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Time Flies but an Unfit Aircrew Does Not:

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Sustainable Development in
the EU Aviation Policy

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Abstract

Aviation policy within the European Union (EU) plays a pivotal role in shaping the aviation industry. This thesis examines the extent to which the EU's regulatory discourse effectively promotes sustainable development norms in aviation policy, focusing on the Regulation (EU) 2018/1139. Employing a multi-level Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework developed by Fairclough (1995), the study analyzes micro, meso, and macro levels of discourse through the lens of Normative Power Europe (NPE) theory by Manners (2002). The research operationalizes Van Hees' (2014) policy-guiding principles on sustainable development – *policy integration and coherence*, *protection of fundamental rights*, and *the precautionary principle*. This is done based on textual and discursive findings from the conducted CDA. The CDA results reveal that the EU's regulatory discourse is particularly effective at the micro level in promoting sustainable development norms. However, its effectiveness is significantly constrained at the meso level, likely due to the regulatory nature of the discourse, which is more applicable to policy recommendations and action plans. The macro level demonstrates stronger alignment with regulatory discourse.

Key words: aviation policy, Single European Sky, sustainable development, Normative Power Europe, European Union

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1. Introduction

“The single European sky is the most ambitious and challenging project in aviation history.”

Siim Kallas, former European Commission Vice-President for Transport
(European Commission, 2014)

In today's world, climate change is one of the biggest challenges we face. At the same time transport infrastructure is considered to be one of the main contributing factors to negatively advancing this challenge even further and aviation being on top of this infrastructure as an ever-growing industry. In other words, this means that there is a need for aviation to be environmentally and socially sustainable (Bergantino et al., 2020:1). The literature suggests that “Sustainability, based on the concept of three pillars: environment, social, economic (Stavins et al. 2003), proposes that sustainable development can only be achieved when each pillar is promoted in concert with the others” (Dimitriou and Sartzetaki, 2020:182). They also add that the defining feature of how to interpret sustainability is based on the level of welfare and well-being (ibid.).

From the 1990s, the European Union has been regulating aviation within its area while the public has seen the liberalization of the air transport sector (Dimitriou and Sartzetaki, 2020:183). The regulations in general aim to improve welfare of the public, consisting of health, safety, and efficient use of public funds. They also have a significant effect on competition which gets highlighted in the aviation industry that is, and will always be, globalized (ibid.:184). Hence this thesis argues that the aviation literature should focus more on studying the ways regulations can affect policies and airline operations. The impacts of regulations are multidimensional, but this thesis investigates the extent to which EU's regulatory discourse is promoting sustainable development in the EU aviation policy in order to reveal EU's agendas, norms and values as an aviation law enforcer and as a normative power. I will now move on to discuss the research aims and objectives of this thesis.

1.1 Research Aims and Objectives

This research entails a few different aims and objectives. Firstly, it aims to reveal the extent to which the EU is using its normative power to regulate the aviation market towards sustainability within its area and additionally to reveal specific norms that are involved in this process. It also aims to provide information about sustainable aviation in the EU for companies and other stakeholders operating in the aviation industry. The study is especially focused on the extent to which sustainable development norms are promoted in the EU regulations because for example all the airlines are mandated to operate under these regulations, and for their sustainable business development it can be useful to know how they are indirectly promoting sustainability already and what more can be done to promote it.

The *research question* will unfold as follows:

To what extent is the EU's regulatory discourse effective in the promotion of sustainable development norm in the EU aviation policy?

By addressing the EU's regulatory discourse and problematizing its ability to act as a norm entrepreneur in its promotion of sustainable development values within its aviation policy making which of critical significance to explore.

1.2 Theory

This paper uses Normative Power Europe (NPE) theory as originally introduced by Ian Manners in 2002 together with the dimensions of sustainable development as outlined by Walker et al. (2020) to examine the research question presented above. Sustainable development being a norm already on its own is a natural choice for the topic and an evident choice for combining it with the NPE theory despite the NPE literature usually overlooking sustainability. However, the application of these two frameworks together, aiming at providing insights for future research, can be seen as a theoretical objective for this thesis. Normative Power Europe as a theory also allows the research to focus on the regulatory

discourse, and the critical discourse analysis used in this piece of work is one of the most suitable methods to bring about norms and values of an actor.

1.3 Method and Material

As discussed above, critical discourse analysis is conducted on the Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 because it represents the most significant and comprehensive regulatory framework published within the EU aviation policy in recent years.

1.4 Paper Outline

The paper will have the following outline. I will first introduce the background to the topic by discussing the EU's role as an aviation law enforcer. The EU initiative and policy *Single European Sky* will be considered before moving on to discuss sustainable development in a broader, global, political context. After having an understanding of the context in which I am going to analyse the research question, I will review the existing literature on EU aviation. The literature review is organized into the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic, and environmental – because it allows us to receive a complete overview of what has been studied before, considering all the necessary perspectives in the light of this thesis. Methodology, analysis, discussion and the limitations of the research will follow.

2. Background

To get a comprehensive understanding on the topic, the background will be introduced through a presentation of the EU's role in aviation policy. Section 2.1 will outline the EU's role as an aviation law enforcer, while section 2.2. will proceed with outlining the sustainable development goals in global politics and their importance for aviation policy implementation.

2.1 EU's Role as an Aviation Law Enforcer: Single European Sky (SES)

The Single European Sky (SES), an initiative developed by the EU in 1999, is first and foremost promoting the unity and efficiency of European aviation (EP, 2023). The European Parliament (EP) states that “initiative aims to increase the efficiency of air traffic management and air navigation services by reducing the fragmentation of European airspace” (ibid.). These aims mentioned by the EP are to be completed approximately around 2030-2035 and will ideally lead to substantial benefits. As a comparison to the year 2004, EP presents specifically four outcomes: tripled airspace capacity, halved costs of air traffic management, improved safety tenfold and reduced environmental impact of aviation by 10% (EP, 2023). In other words, for airlines and for a regular passenger this would mean lower flight costs and aircraft emissions (ibid.). This narrative supports the agenda of sustainable development, which further leads this thesis to study the European aviation policy from the sustainability perspective.

The SES initiative can be divided into four main aspects, as outlined by the European Parliament: the performance scheme, the network manager, functional airspace blocks, and the SESAR – Single European Sky ATM Research (EP, 2023).

2.2 Sustainable Development in Global Politics

According to scholars Dimitriou and Sartzetaki (2020:174) sustainable development and its principles were firstly launched in the 1992 Rio International Conference that resulted in the creation of Agenda 21, a programme launched by the United Nations. According to paragraph 1.3 of the Agenda 21, it “addresses the pressing problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century. It reflects a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on development and environmental cooperation.”¹ (UNSD, 1992). Moreover, the Agenda encourages international, regional, and subregional organizations to engage themselves into the sustainable agenda (ibid.). Being one of most influential actors within the field of sustainable development, the UN launched another agenda more recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs states that this agenda is *a plan of action* for people, planet, and prosperity (UNGA, 2015). The new Agenda 2030, instead of Agenda 21, consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets (ibid.). These are based on the UN’s Millennium Development Goals and central to these Goals are human rights of all, achieving gender equality, and the empowerment of all women and girls (UNGA, 2015). They are also supporting the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic, and environmental – as I will further explain and explore in this thesis.

The EU’s role in promoting sustainable development in global politics has not been a simple one. Lightfoot and Burchell (2005:90) argue that the EU “faces a substantial challenge if it is to effectively promote the global norm of sustainable development”. Day (2003:3) brought in a new perspective into the debate on the EU’s role in promoting this norm internationally by arguing that the EU “must make sure we develop and implement sound policies at home and make them compatible with those we advocate internationally”. The quote suggests that there is a need for the internal EU policies to apply the global norms for the policies to encapsulate normative power.

The last decades have also shown that the EU’s role in sustainable development promotion has been more prominent when there has been an environmental focus (Brinkhorst, 1994:614;

¹ Here to be noted is that the original agenda is outdated and “the pressing problems of today” may not quite be the same in the moment of writing this thesis but the citation demonstrates the starting point of sustainable development in global politics.

Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005:89). Nonetheless, sustainable development is more than the environment and these aspects will be discussed further in the next section where I apply this norm into the aviation policy of the EU by exploring the existing scholarly landscape on the topic.

