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MA Thesis

Discourse Surrounding the Implementation of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals on Micro and Macro Levels: Utrecht as a Global Goals City

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Abstract

As the Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs) are still a recently developed framework, not many studies have been conducted investigating the interplay between their implementation and discourse on macro and micro levels. More specifically, no previous studies have focused on investigating the specific local implementation of a Global Goals city. Therefore, this thesis aimed to provide an overview of the local approach of Utrecht, a Dutch Global Goals city, using theories of intercultural and organisational communication. These include theories such as the concept of discourse, the Montreal School's theory of text and conversation, the Four Flows and Holliday's (2016) concepts of threading and blocking. The analysis was performed using methods such as a document analysis, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic research. The subject of the document analysis was a webpage from the municipality's official website and the interviewees included a representative of Utrecht's municipality and of the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals. The ethnographic research was focused on three projects in Utrecht. The results showed that Utrecht as a Global Goals city employs a bottom-up approach and makes use of storytelling on both local and international scales to increase awareness of the SDGs. Additionally, it was found that the discussed theories served as good models to describe the discourse surrounding the implementation of the SDGs, as well as to analyse Utrecht's local organisational culture as a Global Goals city. Finally, the SDGs were found to be used as a common language, as well as a way of threading between different cities and countries.

1. Introduction

On the 25th of September 2015, the United Nations (UN) agreed on the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (United Nations, 2015, p. 1). This agenda brought forward the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also referred to as the Global Goals, which focus on five main themes: "people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership" (United Nations, 2015, p. 2). More specifically, the goals have the aim of improving the quality of life of humanity, as well as creating a more sustainable future for the planet. A visual overview of the SDGs can be found on this thesis' title page.

Furthermore, in order to reach these goals, the UN advocates for "intercultural understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and an ethic of global citizenship and shared responsibility" (United Nations, 2015, p. 9). This shows that the UN is of the opinion that these goals cannot be reached by nations acting independently. Instead, the UN calls for international cooperation and respect (United Nations, 2015). As a result, many cities worldwide have joined the Global Goals initiative, through which they aim to implement the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on a local scale.

One of these cities is the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands. In 2007, the municipality became a Millennium Municipality, which was based on the UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Keranidou, van Laarhoven, Sakkers & van de Ven, 2018). These goals also provided the basis from which the SDGs were developed in 2015 (United Nations, 2015). Subsequently, Utrecht became a Global Goals city in 2016 and since then has actively been engaging with the SDGs through their local Healthy Urban Living projects (Keranidou et al., 2018). Furthermore, the city of Utrecht is participating in the SDGs on a global scale. Examples of other Global Goals cities, which are also collaborating with Utrecht, are the cities of Bonn, Stuttgart, Malmö, and Ghent (Keranidou et al., 2018).

Additionally, the Dutch Ministry (*Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*) published their own action plan regarding the implementation of the SDGs in the Netherlands, which was included in their report on corporate social responsibility (*maatschappelijk verantwoord ondernemen*) in 2016 (SDG Nederland, 2019). Consequently, studies regarding the position of the Netherlands and the seventeen SDGs have been conducted to obtain more information about which course of action would be needed to achieve them (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2016).

Moreover, the Association of Dutch Municipalities (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten*, *VNG*) produces yearly reports on Dutch municipalities' activities and development regarding the SDGs (SDG Nederland, 2019). In addition, the VNG aims to motivate other Dutch municipalities to join the Global Goals initiative and offers a place for official registration. Subsequently, various other Dutch cities and municipalities joined the initiative, such as Rheden, Oss and Tilburg. However, each city has their own way of dealing with the SDGs on a local level (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2017).

Based on this information, this study aimed to investigate the different discourses surrounding the implementation of the SDGs on macro and micro levels. In this case, macro level refers to an international scale on which the SDGs are used. Micro level is used here as referring to this implementation on a local scale. In order to gain more insight into the discussion of the SDGs on a micro level in the city of Utrecht specifically, qualitative research methods were used. The following section will further explain the relevance of this topic to the field of organisational and intercultural communication, whereas the theoretical framework will offer more insight into theories on these subjects. Subsequently, the way the research was conducted will be discussed in the method section, followed by the study's obtained data and corresponding analyses in the subsequent sections. The study's results will be summarised in the final section.

2. Context

Due to the international nature of the SDGs and the need for cooperation in order to achieve them, this subject is closely interrelated with theories of intercultural and organisational communication. One of the main challenges these Global Goals cities and municipalities face is to find ways to incorporate the SDGs on a local level, due to the SDGs being created on a macro level by the UN (Sakkers, 2018). Moreover, this also touches upon another challenge of the SDGs: working together globally to reach all seventeen goals, while at the same time implementing the goals locally. In the theoretical framework these different levels of implementation will be elaborated on using theories such as the concept of discourse and the Montreal School's approach.

As mentioned in the introduction, the UN calls for "intercultural understanding" during the international collaboration needed to reach the SDGs (United Nations, 2015, p. 9). Moreover, the UN has 193 member states (United Nations, 2019), and is an intergovernmental organisation which advocates for global well-being and peaceful (inter)national collaborations, which is also expressed in their vision:

> "We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity" (United Nations, 2015, p. 4).

This vision corresponds with the issues discussed in the SDGs. However, from the viewpoint of intercultural communication and this thesis' topic, it is interesting that the UN specifically mentions the need for intercultural understanding in reaching the SDGs on a global level.

Moreover, the importance of the UN's call for intercultural understanding in reaching the SDGs also becomes clear from previous research into intercultural understanding,

othering and intercultural communication. These three concepts are relevant in this context because they indicate a link between non-essentialist approaches and successful intercultural communication. Othering is a phenomenon which can be defined as imagining "someone as alien and different to 'us' in such a way that 'they' are excluded from 'our' 'normal', 'superior' and 'civilized' group" (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2017, p. 21). This is also related to the concept of threading and blocking by Holliday (2016). Blocking occurs when the national boundaries are emphasised and people are imagined in blocks, which they cannot transcend. Threading, however, occurs when the similarities instead of differences are highlighted between people, which Holliday (2016) claims increases successful communication and mutual respect.

Non-essentialist approaches are those which do not use the other's national characteristics as pre-determined factors of their behaviour, and those which do not simplify the factors surrounding intercultural interaction. Essentialism can be further defined as "pretending that knowing the other takes place through knowing her culture as a static object" (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2003, as cited in Dervin, 2012, n.p.). The theories mentioned in the previous paragraph are important, due to the SDGs being goals that are set as a global standard which all member states of the UN should aim for. However, without efficient intercultural communication, collaboration on an international level is less likely to be successful.

Intercultural communication occurs when people from diverse cultural backgrounds interact. Therefore, it can be argued that: "an intercultural context is not to be equated with the sum of two different contexts, but essentially the creation of a new one" (Holliday et al., 2017, p. 81). This indicates that intercultural communication is not simply something that occurs between two separate participants. Instead, it occurs within a "middle culture of dealing" (Holliday et al., 2017, p. 30). In order to ensure successful communication within

this culture of dealing, Holliday et al. (2017) argue that "intercultural communication should grow from an understanding of people, culture and society generally" (p. 1). If this is not utilised, miscommunication could occur and stereotypes would be confirmed instead. Hence, this indicates a correlation between intercultural understanding and efficient intercultural communication.

The SDGs are a global framework, meaning they are important world-wide. Due to the large amount of different stakeholders involved in working towards achieving the SDGs such as the United Nations, their member states, other countries, Global Goals cities and the cities' local municipalities and citizens, many different (sub)cultures are brought into contact with each other while discussing the SDGs. Hence, it is important to reflect on the theories of intercultural communication that were discussed in the previous paragraph. Awareness on concepts such as essentialism, interculturality, othering and cultures of dealing can improve communication between these different (sub)groups. This sense of awareness will be crucial in the process towards achieving successful discussion and implementation of the SDGs on both international and local level. This is also relevant in the case of Utrecht as a Global Goals city due to their involvement in raising awareness on the SDGs locally and internationally. In trying to raise awareness on this topic, as well as planning corresponding campaigns or projects, the city of Utrecht has to deal with many different stakeholders.

Therefore, this study will aim to investigate differences in local implementations by providing an in-depth analysis of the city of Utrecht's approach to the SDGs. It will focus on the city's own representation of itself as a Global Goals city, its local initiatives and collaborations with other Global Goals cities. In order to investigate this, different models related to the theory of organisational communication will be used, such as the concept of discourse, the Montreal School's theory of text and conversation, and the Four Flows, as well as the theory of blocking and threading. Data used for analysis was collected through

qualitative methods such as a document analysis, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.

3. Theoretical Background

3.1 The City of Utrecht

Utrecht is the fourth-largest city in the Netherlands and is the capital of a Dutch province of the same name. The municipality has a central geographical position, namely in the centre of the country. On 1 January 2019 the municipality was measured to have a total of 352,795 inhabitants. Of this total number, 69.7 percent is aged between 18 and 64 years and 21.9 percent is aged between 20 and 29. Additionally, the municipality is highly urbanised (64.6 percent is categorised as highly urbanised and only 0.8 percent is categorised as rural), and 90.8 percent of its inhabitants have a Dutch nationality. However, only 66.2 per cent of its inhabitants were born to Dutch parents, showing the city's high level of cultural diversity (City Population, 2019).

After the publication of the SDGs in 2015, the municipality of Utrecht became a Global Goals city. Since then many initiatives have been set up with the aim of helping the UN to reach these goals. Examples of projects are hosting the Climate Planet event, increasing their cycling infrastructure and cooperating with local businesses and organisations to create more understanding of the Global Goals locally (Keranidou et al., 2018). Additionally, the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals was founded at the request of the municipality to raise awareness on the SDGs in Utrecht among citizens and local organisations. The organisation operates separately from the municipality, however, they often collaborate. Furthermore, Utrecht4GlobalGoals aims to stimulate citizens and organisations in Utrecht to engage with the SDGs in their own way. Therefore, they founded the *HeelUtrechtU* Awards to celebrate the most successful initiatives, invested in Utrecht 4

Global Gifts, and provide an overview of different inspiring initiatives in Utrecht on their website (Utrecht4GlobalGoals, 2019a).

Additionally, Utrecht stresses the importance of international cooperation. Utrecht4GlobalGoals argues that the SDGs are for all people across the globe, which corresponds with their initiative 'Here and There' (*Hier & Daar*). Through this initiative, the municipality subsidises projects which aim to raise awareness concerning the SDGs in Utrecht, as well as on an international level (Utrecht4GlobalGoals, 2019b). Additionally, another example which shows the way in which the municipality of Utrecht advocates for the SDGs on an international level is the 'Kajjansi Junction' programme. Through this programme, the municipality of Utrecht is working closely together with businesses in Uganda to raise awareness on the SDGs. In addition, this is done with the aim of facilitating local development in Uganda while maintaining a low "environmental footprint" (Keranidou et al., 2018, p. 17).

The municipality's emphasis on raising awareness on the issues of the SDGs are also highlighted in their published articles. Four main goals were developed by the department of International Affairs which Utrecht's municipality will focus on in the coming years. These goals are:

"1) Working together with various partners to make the SDGs a powerful local movement that is known by a large majority of the population.

2) Further mainstreaming and integrating the SDGs into the municipality's own operations and administration.

