states (D-4). The EU propose that a differentiated responsibility for the LDCs without referring to historical responsibility represents a just burden-sharing agreement.

The EU proposes various principles which are founded on the belief in present-day obligations instead of historical responsibility. As claimed by respondent I-1, the EU proclaims that the universal responsibility-norm – alongside norms with a similar normative underpinning, such as consideration of respective capabilities, should be guiding principles in assigning responsibility for sustainable development. The EU claims that emerging economies in particular should increase their commitments to address global challenges. Emerging economies are the host of many polluting industries. Since 1850, the US and the EU member states have been the biggest emitters of GHGs (Gütschow, Jeffery, & Gieseke, 2017). However, emissions from emerging economies have increased significantly in recent years. In 2002 China surpassed the EU's emission levels. In 2005 China surpassed the emission levels

of the US. In addition, India is the fourth biggest emitter of GHGs today (Gütschow et al., 2017). Given the increased GHG emissions by China and India in particular, the EU perceives it as just if responsibility for the environmental aspect of sustainable development is allocated based on current levels of emissions. For the EU, the PPP is an example of a useful norm for guiding sustainable development policies in the future (I-6, D-7, D-8). The PPP does not refer to historic responsibility in assigning responsibility. The PPP is 'the commonly accepted practice that those who produce pollution should bear the costs of managing it to prevent damage to human health or the environment' (The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2018). For this principle; 'states should bear the costs of managing climate change and its adverse effects in proportion to their share of cumulative global greenhouse gas emissions' (Page, 2013, p. 237). Included in the 1992 *Rio Declaration*, the PPP is the most frequently invoked principle to allocate the costs of abating climate change (von Lucke, 2017, p. 13). Because the PPP allocates responsibility based on levels of GHG emissions, I find the EU's support of this principle to substantiate the expectation based on I. M. Young's theory.

In substantiating the third expectation, the EU claims that it is not necessarily the same actors who contributed to historical injustice who should be assigned responsibility for global challenges today. In the context of a broad sustainable development agenda it is of higher importance to organise collective action for implementing the global goals than it is to assign responsibility for prior contributions to historical injustice. In line with I. M. Young's social connection model, the EU have a forward-looking approach to responsibility. Like I. M. Young, the EU proclaims that the concern for contemporary challenges should weigh heavier than proving liability for historical events. The predominant sense of responsibility is often implicitly stated in the EU's argumentation.

Forward-looking responsibilities and the CBDR-norm

CBDR co-exists with burden-sharing norms of a different normative underpinning in *Transforming Our World*. Examples are universal responsibility, the PPP and respective capabilities. This entails that there is less reference to historical responsibility and repeated reference to forward-looking responsibilities in the 2030 Agenda. This is the same approach to responsibility for sustainable development the EU promoted during the negotiation process. By opposing CBDR as a

guiding principle, the EU wanted the responsibility-debate at the SDGs negotiation to focus more on shared global challenges than historical injustice. The EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development is more in line with I. M. Young's social connection model of responsibility than Butt's backward-looking model of responsibility. In the following citation, one respondent explains why the EU opposed CBDR:

What 'the G77 and China' wanted was a very specific reference to CBDR saying there are developed and developing countries, this is the list and developed countries have a responsibility in providing aid to developing countries to implement. Which again, there is no rejection of that responsibility. What we wanted to say is that we all have a responsibility and it is a shared one. The nuance is, it is not a responsibility which each and every one has but it is a global responsibility [...] In the context of Rio, in the context of the negotiations which we have, it is used in a divisive manner (I-1).

According to respondent I-2, the EU always accepted that the SDGs was going to include a reference to CBDR, given the standing this principle has amongst other foreign policy actors participating in the UNGA. For the EU, it was important to give CBDR little room to have actual policy significance in the 2030 Agenda. As stated by respondent I-5 the EU is satisfied that CBDR is only referred to as a formal reference to *The Rio Declaration* in the 2030 Agenda, separate from the universal responsibility-norm. For the EU, a forward-looking model is appropriate for a sustainable development agenda and in the context of environmental protection. At the SDGs negotiation, the environment was emphasised by the EU as an issue which requires a transformative approach to responsibility. As maintained by respondent I-2 the EU emphasised the need to 'broaden the environmental aspect of the agenda'. As stated by respondent I-3, the EU ' [...] wanted strong goals – and visible goals, related to the environment. But then we wanted also to mainstream the environment throughout the whole agenda'. Environmental concerns relate to all other aspects of development, because when one talks about development there is also a need to consider the environmental risk (I-3, I-4). The EU promoted an approach which addressed environmental degradation through the universal responsibility-norm instead of the CBDR-model for burden-sharing at the SDGs negotiation.