3. Literature Review: Emerging Scholarly Landscape on Sustainable Aviation

This section will outline how sustainable aviation has been studied in the existing literature. The review is divided into four parts – three of them exploring the sustainable development norms brought up in European aviation literature – henceforth the sections are also organized accordingly, covering all the dimensions of sustainable development.

3.1 Social Dimension of Sustainable Development in the Aviation Industry

The literature shows that one way to study the social dimension of EU aviation policy is to focus on key indicators such as *human equality* and *employee equal opportunities* (Dimitriou and Sartzetaki, 2020:174).

There are several different approaches to study these indicators. One approach is to research human rights on passenger and individual level. Prezelj (2015) studies arguments against and for body scanners on European airports. The arguments for said scanners improve the security in Europe as they can detect objects that are not found by traditional scanners. It was also added that x-ray scanning does not cause a health risk to the person scanned (ibid.:153). These two arguments portray two aspects for studying the social dimension of EU aviation policy – human safety and health. This was even supported by Enerstvedt (2017) who highlights the need for transparent and accountable security procedures that respect fundamental human rights.

Arguments against the body scanners entailed three main concerns, namely those of the violation of privacy as a human right, violation of other human rights and threat to health of passengers (Prezelj, 2015:154). These antagonist perspectives handle fundamentally the same aspects as the arguments for the scanners.

Another way to study the social dimension of sustainable development – including human rights and health – is to concentrate on aircrew as employees. The topic of aircrew fatigue is a

critical concern in the aviation industry, impacting both the safety of flights and the well-being of aviation personnel. The academic literature extensively examines the role of aircrew fatigue, focusing on the efforts to mitigate its effects through comprehensive frameworks and policies (Drongelen et al., 2013; Rangan et al., 2020; Åkerstedt et al., 2021). However, I argue that what has not been studied in-depth enough is the discourse on the aircrew fatigue in the European context. The aviation industry includes not just the aircrew but also many other occupations. Academic literature underscores the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, including inadequate facilities, lack of trained staff, and discriminatory practices (Prabandari et al., 2021).

What seems to be common for the literature on the social dimension of sustainable development in European aviation is that there are two main perspectives for studying: working conditions of the aircrew and the passenger rights' perspective. Something that connects both perspectives, is that they study the fundamental rights of people.

3.2 Economic Dimension of Sustainable Development in the Aviation Industry

Aviation policy plays an increasingly important role for the functioning of the global economy, as it is important for contributing to global GDP, enhancing world connectivity and supporting employment opportunities at an European and international scale which is of rising importance in today's fast paced and globalized world.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, air transport has become one of the world's most dominant industries of discussion in the scholarly arena. Aviation policy is a pivotal component of the global transportation network facilitating the promotion of global welfare standards and economic growth. Furthermore, aviation constitutes an important direct and indirect employer through facilitating the expansion of global trade endeavours and providing the resources for travel opportunities worldwide (Upham, 2003). The field of Sustainable Aviation policy covers significant trends and issues relating to sustainability and aviation from a broad variety of academic, industrial and political perspectives. It sets out the

predominant contemporary environmental, social and economic considerations that are associated with aviation policymaking (ibid).

Stamolampros (2022:1) investigates “if general economic conditions influence aviation safety across the whole sector”. The relationship between aviation accidents and incidents involving US airlines is compared with fuel prices, stock market volatility, industrial production growth, and treasury bill rates (ibid.). However, these terms are used in the ‘hard’ economic language and are not as relevant in terms of sustainable development, despite there is an indication to sustainable development in the study with the central focus on safety that is part of the fundamental rights.

3.3 Environmental Dimension of Sustainable Development in the Aviation Industry: Towards Greener Aviation

In recent years, the aerospace industry is facing new challenges in managing sustainable development. From an instrumental perspective, eco-friendly business models should strengthen operations efficiency and improve companies' reputations while at the same time creating conditions for stronger financial performance (Gangie et al, 2022). For instance, scholars make reference to concepts such as “green transport” as a new concept and initiative to support sustainable economic development without sacrificing the local and global needs of the environment in the policymaking process (Sarkar, 2012:1). This integrated approach that has now been proposed within the literature can be effectively utilized to harmonize the system processes that co-constitute the Green Aviation Transport system and create opportunities for the future of aviation policy.

Additionally, it has been suggested by pertinent research that aviation’s emission levels need to be constantly monitored and evaluated through the following just mitigation and adaptation measures to facilitate Green Aviation development. This can only be achieved only by collective efforts from a plethora of policy streams such as the field of aerodynamics in aircraft design and manufacturing, investigation of alternative and greener fuel sources such as bio-energy and enhancing the energy efficiency in engines. What is more, route optimization research could enhance network development and efficient air traffic management. However, it has been established within the scholarly debate that the above can

only be achieved effectively and holistically through the implementation of coercive legislative procedures and sustainable economic measures and standards (Sarkar, 2012:5). To name a few, big global airlines such as KLM and United Airlines have already begun the integration of the sustainability energy field into their operations, demonstrating significant reductions in CO₂ emissions which provide real-life, case study indications for significant advancements in the aviation industry towards a greener aviation (Staples, 2018).

According to the most recent development in the European Union regulation landscape, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) has been most recently passed by the European Commission in 2023, which requires all large companies and institutions to regularly report their provisions on meeting the standards of key social, environmental and governance risk that they face in their sustainability policy making in line with the European Green Deal implementation through a sustainability taxonomy system. To achieve this companies have to report their standards guided by the provisions provided and embedded in the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) document. The aims of these policy development is to facilitate the green transition and achieve a coverage of a full range of environmental, social, and governance issues, including that of climate change, welfare policy and human rights (European Commission, 2024).

Interestingly, studies conducting an empirical analysis of sustainability reporting in the aerospace industry have been scarce within the scholarly literature, which is a dimension this paper wants to remedy and address, in light of the most recent development in the EU and international context, as well as the global expectations and pressures that have been places on companies to enhance their effectiveness and better drive their moral compass in their green sustainability policy making through increasing their eco-efficiency standards.

Overall, it can be established from the reviewed literature that the aviation industry is currently facing a state of emergency, perplexed by the COVID-19 pandemic and current wars worldwide, while the substantial environmental challenges of climate change, coupled with recent advances in technological innovation and operational improvements, and regulatory measures are increasing the need to drive progress towards sustainable development. Henceforth, a continued investment in greener technological practices is deemed pivotal to counter the negative impacts of environmental degradation caused by destructive aviation

policy and contribute unilaterally to the pursuit of global sustainable development goal in the pursuit of just welfare policy in aviation.

3.4 Unveiling the Research Gap

A question arises: If the norm of sustainable development is usually studied by focusing on a certain dimension of it in the existing research, how can we get a more holistic understanding of sustainable development's role in the aviation industry? Walker and Cook (2009:378) introduce the concept of sustainable aviation, and additionally encourage the interconnectedness of the three dimensions: "While bringing considerable economic benefits, growth of the aviation sector is also likely to lead to greater adverse social and environmental impacts. To address this, sustainable aviation policy is framed as a 'balanced strategy'. While this emphasizes the economic benefits of the aviation sector, it also aims to address the environmental and social impacts that may arise from its expansion." The reviewed literature shows that there is a clear gap of what is lacking in the research field of sustainable development and aviation industry. Sustainable development has not really been studied extensively in the European aviation context because the EASA is conducting plenty of research and assessments on regulations themselves.

4. Theoretical Framework

This section will outline the theoretical framework the thesis uses to answer the question *To what extent is the EU's regulatory discourse effective in the promotion of sustainable development norm in the EU aviation policy?* Due to the nature of the question, two frameworks are essential when analysing the research problem later in this thesis – Normative Power Europe (NPE) as defined by Ian Manners (2008) and the conceptualization of sustainable development outlined by Walker et al (2020). I will first start off by explaining the three necessary tenets of NPE theory.