3) Involving the cultural sector in rethinking their contribution to the SDGs and challenge them to formulate a 'fourth' pillar of sustainable development.

4) Connecting with new international networks and projects to facilitate increased

knowledge-sharing about how best to integrate the SDGs locally" (Keranidou et al.,

2018, p. 19).

These goals emphasise the municipality's aim to involve citizens and local organisations in the realisation of the SDGs in Utrecht, as well as their goal to improve international cooperation.

3.2 Threading and Blocking

Sakkers (2018), the head of the municipality's International Affairs department, argues that the SDGs are the only framework that countries have in common that was approved by the UN. Therefore, he claims that it is not about simply marketing one's own city, but about working together on an international level to find the most effective ways of implementing these goals locally. In order to achieve this, he focuses on the concept of storytelling, which is used to tell Utrecht's own story within the wider international context, and emphasises the need to aid each other in this process (Sakkers & vom Scheidt, 2017).

The SDGs were created as a worldwide guidance on how to create a more sustainable future for everyone, meaning these SDGs are used and discussed across the UN's many member states (United Nations, 2015). Therefore, these matters are of high international relevance and international cooperation is crucial to ensure their success. As previously mentioned, successful intercultural communication will increase the likelihood of successful international cooperation (Holliday et al., 2017). If countries only focus on their differences and base their communication solely on essentialist models their cooperation could be unsuccessful. For instance, if during a business meeting of Western and Asian countries the representatives of each country do not understand or respect each other's customs, miscommunication could occur and as a result the meeting would fail. The SDGs can only work if most nations agree to participate (United Nations, 2015).

Additionally, cooperation on a national level is also important for the SDGs to succeed. Countries have a national culture, however, there are also many sub-cultures within a country (Holliday, 2016). Holliday (2016) discusses the concept of interculturality, which relates to the phenomenon of making "sense of intercultural experience in terms of one's own cultural background" (p. 319). He argues that there are multiple "cultural environments" which people navigate through. These environments could be related to national cultures, but could also be found on smaller levels or sub-cultures such as roles within families or between different professions.

Moreover, in order to investigate intercultural communication between these cultural environments, and during student exchanges specifically, Holliday (2016) developed his theory of threading and blocking. He defines the concept of threading as focusing on similarities between people, instead of looking at each other's differences and cultural backgrounds. As a consequence, the focus of the intercultural interaction is shifted from a perception of 'us versus them', towards a more inclusive approach. Contrarily, the concept of blocking occurs when someone emphasises differences instead of similarities, and tends to see the other in their own cultural or national block which they cannot cross. Threading is the option closest to a non-essentialist view and is therefore desired in intercultural situations (Holliday, 2016).

Even though Holliday's (2016) theory was developed in the context of student exchange programmes, it is also relevant for the SDGs. The theory was developed to explain international interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds. Due to the international nature of the SDGs and the need for international cooperation to ensure their success, the theory of threading and blocking are can also be applied to this context. For example, if one country decides to actively place another country in a specific block during their communication and would rely on certain stereotypes, their communication could not be

successful. However, if the countries were both focusing on threading instead, the SDGs could be used as their similar interest which would facilitate their cooperation. Sakkers (2018) also emphasises this need to not focus on nations as a whole, but instead look at their local implementations and stories of local successful initiatives which are related to the SDGs.

3.3 Communicative Constitution of Organisations

The UN's way of looking at the SDGs and Utrecht's implementation of them is related to macro and micro levels of implementation, and can be linked to a constitutive view of organisation and communication. This theory has evolved from earlier theories which claimed that communication happens within certain static situations or blocks, which is relevant to the theory of blocking and the "container metaphor" (Miller, 2015, p. 83). The container metaphor was used to describe communication within an organisation. However, this theory only viewed communication as happening within one specific frame, or container, instead of also looking at other surrounding influential contexts (Kuhn, 2012). In other words, the container represented the organisation as a place that was able to "hold and shape the communication processes within it" (Miller, 2015, p. 272). Additionally, theories such as the sender-receiver model of communication, which focused solely on one sender and one receiver between which communication occurs via the transfer of a static message, used to be applied often to explain communication between individuals (Miller, 2015).

However, scholars have found these models to be too simplistic when describing communication, which lead to the development of theories such as the constitutive concept of communication (Miller, 2015; Kuhn, 2012). This new model takes the context of the conversation into account and sees communication as a process of creating shared meaning. Hence, communication is not seen as something that happens within a contained space or vacuum, but instead as something that is influenced by and interacts with the environment in

which it takes place. It emphasises that meaning is shaped and negotiated throughout the interaction itself (Miller, 2015).

Miller (2015) further links this to a "social constructionist position", which claims that: "we create our own social world through our words and other symbols, and through our behaviour" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1992, as cited in Miller, 2015, p. 83). Therefore, the constructive approach is linked to Structuration Theory, which argues that "the social world is generated through the agency of active participants" (Miller, 2015, p. 84; Giddens, 1979; Giddens, 1984). In this case, agency refers to people's ability to act in different ways from a standard norm in certain contexts or situations. There are specific sets of rules that people rely on, but within these rules they can choose to change their behaviour to fit the context (Giddens, 1979; Giddens, 1984). For example, an employee can allow a customer to enter the store five minutes before the store's normal opening time if needed or desired in that situation (Miller, 2015).

Structuration Theory can be used to analyse the SDGs and their realisation in Global Goals cities: It can be used to argue that stakeholders in each city have their own agency when implementing the SDGs locally. Additionally, theories such as the Constitutive Concept of Communication and the Social Constructionist Position can be used to acknowledge that the report on the SDGs is not something that was created in a container or vacuum. Instead, the SDGs are the product of discussions that have taken place over a long period of time, acknowledging the communicative events that led up to the creation of the SDGs. Additionally, applying these theories could indicate that the discussion and implementation of these SDGs is an ongoing communicative interaction both on an international and a local scale.

Moreover, when discussing these matters in the case of specific organisations the term "communicative constitution of organisation" (CCO) is often used (Miller, 2015, p. 83;

McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This term refers to the rejection of only focusing on interaction within a company or organisation as a container. Alternatively, CCO places focus on the constitutive processes that surround the organisation, as well as the processes that occur within the organisation.

Another area of critique has been directed towards using either a focus on macro or on micro levels when analysing organisational situations. Again, this can create a simplistic image and divides two interconnected subjects (Kuhn, 2012). For example, when looking at the local implementation of the SDGs in the city of Utrecht, meaning on a micro level, it would be unwise to forget about the related processes on macro level, namely on the international scale. This is due to the ongoing interaction between micro and macro levels. Neither one operates completely separately from the other (Kuhn, 2012).

Consequently, CCO theories were created to focus on the interaction between these two levels and aimed to reveal the complex underlying processes of communication that shape what happens internally, and externally, at an organisation (Kuhn, 2012). Therefore, this study uses CCO theories in its analysis of the use and implementation of the SDGs on both macro and micro levels. These theories will consist of the concept of discourse, the Montreal School, and the Four Flows and will be discussed in the next sections.

3.4 The Concept of Discourse

The previously discussed theories are related to the way we act and interact with each other, and the way in which this shapes our communication. As is the case with the implementation of the SDGs, communication takes place within the context of certain rules or a specific document, which relates to the "concept of discourse" (Miller, 2015, p. 84). Discourse consists of two separate, but intertwined concepts: discourse and Discourse. Little-d discourse "refers to the study of talk and text and social practices", whereas big-D Discourses "are general and enduring systems of thought" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7).

For example, a general feeling of "compassion" for others could be a big-D Discourse (Miller, 2015, p. 84). In the case of not-for-profit organisations conducting humanitarian work, "compassion" could refer to the overall value system that everyone in the organisation has in common and on which the organisation was built. The way in which people in that organisation deal with and interpret "compassion" in their own way in their daily talk and practices is then related to little-d discourse (Miller, 2015, p. 84). In this thesis, this concept will be used to analyse the constant interactions between texts, talks, and practices about the SDGs on micro and macro levels.

3.5 The Montreal School

The key focus of the Montreal School is "the process through which people coordinate activity through interaction" (Miller, 2015, p. 85). This is done through the use of conversation and text. As is also the case with the double concept of discourse, these two concepts are intertwined and work recursively. However, the relationship between text and conversation is slightly different, which is what makes the Montreal School standout from other similar theories (Kuhn, 2012). In this case, "conversation" can be defined as "ongoing interaction among individuals facilitated by language" and "text" "refers to substance or meaning, and can take many forms" (Miller, 2015, p. 85).

Text can be seen as a similar concept to macro levels and Discourse, yet it works in a slightly different way. It can take the form of, for example, "an understanding of a particular interaction, a memo, a mission statement…" (Miller, 2015, p. 85). Conversation can be compared to micro levels or discourse. Therefore, text can serve as the basis on which conversation is constructed and it is through conversation that many texts come to be constructed. For example, the conversation in a classroom can be mostly based around a specific "textbook" (Miller, 2015, p. 86). In this case, the textbook represents the "text", and the way in which this text is used and discussed is the "conversation" (Miller, 2015, p. 86).

Moreover, due to this link between conversation and text on multiple levels, the Montreal School speaks of the phenomenon of "scaling up" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, as cited in Miller, 2015, p. 86). This process is marked by multiple "degrees of separation" (Miller, 2015, p. 86). During this process the "initial intent of a speaker is embedded in conversation and then distanced from that conversation (…) through its transformation into text" (Miller, 2015, p. 86). These degrees range from the "First Degree" to the "Sixth Degree of Separation" (Miller, 2015, p. 86). The "First Degree of Separation" is the first step in this interplay between text and conversation and occurs when an idea is spoken out loud. The idea is then discussed with a larger group of people, the "Second Degree of Separation", and the idea is recorded on paper and takes the form of a text, the "Third Degree of Separation" (Miller, 2015, p. 87). In the "Fourth Degree of Separation" "specific terminology" is created for future discussion of the text (Miller, 2015, p. 87). The "Fifth Degree of Separation" occurs when "the texts and conversations are transformed into material and physical frames", for example when a textbook is created (Miller, 2015, p. 87). Lastly, during the stage of the "Sixth Degree of Separation" "the standard form is disseminated to a broader public" (Miller, 2015, p. 87). For example, when the textbook is published and distributed to different schools.

When a text is scaled up, it will no longer have one single, specific meaning around which one specific conversation takes place (Miller, 2015). A textbook is created through interaction, or conversation, in a specific environment. After being published, the textbook could be used in multiple classrooms. However, the way in which this textbook is used and discussed through conversation can differ per classroom or context. Therefore, the first intent with which the textbook was created was scaled up to be used in different contexts. The way in which teachers discuss the textbook's content, and shape the conversation around it, can be different to the initial intent. Therefore, the textbook can attain different meanings (Miller, 2015, p. 86-87).

3.6 The Four Flows

Another theory related to CCO is the Four Flows Approach: "membership negotiation",
reflexive "self-structuring", "activity coordination" and "institutional positioning" (Miller,
2015, p. 92-93; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). This approach was created with the aim of
investigating the communicative processes that enable an organisation to exist. Without these
four flows and their cooperation, the organisation would not be able to survive. Furthermore,
all four flows are important to, and shaped by, both the internal and external communication
of the organisation (Kuhn, 2012). Moreover, they are referred to as flows, since they are
"reciprocal" and used by multiple people in several contexts and positions (Miller, 2015, p.
94; McPhee, 2015). They will, therefore, be used as a basis on which Utrecht's approach as a
Global Goals city will be analysed.