Concluding remarks to this chapter

In this chapter, I presented my empirical analysis and found that two of the three previously formulated theoretical expectations were substantiated. Considering that the 2030 Agenda is a non-binding resolution, it is voluntary to make commitments for the sustainable development agenda. At the same time, the EU encourages emerging economies to recognise a moral obligation for sustainable development, which stems from emerging economies approaching similar capacities as the EU. The EU's approach is in line with the first expectation, based on the non-domination theory of Pettit. At the same time, the EU perceives that responsibilities should be differentiated based on different actors' privilege in the current system of international relations. The EU actively speaks against assigning responsibility based on historical inequalities in the context of sustainable development and instead emphasise the shared responsibility of all countries. The EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development is a forward-looking model of responsibility which differentiates obligations based on respective capabilities, as opposed to a backward-looking model which allocates responsibility based on contributions to historical injustice. While the 2030 Agenda is a non-binding resolution, this nonetheless substantiates the third expectation based on I. M. Young's social connection model of responsibility. For the EU, it is important that a global sustainable development agenda should reflect the shared responsibility for global challenges and not imply differentiation based on historical events. In the next chapter I will discuss what the implications of this particular approach might be. Before I do, I will comment on some additional aspects of the EU's role at the negotiation for the SDGs, which emerged through the empirical research.

The EU's role at the SDGs negotiation

The EU's active participation in the negotiation processes for the SDGs clearly express a desire to influence which norms a global sustainable development agenda should be founded on. From my analysis, it emerged that there were deep divides between the EU and 'the G77 and China' on the normative question of responsibility. At the same time, the EU expressed satisfaction with the substance of the 2030 Agenda and the overall role of the EU in the negotiation process. The EU was not able to reach consensus on all issues it proposed for the agenda (I-6, I-7). This included a strong emphasis and clear ambitions to achieve gender equality and the emphasis on good governance (I-1, I-6). However, as maintained by respondent I-6, the EU believed it were

firm on certain principles from the beginning of the negotiation process, which are now reflected in the 2030 Agenda. From the perspective of respondent I-4 it was important for the EU to highlight the inter-linkages between environmental degradation and social and economic development. According to respondent I-1, the EU was 'very happy because the EU objectively and definitely played a leading role in shaping that agreement and building ambitious bridges with partners to reach a consensus'. The SDGs negotiation was also described by respondent I-7 as an 'internal lesson for the EU' on how to cooperate inter-institutionally for an intergovernmental negotiation process on sustainable development. According to respondent I-1, the EU had a 'strong and united position' for the SDGs negotiation. In the opinion of respondent I-7, prior to the process which resulted in the 2030 Agenda, the EU viewed sustainable development primarily as an environmental issue. At the Rio+20 Conference DG-ENVIRONMENT were the department responsible for negotiating on behalf of the EU. At the SDGs negotiation, DG-ENVIRONMENT and DG-DEVCO both negotiated on behalf of the EU and the official EU position evolved from close cooperation between the Commission and the Council of the EU.

Chapter 6

Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I will discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter. The first section discusses the implications the EU's particular approach to responsibility for sustainable development would have for the structure of responsibility at the international level. The second section details in which ways this report contributes to the political sociology of the EU, the literature on burden-sharing in international relations and to the GLOBUS project. The third section presents my conclusion. Unanswered questions emerged through my empirical investigation. This chapter therefore ends with some suggestions for additional research.

Implications of the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development

The burden-sharing agreement of the 2030 Agenda is a result of a compromise between the UN member states. In the following subsections I will discuss the implications for the roles and responsibilities of different foreign policy actors, if the EU's ideal approach to responsibility for sustainable development were to be implemented. I will highlight how it may be in the interest of the EU to promote a structure of responsibility which is founded on universal responsibility and norms with a similar normative underpinning. I do not focus on the *interest dimension* of the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable

development in this report (see subsection *The normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy*). However, the question of which interests the EU had for promoting a certain structure of responsibility arises from my empirical research. The following discussion focuses on the implications the EU's approach to the normative question of responsibility would have at the international level, without engaging in the normative debate. Findings from the empirical research serve as examples to substantiate my claims.