4.1 Normative Power Europe (NPE)

A theory originally developed by Ian Manners in 2002, Normative Power Europe (NPE) has been traditionally applied for studying EU external relations (Jenichen, 2022:1299). In short, the NPE theory holds that “the EU is distinctive from traditional powers due to its normative character” (Forsberg, 2011:1186; Jenichen, 2022:1299). Norms and values the EU is prioritizing according to the literature are peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and finally its external relations with the rest of the world while aiming for greater legitimacy and power-building (Jenichen, 2022:1299; Manners, 2002:244).

The normative character of the EU is supported by Forsberg (2011) too. He mentions that one way to define a normative power is to “say that it obeys norms such as international law or various conventional rules and principles such as multilateralism” (Forsberg, 2011:1193). The question is asked: Does the EU behave according to international norms? (ibid.). Forsberg (2011) confirms that the EU does respect international norms most of the time, and this can be used as an initial assumption in the analysis.

Later on Manners (2008:55) also aimed to “examine the constitutive principles of the EU and how they become promoted as aims and objectives of the EU in world politics”. Similarly, this thesis studies the underlying norms of the EU and how they have been applied to the regulatory discourse in terms of sustainable development, specifically focusing on aviation policy as a case study. However, as mentioned earlier, Manners’ work is fully focused on

explaining the external relations of the EU but recently scholars have been applying his theory onto the internal politics as well.

Above I listed some of the norms the EU prioritizes as a normative power actor (Sicurelli, 2016). However, based on the existing literature I reviewed for this study, I noticed that NPE research, when focusing on human rights, is mostly about direct human rights such as LGBTI communities (Swiebel, 2009; Mos, 2013; Jenichen, 2022), but very little to none of the previous research pointed out that human rights occur in different forms. Therefore, I argue that sustainable development, which also part of the human rights field and vice versa, deserves more attention in the theoretical framework of Normative Power Europe. Some studies have investigated the environmental dimension of sustainable development together with NPE, but the holistic view of sustainable development together with NPE remains incomplete.

Forsberg (2011) explores Manners' work on the theory and explains Manners' four different mechanisms for exercising normative power: by persuasion, by invoking norms, by shaping discourse, and by leading through example. Normative power, defined by Manners, is "the ability to shape conceptions of 'normal'" (Manners, 2002:252). This definition will be applied in this thesis too.

One of the mechanisms deserves more attention in light of this thesis – *shaping the discourse of what is normal*. Although this mechanism can be seen as a normative end in itself, it should also be seen as a "potentially effective form of normative power" (Forsberg, 2011:1197). The mechanism is important to understand in this paper because the hypothesis, as mentioned in the section 1, assumes that norms of sustainable development shape the regulatory discourse of the EU aviation policy to a great extent. However, this is still to be confirmed later in the analysis.

4.2 Operationalizing Sustainable Development

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, sustainable development can be divided into three pillars: environment, social, and economic (Walker et al., 2020). Each pillar includes different criteria of what and how to measure sustainability. At this point it is good to note that all these dimensions are interacting with each other, meaning that there is some overlap when it comes

to analyzing the dimensions. Dimitriou and Sartzetaki (2020:175) explain this in their work and based on this, figure 1. below illustrates the interaction as follows:

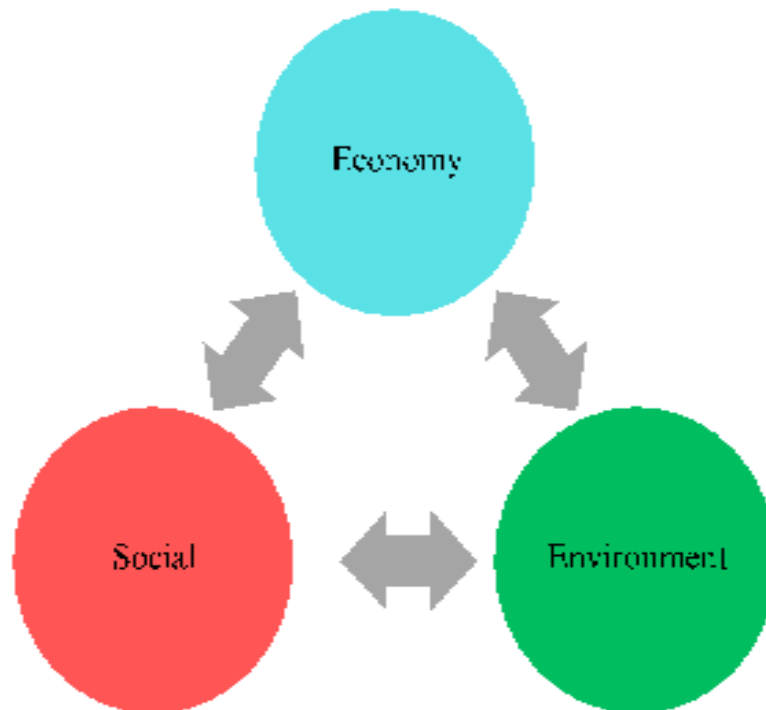


Figure 1. The interplay of different dimensions of sustainable development.

Sustainable development is also strongly shaped by the discourse, as recognized by Lightfoot and Burchell (2005:77): “The way in which issues relating to sustainable development are constructed, interpreted, discussed and analysed holds significant consequences for the type of policies that will emerge as a part of sustainability strategy”. The scholars base this argument on the work of Dryzek (1997) and add that “Hence the language of sustainable development, and the ability to influence that language and the debates and interactions that accompany it, provide a significant weapon in shaping the parameters of environmental discourse more generally, and the nature of responsibilities that will ultimately accompany it” (Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005:78). This shows that sustainable development is conceptualized usually in discourse and the effectiveness of sustainable development norm promotion can be examined by using discourse analysis.

4.2.1 The EU's Policy-Guiding Principles of Sustainable Development

After presenting this interplay of the three dimensions of sustainable development above, a few questions arise: How can these dimensions be studied effectively within the scope of this thesis? What is effective promotion of sustainable development? Van Hees (2014:66) brings up the policy-guiding principles formulated by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy that can be seen as *tools* that should help the EU to achieve sustainable development². Since the Strategy is not extensive in explaining these principles, this paper supports Van Hees' (2014) work on the topic. I will now briefly present some of the core principles as outlined by Van Hees (*ibid.*).

4.2.1.1 Policy Integration and Policy Coherence

The principle of policy integration requires the EU decision-making to “‘take into account’ all sustainability-related policy objectives” (Van Hees, 2014:66). This means that “policies should be ‘coherent and mutually reinforce each other’” (*ibid.*). In other words, the principle entails that the objectives a single policy has, should not be undermined by other policies but they should rather promote them. As an example, the EU competition policy is mentioned since it has clearly experienced a policy integration reform when compared to the past – before being focused strictly on its own policy agenda of consumer welfare and nowadays taking into account both consumer welfare together with environmental benefits (*ibid.*:66-67). Impact assessments are perceived as an important tool for policy integration, and these include three criteria: effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence.

4.2.1.2 The Polluter Pays Principle

This principle is concerned with the price matching with real costs to ‘society of consumption’ and ‘production activities’, in which the ‘polluter’ should pay for the damage they are causing to human health and the environment by using a product (Van Hees, 2014:68). Essential here is to note that this is a principle of allocating costs instead of reducing the pollution levels into certain ideals (*ibid.*).

² Following the theory of NPE, in addition to being a norm, sustainable development is an objective to be achieved as demonstrated in the figure 2.

4.2.1.3 The Precautionary Principle and the Taking of Preventive Action

The precautionary principle is a significant part of the EU's environmental policy and plays a major role when "a policy decision must be taken and if there is scientific uncertainty about the risks to public health which stem from that decision" (Van Hees, 2014:68-69).

4.2.1.4 The Principle of Fundamental Rights

According to Van Hees (2014), this principle deals with the UN's Fundamental Rights.

4.3 The Interplay of NPE and Sustainable Development: The Norms in Sustainable Aviation

Manners (2002:242) recognizes that there are five core norms that are constituting the EU's normative basis, all of them within the EU laws and policies comprising 'the *acquis communautaire* and *acquis politique*'. These five norms are *peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and human rights* – as presented in section 4.1. Nevertheless, these are not the only norms introduced by Manners (2002). He is suggesting four minor norms 'within the constitution and practices of the EU': *social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance* (Manners, 2002:242-243). All these norms can be found gathered below in the figure 2.