The first of the four flows is "membership negotiation" (Miller, 2015, p. 90). This
flow describes the process of involving people in a certain cause or organisation. In other
words, it is focused on how people within an organisation become a member of that
organisation. In order to do so, the person has to be involved in multiple ongoing processes;
identity, shared meaning, and understanding are key features here (McPhee & Iverson, 2009).

In addition, "reflexive self-structuring" is focused more on "formal communication"
within an organisation (Kuhn, 2012, p. 558). This encompasses matters such as formal
documents and the communication around them. More specifically, these documents provide
the basis on which the organisation functions, a record of general rules and distribution of
tasks, and the criteria of membership (Schoeneborn, Blaschke, Cooren, McPhee, Seidl &
Taylor, 2014).

Furthermore, "activity coordination" refers to the coordination of specific tasks within
an organisation, as well as to the corresponding collaboration that is needed to achieve them
(Kuhn, 2012, p. 558; Miller, 2015). This flow is partly built upon the flow of reflexive self-

structuring, however, activity coordination takes it a step further and focuses on how the members of an organisation execute these tasks (McPhee & Iverson, 2009). Additionally, not all communication within an organisation can be performed solely on the rules documented through the flow of reflexive self-structuring. In some situations, activity coordination is needed to keep a process of ongoing communication happening to ensure all work is performed smoothly within an organisation (Miller, 2015). However, it is important to note that the communication which takes place inside this flow will not always be "successful", nor will all members within an organisation be working towards achieving the same specific objective (Miller, 2015, p. 92).

The last flow is "international positioning" (Miller, 2015, p. 93), which describes the ways in which the organisation positions itself compared to other, possibly similar, organisations on a macro level (Kuhn, 2012; McPhee, 2015). McPhee and Iverson (2009) argue that this is an important aspect for an organisation, due to its influence on the organisation's self-representation and access to resources. For example, a positive representation could be favourable for the city and well executed international positioning could provide new opportunities (McPhee & Iverson, 2009).

3.7 Critique on the Sustainable Development Goals

The predecessor of the SDGs, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were subject to several points of critique. The reason behind this was the focus of the MDGs, which was said to be out of touch with the reality of the situation, and laid too much focus on the more developed countries helping the lesser developed ones (Carant, 2017; United Nations, 2015). Consequently, the SDGs were developed with the aim of building on the framework of the MDGs, while at the same time adding to what they were lacking (United Nations, 2015).

Furthermore, due to the SDGs serving as a global guideline to a more sustainable world before 2030, as well as being the main focus of this study, it is important to discuss

several points of praise and critique surrounding the SDGs. Carant (2017) performed a critical document analysis on both the MDGs and the SDGs. She argues that due to the high number of SDG goals, namely seventeen, and its 169 underlying targets, it could be easy for governments to only focus on some of the issues instead of looking at them as an interconnected whole (Carant, 2017). In addition, she highlights that some of the SDGs can be interpreted as contradicting each other, and that there is still a lack of "problem-solution frames" (Carant, 2017, p. 34).

However, Moore (2015) claims that a "paradigm shift" is taking place, where we start looking at society in a different way (p. 801). This is a shift towards a society in which we need to become increasingly aware of current social and sustainable issues, and adapt our approach to them. Furthermore, she argues that the SDGs have been developed as a reaction to this shift and claims that the years between 2015 and 2030 will be a crucial period for these topics. Additionally, one of the most important aspects of the SDGs are their ability to include "citizen participation", and their urge to localise "the agenda" (Moore, 2015, p. 803). However, while indicating there is a need towards such a shift in thinking, she also supports the idea that perhaps the SDGs should not be taken as the only goals we should work towards (Moore, 2015).

Therefore, in general, globally the SDGs should not be regarded as the sole framework for social and environmental change; other innovations and "local development" that are not necessarily connected to the SDGs are also needed to achieve a more sustainable world. Hence, the strength of the SDGs lies in encouraging stakeholders, such as countries, cities or organisations, to not only focus on macro levels, but also in pairing themselves with local initiatives which are already in place (Sakker & vom Scheidt, 2017, p. 53).

3.8 Research Questions

In conclusion, due to the development of the SDGs being recent, no specific studies have been performed on Utrecht as a Global Goals city apart from reports written by Utrecht's municipality (Keranidou et al., 2018; Sakkers & vom Scheidt, 2017). Nor have there been specific studies investigating the discussion and implementation of the SDGs on macro and micro levels using organisational and communicative theories. As described above, these theories are highly relevant to this topic due to the requirement of international cooperation for the SDGs to succeed. Additionally, the topic of the SDGs is highly relevant to the current time period due to the increasing acknowledgement of the importance of shifting to a more sustainable lifestyle worldwide (Barr & Gilg, 2006).

Over the years, climate change has become an increasingly important phenomenon. Many agree it is a pressing issue in which humans play a crucial role. Consequently, in 2019 many students have participated in strikes and protests in large cities such as London, Amsterdam, Berlin, Delhi, Mexico City and Stockholm (Glenza, Evans, Ellis-Petersen & Zhou, 2019; Malhotra, 2019). The SDGs call for action on these matters, as well as on subjects such as social inequalities. The SDG framework shows these issues are all connected and highlights that they cannot be viewed as separate matters (United Nations, 2015).

Given the timeliness and importance of this issue and the lack of research so far on how macro level Discourse are being implemented locally in micro level discourse, it would be important for us to understand the organisational and communicative processes behind the implementation and discussion of the SDGs in Utrecht. Understanding the way in which the municipality of Utrecht approaches the SDGs is important because it provides an example for local implementation. As previously argued, the strength of the SDGs lies in their ability to be used as a framework on both micro and macro levels. However, to ensure the SDGs succeed intercultural communication and international cooperation, as well as local cooperation, is

needed. Due to the crucial role of communication and discourse in spreading and achieving

the SDGs, this thesis focuses on a communication approach. The following research question

and three sub-questions were developed to investigate this topic:

RQ: How does the municipality of Utrecht implement the Sustainable Development

Goals locally?

SQ1: In what ways does the city of Utrecht position itself as a Global Goals

city?

SQ2: What links between discourses and Discourse and between conversations

and texts are apparent in the implementation processes?

SQ3: Does Utrecht use the SDGs as a way of threading between different

Global Goals cities, and if so, how?

4. Method

This study focused on obtaining as much information as possible on the city of Utrecht in

relation to the Global Goals. A combination of qualitative methods was used to investigate

this: a document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and ethnographic research were

applied. Using different methods to investigate the same phenomenon added to the study's

reliability (Brown, 2009).

4.1 Procedure

4.1.1 Document analysis.

Firstly, a document analysis was performed in which the website of the municipality of

Utrecht was analysed. The webpage was chosen due to its focus on Utrecht as Global Goals

city. More specifically, the website explains what the SDGs are, how Utrecht and its

municipality are involved with them, and mentions several SDG related campaigns[2]. The website of Utrecht4GlobalGoals was used to provide more information about Utrecht in general, however, was not focused on in great detail due to time restrictions for completing this research. The focal point of this document analysis was placed on the municipality's approach towards being a Global Goals city, by looking at which specific words and images were used to describe this approach. More specifically, the website was analysed from the top to the bottom. Attention was placed on the representation and discussion of the SDGs on micro and macro levels, as well as on the order in which the different sections on the webpage were positioned.

This method was chosen with the aim of obtaining general, publicly available information about Utrecht as a Global Goals city. In addition, it was used as a document analysis allowing for very specific, in-depth analysis of a topic (Brown, 2009). The obtained information provided the basis on which the topic lists and interview schemes, used for the semi-structured interviews, were created. The interview schemes were based on the model provided by Baarda and van der Hulst (2012).

4.1.2 Ethnographic research.

Methods such as ethnographic research and "thick description" were also used to collect data (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 130). Thick description refers to describing "richly and in great detail the daily life of the community as well as the cultural meanings and beliefs the participants attach to their activities (…)" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 130). These methods specifically were chosen to investigate different projects and events in Utrecht in more detail and to gain an understanding of Utrecht's approach towards the discussion and implementation of the SDGs locally. More specifically, while the document analysis and interviews obtained

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[2] International Affairs Global Goals, Utrecht municipality webpage: https://www.utrecht.nl/bestuur-en-organisatie/internationale-zaken/global-goals/

information from the viewpoints of the municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals, the ethnographic observations served to also include data from the streets of the city itself. The aim was to obtain more information on the actual implementation of the SDGs in Utrecht in the manifestation of buildings or structures in the city, as well as to develop a sense of the discussion of the SDGs among citizens or local organisations.

Therefore, three projects in the city of Utrecht were observed in detail during the data collection for this thesis. Two projects in Utrecht were visited and observed during the period of this thesis. One project, the Climate Planet, was an exception to this: this project was observed before the official outlines and ideas for this study were created. However, its data was used due to the event's high relevance to this study's research questions. Moreover, the projects were selected using the following two criteria: they had to touch upon topics discussed in one of the seventeen SDGs and they had to be publicly accessible.

4.1.3 Semi-structured interviews.

4.1.3.1 Interview participants.

As will be explained below, the data collection of the interviews occurred in two different sessions. The preliminary session consisted of general meetings, whereas the second session included official semi-structured interviews. During the preliminary session an employee of the municipality and an intern were invited to participate in two different meetings. More specifically, the employee was a coordinator of the department of International Affairs and was directly involved with the discussion and implementation of the SDGs on a local and international level. The intern was conducting her internship in the same department.

During the second session, which consisted of semi-structured interviews, a member of the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals, their project manager, was interviewed. As

previously discussed, this organisation has worked closely together with Utrecht's municipality on the management and discussion of the SDGs in Utrecht. In addition, the same member of the municipality that was spoken to during the preliminary session was interviewed. All interviewees' names were left out due to privacy reasons.

4.1.3.2 The interviews.

The information obtained through the document analysis was used during two meetings in which topics surrounding the role of the SDGs in Utrecht were discussed. These two meetings were scheduled before the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted. Both meetings were held in the municipality's city office. One was held in the meeting hall of the municipality's city office with a member of the municipality and the second meeting was held in a different location in the office with an intern of the department of International Affairs. The meetings occurred a week apart and were originally meant to be the preliminary interviews used for this study's data collection. However, due to the researcher's bag and laptop being stolen two weeks later the detailed notes and data collection of these meetings were lost. Therefore, a small summary of these meetings is provided here instead and new interviews were held at a later date. Nonetheless, both of these preliminary meetings gave interesting insights on Utrecht as a city and the role of the municipality in making the SDGs known across Utrecht. More specifically, during both brainstorm sessions questions were asked according to the interview scheme that was created beforehand (Appendix C). Both meetings lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Approximately four weeks after these preliminary meetings were held, two official interviews were conducted. These two interviews were held after the ethnographic research was conducted. A semi-structured interview approach was chosen and the same interview scheme and topic lists were used for both interviews. This time the interviews were also recorded and transcribed (Appendix A and B). Personal details or information which was not

relevant for this thesis were left out. The first semi-structured interview was conducted with a member of the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals, whereas the second interview was conducted with the same employee of the municipality who was invited to the preliminary meeting, namely a member of the International Affairs office.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to their ability to give the interviewees a high degree of freedom in answering the questions, while at the same time relying on the same interview scheme and topic list for both interviews (Baarda & van der Hulst, 2012). As a result, the obtained answers could be used for a more in-depth discussion (Dörnyei, 2007). However, when using semi-structured interviews, it is important to ensure the that the discussed topics do not deviate too far from the topic list (Baarda & van der Hulst, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007). Hence, the interview scheme was carefully constructed beforehand to make sure this problem did not occur. Additionally, the concept of decentring was used by the researcher to become aware of possible personal opinions and experiences which could influence the interviews, as well as the later performed ethnographic research (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). These steps were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the obtained results (Baarda & van der Hulst, 2012; Dörnyei, 2007). More information on the topic of decentralisation can be found in this thesis' conclusion section.