In a GLOBUS paper, Eriksen (2016, p. 4) states that; 'people are more vulnerable to dominance in settings in which their basic interests are at stake'. I argue that this vulnerability to dominance applies to the EU today. Therefore, it may be in the EU's interest to set up systems which counters vulnerability and prevents the EU from becoming at the arbitrary will of both established and emerging actors in international relations. The EU has faced a number of internal crises and complex challenges in recent years, which threatens their established position in international relations (Bulmer & Joseph, 2016, p. 726). The weakening of the economy as a result of the eurozone-crisis has in turn resulted in less public support for political initiatives and a prioritisation of internal European affairs over international engagements (Bulmer & Joseph, 2016, p. 726). There is also a declining commitment among EU member states to reach the 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI-target. In 2005, the EU member states at the time agreed to reach the target by 2015 (OECD, 2018). However, by 2017 the EU had not fulfilled this objective (Oliveira & Zacharenko, 2018). This further goes to indicate an increased emphasis on domestic affairs over international commitments. Keijzer (2017, p. 194) claims that; 'the universal development agenda that the EU successfully pushed for reflected its understanding of what is needed for global sustainable development, yet also served to advance its own interests through burden-sharing of international cooperation with economically powerful developing countries'. The structure of responsibility the EU advocates for a global sustainable development agenda, might be in the EU's interest, in the sense that it would lessen the EU's *risk of domination* at the international level.

Opposing CBDR as a guiding principle for the 2030 Agenda

The argument *against* CBDR is key to understand the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. It reflects the emphasis on voluntary commitments and moral obligation of my first expectation based on the non-domination-conception. Given how Stalley (2018) describe CBDR as a widely accepted norm in intergovernmental environmental negotiations it is important to learn the justifications by the EU for opposing CBDR as a guiding principle for a global sustainable development agenda. The EU's opposition to CBDR was emphasised by all respondents for the SDGs negotiation. At the same time, the principle was advocated by emerging economies and most of the developing countries during the same intergovernmental negotiation process. One might ask if it is in the EU's interest to promote a structure of responsibility different from the CBDR-principle. Arguably, the implications of not having this traditional burden-sharing principle in international agreements would be significant for the roles and responsibilities of different foreign policy actors. An agenda *without* CBDR would imply a less clearly stated commitment for the EU and its member states. For example, *Transforming Our World* only explicitly states the obligations of developed countries to achieve the 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI-target (United Nations, 2015b, goal 17). Without CBDR as a guiding principle, ODA-commitments would not be assigned solely to the countries perceived to be the traditional *developed* countries. As a consequence, emerging economies might be expected to meet the 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI-target, as developing countries and the EU is today. The responsibility of developed countries is also highlighted in *Transforming Our World* in reference to SDG number 12 ('responsible consumption and production'). Here, it is stated that *developed* countries should take the lead in moving towards more sustainable consumption and production patterns (United Nations, 2015b, §28).

While CBDR in the end was included in *Transforming Our World*, it co-exists with other norms for burden-sharing in the current resolution. If the universal responsibility-norm of *Transforming Our World* existed without the CBDR-principle, responsibility for sustainable development would to a greater extent be assigned according to countries' respective *capabilities*. In the literature review, it was established that CBDR has been the guiding principle for burden-sharing in inter-governmental agreements since the 1970s. However, Stalley (2018, p. 4) indicate that

before the existence of CBDR, the outcome documents from environmental intergovernmental agreements in particular were based on principles dissimilar to CBDR. Examples are the *sovereign equality*-principle and *reciprocity between states*²³. Arguably, the structure of responsibility the EU proposed for the 2030 Agenda were modified versions of these principles. The EU emphasised the universal responsibility of all states to meet international agreed-to objectives and the moral obligation of countries with the greatest capacities to increase their commitments to the global sustainable development-agenda. In the words of respondent I-1, there is a 'moving scale of responsibilities' at the international level. The EU emphasised the 'fair share' of emerging economies in particular, who are approaching similar economic capacities as the EU considering their relatively strong economic growth in recent years (United Nations, 2018). If current capabilities should weight heavier than historical contributions to injustice, emerging economies would have to commit more clearly and specifically towards a global sustainable development agenda. As a consequence, fewer obligations would be expected from the EU.