<i>Founding Principles</i>	<i>Tasks and Objectives</i>	<i>Stable Institutions</i>	<i>Fundamental Rights</i>
Liberty	Social solidarity	Guarantee of democracy	Dignity
Democracy	Anti-discrimination	Rule of law	Freedoms
Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms	Sustainable development	Human rights	Equality
Rule of law		Protection of minorities	Solidarity
			Citizenship
			Justice
Treaty base – set out in art. 6 of the TEU	Treaty base – set out in arts. 2 of TEC and TEU, arts. 6 and 13 of TEC	Copenhagen criteria – set out in the conclusions of the June 1993 European Council	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

Figure 2. *The EU's normative basis as presented by Manners (2002:243).*

At the time of Manners' publication in 2002, the minor norms were contested to some extent but for the purposes of this thesis, it should be noted that already back in 2002 the norm of sustainable development became important after the Rio Earth Summit which made sustainable development to be included in the Treaty of Amsterdam (Manners, 2002:243). This can also be found in the Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) and in the Article 6 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community (TEC).

Lightfoot and Burchell (2005) studied the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and questioned how the EU operationalized sustainable development and secondly, whether the EU represents a normative power in the field of sustainable development. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Article 6 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (ToA) includes sustainable development, and it states that "the promotion of sustainable development must be integrated into the definition and implementation of all EU policies" (Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005:78). Their study also shows that the EU has "a strategic interest in shaping how the norm of sustainable development is understood in global policy terms, and that action is taken via

multilateral agreements to prevent damage to the Union's economic competitiveness” (Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005:78; Baker, 2000:308-309).

Today it can be argued that the norm of sustainable development has become more important than ever throughout industries, but in NPE and sustainable development literature the EU aviation policy remains understudied, and thus, it is not possible to apply a specific existing framework or methodology for studying the research question. Instead, I will next elucidate how I am going to carry out the analysis methodologically.

5. Methods: Evaluating Sustainable Aviation Policy in the EU

Having laid the foundation for the theoretical framework of the thesis, I will now explain the methodological toolbox that will guide the examination of the main research question and the analysis of sustainable development norms within the realm of EU aviation policy. This section will begin by outlining the ontological and epistemological premises of the paper. It will proceed by comparing different methods and explaining why the chosen method provides the most suitable way to study and answer the research question. I will continue by discussing the research design and the materials used for data collection, and finally conclude by presenting the strengths and limitations behind critical discourse analysis.

Before outlining the epistemology and ontology that will explain this paper's stance, I want to add that the approach this qualitative study takes, is a deductive one in which I aim to confirm my hypothesis stated in section 1 (Bryman, 2016:21).

5.1 Epistemological and Ontological Considerations: Constructivist-Interpretivist Worldview

Social sciences have experienced an interpretive turn over the last decades (Yanow, 2009:429). As it can be deduced from the research question, this paper has a constructivist-interpretivist worldview which entails certain constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology for the analysis. Yanow (2009:429) states that this kind of a worldview, informed by hermeneutics, "combine in support of a subjectivist methodology: that is, a position that argues that 'knowers' (researchers and participants) and what is known are both situated in specific historical and cultural contexts, such that objective knowledge – by definition, that obtained from some external vantage point – is not possible".

Bryman (2016:29) suggests that constructivist ontology is a position in which social phenomena and social actors are not only "produced through social interaction but are in a

constant state of revision”. Additionally, ‘categories’³ are social products meaning that they are constructed in and through interaction (Bryman, 2016:30).

The constructivist ontology is combined with interpretivist epistemology as these are “complementary” approaches (Hay, 2015:111) and often used together, as demonstrated by Yanow (2009). When it comes to epistemology – meaning the nature and scope of knowledge – there are few considerations that are relevant to bring up.

The interpretivist approach provides a framework to explain how the knowledge about sustainable development and normative power is constructed within the EU. This guides the paper to explore the research problem by using discourses, language and narratives present in the EU aviation regulations. The documents and critical discourse analysis also help to explain how sustainable development norms are being framed and promoted.

The paper focusing on studying regulatory discourse of the EU also means that it is using evidence that is closely connected with the interpretivist epistemology. Furthermore, the evidence comes from the CDA method as it allows this paper to measure the effectiveness of the EU in promoting sustainable development norms by providing certain indicators of effectiveness that will be discussed later in this section.

Finally, normative evaluation contributes to examining the effectiveness of norm promotion and is a way to find out how we know what we know, in other words, how a conclusion is reached and how suggestions for further research are made in the section 7.1.

To compare, these interpretivist epistemological considerations oppose positivism as positivist epistemology is usually known for an approach in which principles such as beliefs are only to be seen as intervening variables at most and meanings are irrelevant to political science (Bevir and Rhodes, 2016:4). As I am looking into the sustainable development norms and regulatory discourses in this paper, interpretivist epistemology offers a more solid explanation for understanding how this thesis eventually develops an answer to the research question.

³ Categories being concepts such as femininity or masculinity whose meanings can be socially constructed (Bryman, 2016:30).

5.2 Data Analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis

The method used for this thesis is critical discourse analysis (CDA), a sub-field of discourse analysis that is currently one of the ‘most widespread’ research methods for studying Europe (Crespy, 2015:102). Discourse analysis in general means fundamentally either studying European discourses by applying discourse as a dependent variable, asking questions such as “what is said about Europe? How and why?” or alternatively, discourse can be the independent variable of the research asking “how do discourses impact national policies and shape the process of integration? Or both” (Crespy, 2015:102).

Based on this, the research question of the paper has the following structure: the EU’s regulatory discourse is the independent variable in this research that is affecting the effectiveness of the sustainable development norm promotion that is the dependent variable.

Narrowing down the discursive methods, there are four different approaches to it – content analysis, frame analysis, policy narratives, and critical discourse analysis (Crespy, 2015:106-109). In order to get a deeper holistic understanding of the effectiveness of the sustainable development norm promotion in the regulatory discourse of the EU aviation policy, different discursive levels are utilized through the framework of CDA. This framework is widely accepted in the political science literature and was originally coined by Fairclough (1995). Fairclough notes in his more recent work that research counts as CDA in case the following criteria is met (2013:10-11):

1. It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process.
2. It is not just general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.
3. It is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them.

I expect that these criteria will be fulfilled in my analysis in the following way. The critical discourse analysis involves three tenets that were also applied by Ala-Uddin (2019) for studying the discursive practices that played a role in shaping the conception of sustainability

when forming the SDGs: *discourse, culture, and social structure* (Fairclough, 1995). Firstly, *discourse* can be studied as texts. These can be either spoken or written. Secondly, *discursive practices* like processes of text production, distribution, and consumption can be studied. Thirdly, *discursive events* meaning sociocultural practices are explored (Fairclough, 1995; Ala-Uddin, 2019:217).

As mentioned earlier, CDA provides a multilevel interpretation that entails *micro level, meso level, and macro level* (Fairclough, 1995; Ala-Uddin, 2019:217). Micro level consists of the textual or linguistic dimension, which includes grammar, vocabulary, structure and meaning. To expand from this, meso level refers to producers, consumers, and the forms and conditions. Finally, macro level examines intertextual elements at societal levels, or alternatively, the wider discourses and social practices of groups and institutions (Fairclough, 1995; Ala-Uddin, 2019:217).

Fairclough (1995:16) presents an important quote by saying: “linguistic analysis is descriptive in nature, whereas intertextual analysis is more interpretive. Linguistic features of texts provide evidence which can be used in intertextual analysis, and intertextual analysis is a particular sort of interpretation of that evidence”. This represents the interplay between the three different levels of interpretation and will be useful for taking the analysis on to a multidimensional direction that will help us to gain a deeper understanding of the entire discourse.

5.3 Research Design: Normative Case Study and Sustainable Impact Assessment

The case study is “one of the major research strategies in contemporary social science”, or particularly, in contemporary political science (Thacher, 2006:1631). In spite of this type of research usually focusing on contributing to explanatory theory, Thacher (2006) argues that case studies are also applicable for normative theory.

Normative case studies aim to have an impact on how public values and ideas are perceived – what kind of regulatory discourse the EU should have in terms of sustainable development norm promotion, for example (Thacher, 2006:1632). These case studies can also bring to light normative reflections about rethinking the existing values that are widely accepted by the public in the EU (ibid.).