A limited amount of two interviews was chosen due to the short time span in which this study was able to take place. Moreover, the interviewees were selected based on their crucial positions within Utrecht's municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals, meaning they worked closely together with the local implementation of the SDGs. Furthermore, both interviews were conducted at the interviewee's offices, were recorded using an iPhone and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Both were conducted in Dutch and the fragments most relevant for this study's results and discussion sections were translated in English (Appendix A and B).

4.1.4 Analysis methods.

As argued by Dörnyei (2007), there is no simple way to analyse qualitative data due to its complexity. He discusses four components in the process of obtaining and analysing qualitative data: "language-based analysis", "the iterative process", "subjective intuition versus formalization", and "generic analytical moves versus specific methodologies" (p. 243-245). The "language-based analysis" is a key component of qualitative research, due to qualitative data being mostly presented in "a textual form" (p. 243). This textual presentation is also present in this thesis due to the use of data collection methods such as a document analysis, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic research.

The "iterative process" refers to the process of qualitative research not occurring in one specific, linear order which is often found in quantitative research (p. 243). Instead, qualitative research can be used to move between the stages of analysis and data collection throughout the research process, as was also the case for this thesis. In this thesis, the document analysis was performed after which coding was used to highlight key terms relating to the discourse of the SDGs on micro and macro levels. In addition, the document analysis obtained new insights which helped shape the interview scheme. Subsequently, ethnographic research was performed and the interviews were conducted and transcribed. Transcribing the interviews was needed to conduct a "language-based analysis" and small fragment analyses (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 243) using the concepts of discourse, the Montreal School Approach, the Four Flows Approach, and Holliday's (2016) threading and blocking.

The use of coding relates to the component of "generic analytical moves versus specific methodologies" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 245), which describes the balance needed between using "generic analytical moves" such as coding on the one hand, and "specific methodologies" or "grounded theory" on the other hand (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 245). Coding involves reading a text and highlighting relevant passages and identifying key terms, as

discussed by Dörnyei (2007). "Grounded theory" is a common "qualitative research method" and refers to a process of research where the researcher moves between stages of collecting and analysing data through theoretical sampling with the aim of creating a new theory (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 258). Due to the short time period in which this study was conducted, a simpler version of collecting and analysing data was used: the obtained data was coded by narrowing it down to specific examples and key terms, which were then analysed using the four theories.

"Subjective intuition versus formalization" refers to the way in which qualitative data is presented and analysed. The researcher needs to find a balance between "subjective intuition" and "formalized analytical procedures" while interpreting the study's results (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 244). This thesis consists of descriptive ethnographic research combined with a document analysis and semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using organisational and communication theories in order to incorporate both "subjective intuition" and "formalized analytical procedures" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 244). By focusing on both analytical approaches, the researcher's freedom was maintained while existing theories were also used to maintain reliability.

As mentioned in a previous paragraph, theories that were used for the analysis of the data collected through the three research methods used in this study consisted of the concept of discourse, the Montreal School Approach and the Four Flows Approach, as well as the theory of threading and blocking (Holliday, 2016). Sub-question one (SQ1) was focused especially on the Four Flows, whereas the concepts of text and conversation and the concepts of discourse were used for the analysis of the data obtained for the second sub-question (SQ2). Furthermore, sub-question three (SQ3) was focused on investigating if the SDGs were used as a form of threading between different (sub)cultures. Therefore, SQ3 used Holliday's (2016) theory of threading and blocking to analyse the obtained results. These three sub-

questions came together in the main research question (RQ), which focused on investigating the overall approach the municipality of Utrecht uses to implement the SDGs locally.

4.2 Materials

Materials that were used include the website of Utrecht's municipality, an iPhone to record the interviews, and a paper and pen to write down ethnographic observations. Furthermore, all photos included in this study were taken by the researcher.

5. Results

5.1 Document Analysis: Utrecht's Municipality Website

Utrecht's municipality's website has one page that is dedicated to the Global Goals. The page can be found from the home page by clicking on the links 'Management and Organisation' (*Bestuur en organisatie)* and 'International Affairs' (*Internationale zaken*) (Utrecht Municipality, 2019). When Googling the key words 'Utrecht Global Goals', the page also shows up as the second suggested option in the search results. The first suggestion is the website of the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals.

The page on the municipality's website itself is called "International Affairs Global Goals". Firstly, it includes a large image showing all seventeen of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which is positioned directly underneath the heading of the webpage (Figure 1). By starting with this image, the webpage first introduces the SDGs on a macro level, or in other words, the Discourse or text.

Figure 1. Utrecht's Municipality's Website Page on Global Goals Section 1.

Secondly, the succeeding heading is called 'What are Global Goals?' (*Wat zijn Global Goals?*) and includes four hyperlinks: one to a Dutch article explaining Utrecht's involvement in these Global Goals, a link to the UN's website explaining the Global Goals, one to the Utrecht4GlobalGoals webpage, and lastly, a link to an English article explaining Utrecht's involvement in the Global Goals. The collaboration with Utrecht4GlobalGoals, as well as with other citizens, is emphasised by a little section informing the reader that the municipality is helping the UN realise the Global Goals by working together with its citizens, organisations and Utrecht4GlobalGoals:

> "The UN calls for everyone to contribute to the execution of the Global Goals. We also do this, we are working towards a healthier future in our city. We do this in collaboration with citizens, organisations and entrepreneurs via www.Utrecht4GlobalGoals.nl" (Utrecht Municipality, 2019; Figure 2).

This examples shows Utrecht's inclination towards using a bottom-up approach to reach these goals.

Furthermore, the goals that are specifically highlighted in this section are: no poverty, affordable and clean energy, clean water and sanitation, and reduced inequalities (Figure 2). These correspond to the SDGs 1, 6, 7, and 10 (Figure 1). Additionally, in this section the logo of Utrecht4GlobalGoals is also shown. As can be seen in Figure 2, the large 'U' depicted in the Utrecht4GlobalGolas logo is made out of the seventeen different colours used to present the seventeen SDGs in the original image used by the UN (Figure 1). This serves as a clear example of the translation of the SDGs from macro to micro level. By including the Utrecht4GlobalGoals logo and articles on Utrecht as a Global Goals city, this section places more emphasis on the SDGs on a local level, or the discourse or conversation, compared to the first section which focused on the framework of the SDGs in general, or the Discourse or text.

Figure 2. Utrecht's Municipality's Website Page on Global Goals Section 2.

The third section is called 'Council is committed to the Global Goals' (*Raad zet zich in voor Global Goals*), which explains the involvement of Utrecht's council and their acceptance of the following goals: 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16 and 17 (Figure 1). The section called 'Manifest'*,* is a sub-section written from the perspective of the council members. In this section, they explain their involvement in the SDGs and highlight their tasks and goals:

> "Everyone in their own way and together with the city, we work on the Global Goals, just like many others are doing" (Utrecht Municipality, 2019; Figure 3).

> "We expand the awareness in the municipality and the city. We stimulate citizens, social organisations and companies to take action" (Utrecht Municipality, 2019; Figure 3).

Similar to the example shown in the previous section, these two examples focus on including local citizens and organisations in order to achieve the SDGs, indicating another link to the municipality's bottom-up approach.

Additionally, the webpage includes a link to the manifest the council signed, which shows that each of these goals has one to three council members ascribed to them (Figure 3). Lastly, this section includes a video showing a short summary of the day the council members signed the manifest (Figure 4). Hence, this section emphasises Utrecht's bottom up-approach when it comes to spreading awareness surrounding the SDGs, however, it also shows that the top is also actively working towards working with these goals.

Figure 3. Utrecht's Municipality's Website Page on Global Goals Section 3.

Figure 4. Utrecht's Municipality's Website Page on Global Goals Section 3 Video.

Lastly, the fourth section focuses on the main initiatives the municipality and city of Utrecht support and collaborate with. The section is called 'How do we work on the Global Goals?' (*Hoe werken we aan de Global Goals?*). They mention the U campaign, which was created by the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals and is otherwise known as *HeelUtrechtU*. This campaign was specifically designed to include Utrecht's citizens, local organisations,

companies and entrepreneurs into working towards achieving the SDGs. The 'U' in the U campaign stands for initiatives and stories that the city and its people are proud of, and shows initiatives other citizens could follow (HeelUtrechtU, 2019):

> "*Utrechters,* organisations or entrepreneurs that contribute to the Global Goals and inspire others to do the same" (Utrecht Municipality, 2019; Figure 5).

Emphasis is placed on the involvement of not only the municipality, but other local initiatives and citizens in the SDGs for the third time on the analysed webpage. Furthermore, the website of *HeelUtrechtU* itself reports on different initiatives around Utrecht and links them to specific SDGs, which is meant to inform and motivate other people living in Utrecht.

In addition, the section mentions the initiative Utrecht4GlobalGifts, which is a web shop where companies can order local, sustainable products for their yearly Christmas gift packages, or where citizens can buy presents for their loved ones. Lastly, they mention the subsidies programme, 'Here and There', which is offered by the municipality to support organisations or local initiatives that aim to help achieve the SDGs. The programme was created to facilitate local organisation's involvement in the SDGs on a local or international level. Furthermore, 'Here and There' has its own webpage on the website of the municipality offering more information and providing a platform to register for the subsidy (Figure 5). Lastly, the webpage ends with the International Affair's contact details: a phone number and an email-address.

Figure 5. Utrecht's Municipality's Website Page on Global Goals Section 4.

Hence, it can be concluded that the webpage introduces the topic of the SDGs by showing and explaining the Sustainable Development Goals from the viewpoint of the UN, which is then narrowed down to a smaller, more specific scale. This is related to the macro and micro levels which were introduced in this thesis' theoretical framework. Furthermore, the webpage shows Utrecht's bottom-up approach by highlighting initiatives such as Utrecht4GlobalGoals, the U campaign (*HeelUtrechtU*), and its subsidy programme. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the subsidy programme also highlight's Utrecht's willingness to work with others in achieving these goals. Moreover, this section also shows an increased involvement of Utrecht's council, as is shown in the video which was posted on 1 March 2019.

5.2 Ethnographic Observations

As previously mentioned in the method section, ethnographic research was used to obtain more insight into the current situation in Utrecht. Hence, in the following sections the pronoun 'I' will be used to describe these experiences, following the conventions of

ethnographic writing (Riemann, 2005; Walford, 2009). These sub-sections will include general information on the events I visited, as well as my own observations and experiences during these events. All used photos were taken by me during my visits to these events.