A forward-looking approach to responsibility

The EU's distinctly forward-looking approach is also important to understand how the EU perceives responsibility for sustainable development. Given how the existing literature is unclear on the significance of historical events for allocating responsibility for sustainable development (see section *Burden-sharing norms in inter-national relations*), it is important to learn how the EU justifies its approach. The previous chapter detailed how the second expectation based on Butt's theory was not substantiated, a theory where historical events have consequences for the allocation of responsibilities. At the same time, the chapter highlighted how the third expectation based on I. M. Young's social connection model was substantiated. I. M. Young claims that there is a collective responsibility at the global level to ensure that no further systematic injustice will occur; 'Our forward-looking responsibility consists in changing the institutions and processes so that their outcomes will be less unjust' (2006, p. 123). By not substantiating the second expectation based on Butt's theory, the EU's approach to responsibility

²³ Referring to Kelsen (1944) *sovereign equality* implies a respect for the *sovereignty* of all states, which is the ability to conduct internal and external affairs without interference by other states. Referring to Keohane (1986, p. 4) *reciprocity between states* demands states to conform to generally accepted standards of behaviour (with no further obligations).

for sustainable development is less focused on historical liability and more focused on how important actors in the current system of international relations should act to achieve sustainable development.

A forward-looking approach to responsibility is reflected through the 'universal-responsibility'-norm of the 2030 Agenda. However, it might be more limited than the EU advocated during the negotiation for the SDGs. The implications of an exclusively forward-looking approach to responsibility for sustainable development would be significant for the allocation of burdens. One might therefore ask if it is in the EU's interest to promote a distinctly *forward-looking* structure of responsibility. For example, a forward-looking-model of responsibility would not hold the EU accountable for the historical injustice some of its member states might have contributed towards in light of historically being some of the largest emitters of GHGs (Gütschow et al., 2017). Guided by more 'forward-looking'-principles such as the PPP, the EU would be held accountable for its current emissions. While the EU collectively stands for a significant percentage of GHG emissions historically, emerging economies have increased their share in current emission levels (see subsection *The EU's present-day responsibilities*). With the EU's approach, instead of referring to developed countries' harmful environmental policies in the past, obligations would be aimed at countries with the greatest GHG emissions today. This structure of responsibility would in particular have implications for emerging economies with large and polluting industries, like China and India. Like the previous section argued, the EU's approach would entail a greater responsibility for emerging economies. They would be asked for similar contributions as the EU given their current capacities.

Contributions to literature

The findings of this report are relevant for all with a concern for justice and injustice at the international level, because it provides knowledge of how an important foreign policy actor view its responsibilities. However, the main contributions of this report are to the political sociology of the EU, the literature on burden-sharing and towards the GLOBUS project.

To the political sociology of the EU

Through analysing the *ideas* behind the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development, I have contributed towards a greater understanding of the normative aspect of the EU's foreign policy. This report has illustrated that it is viable to study the EU from a political sociological perspective, a field relatively new to studies of the EU (Kauppi, 2018). Norms are a precondition for understanding the behaviour of political actors within political sociology which has received little attention in contemporary studies of the EU (see section *The political sociology of the EU*). One of the ambitions of this report have therefore been to contribute towards a renewed debate about the analytical usefulness of norm-guided action in studies of the EU. In the IR-perspective of Manners (2002), the EU is perceived as a distinct normative actor in international relations. Like Sjørnsen (2017b) this report has argued that although it is widely recognised that norms influence foreign policy actors, it is important to make clear what these exact norms are.