Characteristic to normative case studies is combining empirical observation together with normative assessment and thus they are particularly suitable for analysing “thick ethical concepts” with both descriptive and evaluative dimensions that cannot be separated from one another (Williams, 1986:129-130; Thacher, 2006:1632).

According to the NPE theory, the EU is known for being a normative power and the study of it as an actor is often focused on the normative perspective. Hence, it is prominent that also this study utilizes normative case study design to fulfill the purpose of finding out the extent to which sustainable development norms are present in the EU’s regulatory aviation discourse and whether this discourse is effective in promoting them. This is also confirmed by Manners (2015:225) as he states that “The normative power framework provides a causal method for explaining how one ‘independent variable’ causes an effect on another ‘dependent variable’”. Furthermore, “this involves analysing how principles can lead to actions; how actions may have an impact; and how any such impact might change the principles” (Manners, 2015:225).

The causal method of normative power framework, as described by Manners (2015:225) above, enables this thesis to explain and answer the research question by focusing on the policy-guiding principles of sustainable development that may be present in the regulatory discourse and that can eventually lead to actions, and vice versa, how the presence (or the absence) of these principles in the discourse might also change the way we perceive them (effectiveness of the principles) and this way lead to changing them.

Policy-guiding principle(s)	Question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Policy integration and coherence</i>¹ - <i>The protection of fundamental rights</i>² 	1. Does the decision have negative consequences for policy objectives such as the protection of a high level of quality of the environment and public health and for the protection of fundamental rights?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Using the best available knowledge</i>³ 	2. Has the best available knowledge been used to prevent possible negative consequences resulting from the decision? Are there alternatives?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>The precautionary principle and the taking of preventive action</i>⁴ 	3. Is there scientific uncertainty about the existence or extent of risks to public health, safety or the environment stemming from the decision? If there is, have measures been taken to prevent the occurrence of those risks?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Policy integration</i> - <i>The polluter pays principle</i>⁵ 	4. If negative consequences stemming from the proposed decision continue to exist: is the decision based on a sincere balancing act conducted between the positive economic effects of the decision and its negative (e.g. environmental) effects? And are the costs of these negative effects borne by those who are responsible for causing them?

Table 1. *The framework for sustainability impact assessment (Van Hees, 2014:73).*

Due to the tripartite nature of normative power analysis, three policy-guiding principles are chosen to be the focus of the analysis. These are *policy integration and coherence*, *the protection of fundamental rights*, and *the precautionary principle and the taking of preventive action*, as outlined by Van Hees (2014). The three aforementioned principles represent all the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic, and environmental – in the most balanced way and hence, they are suitable for the purposes of this thesis. For example, *the polluter pays principle* is presuming the environmental aspect and because of this, it would not provide a credible analysis.

Towards the end of this thesis, I will discuss the results and the arguments presented in the analysis part and additionally, I will apply the framework of sustainability impact assessment developed by Van Hees (2014) by focusing on the two questions that are related to my chosen three policy-guiding principles. This means that the questions 1 and 3 (see table 1.) will be discussed and elaborated. However, this study is only using this impact assessment as a tool for discussion because of the descriptive nature of the questions. There are two reasons why the other two questions (Q2 and Q4) are not discussed. Firstly, question 2 does not bring any additional value to the discussion because the normative approach of the paper assumes that such regulatory discourses of the EU are indeed using the best knowledge available, although

this could possibly be questioned by future research. Secondly, question 4 can also be interpreted as too single dimension specific, considering that it is referring to *the polluter pays principle*.

5.4 Materials and Data Collection

Since sustainable development is one of the main perspectives and themes in this paper, I have also gathered the material I am going to use in the analysis based on the three dimensions of sustainable development. The type of the main documents to be examined are EU regulations. This means that I have chosen one regulatory framework published by the EU that represents different categories i.e., dimensions, as equally as possible. I chose the Regulation (EU) 2018/1139 because it provides vital regulatory discourse and is widely applied in the EU area, many of the EU aviation documents basing their knowledge on it. The document also interconnects the environment and economy in a very prominent manner. Additionally it creates a framework for employee rights together with human rights as everyone should, normatively, be allowed to have work-related training (outlined in the regulation).

Another point I want to note is that the interpretivist approach also reveals meanings, which supports the choice of regulations as main materials.

5.5 Strengths and Limitations behind CDA

Next, I will evaluate and assess the strengths and limitations of my chosen method, critical discourse analysis. The strengths will be assessed first and the section continues by explaining what the weaknesses or limitations of the CDA are. The points and arguments made in this section are to extent applied according to my research topic.

To begin with the strengths, the CDA provides a thorough in-depth examination of the text and the language used in a way that it can reveal ideologies and power relations that shape the

promotion of the sustainable development norm (see the macro level analysis in 6.1.3). What the CDA method also considers is the context, as it can situate the discourse within broader social, political, and economical contexts. This helps me to see how the sustainable development norm is being constructed by the EU in its discourse. Since the thesis uses NPE theory as its lens, by conducting a critical discourse analysis it is possible to unveil the power relations between different actors, for example, the EASA and the EU in general.

When it comes to the limitations of the chosen method, critical discourse analysis can be rather subjective. This is because its approach is highly interpretative, and researcher's own perspectives affect the outcome of the analysis. This can further lead to lower validity of the study. Due to its three-level framework, the method is also very extensive and comprehensive. This can be seen as a strength but also as a limitation because the method is more time consuming, and it requires more effort from the researcher.

Taking the aforementioned methodological toolbox into consideration, the paper will now adopt this framework to conduct a thorough analysis of the EU's role in aviation policy in the next section.

6. Analysis and Results: Evaluating the Discursive Shift in EU Aviation Policy

This section aims to answer the following RQ: *To what extent is the EU's regulatory discourse effective in the promotion of sustainable development norms in the EU aviation policy?* The document to be analysed is the Regulation 2018/1139. I will analyse each subsection corresponding to the three-level framework of critical discourse analysis separately in order to examine the material systematically, which is one of the main characteristics of CDA. Eventually this will give us a holistic answer to the research question as the paper finds out the extent to which the three chosen policy-guiding principles on sustainable development can be found in the regulatory discourse. The chosen principles for the analysis were: *policy integration and coherence, the protection of fundamental rights, and the precautionary principle and the taking of preventive action.*

To add clarity to the upcoming analysis, I want to conceptualise the protection of fundamental rights more in detail and bring up specific articles outlined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁴ (EU, 2012).

Article 31 of the Charter is on fair and just working conditions, something that is also relevant for the social dimension of sustainable development. It states (EU, 2012:401):

1. Every worker has the right to working conditions which respect his or her health, safety and dignity.
2. Every worker has the right to limitation of maximum working hours, to daily and weekly rest periods and to an annual period of paid leave.

Article 35 on health care of the Charter states the following (EU, 2012:402):

Everyone has the right of access to preventive health care and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices. A

⁴ From now on, I will also refer to this as 'the Charter'.

high level of human health protection shall be ensured in the definition and implementation of all the Union's policies and activities.

Article 37 on environmental protection is also closely related to sustainable development's environmental dimension (EU, 2012:403):

A high level of environmental protection and the improvement of the quality of the environment must be integrated into the policies of the Union and ensured in accordance with the principle of sustainable development.

Article 38 on consumer protection represents the economic dimension of sustainable development together with social dimension (EU, 2012:403):

Union policies shall ensure a high level of consumer protection.

If article 38, for example, would be present in the regulation 2018/1139, it can be argued that the principle of policy integration, one of the policy-guiding principles of the SD framework, is fulfilled as it brings about both dimensions' objectives.

6.1 Regulation (EU) 2018/1139

The Regulation 2018/1139 on common rules in the field of civil aviation and establishing a European Union Aviation Safety Agency, also known as Basic Regulation, sets out the very foundation for the European Union's aviation policy and is thus the most significant single aviation regulation established by the EU. This Basic Regulation was updated in 2021 by the Regulation 2021/1087 but only minor changes were made for the Articles 1 and 2, making the original Regulation 2018/1139 still valid for the purposes of this thesis.