5.2.1 The Climate Planet Event.

The city of Utrecht participates in multiple collaborations with the aim of raising awareness around the SDGs. One of these examples is the Climate Planet event, which was brought to Utrecht through a collaboration of the municipality, Utrecht4GlobalGoals and Global Citizen, among others. As a result, a large globe was positioned at Utrecht's Jaarbeurs square from the period of October 2018 to November 2018 (Utrecht4GlobalGoals, 2019).

Due to the size of the outer globe, the Climate Planet was hard to miss when walking down the stairs of *Jaarbeursplein* near Utrecht Central Station. Therefore, it was unsurprising to notice that it attracted much attention from not only me, but from most of the people who passed by at that moment (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Climate Planet Globe Exterior.

The globe was created through a collaboration between NASA and climate expert Jesper Theilgaard and aimed to spread awareness surrounding SDG 13, Climate Action (Climate Planet, 2019). This collaboration also immediately became clear when entering the little theatre inside the globe: in the middle of the room another, smaller yet still of impressive size, globe was positioned on which a live feed was projected. This live feed was produced directly from NASA's satellites and showed the movements of the clouds across the earth (Figure 7). Visitors sat around the globe in a circle of chairs, with the glowing globe as its centre piece. That is also why as soon as you walked into the room, you were instantly drawn to it. After being seated and having stared at the globe in mesmerisation for a few minutes, the same globe was used to display an interactive and informative video on climate change over the past decades.

Figure 7. Climate Planet Globe Interior.

Furthermore, surrounding the outer globe stood a temporary building hosting a little gallery, which displayed multiple initiatives in Utrecht surrounding the SDGs. This temporary room was the first thing you would see upon entering. Hence, in this case the event laid focus

on the micro level, or discourse or conversation, before letting its visitors become acquainted with the SDGs on a macro level, or Discourse, in the form of an interactive video.

Furthermore, the visitors were free to walk around the outer building for as long as they wanted. Its walls were covered with text informing the viewer about local shifts to sustainable energy and graphs depicting the high pollution levels of the meat and dairy industry. Just like the seventeen SDG tiles, the walls and their posters were made attractive by using simple shapes and bright colours.

While walking around the outer building I thought it was interesting how at least half of the walls were dedicated not only to spreading awareness on sustainability, but also aimed at trying to involve visitors into ways to live a more sustainable life. An example of this was a wooden frame of a tree on which visitors could hang their own sustainable resolutions for the upcoming year (Figure 8). Other examples were a wall showing easy steps on making sustainable changes to your lifestyle, leading up from a scale of slightly sustainable to very sustainable, and a wall on which visitors could write how they would view 'the new world'. Visitors wrote words such as: 'innovative', 'plant-based', 'sustainable', 'happy', 'less complicated', 'cleaner', 'sustainable energy' and 'stronger together'.

Figure 8. The Tree of Sustainable Resolutions.

At the end of this row of walls stood a final one on which the images of the SDGs were depicted. In front of the wall a lectern stand was placed with the words 'Climate Planet Utrecht' on its side. This was the place decorated to hold the ceremony for the HeelUtrechtU-Awards, designed to honour local citizens and organisations involved in working towards achieving the SDGs (HeelUtrechtU, 2019). Hence, the lay-out of the Climate Planet event reflected Utrecht's bottom-up approach and their aim of involving as many citizens as possible into the Global Goals movement.

The event was open for everyone, but its marketing was also directed towards schools and companies. Consequently, many primary and secondary school classes visited the event. This was also how I ended up visiting the event twice; once on my own and a second time with the honours programme Young Innovators. After the event, we were invited to join three members of Utrecht's municipality to discuss the themes of sustainability, food and digitalisation at their main city office. Hence, all of the above shows the involvement of the municipality in reaching its citizens and spreading awareness surrounding the SDGs.

Furthermore, the positioning of the Climate Planet globe next to Utrecht's central train station also helped its marketing.

5.2.2 The Plastic Whale.

The plastic whale, also referred to as *the Skyscraper*, is an art project which is currently positioned next to TivoliVredenburg in Utrecht (Figure 9). It was designed entirely from plastic that was found in the Pacific Ocean and was originally created for the event Bruges Triennial. The designers StudioKCA, chose this form to show the size of the current plastic waste problem, using the largest mammal living in the oceans as the inspiration behind their design (STUDIOKCA, 2018). The whale will be shown in Utrecht from the period of January 2019 until June 2019 and has been brought to Utrecht by Utrecht University (Knobel, 2018).

When I exited Utrecht's new, large shopping mall *Hoog Catharijne* through one of its side entrances on 20 January 2019, the large plastic Skyscraper could not be missed. This was the first time I had been able to inspect the whale from a closer angle and would return many times over the next few months to look at the structure. Especially throughout March to observe the Skyscraper for this thesis. The whale, meant to show the massive extent of plastic pollution through its large size, easily drew attention. From a distance the giant whale itself was a sore sight for eyes. However, when approaching the structure its wide range of different plastic pieces became easily visible and identifiable. On its side a propeller which had once belonged to some sort of air conditioner or ventilator, still turned in the wind.

Soon I realised the whale was not the pretty whole it pretended to be. Instead, its structure promptly had an unnatural air around it. The stark contrast of the whale in its partly natural habitat of the grey water, against the hundreds of pieces of plastic it was made out of, made me stop in my tracks. Now the different shades of blue from the used pieces of plastic seemed to stand out more, calling attention to the fact that they were not supposed to be there.

Different types of jerry cans and crates in many different sort and sizes that I didn't know existed were inviting me to look at them, to stand there and reflect on how they arrived here, in a canal in Utrecht. After sitting there for a while and observing the structure, I noticed many others passing by seemed to do the same.

The whale itself presents a local initiative that aims to spread awareness on subjects such as plastic pollution. However, what is interesting is that no clear, visible link was made between the UN's SDGs (the Discourse) and the plastic whale itself (the discourse). Its cause and origin can be easily found through a Google search. However, while walking past the art structure something simply seemed to be missing: a sign informing you of the Skyscraper's origin and how it ended up in one of Utrecht's canals.

Figure 9. The Skyscraper in Utrecht.

5.2.3 Studium Generale: Utrecht University

Studium Generale is a "public platform for knowledge and reflection of Utrecht University", which organises events in which they critically reflect upon and discuss interdisciplinary topics (Studium Generale, 2019). I visited their event Ladies First, with the aim of investigating their approach towards social issues and the SDGs. Additionally, it was an interesting event to attend, due to its focus on creating local awareness of the SDG.

Furthermore, it was interesting to see in what way the bottom-up approach used by Utrecht's municipality affected other events organised in Utrecht by stakeholders such as Utrecht University and other organisations. This event was organised on 26 February 2019, in the halls of the University's Auditorium in Utrecht's city centre (Figure 10).

When I entered the room many seats were already taken. Most of the attendees appeared to be female, however, multiple mixed gender study groups were also attending. While the event was open for all citizens most attendees were students, which could be due to Studium Generale's connection to Utrecht University. The large hall with its tapestries hanging from the walls served as a fitting background to the evening's discussion. The event focused on SDG 5, Gender Equality, by looking at gender inequality found throughout the past centuries on a global level. Dr. Sarah Carmichael, a historian, was soon introduced as the main speaker.

However, before her lecture started, an organiser of the event and member of Studium Generale explained in a short talk the reason behind the organisation of the event. He informed us that it was organised as part of a series of symposia called 'with a goal in sight' (*Met het doel voor ogen*) organised in collaboration with the Copernicus Institute. He went on to explain that the lectures serve to "critically asses the Sustainable Development Goals" (Carmichael, 2019, 0:00:21), and provided a small overview of the goals while asking the question "what have we achieved since the goals have come into force in 2015, and will they indeed lead to a better future?" (Carmichael, 2019, 0:00:39-0:00:53).

After his general introduction, Dr. Carmichael started her lecture by explaining that a lack of data on women's positions over the ages makes it difficult to assess the degree of gender inequality that was present. She provided another introduction focused on her topic in more detail and used multiple UN reports as support. More specifically, her talk first focused on the overall macro level of the SDGs and the UN, but soon focused on the subject of SDG 5

and its importance to the other goals. Her lecture did not focus on only local issues in the Netherlands, or Utrecht, but she also discussed local initiatives in countries with a larger gap in gender inequality as well. By doing this, she applied SDG 5 to different situations across the world and discussed the implications for differences in cultural and historical backgrounds in several local contexts.

Figure 10. Studium Generale's Ladies First Event.

Additionally, Carmichael (2019) argued that "tailor-made solutions" are the most effective ones (0:50:21). She discussed micro (local) and macro (UN) levels and claimed that it is not possible to simply use a solution made at macro level on a micro level. Instead, it must be tailor-made in such a way that it suits the local circumstances or context (Carmichael, 2019, 0:50:21).

Furthermore, when the host of the event asked Carmichael: "if you look at the SDGs right now, is there enough room for all of these very, sort of local contexts?" (Carmichael,

2019, 1:10:09), she answered that she is not sure whether there is enough "contextualisation and understanding of where certain practices come from" (Carmichael, 2019, 1:10:34-1:10:38). This would suggest that the SDGs are something discussed and created by the UN on macro level, and that their implementation on micro levels is extremely important to making them work. In conclusion, she argued that change cannot just happen from the top, but has to be initiated from the bottom in order for it to be effective:

"You can't just from the top say, 'we're going to do this' and try and project that onto a whole of society. You really have to look at what the institutions are, (…) what the kind of relationships are between people, and try and find, I would say, tailor-made solutions to the problems in certain countries. So, this I find a very interesting example of one that has really come bottom-up and functioned very well" [when discussing a local initiative in a village in India][3], (Carmichael, 2019, 0:50:05-0:50:32).

5.3 Interviews

5.3.1 Utrecht Municipality's city office, first meeting.

While entering the Utrecht municipality's office building for the second time in my life to meet my interviewee, I had expected that I would have to look for our meeting place, the *Dialoogbol*. However, as soon as I entered the building's massive meeting hall, it was easy to spot. The *Dialoogbol* was a structure made out of a wooden framework resembling a sphere, or globe. The wooden framework created levels of shelves which were filled with different varieties of plants (Figure 11). In between the plants little coloured, wooden tiles could be found resembling all seventeen SDGs. The globe was positioned next to the revolving doors of the city office's entrance and a little sign next to it informed the people passing by of its purpose.

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[3] The text between the square brackets was added by the researcher to add more context to the quote.

Figure 11. The 'Dialoogbol' at Utrecht's Municipality's Office.

The globe is unique to Utrecht and was built to create a space where citizens could sit and reflect for a while: a place to talk about the SDGs and what they mean. A small letterbox was positioned near the entrance of the sphere, in which anyone could post a card with their own goals. The seats inside the little sphere were made from recycled KLM uniforms, as I was later informed of by my interviewee. We had agreed to meet here, because it suited the nature of our meeting: to discuss Utrecht as a Global Goals city and the SDGs in general. The globe itself can be seen as a manifestation of the municipality's desire to raise awareness among its citizens and serves as a means to start a conversation about the SDGs.

The person sitting inside of the sphere seemed to be slightly shielded away from the other people visiting the office. While sitting inside, only three people passing by had glanced my way, showing the little serenity of the place positioned within the hustle and bustle of the city office: a good atmosphere to do some reflective thinking. However, it seemed most people who passed the sphere did not glance in its direction, nor did they approach it. During the ten minutes I sat there waiting for my interviewee to arrive, only one person approached the sphere and asked if he could join me.