In the study of international relations in general and particularly within the realist tradition, researchers tend to explain foreign policy actors' behaviour based on their *interests*, excluding what the sources of these interests are (Checkel, 1998). In this report, I have illustrated why an analytical focus on norm-guided action – which originated from the sociological theories of Weber and Habermas, is a relevant and important perspective on the EU in international relations. Like Ylä-Anttila and Luhtakallio (2016), I aspired through my analytical framework to study how political actors address moral questions. And by studying the EU from a political sociological perspective, this report emphasises an aspect of international relations which is not found in many traditional political science or IR-studies, namely the contestation over norms. My empirical study highlights how the concept sustainable development sparks a normative debate about responsibilities in international relations. Foreign policy actors clearly are preoccupied with how the world will look like depending on which norms we collectively choose to follow. These findings are in line with a political sociological approach and normative theories within the IR discipline.

To the literature on burden-sharing

The findings in this report are relevant for the academic debate on burden-sharing at the international level. As I have detailed in the literature review, the burden-sharing debate in the existing literature is perceived to be determined by a *developed/developing country-dichotomy* (Sachs, 2014), the relevance of historical responsibility (Stalley, 2018) and increasingly by the assertion that emerging economies challenges established positions within the current system of international relations (Abeyasinghe & Huq, 2016; Hockstetler & Milkoreit, 2015). There is a conflict between the international demand to focus on social and economic development *within* countries and the need to protect sovereign decision-making which highlights the contentious role of obligations in international politics (Bexell & Jönsson, 2017, p. 22). The empirical contribution of this report evidence how central the allocation of responsibilities was in achieving consensus for a global sustainable development agenda. Given the contentious nature of the burden-sharing debate at the negotiation for the SDGs, consensus was not achieved before the last days of inter-governmental negotiation.

In this report I have argued that the EU – by being the largest provider of ODA, is an important actor for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As the literature review indicated however, there is uncertainty regarding which norms the EU adhere to in its current development policy (see section *Sustainable development and the EU perspective*). This report highlights the EU's underlying approach for how responsibility for sustainable development should be allocated. It therefore provides an answer to 'who should bear the burden' for sustainable development from the EU perspective. Consequentially, it also details how the EU view its own role and responsibilities at the international level. The analytical framework in this report, which utilised theoretical propositions to analyse the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy, also provided a framework for nuancing the EU's approach to the question of historical responsibility. This report evidence that the EU disagrees with a traditional model of burden-sharing highlighted where developed countries primarily are expected to take responsibility for development initiatives given their historical contributions to injustice. This report highlights how the EU seek to overcome the *developed/developing country-dichotomy* in international relations and see a new role for the increasingly influential actors in international relations, the emerging economies.

To the GLOBUS project

The main contribution of this report to the GLOBUS project is to bring in new elements into the framework which were not present before, specifically the idea of historical responsibility. GLOBUS seeks to achieve a greater understanding of the normative dimension of the EU's foreign policy. Both the theoretical framework and the findings of this report contribute towards this aim. By applying theoretical propositions based on non-domination and mutual recognition to a specific empirical case, I have seen that conceptions of justice were useful to analyse the EU's approach to the issue of responsibility for sustainable development. I have nuanced the conception of non-domination by defining how its theoretical underpinnings applies to the question of responsibility. I have also nuanced the mutual recognition-conception by introducing two different types of differentiated responsibilities. One manner of differentiating responsibilities draws on I. M. Young's social connection model and has a forward-looking theory of justice. The other manner of differentiating responsibilities draws on Butt's theory in *Rectifying International Injustice* and has a backward-looking theory of justice. To my knowledge, there are no other contributors to the GLOBUS project who have utilised the conceptual framework to research the role and responsibilities of different foreign policy actors in the context of sustainable development. Nor have any other contributions to the project addressed the EU's approach to the question of historical responsibility. The conceptual framework of this report is therefore relevant for GLOBUS participants (or scholars with corresponding research interests) who will conduct research on a similar topic in the future.

Conclusion

This report has provided a richer understanding of the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development. For the EU, the structure of responsibility embedded in the 2000 UN development agenda and the MDGs does not reflect how responsibility for contemporary global challenges should be allocated. While the MDGs were efficient as a *North-South aid-agenda*, a sustainable development agenda requires a transformative approach to responsibility. This led the EU to promote a universal responsibility-norm as a guiding principle for the 2030 Agenda, which focuses on the shared responsibility of all countries for contemporary global challenges. At the same time, the EU opposed the CBDR-norm as a guiding principle during the intergovernmental negotiation for the SDG. CBDR was advocated by many developing