6.1.1 The Micro Level

I will now start by analysing the Regulation 2018/1139 at the micro level of CDA, meaning that the following analysis highlights the language and the way it has been used to promote the norm of sustainable development. In a similar manner to Ala-Uddin's (2019) work on combining policy document analysis together with CDA, the thesis examines the presences

and absences in the text, aiming to understand what ideational function it plays, what categories of actors are highlighted and the way in which these actors' relationships are constructed (Ala-Uddin, 2019:217; Fairclough, 1995:58).

From the very beginning, the article 1 of Reg. 2018/1139 lays out the aims and objectives of the regulation. At this point, it seems like the EU is aiming to show its normative power on sustainable development by highlighting all the dimensions of the norm in paragraph 2 of the article 1, using the exact keywords such as *free movement*, *capital*, *competitiveness*, *cost-effectiveness*, and *environmental protection* (Regulation 2018/1139:2):

2. This Regulation further aims to:

- (b) facilitate, in the fields covered by this Regulation, the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital, providing a level playing field for all actors in the internal aviation market, and improve the competitiveness of the Union's aviation industry;
- (c) contribute to a high, uniform level of environmental protection;
- (e) promote cost-efficiency, by, inter alia, avoiding duplication, and promoting effectiveness in regulatory, certification and oversight processes as well as an efficient use of related resources at Union and national level;

These key words support *the principle of policy integration and coherence* as social, economic, and environmental policy agendas of the EU come together. Is this too good to be true? The harmonized presentation of the policy integration paints a picture of the ideal aviation policy regarding sustainable development, but it needs to be addressed whether this is conveyed all the way to practical level.

Examining the objectives further, from the normative power perspective it is interesting to note that besides promoting these sustainable development terms, the EU is shedding light on the other norms too, listed in the section 4.1. *The rule of law* is brought up already in the previous citation 'promoting effectiveness in regulatory processes' but also in the art. 1 paragraph 2 (g) and (h) (Regulation 2018/1139:3):

- (g) assist Member States, in the fields covered by this Regulation, in exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations under the Chicago Convention, by ensuring a

common interpretation and a uniform and timely implementation of its provisions, as appropriate;

- (h) promote, worldwide, the views of the Union regarding civil aviation standards and civil aviation rules, by establishing appropriate cooperation with third countries and international organisations;

Despite the rule of law being out of the sustainable development scope, for this thesis to get as valid conclusion as possible, a comparison to other norms or gaining an understanding of the balance between different norms being promoted in the discourse is necessary because it also impacts the effectiveness of the single norm promotion.

Moreover, as explained in the methodology section, I decided not to analyse all the policy-guiding principles of sustainable development and the principle of ‘using the best knowledge available’ was assumed to be fulfilled by the EU due to the normative nature of the actor. However, Regulation 2018/1139 confirms this assumption made earlier and the evidence for this can be found both in the article 1 but later also in the article 4 of the regulation. Article 1 paragraph 2 states the following objective (Regulation 2018/1139:3):

- (i) promote research and innovation, inter alia, in regulatory, certification and oversight processes;
- (j) promote, in the fields covered by this Regulation, technical and operational interoperability and the sharing of administrative best practices;

Meanwhile article 4 paragraph 1 on principles for measures under the regulation states (Regulation 2018/1139:13):

1. When taking measures under this Regulation the Commission, the Agency and the Member States shall:
 - (a) reflect the state of the art and best practices in the field of aviation, and take into account worldwide aviation experience and scientific and technical progress in the respective fields;
 - (b) build on the best available evidence and analysis;

The citation above demonstrates that as a normative actor the EU aims for best practices and is also trying to develop scientifically and technically. These two words can be seen as

referring to sustainable development, however, the main objectives presented above in the article 1 do not have words that would fit into the sustainable category. Instead, article 1 is more emphasizing the social interaction between different stakeholders as it describes promoting best practices with *interoperability* and *sharing knowledge* ('sharing of administrative best practices'). These interactions are not directly linked with any specific norm or field so they cannot represent sustainable development per se, and it is impossible to deduce any specific norm promotion based on the citation.

Another policy-guiding principle that I am now going to analyse is *the precautionary principle and the taking of preventive action*. From the beginning it is possible to see that the EU is using a precautionary tone when it comes to civil aviation safety. The objectives (f) and (k) in the article 1 paragraph 2 state that the EU aims to (Regulation 2018/1139):

- (f) contribute, in the fields covered by this Regulation, to establishing and maintaining a high uniform level of civil aviation security;
- (k) support passenger confidence in a safe civil aviation.

The objectives above the Union is planning to achieve by following paragraph 3 of the article 1 that outlines the measures that should be taken to the successful implementation of the objectives. It can be seen though that the regulatory discourse is very cautious and vague when presented in the article 1. Despite the Union aiming at maintaining a high level of civil aviation security and promoting safe civil aviation to the passengers, it does so by only stating that these are achieved by "the taking of measures to improve safety standards" (Regulation 2018/1139:3). This does not specify anything in detail and remains on a peripheral level. It is additionally unclear how the EU is defining aviation safety in this context, no direct reference to sustainable development is being made. I do still see that it shows a moderate level of precaution and taking the safety measure seriously. This can be a result of the socially constructed normative identity as something that is present in this regulatory discourse is the emphasis on the interaction between different actors.

The normative identity construction through interaction is especially prominent in the words that are used to describe the objectives of the regulation and these words also reveal the external normative power the Union has or at least is aiming to have in global politics. Article 1 paragraph 2 (h) (see the quotation above) exemplifies this by referring to words like

worldwide, cooperation, and third countries. The entire reference is about the establishment of cooperation which reveals the importance for a normative power actor like the EU to establish themselves in the external aviation policies.

When investigating the structure of the regulation, the earlier question about whether the policy integration principle remains only on the objective level becomes more valid. There is an attempt to reach *policy integration*, but no plausible effort can be seen based on the structure of the document. Article 87 contains a regulation on environmental protection that has a central focus on sustainable development, although as it is possible to conclude from the name of the article that the different dimensions of sustainable development are not receiving an equal emphasis which leads to this article to lose some of its *effectiveness* in promoting sustainable development (Regulation 2018/1139:83).

To summarise, the micro level analysis of the regulatory discourse shows that Regulation 2018/1139 attempts to use all three policy-guiding principles on sustainable development in the EU aviation policy by using words and terms that can clearly relate to the norm promotion and establishing the institution's normative power as a global actor. However, there are significant shortcomings in wording and structuring the document that inevitably lead to undermining the effectiveness of sustainable norm promotion. The thesis moves on to analyse the meso level of the discourse to see whether the effectiveness performance on micro level is reflected onto the discursive practices.

6.1.2 The Meso Level

Also called process analysis, the following part of the analysis will focus on the meso level. Like Ala-Uddin (2019:219) explains, there are two different processes – institutional processes of the text and discourse processes. By institutional processes I am referring to the editorial side of the text and discourse processes are about the consumption and production changing the text (ibid.).

To start with institutional processes, Regulation 2018/1139 is mostly written according to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards and recommendations on civil

aviation safety. Particularly important is the Chicago Convention, the Convention on International Civil Aviation, which results in the EU member states having certain rights and obligations that the EU needs to support in the regulation and in its discourse because all the EU member states are Parties to the Chicago Convention (EC, 2024:1). In practice, the Chicago Convention aims to regulate international air transport and despite not being a law directly, the Member States follow this as it forms the basis of the International Air Law (ibid.). Article 1 paragraph 2 (g) demonstrates how some of the regulations were drafted:

- (g) assist Member States, in the fields covered by this Regulation, in exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations under the Chicago Convention, by ensuring a common interpretation and a uniform and timely implementation of its provisions, as appropriate;

This point demonstrates the intertextuality between the linguistics and interpretation but also adds to the micro-level analysis as the references to ICAO standards and international agreements can be seen as the EU seeking for legitimization. As a normative power, the institution needs credibility and by using ‘international standards’ as explained above, it most likely will get a higher acceptance rate to its regulatory framework.