Unfortunately, as previously discussed in this thesis' method section, the data from this interview, along with the data from the brainstorm session with the department's intern, was lost. Therefore, the small amount of documented data that was recoverable was used to create the second interview schemes (Appendix C) and served as a background to reflect on during the ethnographic observations.

5.3.2 Organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals

I had walked around the beautiful, white building of the café *The Utrechter* twice before I realised the entrance of the Social Impact Factory was through the café and up a hidden stairway to the left. When entering the colourful first floor, I was pleasantly surprised by the presence of multiple social and sustainable initiatives and entrepreneurships spread across the work space of the Social Impact Factory. I was soon told to climb another set of stairs to the second floor, where I would find a glass meeting room to the right which belonged to Utrecht4GlobalGoals. This room would also be the setting for our interview, while the plastic whale was showing itself off through the window as we spoke.

My interviewee explained to me that Utrecht4GlobalGoals is an organisation which was founded in 2012 through a request by the municipality. This request came during the time of Utrecht as a Millennium city and focused on the following:

"This means that Utrecht as a municipality expressed 'well, we think it is important that our citizens are acquainted with the Millennium Goals, and that they know what they can do with them and that from that, that from that very abstract UN-story a translation is made concerning what you, as a citizen of Utrecht, can do with them'. And the intention was to not only do this from the level of the municipality or the province, but also from the citizens themselves" (Appendix A, translated, lines 27-30).

Therefore, their main goal is to raise awareness on the SDGs among as many citizens and local organisations in Utrecht as possible: "So if everyone in Utrecht is acquainted with those

SDGs, and if everyone in Utrecht knows 'well, that's something I can do something with myself', then we're finished" (Appendix A, translated, lines 34-36). Hence, the organisation was founded to actively promote the SDGs among Utrecht's citizens. Furthermore, these two quotes reflect the active involvement of Utrecht's municipality and the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals in involving their local stakeholders in achieving higher goals, since even before the SDGs were created.

When I inquired about this matter in further detail, my interviewee told me that Utrecht4GlobalGoals focuses on four specific pillars: citizens, companies, schools, and the municipality or governance (Appendix A, translated, lines 43-52). Additionally, she emphasised that they try to use the local initiatives and institutions that were already present in the city as much as possible and try to link them to the SDGs. This serves as a model for "well executed local collaborations" (Appendix A, translated, lines 70-71).

Furthermore, this year, 2019, Utrecht was nominated by the Association of Dutch Municipalities International (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten Internationaal*, VNG internationaal) along with two other Dutch cities for the title of being able to best present the SDGs locally. Furthermore, my interviewee explained that the city of Utrecht uses a local bottom-up approach in trying to work towards reaching the SDGs. She continued to argue that:

> "I believe that is the only way to have it succeed. (…) And I don't think it works, in any way, to try and say from the province or municipality to say 'hey guys, everyone has to start working with the SDGs'. That's no use" (Appendix A, translated, lines 91-96).

Moreover, when commenting on the macro and micro levels of the SDGs and the possibility of creating something that works on macro level but not on micro level, she replied:

"I think that's where its strength lies, (…), an organisation like this which is positioned

in the city like this, amidst the citizens, council members, organisations, and schools.

You first must cultivate enthusiasm for it. And translate a very abstract story to very

concrete examples. And I think that's our primary goal and that that's also the reason

why it's actually succeeding" (Appendix A, translated, lines 101-106).

She continued to argue that a difference between the MDGs and the SDGs is that people

tended to say that the MDGs was something that the UN created *for* them, whereas now the

SDGs are something that was created *with* them. In this way, she said, "every organisation,

every city, every country can come up with something on how to collaborate towards a more

sustainable world" (Appendix A, translated, lines 122-124). Additionally, she is of the

opinion that the SDGs propose a measurable framework, which is important for this process.

When discussing Utrecht as a Global Goals city specifically, she informed me of a few

upcoming projects: the opening of a mosaic path near Utrecht central station on which each

SDG is presented in its own tile, as well as a project which will project the SDGs on the front

of the white, old building previously described in which the Social Impact Factory is located

(Appendix A, translated, lines 142-146). These two projects and their positioning in some of

Utrecht's most visited places will add to other projects which aim to spread awareness on the

SDGs among Utrecht's citizens and organisations.

This is also linked to their main approach: trying to make the icons of the SDGs

visible in as many places in the city as possible to ensure their visibility and recognisability

for all citizens. By doing this, they aim to reach citizens who do not have any knowledge of,

or experience with sustainability yet:

"Because you want to reach the large group underneath that. You want to reach that

group which does not actively participate yet, that [group that] knows that a solar

panel exists but that's where it stops. Those are the one you want. And you have to

start at the start. Otherwise you won't get there" (Appendix A, translated, lines 232-235).

Furthermore, she continued arguing that: "(…), it has to be as easy as possible. Everyone is busy and has schedules which are overflowing" (Appendix A, translated, lines 214-215). Examples of this are the earlier described projects such as the Climate Planet event and the Skyscraper, but also other initiatives such as TivoliVredenburg's Global Goals café or the SDG House at Neude. They are aiming for citizens to realise: "'hey, I've seen this before about three times, maybe I should look it up'" (Appendix A, translated, lines 221-222).

Our conversation ended with a story about her daughter who proclaimed she was going to be a vegetarian after she had had a class on vegetarianism at school. My interviewee argued this showed the effect of such a bottom-up approach:

"So I think it works, if you enter it on different levels. And if a toddler starts telling their parents what's better for the world, then parents are more inclined to listen compared to when a municipality imposes it on them" (Appendix A, translated, lines 261-263).

In addition, this example relates to the nature of the SDGs and their ability to be used on different levels.

5.3.3 Utrecht's Foreign Affairs office, second meeting.

Similar to the first interview, the second official interview took place in the *Dialoogbol* in the municipality's main office. Amid the busy life of the people of Utrecht, the representative of the municipality's International Affairs department was kind enough to sit down with me a second time. We discussed Utrecht as a Global Goals city and the municipality's approach to the SDGs. However, before the interview started I took the time to sit down in the globe again and observe the people passing by. This time, a group of elderly couples stopped near the globe and took the time to discuss the structure among themselves.

When one of the women approached me to ask if it was okay if she took a photo of the globe with me in it, I took the opportunity to ask her about the SDGs. She admitted she had been intrigued by the globe, yet did not know why it was there. As I explained the SDGs to her and Utrecht's local approach to it, the interest sparked in her eyes. This time I experienced the attraction of the globe and its ability to be an easy conversation starter between citizens, or the municipality and citizens.

In addition, it showed the way in which the SDGs can be used as a framework to discuss the issues depicted in the seventeen goals between people from different (sub)cultures; between age groups, professions, or nations in general. This was also confirmed by my interviewee on both a local and an international scale: "The advantage of it is that the Sustainable Development Goals – they are an international language. So other cities and countries will understand it" (Appendix B, translated, lines 17-19). During the context of this quote, we discussed the use of the SDGs as a common language across cities and nations. Furthermore, my interviewee argued that the SDGs are not only a common language, but also a connecting language, explaining the reason behind why they suit Utrecht as a city:

> "(…) it is appropriate for both governments and organisations, as entrepreneurs and people, so you're suddenly working on comparable goals. Only everyone does this in their own way. And a third point is that is also connects internally. (…) so, it connects social, sustainable, and economic goals. Well – and because it's such a connecting language it is very useful, as a Global Goals city, to connect this city with one another" (Appendix B, translated, lines 23-28).

Moreover, Utrecht's project 'Healthy Urban Living for All' resonates well with the SDGs. The project focuses on creating a healthy environment in the city of Utrecht. Therefore, it is used by the municipality to support their SDG campaign (Appendix B, translated, lines 10-15). By doing this, the municipality investigates how their already existing

projects contribute to the UN's SDGs (Appendix B, translated, lines 42-44). Additionally, the municipality's objective is to raise awareness on the SDGs among the city's inhabitants and the SDGs' ability to: "(…) let them reflect on [the fact that] what they are doing locally has an impact on what happens internationally" (Appendix B, translated, lines 36-37).

Furthermore, she argued that: "[The SDGs, ed], it creates a consciousness of 'oh right, we're all working on the same thing'" (Appendix B, translated, line 79). This is also reflected by the fact that multiple cities across the Netherlands, such as cities in Friesland, but also on an international level, such as Taipei, reach out to Utrecht for advice on local implementation of the SDGs. Before the SDGs, my interviewee would not have expected this to be possible (Appendix A, lines 184-186; Appendix B, lines 233-237). Similarly, she explained she often does the same thing during international meetings. For instance, she explained that she advised the VNG to invite their Belgian counterpart to learn from the seemingly successful Flemish methods concerning the collaboration between Belgium's Global Goals cities (Appendix B, lines 120-125).

Additionally, we discussed the specific approach my interviewee and her department chose to implement the SDGs locally. She explained that the VNG did not actively push for decision-making among cities during the period of the shift from the MDGs to the SDGs:

> "I did do that. I think it is important that as a mayor and city council, and local council you actively decide 'we're going to work on those Global Goals'. And that at short notice you record how you will do this, what you will do and what it should produce. I thought that was important, so we did that in Utrecht too" (Appendix B, translated, lines 90-93).

This slightly different approach that was taken by Utrecht's municipality regarding the implementation, as well as their active involvement, further becomes clear from the following statement:

> "We have mostly organised it in a bottom-up way, so we first involved the citizens, organisations, campaigns and subsequently looked at how we could use this as a strategy to link this to the [municipal] policy via monitoring. I think this suits Utrecht, however, for example in Leeuwarden or Rheden it's more of a top-down approach" (Appendix B, translated, lines 135-138).

She also admitted there was still some improvement possible in citizens' interest in certain projects. For instance, the *HeelUtrechtU* campaign could have more involvement from local citizens and organisations. Therefore, the municipality aims to see positive development on these levels (Appendix B, lines 181-190). However, both the representatives from the municipality as well as from Utrecht4GlobalGoals believe that a bottom-up approach will be the most effective. Additionally, both are of the opinion that even though on certain levels development can seem slow, a clear shift is visible towards a more sustainable lifestyle among citizens of Utrecht (Appendix A; Appendix B).

6. Discussion

6.1 Utrecht as a Global Goals City

The main research question aimed to investigate the ways in which Utrecht designed their local SDG campaign:

> *RQ: How does the municipality of Utrecht implement the Sustainable Development Goals locally?*

The data collected through a document analysis, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic research, clearly reflects the municipality's bottom-up approach. More specifically, as become

clear from the data obtained through the interviews, Utrecht's municipality chose to focus on involving Utrecht's citizens, local organisations and entrepreneurs as the first step in aiming to implement the SDGs locally.

Furthermore, from both interviews it became clear that the municipality as well as the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals strongly believe that a bottom-up approach is the most effective way in reaching these goals and initiating change on a micro level. They argued that change is most effective when coming from the local initiatives and citizens themselves, compared to using prescribed rules by the government of what everyone should do.