countries and emerging economies. This case study has evidenced that the allocation of responsibilities the concept sustainable development entails, continues to be interpreted differently by different foreign policy actors. It is also evident from this case study that foreign policy actors interpret the significance of historical inequalities differently, which increases the contention over the just allocation of burdens. The EU's normative reflections about sustainable development corresponds with a *value rational* ideal type (see subsection *The interpretative sociological tradition*). It also illustrates how the EU has considered different validity claims in the intergovernmental negotiation for the SDGs (see subsection *An Habermasian approach to morality*). First, the EU disagrees with emerging economies that developed countries have a special responsibility for the LDCs (a validity claim to truth). Second, the universal responsibility-norm of the 2030 Agenda reflects a renewed commitment towards shared global challenges (a validity claim to normative correctness). Third, these claims reflects the EU's subjective position about responsibility for sustainable development (a validity claim to truthfulness).

The EU proposes a structure of responsibility which would have broad implications for the roles and responsibilities of different foreign policy actors in a global sustainable development agenda. In the data material the EU explicitly argues for a burden-sharing agreement which is more adapted to the current system of international relations, where emerging economies should recognise their moral obligation to increase their international commitments. What is more implicit is that the EU argues for a lesser role of historical events in allocating responsibility. Consequentially, the EU argues for a lesser responsibility for itself. If the EU's approach to burden-sharing was to be realised, it would have wide implications for the structure of responsibility at the international level and impact different actors disproportionately. The EU's ideal burden-sharing agreement would entail a greater responsibility for emerging economies. These findings open for new questions about the EU's *interests* for its approach to responsibility for sustainable development, which needs to be further examined in other empirical studies. In the following subsection I will provide suggestions for further research.

Suggestions for further research

This study has emphasised the usefulness of a political sociological perspective in studies of the EU. However, there is a need for more research on the normative aspect of the EU's foreign policy. While this study has provided an empirical and conceptual contribution to the literature on burden-sharing in international relations, there is a need for more research which addresses this key normative debate in international relations. Possible new research questions could be; 'how does the EU perceive the allocation of responsibilities in the negotiation processes following up on the SDGs?' and 'which interests does the EU have in specific burden-sharing agreements?' In addition, empirical research is needed to address how other foreign policy actors view their roles and responsibilities in the context of a global sustainable development agenda. While this case study has indicated how in particular the 'G77 and China' disagrees with the EU's approach to responsibility for sustainable development, there is a need to further examine the approach of foreign policy actors other than the EU. Possible new research questions could be; 'what does foreign policy actors outside of the EU perceive as a just burden-sharing agreement?' and; 'is the universal responsibility-norm suitable as a guiding principle for a global sustainable development?' The many emerging questions that arises from this case study evidence the contentious role of burden-sharing in international relations. It also highlights the desire of many foreign policy actors in shaping a global sustainable development agenda.

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GLOBUS Reports

- 5: Sigrid Jerpstad: "Who Should Bear the Burden? The EU's Approach to Responsibility for the Sustainable Development Goals"
- 4: Vera Sofie Borgen Skjetne: "The EU as Promoter of Global Gender Justice. Combating Trafficking in the Face of the 'Migrant Crisis'"
- 3: Lea Augenstein: "The Western Argument Wins: A Postcolonial Critique of Conceptions of Global Justice as Mutual Recognition"
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- 1: Enrico Fassi and Sonia Lucarelli (eds): "The European Migration System and Global Justice: A First Appraisal"

In 2015, the UN member states agreed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The EU – which has a long history with sustainable development and ambitious goals in this field – participated actively in the negotiation process on behalf of its 28 member states. This report seeks to provide a richer understanding of the EU's role in negotiating a global sustainable development agenda. It does so by analysing the EU's approach to the question of responsibility for sustainable development. The allocation of burdens was a highly contested issue during this intergovernmental negotiation process.

The report finds that the EU promoted a universal responsibility-norm as a guiding principle for the new agenda, meaning that the shared responsibility of all countries for contemporary global challenges is emphasised. At the same time, the EU opposed principles promoted by many developing countries aimed at addressing liability for historical events. For the EU, the actors who contribute the most to injustice in the current international system should be assigned the most responsibility. It emphasised that the emerging economies in particular should recognise their moral obligation to increase their international commitments given their increasingly influential position.

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