Another viewpoint on the institutional process are the amendments to regulations and delegated acts. The Regulation 2018/1139 contains six amendments, and the provisions on delegated acts are laid out in the article 128. After the original Basic Regulation was published, several delegated acts and amendments have been made and since these types of provisions are results of several different editors, it can decrease the coherence of the regulatory discourse. The actors involved are portrayed in the next passage (Regulation 2018/1139:107):

4. Before adopting a delegated act, the Commission shall consult experts designated by each Member State in accordance with the principles laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making.
5. As soon as it adopts a delegated act, the Commission shall notify it simultaneously to the European Parliament and to the Council.

Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that only the designated experts are external editors in this process, meaning that the normative identity and power of the EU are both remained within the institution. Additionally, the experts are decided by the EU itself which can lead to a specific perspective or narrative of what the EU wants to include into their regulatory framework. This can either be promoting sustainable development or hindering it under the guise of economic growth.

To finally lay out the main arguments of the meso level analysis, it should be stated that this level did not produce a desired discursive outcome. The document itself is lacking a lot of information about the processes but the Chicago Convention together with international aviation agreements are clearly promoting sustainable development due to the international standards following the fundamental rights laid out by the UN. Secondly, there is a risk that amendments to regulations and delegated acts are filtered by the several actors involved in the discursive process, but this is not seen as something that would specifically impact sustainable development and its norm promotion.

6.1.3 The Macro Level

Finally, I want to dive into examining the macro level of the EU's regulatory discourse. In the process of doing this, the different 'subdimensions' of the macro level are economic, power and ideology, and cultural (Ala-Uddin, 2019:220).

Before anything else, comes the economy. The regulation entails countless number of economic implications that also address the issue of sustainability. As explained above, the regulation promotes innovation and efficiency in aviation, aiming to enhance the industry's competitiveness (see the micro level analysis on wording) while reducing the environmental footprint. In addition to the objective on innovation (article 1 paragraph 2 (i)) cited above, the following part, Article 87 paragraph 1 of the regulation support the argument on innovation, environmental sustainability, and competitiveness (Regulation 2018/1139:83):

1. The measures taken by the Agency as regards emissions and noise, for the purpose of the certification of the design of products in accordance with Article 11, shall aim to prevent

significant harmful effects on climate, environment and human health caused by the civil aviation products concerned, giving due consideration to the international standards and recommended practices, environmental benefits, technological feasibility and economic impact.

This additionally reflects the EU's broader economic strategy of achieving sustainable growth through green innovation. Since the Basic Regulation was established in 2018, which makes it outdated to some extent, some of the results of this norm promotion can already be detected. The most recent regulatory framework the Union published in its aviation policy is the Regulation 2023/2405 on ensuring a level playing field for sustainable air transport (ReFuelEU Aviation). According to the Council of the European Union, The ReFuelEU Aviation initiative is part of the EU's 'Fit for 55' package that aims to increase the uptake of greener fuels in the aviation industry (Council of the European Union, 2023a). The Union justifies these measures by statistical data, the aviation transport being responsible for 14.4% of the total EU transport emissions in 2018 (ibid.).

Furthermore, Article 86 is dedicated to innovation and research (Regulation 2018/1139:82) but despite containing 5 paragraphs, none of them are directly referring to sustainable development.

Using the analysis conducted in the section 6.1.1, the objective on cost-efficiency is an ideal example of the policy framing present in the regulatory discourse.

- (e) promote cost-efficiency, by, inter alia, avoiding duplication, and promoting effectiveness in regulatory, certification and oversight processes as well as an efficient use of related resources at Union and national level;

Similar to my previous point, this dual focus reflects the EU's strategic narrative of integrating the environmental perspective into the economic implications. Moreover, as the objectives of this regulation that were studied more in detail earlier emphasize sustainability, the regulation seeks to mitigate the aviation industry's environmental 'footprint' or impact and is therefore contributing to the EU's broader climate and emission goals, discussed above in this section. The argument refers mostly to the principle of policy integration but also coherence is required with the systematic certification mechanism. On the contrary, even

though the policy integration and coherence principle are present in terms of sustainable development, there are indicators that suggest for the discourse to be ineffective such as the lack of considering the social dimension of sustainable development.

The establishment of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in the regulation chapter V reveals how the normative power of the EU in the field of its aviation policy is multidimensional as the power is divided between different internal stakeholders. The Agency's role in this power division is the most significant one out of all the stakeholders mentioned (expert groups included). When interpreting the regulation, there are two main points that are highlighted in terms of EASA's mandate.

2. The Commission, the Agency, other Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and the Member States shall, within their respective fields of competence, cooperate on environmental matters, including those addressed in Directive 2003/87/CE of the European Parliament and of the Council (1) and Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 with a view to ensuring that interdependencies between climate and environmental protection, human health and other, technical, domains of civil aviation are taken into account, giving due consideration to the international standards and recommended practices, environmental benefits, technological feasibility and economic impact.

3. The Agency shall, where it has the relevant expertise, assist the Commission with the definition and coordination of civil aviation environmental protection policies and actions, in particular by conducting studies, simulations and providing technical advice while taking into account the interdependencies between climate and environmental protection, human health and other, technical, domains of civil aviation.

Firstly, the Agency ensures aviation safety in the EU area and simultaneously it needs to ensure that the environmental standards are being complied by air operators, fuel producers, and other stakeholders within the aviation industry. The EASA's progress and effectiveness is annually audited by the European Court of Auditors, the EU's external auditor, which adds to the EU's legitimacy as a normative power actor and as a promoter of sustainable development. Since the EU is combining aviation safety with environmental sustainability systematically and thoroughly throughout the regulatory discourse, the institution reveals its agenda to set the global example in integrating sustainable development into a regulatory

framework. This emphasizes the Union's broader strategy again on leading global environmental governance.

There is one aspect in the regulation that encapsulates the essence of the EU, its normative identity, and all the points studied so far on macro level. This is article 93 of the regulation on the implementation of Single European Sky (Regulation 2018/1139:86). The article is a short one, and will be now presented in its entirety below (ibid.):

The Agency shall, where it has the relevant expertise and upon request, provide technical assistance to the Commission, in the implementation of the Single European Sky, in particular by:

- (a) conducting technical inspections, technical investigations, and studies;
- (b) contributing, in matters covered by this Regulation, in cooperation with the Performance Review Body provided for in Article 11 of Regulation (EC) No 549/2004, to the implementation of a performance scheme for air navigation services and network functions;
- (c) contributing to the implementation of the ATM Master Plan, including the development and deployment of the SESAR programme.

Due to the length of the article 93, the importance of the Single European Sky (SES) policy should be questioned. However, the SES policy is perceived in this paper as the one that constructs the entire European aviation policy ideology and crystallizes the emerging norms also within sustainable development. The European Commission describes a few perspectives relevant to the SES policy. The air traffic management (ATM) in Europe is challenged by sustained air traffic growth and unforeseen circumstances like COVID-19 (EC, n.d.). The same institution is also faced with reducing the environmental footprint of the aviation sector, new technology such as drones, and securing the systems from cyber-attacks (EC, n.d.). These are all challenges that not only Europe is facing, rather this is a sector wide problem, and the EU is trying to promote itself effectively as a global leader in implementing new strategies and regulatory framework to these developments. The Single European Sky as an initiative and policy holds a significant potential when it comes to promoting sustainable development through the policy-guiding principles of policy integration and coherence, the protection of fundamental rights and the precautionary principle together with the taking of preventive action principle. By itself, it fulfills all the principles for this paper to argue that this is a

highly effective way to promote the sustainability norm but as I am focusing on the regulatory discourse, the text does not give any correspondence to these principles at least when the term Single European Sky needs to be present. However, it is mentioned in several different articles of the regulation that it aims at a “high, uniform, level of environmental protection” which refers to the idea of a uniform single sky and hence it becomes more prominent and effective in the text. There are shortcomings like the heavy environmental scope without any reference to the social dimension of sustainable development, for example.

The Single European Sky prerequisites that stakeholders on different levels interact and engage with the regulatory framework. This type of interaction is demonstrated in the following citation from the article 62 paragraph 1 (Regulation, 2018/1139:51):

1. The Commission, the Agency and the Member States shall cooperate within a single European aviation safety system to ensure compliance with this Regulation and with the delegated and implementing acts adopted on the basis thereof.

This refers to ‘a single European aviation safety system’ and meanwhile it does not expand the description any further and it has not been defined in the regulation, the term can be concluded to mean the initiative.