This bottom-up approach corresponds with previously written articles on Utrecht as a Global Goals city (Keranidou et al., 2018; Sakkers & vom Scheidt, 2017) and becomes clear from the events and campaigns organised by the municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals. Examples are the *HeelUtrechtU* campaign and the *Hier & Daar* subsidy programme which actively try to involve and encourage local stakeholders to engage with the SDGs. In addition, as explained during the interviews, the existence of the organisation Utrecht4GlobalGoals already is a clear example of this. The organisation's main purpose is to raise awareness on a local level and to motivate citizens and organisation to help work towards reaching the SDGs. Additionally, events such as the Climate Planet and the Skyscraper, but also the mosaic SDG-path or the projection of the SDGs on the building of the Social Impact Factory, are a collection of ways in which this bottom-up approach displays itself in the city. These initiatives reflect the municipality's aim to have all citizens become acquainted with the SDGs.

Additionally, campaigns such as *HeelUtrechtU,* the subsidy programme 'Here and There' (*Hier & Daar*), and projects such as the *Dialoogbol* reflect the city's bottom-up approach, due to these initiatives' main purpose of increasing the involvement of local stakeholders. Furthermore, they show not only Utrecht's involvement on a local level, but

also their collaboration on an international scale. Utrecht does not only aim to successfully implement the SDGs on a local scale, but also invites representatives from other cities, both in the Netherlands and abroad, to show them Utrecht's approach.

Moreover, the results of the document analysis also show that municipality itself and the city's council have formally accepted the SDGs. Meaning that while most emphasis is placed on a bottom-up approach, the municipality us also involved in implementing the SDGs from the top. However, the interview data showed that both the municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals believe that it is important to start at the bottom first. Contrarily, other Global Goals cities such as Rheden or Oss have applied top-down approaches as indicated by both interviewees during the semi-structured interviews.

6.2 The Four Flows

The first sub-question focused on Utrecht's own representation as a Global Goals city:

SQ1: In what ways does the city of Utrecht position itself as a Global Goals city?

The obtained data was analysed using the Four Flows Approach and indicated clear links between the different communication flows and the way Utrecht constitutes itself as a Global Goals city. All four flows will be discussed in their own sub-sections.

6.2.1 Membership negotiation.

As was explained in the theoretical framework, membership negotiation relates to the way in which an organisation's members are defined as belonging to the organisation. Shared meaning and goals are key factors within this process (McPhee & Iverson, 2009). From previous research it was expected that Utrecht does this via storytelling on local scale (Sakkers & vom Scheidt, 2017). This corresponds with the data that was found in this study. By using storytelling, the municipality is able to share its values and Global Goals plans, and engages citizens in this process. The citizens that notice this and become active participants in

working towards the SDGs have negotiated their membership as part of the Global Goals city as it were.

At the same time, the same process is performed by the UN on macro level. For example, the different Global Goals cities have had to go through a similar process to earn this title. By publishing the report on the SDGs and spreading awareness, the UN created a process of membership negotiation between these cities, leading up to them becoming part of the movement.

Additionally, the results showed that Utrecht does not only use storytelling on a local scale, but also on an international one to create a sense of membership. Furthermore, as argued above, their approach of storytelling becomes clear from the many projects the municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals organise to raise awareness on the issues depicted by the SDGs locally. By using a bottom-up approach, the municipality places emphasis on this process of membership negotiation and, consequently, shows that they place high value on this particular flow.

6.2.2 Reflexive self-structuring.

Reflexive self-structuring was defined as the formal communication and basic rules of an organisation (Kuhn, 2012). In the case of the SDGs this could be certain rules or agreements the UN and its member states have agreed on, such as the maximum permitted levels of CO_2 emissions per country. Additionally, when talking about Utrecht this could also refer to general rules the municipality set up within the city, or to Utrecht adapting to becoming a Global Goals city and being able to refer to itself as one (McPhee, 2015). For example, this becomes clear in the manifest that was signed by the council members. This formal document shows Utrecht as a city is actively involved in working with the SDGs.

Additionally, as argued in the interview with a member of the municipality, when the UN's report on the SDGs was published, the municipality actively recorded their evolvement into a Global Goals city. Furthermore, the involvement of Utrecht4GlobalGoals shows a general task division between the municipality and Utrecht4GlobalGoals. Whereas the municipality mostly seems to focus on designing and executing projects such as 'Healthy Urban Living for All' and engaging with other Global Goals cities internationally, Utrecht4GlobalGoals' main task is so raise as much awareness as possible on the SDGs locally.

6.2.3 Activity coordination.

This flow is focused on the way in which all these different tasks are executed in reality (McPhee & Iverson, 2009), as well as the collaboration that is needed for their achievement (Kuhn, 2012; Miller, 2015). As stressed by Utrecht's bottom-up approach, local stakeholders such as citizens, entrepreneurs and local organisations are partly expected to engage with the SDGs. The municipality is actively working towards creating a healthier environment in Utrecht as a city and increasing international collaborations and Utrecht4GlobalGoals is designing campaigns to raise more awareness. However, without the involvement of local stakeholders, Utrecht's goal of being an active Global Goals city would not be accomplished.

Events such as the series of symposia organised by Studium Generale show the active involvement of local organisation such as Utrecht University, as well as their similar bottom-up viewpoint on the SDGs. Additionally, an award show such as the *HeelUtrechtU* Awards and its website give insight into the way the SDGs are becoming a phenomena that local stakeholders become increasingly involved with. As Sakkers (2018) argued, making the global local and the local global. This was further confirmed during the interview with the representative of the municipality, making global issues relevant on local scale and vice versa.

Furthermore, the extensive local collaboration that was needed to bring the Climate Planet event and the Skyscraper to Utrecht are also examples of this.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the flow of activity coordination is made out of extensive collaborations between all stakeholders in Utrecht as a city: the municipality, Utrecht4GlobalGoals, citizens, schools, other organisations and entrepreneurs. Furthermore, their main goal is working towards the SDGs in their own, local way. While this is the main objective, the results showed that the different initiatives also have their own specific goals they are working towards. For instance, the Studium Generale event 'Ladies First' mostly focused on the discussion of SDG 5 on a global scale, whereas the Skyscraper aims to spread awareness on plastic pollution. Hence, this shows the versality of the SDGs.

6.2.4 International positioning.

As previously discussed, international positioning refers to the way in which the organisation presents itself to a larger network (Miller, 2015; Kuhn, 2012; McPhee, 2015). This relates, for example, to the way in which Utrecht positions itself as a Global Goals city within the international framework of Global Goals cities. As was expected from previous papers written on Utrecht as a Global Goals city (Keranidou et al., 2018; Sakkers & vom Scheidt, 2017). However, the results in this study showed the importance Utrecht places on being active on both a local and a global scale. Additionally, it showed their emphasis on aiding each in reaching the SDGs through collaboration. More specifically, Utrecht seems to represent itself as a city that values collaboration on multiple levels and that aims to do as much as they can do spread awareness on the SDGs.

6.3 The Concept of Discourse and the Montreal School Approach

The second sub-question aimed to investigate the link between the concept of discourse and the Montreal School approach of text and conversation to the way in which the SDGs were discussed on macro and micro levels:

SQ2: What links between discourses and Discourse and between conversations and texts are apparent in the implementation processes?

The results from the discourse analysis showed that the municipality's webpage was organised in such a way that it discussed the SDGs on a macro level before moving on to Utrecht's own local approach, or on a micro level. This shows that the SDGs can be linked to the concept of discourse in the way that the SDGs represent the big-D, Discourse. It is the general structure that is used to frame both international and local interaction surrounding the issues discussed in the SDGs, such as gender equality, clean water and sanitation and so on. In other words, the SDGs represent the overall "enduring system of thought" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7; Miller, 2015).

As previously discussed, within these rules or this structure, countries, cities or citizens can make use of their own agency (Miller, 2015, p. 84; Giddens, 1979; Giddens, 1984). This leads to the concept of little-d, discourse, or the micro level. These terms refer to the way in which these countries, cities and citizens interact with the SDGs, the Discourse, in their own way. More specifically, little-d, discourse relates to the way in which the cities and its local stakeholders choose to interact, or use their agency, within this framework of the SDGs. Therefore, the little-d, discourse is reflected in the Global Goals cities' local implementation. For example, in the Utrecht's events and projects such as Climate Planet, the SDG-path, and all initiatives mentioned on the *HeelUtrechtU* website are part of Utrecht's municipality and its city's discourse on this topic (HeelUtrechtU, 2019).

This corresponds with theory defining little-d, discourse as "the study of talk and text and social practices" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004, p. 7; Miller, 2015) in the way that the SDGs serve as the basis around which the talk, text and social practices in Utrecht are shaped. The SDGs are used to create Utrecht's own interpretation of dealing with the global issues the SDGs present, which becomes visible in the different projects such as the plastic whale or the

symposia organised by Studium Generale. Furthermore, the way in which Utrecht's municipality represents themselves and discusses the SDGs on their webpage indicates how they interpret and deal with the SDGs in their own way. By placing this information on their website, the municipality creates their own version of talk and text around the larger framework of the SDGs.

Similarly, the concepts of text and conversation used by the Montreal School can be applied to the way in which the SDGs are presented on a macro level and on a micro level in the city of Utrecht. The SDGs can be referred to as the text around which all other conversation related to the discussion of "people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership" (United Nations, 2015, p. 2) within Global Goals cities like Utrecht, takes place. This corresponds with the models provided by Kuhn (2012) and Miller (2015). Moreover, the same could also happen vice versa. For example, the UN's report on the SDGs was created through ongoing interaction on current pressing global issues. Through this interaction between the different members of the UN, the report in which the SDGs are presented was created.

Hence, this is also related to concepts such as the "communicative constitution of organisation" (CCO) and Structuration Theory (Miller, 2015, p. 83; McPhee & Zaug, 2000). As previously explained, CCO places focus on the constitutive processes that surround an organisation, as well as the processes that occur within the organisation, instead of solely looking at communication processes as if happening within a container. In addition, Structuration Theory argues that "the social world is generated through the agency of active participants" (Miller, 2015, p. 84; Giddens, 1979; Giddens, 1984). This is reflected in the discussion of the SDGs and the local implementation in Global Goals cities such as Utrecht in the way that it shows that each participant can choose their own way of talking about, or dealing with, the specific text at hand (the framework of the UN's SDGs). Meaning, the Global Goals cities have different ways in which they can use conversation around the text of

the SDGs (Miller, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that there is a link between macro, Discourse, or text and the SDGs as a framework on the one hand, and micro, discourse and conversation and local implementation on the other hand. This link refers to the ability of the Global Goals cities to use their agency to shape their local discourse surrounding the Discourse, or wider framework of the SDGs. In applying these different theories, this thesis has provided an example of how these organisational and communication theories can be combined and applied to the context of the SDGs and Global Goals cities.

Additionally, the concept of scaling up can be applied here. For example, it can be said that the SDGs are a text that was created through interaction within a group of UN members. Subsequently, many nations and cities across the world took the report seriously and started working with the SDGs. At the same time, it can be argued that the SDGs were also scaled up again by the Global Goals cities themselves in order to implement them locally and discuss their own implementation with other Global Goals cities on an international scale. An example is Utrecht's local approach and their storytelling on an international scale, and consultancy to other Global Goals cities.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the SDGs were scaled up from a text which was created in one specific environment, towards something that was made more concrete and personal by different Global Goals cities. In other words, the conversation around the text changed and the text brought forward multiple interpretations and local implementations. Hence, this also shows the ability of the Montreal School Approach to examine these processes on both micro and macro levels (Miller, 2015), and indicates that the approach can be used in many different contexts. This thesis has used the concepts of discourse and the theories of conversation and text and applied them to practical examples, which has shown that these theories are applicable to this kind of research while providing an example of how to apply them to international and local organisational processes.

6.4 Threading and Blocking

Finally, the third sub-question was aimed at the topic of threading and blocking. It sought to investigate whether the SDGs could be used as a form of threading between local (sub)groups, as well as between different international cities:

SQ3: Does Utrecht use the SDGs as a way of threading between different Global Goals cities, and if so, how?

Previously, threading was defined as looking at similarities instead of differences during communication between people of different (sub)cultures (Holliday, 2016). Due to the SDGs' international significance, it was expected that threading or blocking could be found in relation to the discussion of them between different cities (Holliday, 2016; Sakkers, 2018; United Nations, 2015; Sakkers & Vom Scheidt, 2014; Keranidou et al., 2018).

The results showed that threading was found on two different levels: firstly, it was found in the bottom-up approach adapted by Utrecht's municipality. As argued by my interviewee, the SDGs do not only serve as a common language, but are also used to form connections. This becomes clear from the involvement of multiple, diverse stakeholders such as citizens and organisations in the city. Furthermore, I experienced this myself when the *Dialoogbol* in the municipality's city office served as a conversation starter between myself and an older woman. The SDGs led us to have an interesting conversation, which we would otherwise not have had. Therefore, in these scenarios the SDGs, the global issues they represent and the municipality's aim to spread awareness on these topics served as the aspect we had in common. We did not focus on our differences, such as belonging to different sub(cultures) or generations, and did not place each other in specific blocks during our conversation. Instead, we used the SDGs as the basis of our threading during the conversation.

Secondly, threading was found in collaborations between Dutch Global Goals cities, as well as between Global Goals cities in different countries. Examples are Utrecht's involvement in many international projects and their communication with Taipei regarding the local implementation of the SDGs. As my interviewee argued, before the SDGs were designed she would not have imagined herself discussing such matters with the municipality of Taipei. She explained that, during the international meetings she attends, she is now also approached by representatives of different countries and cities who are curious about the SDGs and Utrecht's approach to them. This newfound sense of connection between countries and cities is based on their similar interests in the SDGs. Whereas perhaps normally the representatives attending the international meeting would tend to look at each other in separate blocks such as the Netherlands and Taiwan, they now approach other representatives with the stories of their Global Goals cities in mind and the purpose to learn from each other's initiatives. Hence, the obtained data shows that the SDGs serve as an international language and framework which is measurable and understandable for everyone, as was meant by the UN (United Nations, 2015). Due to serving as this understandable and measurable framework, the SDGs can be used as similar interests to start conversations during international, or national, meetings. Therefore, they can be used as a basis for threading in conversations.

6.5 The Sustainable Development Goals General Comments

Re-addressing the critical comments discussed in the theoretical framework of this thesis, these results would indicate that the power of the SDGs lies in its ability to be used on macro as well as micro levels. This corresponds with what was claimed by Moore (2015), namely that the most important aspects of the SDGs are the way in which the framework can be used to include "citizen participation" and the localising of "the agenda" (p. 803).

Additionally, the paradigm shift argued for by Moore (2015) seems to have become clear in Utrecht's approach of involving its citizens and organisations in working towards the

SDGs. The paradigm shift was argued to be a shift towards a society in which we need to become increasingly aware of current social and sustainable issues as well as adapting our approach to them. Utrecht's municipality is using the SDGs to raise awareness among its local stakeholders on the current social and sustainable issues both locally and internationally through Utrecht4GlobalGoals' campaigns and other projects such as the Climate Event.

Furthermore, Carant's (2017) critique that due to the high amount of different goals and targets of the SDGs, it would be more likely for governments to only focus on a few does not seem directly applicable here. Due to Utrecht's bottom-up approach and encouragement of viewing the SDGs on not only their local, but also international level, multiple local and international initiatives can deal with a wide range of goals.

Lastly, Utrecht's inclusion of already existing projects such as 'Healthy Urban Living for All' seem to indicate that the municipality does not use the SDGs as their only guideline for creating a healthier and more sustainable city. This corresponds with what was argued by Sakkers and vom Scheidt (2017), namely that other innovations and "local development" not connected to the SDGs are also needed in order to achieve the SDGs and to create a more sustainable world. In the case of Utrecht, the SDGs are used as a general framework of creating awareness around the topics the seventeen goals depict. In addition, the SDGs have been shown to serve as a connecting language between cities and countries.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study's results show that the involvement with the SDGs on both macro and micro levels, such as the inclusion of Global Goals cities, seems to be a way to create threading between different cities and countries. This becomes visible through international collaborations between Utrecht and cities such as Taipei. Additionally, the same can be found on local levels between different stakeholders, such as citizens and local organisations. This is

also linked to Utrecht's approach to being a Global Goals city. Their main goal is to raise awareness on the SDGs locally, with which they aim to involve as many local stakeholders as possible. They believe such a bottom-up approach is the only way to create a change, after which changes on higher level will follow.

Moreover, CCO theories were used to analyse this data: the UN's framework of the SDGs was linked to big-D Discourse, whereas the way in which the separate Global Goals cities, such as Utrecht, controlled their local implementation and shaped their discourse surrounding the SDGs was linked to little-d discourse. Examples of this are the different events they organise, such as the Climate Planet event, and the incorporation of the municipality's 'Healthy Urban Living' projects. Additionally, projects such as the Skyscraper, Studium Generale, and the SDG-path (Figure 12), are ways in which Utrecht attempts to create a local meaning out of the abstract SDGs on macro level, or as Discourse.

Similarly, the Montreal School can be found in the ways in which the SDG's are used as the text around which on both local and international level conversation takes place. The processes of scaling up can be found in the way the SDGs were created and spread across Global Goals cities, as well as in the way Utrecht uses its own local approach to give advice to other Global Goals cities on an international level.

Furthermore, the Four Flows were linked to the way in which Utrecht as a Global Goals city organises and communicates its local approach to the SDGs. Firstly, membership negotiation was found through storytelling and the involvement of local stakeholders. Secondly, reflexive self-structuring was reflected in the UN's report of the SDGs, Utrecht's official acceptance of them and the foundation of Utrecht4GlobalGoals. Thirdly, activity coordination was reflected in the collaborations between the municipality, Utrecht4GlobalGoals and local stakeholders. Finally, institutional positioning was shown in the way in which Utrecht approaches and represents itself towards other Global Goals cities.

The results of this study add to research on Global Goals cities and the local implementation of Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to research on intercultural and organisational communication. This was done by analysing the obtained data using the concepts of threading and blocking and the concept of discourse, as well as the Montreal School Approach and the Four Flows. Furthermore, they can be used as a model on how to study the SDGs on micro and macro level using theories on (intercultural) communication and organisation.

Moreover, the example of Utrecht is one way of implementing these goals locally. The strength of Global Goals cities and the SDGs, as partly argued in this study, is that each city is able to implement them in their own way. Consequently, they can be suited to each local environment and have an increased chance of succeeding compared to an approach which would only focus on a macro level. In other words, by using the SDGs on both the macro level of the UN and the micro levels of the cities, the SDGs are brought closer to the cities' citizens and their specific contexts, needs and possibilities. As a consequence, as was seen in the example of Utrecht, citizens become more aware of the global issues the SDGs represent and are more likely to become active participants in helping to reach these goals.

This thesis has shown that organisational and communication theories such as the concept of discourse, the theories of text and conversation, the Four Flows and Holliday's (2016) concepts of threading and blocking are suitable for the analysis of phenomena on micro and macro levels. In other words, the theories have been proven to be applicable to matters which are at play on both international and local scales. Therefore, this thesis has helped to gain more insight into how organisational and communication theories can be operationalised in research. Furthermore, it has provided insight into the complexity of the organisational and communication processes which underly the implementation of a global framework on a local level.

Unfortunately, due to time restrictions, this study was not able to include other Dutch Global Goals cities such as Oss or Rheden to compare their approach to the one used in Utrecht. As mentioned in one of the interviews, these cities have chosen a different approach in implementing the SDGs locally. Whereas Utrecht uses a more bottom-up technique, the municipalities of Oss and Rheden are said to focus on top-down approaches instead. The benefits of using a top-down approach could be that adjustments to help reach the SDGs could be implemented without prolonged discussions with other local stakeholders. However, this could also lead to a situation in which these adjustments could be imposed on them.

Furthermore, as has become clear from this study, one of the main challenges of working with the Global Goals is finding efficient ways of working with the SDGs locally. Future research could investigate this in more detail, using the Four Flows model and other similar methods that were chosen in this study. Additionally, future research could further investigate the different local implementations on an international scale. For example, investigating other Global Goals cities around the world and their approaches, with the aim of further exploring the effects of using the SDGs as a common language and the corresponding phenomenon of threading. This would especially be interesting due to the high level of international interaction between the Global Goals cities and their willingness to learn from each other and to find ways to translate the SDGs from macro to different micro levels. From a perspective of intercultural communication, it would be interesting to see how the common framework of the SDGs influences intercultural communication and shaped interactions on an international level.

Other limitations of this study include the limited amount of interviews and document analyses that were conducted due to time restrictions. Future research could, therefore, also include interviews with citizens of Utrecht, or include a survey investigating the citizen's involvement and knowledge concerning the SDGs and corresponding projects organised in

Utrecht. Moreover, documents such as the original UN report on the SDGs and the Dutch Ministry's report on their acceptance of them could be studied in further detail. This would lead to a better overview of the discourses surrounding the implementation of the SDGs on international and local scales, and could provide more insight into the concept of scaling-up.

Moreover, while the concept of decentering was used, it is possible that the researcher's own background partly influenced the results. Since I was raised by an environmentally conscious family in a small town in the Netherlands, I have always been aware of some of the issues that are depicted in the SDGs. Therefore, these issues might seem of higher importance to me than they might possibly hold for others.

Lastly, an interesting recent development are the results of the Dutch national election for the Provincial Assembly (*Provinciale Staten*) that were held on 20 March 2019. The results in the city of Utrecht were remarkable compared to the rest of the Netherlands, especially in comparison with cities such as Rotterdam and Tilburg. In these cities the right-wing parties obtained the highest number of votes. Contrarily, progressive, left-wing parties, which value sustainability and an inclusive society such as *GroenLinks*, were among the parties which attained the highest number of votes in the city of Utrecht. This is especially remarkable due to the high number of votes for right-wing, more conservative parties, and in particular newcomer *Forum voor Democratie* on a national level.

Therefore, future research could also aim to investigate whether there is a link between Utrecht's emphasis on spreading awareness on the SDGs and the issues they represent and the high amount of left-wing, progressive voters. The obtained data that was analysed using the activity coordination flow of the Four Flows shows that not only Utrecht's municipality, but also its citizens and local organisations are a part of executing the tasks that make Utrecht a Global Goals city. Due to Utrecht's bottom up approach, the municipality places emphasis on involving the local stakeholders in helping achieve the SDGs locally. It would be interesting

to investigate whether the municipality's aim of producing constant reminders to its citizens on the SDGs in the form of discourse, such as the SDG-path, influences the importance Utrecht's citizens place on working towards solutions for the issues presented in the SDGs through politics.

Figure 12. The New SDG-path on the Croeselaan in Utrecht.

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