To summarise the analysis conducted at the macro level, there are a few key themes that should be underscored – the economic implications combined with environmental protection as a part of promoting the EU’s innovative, normative, and competitive agenda in the global political arena and the Single European Sky policy representing the EU as a normative power with a socially constructed identity through stakeholder engagement and international agreements. The analysis concludes that the previously mentioned economic perspective together with environmental sustainability eventually led to the EU initiative ReFuelEU in which a recent regulatory framework has been published to shape the direction of the EU aviation policy towards even more environmentally sustainable aviation.

6.2 Summary of the CDA: A Single Word Can Reveal More Than a Book

Before moving on to the last part of this section where I am going to discuss the examination of the research question more in detail and consider what the shortcomings for this thesis are regarding the analysed material and the arguments presented based on the critical discourse analysis, I am going to provide a short summary of the previous three sections so that it will be easier to grasp an overall image of the main points presented so far.

Overall, the Regulation 2018/1139 provides a solid approach for integrating sustainable development norm promotion into the European aviation policy. The micro level highlighted words such as *free movement*, *capital*, *competitiveness*, *cost-effectiveness*, and *environmental protection* and this level also fulfilled the application of the chosen policy-guiding principles entirely. The meso level emphasized the Chicago Convention together with international aviation agreements, which clearly are promoting sustainable development due to the international standards following the fundamental rights laid out by the UN. The meso level also analysed the amendments to regulations and delegated acts. The macro level made several references to different broader agendas of the EU policies such as the ReFuelEU and the Single European Sky.

6.3 Discussion and Delimitations

Lastly, in order to give a complete and comprehensive answer to the research question “To what extent is the EU’s regulatory discourse effective in the promotion of sustainable development norm in the EU aviation policy?” I will discuss the meanings of the results presented in section 6.1. Moreover, the discussion will address the two questions that were presented in relation to the policy-guiding principles of sustainable development (*see Table I.*) to reveal the effectiveness of the norm promotion. The section will conclude by assessing delimitations involved in the research process.

Analysing the results from the CDA showed that the EU’s regulatory discourse can be effective in the promotion of sustainable development to some extent, especially on the micro

level. However, the effectiveness is majorly limited by the meso level of the discourse. This can possibly be a result of the regulative nature of the discourse analyzed and most likely this level will be more applicable on policy recommendations and action plans, for instance. The macro level was more suitable for regulatory discourse.

As sustainable development was operationalised through Van Hees' (2014) framework and three different policy-guiding principles were analysed - *policy integration and coherence*, *protection of fundamental rights*, and *the precautionary principle* - these need to be discussed by using the sustainable impact assessment framework, like introduced in the methodology section. I will first start with the question 1 as outlined below:

Q1. Does the decision have negative consequences for policy objectives such as the protection of a high level of quality of the environment and public health and for the protection of fundamental rights? (Van Hees, 2014:73).

Before I discuss this question, it needs to be stated that the wording of this question - 'decision' - is in this thesis referring to the regulatory discourse.

To discuss the negative consequences of the Regulation 2018/1139, some positive ones are vital to acknowledge too. The regulation addresses environmental quality by mandating higher standards for the aircrafts, their emissions and noise. This aims to reduce the environmental footprint within the EU area by promoting more fuel-efficient aircrafts and sustainable aviation fuels (SAFs). These are supposed to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the effectiveness of these measures outlined in the regulation can be limited. Based on my own experience from working in the aviation industry, applying these measures and increasing the percentage of SAFs used compared to aviation fuel can be slow because of the availability of the 'new innovation and technique'. Due to the SAFs being such a new innovation, it leads to high costs which is not economically sustainable for airlines and other operators.

Question 3 of the framework is presented below:

Q3. Is there scientific uncertainty about the existence or the extent of risks to public health, safety, or the environment stemming from the decision? If there is, have measures been taken to prevent the occurrence of those risks? (Van Hees, 2014:73).

To answer this question, there is some scientific uncertainty about for example noise pollution risk to public health and environment.

A final point to consider when analysing the EU as a global actor in the aviation policy landscape is its unique, sui generis, two-level nature which invariably impacts its actions on all policy fields. Specifically, the EU is a multi-level actor that has to implement policy on both the EU's institutional level, which was the focus of this paper, but also on the member state level. Hencewise, national level policymaking of member states can impact the effectiveness of the EU as a norm-promoter in aviation, since there are differing motives, interests and decisions that guide the mosaic of different countries within the EU to enact and implement policy. To name a few, there is a gap between EU North, South, and Eastern member states in their approach to managing aviation due to the strike differences in economic welfare across these regions which impacts their implementation effectiveness. While this element was not explored in this study, future explorations could analyse this interaction between the Member State and EU level, to uncover the variations and discrepancies that exist and shed light into a more holistic analysis on the topic.

7. Conclusion: The Quest Towards a More Equitable Aviation Landscape

This thesis has aimed to answer the question *To what extent is the EU's regulatory discourse effective in the promotion of sustainable development norm in the EU aviation policy?* A multilevel, comprehensive, critical discourse analysis was conducted by using the framework of three levels of discourse, originally developed by Fairclough (1995). The three levels were micro, meso, and macro level and these were analyzed by applying the theoretical lens of Normative Power Europe (NPE), developed by Manners (2002). This chosen theory emphasizes the EU's role in shaping international norms and thus it was interesting to examine a document that is of major importance within the EU area and as a normative power actor, it could have been assumed that the regulation analyzed would have contained even more detailed and effective sustainable development norm promotion because the EU policies across the fields are currently all having the same focal point – the environmental protection in connection with the other dimensions of sustainable development (economic and social).

Van Hees' (2014) policy-guiding principles on sustainable development were used as operationalization of the norm and the chosen principles were then reflected against the textual and discursive findings. The principles used were *the policy integration and coherence*, *the protection of fundamental rights*, and *the precautionary principle and the taking of preventive action*.

Analyzing the results from the CDA showed that the EU's regulatory discourse can be effective in the norm promotion of sustainable development to some extent, especially on the micro level. However, the effectiveness is majorly limited by the meso level of the discourse. This can possibly be a result of the regulative nature of the discourse analyzed and most likely this level will be more applicable on policy recommendations and action plans, for instance. The macro level was more suitable for regulatory discourse.

Overall, it was concluded that the policy-guiding *principle of policy integration* was most used out of all three and it exemplifies the complexity and the interdisciplinary nature of sustainable development. The highlighted argument was that the economic and the

environmental dimensions of SD are almost inseparable because when the EU is protecting the environment and saving environmental resources, it directly has a positive impact on the economic growth due to *cost-efficiency* and *competitiveness*.

The NPE theory applied suggests since the first article of the regulation began by stating ‘the big words’, the EU aims to lead by example, meaning that the institution is embedding sustainable development within its own ‘internal’ regulatory framework for it strengthen its normative power and thus to be able to influence international standards and practices.

7.1 Future research implications and research avenues

Based on the critical normative research done in this paper, I have a few suggestions and recommendations for future research. Firstly, investigating the effectiveness of the regulatory framework in sustainable development norm promotion and in terms of the EU’s normative power, similar research could be conducted in sectors other than aviation. Something to note here is that the sector studied should be working under a certain regulatory framework.

Continuing with a similar discourse to the regulation studied, I suggest that in order to follow the norm of sustainable development, examining the role of technological innovations and advancements in relation to achieving sustainable development could be studied. For example, noise reduction, greener fuels and electric aircrafts are all present in the Regulation 2018/1139 and they all have an impact on reducing the environmental footprint.

Applying the Normative Power Europe (NPE) framework into future research, something that could be studied is the global collaboration and international aviation agreements the EU is a part of. This would support the NPE approach of studying the EU’s external policies.

Finally, since sustainable development is a norm with an interdisciplinary nature, more emphasis should be put on social sustainability when studying the aviation policy of the EU. Currently the mainstream literature on the EU and sustainable aviation is solely about the relationship between the economy and the environment, and often for example the aircrew’s working conditions are left overshadowed. In future this might even hinder the EU from achieving sustainable development in the field of aviation in case the aircrew is unfit due to

the cost-efficiency pressures that are present in the current regulatory discourse. In this context it should be kept in mind that time flies – unfit aircrew does not.

8. References

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