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**“THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY ON JOB SELECTION:
AN ANALYSIS OF OCCUPATIONAL PREFERENCES”**

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*To you, Grandpa,
whose example lives in each of my accomplishments.*

*It is so shocking to find out how many people do not believe that they can learn,
and how many more believe learning to be difficult.*

- Frank Herbert, Dune

ABSTRACT

Questa prova finale esplora l'interazione tra sostenibilità sociale e selezione del personale, concentrandosi su come le pratiche orientate alla sostenibilità influenzino le preferenze lavorative nel mercato del lavoro contemporaneo. Nonostante la crescente importanza della sostenibilità sociale, essa riceve meno attenzione rispetto alle dimensioni economica e ambientale, sia nel mondo delle aziende sia negli studi accademici. Questo studio mira a colmare questa lacuna, mettendo in luce il contributo unico della sostenibilità sociale nel migliorare il benessere dei collaboratori e la performance organizzativa.

Attraverso un'analisi basata su un questionario, la ricerca indaga l'importanza di attributi lavorativi legati alla sostenibilità sociale, come l'equilibrio tra vita privata e lavoro, lo sviluppo professionale, la salute, la sicurezza, l'uguaglianza e l'inclusione. Un ulteriore obiettivo è comprendere in che misura queste percezioni variano in base a fattori esterni, come genere ed età, offrendo un quadro più completo sulle dinamiche che guidano le scelte professionali in un'epoca in cui la responsabilità sociale è sempre più cruciale.

I risultati di questo studio non solo offrono spunti preziosi per le aziende nella definizione delle proprie politiche di reclutamento e sostenibilità, ma arricchiscono anche la letteratura presente, suggerendo l'importanza di considerare l'età e il genere nei processi decisionali aziendali.

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of social sustainability is gaining relevance in the contemporary economic and labor context, as both companies and workers become more aware of the significant role that socially sustainable practices play in creating fair and inclusive work environments. This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between social sustainability and job selection, analyzing how sustainability principles influence employees' job preferences and companies' recruitment policies. By integrating social sustainability, companies not only aim for economic success, but also seek to promote collective well-being and improve the quality of life of their employees.

In a continuously evolving labor market, the search for solutions that ensure not only economic growth, but also social well-being has become essential. Social sustainability, understood as the set of practices aimed at promoting equity, diversity, and social responsibility in organizations, is emerging as one of the decisive criteria in the professional choices. The work presented in this thesis focuses on the analysis of theoretical and empirical models with the goal of understanding how social sustainability is integrated into decision-making processes at both the individual and organizational levels. This analysis is particularly relevant in a context where workers are increasingly sensitive to the quality of the work environment, inclusivity, and the social responsibility of the companies for which they choose to work.

Through an empirical investigation based on a questionnaire aimed at workers and candidates, this research focuses on exploring which economic, labor, and social characteristics are perceived as most relevant in professional choices and how these factors interact with values related to social sustainability. Furthermore, the survey seeks to identify any differences in preferences based on variables such as gender and age to assess if such differences may influence job choices. Analysis of questionnaire data will enable a detailed examination of the weight that various attributes of social sustainability in occupational decisions, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that drive job selection in an era where social responsibility has become a crucial element for organizational success and collective well-being.

Finally, the importance of this research lies in providing empirical and conceptual contributions that can support both companies and the academic world. The results obtained will offer valuable information for companies wishing to improve their social sustainability practices and adapt their recruitment policies, while also contributing to strengthening the academic literature by highlighting the importance of considering variables such as age and

gender in corporate decision-making processes and sustainability strategies. In summary, this thesis aims to explore a dimension of sustainability that is often ignored but increasingly relevant, contributing to a deeper understanding of workers' expectations and the dynamics that guide job choice.

CHAPTER 1: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY: FOUNDATIONS, RELEVANCE, AND CORPORATE RESPONSABILITY

1.1. The Concept of Sustainability

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This is the definition of sustainability given by the Brundtland Report (1987, p. 37) – also called *Our Common Future* – published by the *World Commission on Environment and Development* (WCED) in 1987. In the report, the concept of sustainable development was introduced for the first time.

At the beginning, the focus of sustainability referred to the well-being of people and the responsibility of today’s generations towards future generations. Today, the WCED definition of Sustainable Development is often seen as limited, as it is fundamentally anthropocentric, focusing primarily on satisfying human needs (Seghezzeo, 2009): in the earlier literature, it is used as a necessity for developing countries and has not always been associated with growth. This brought issues and numerous studies from authors who hold the term, but this distinction is completely lost when the United Nations (UN) merges the term development with growth. Growth is the driving force that allows the resolution of ecological and social problems (Purvis et al., 2019). Following the publication of the Brundtland Report, the concept of sustainability has been continuously reinterpreted and adopted in various forms (Lafratta, 2004). In 2015, the UN provided a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity called The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda is made up of *17 Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) and is adopted by all member states of the UN and requires a strong participation of all components of society; this means that both public and private sector companies must also commit to implementing their own strategy and commitment to sustainable development to achieve these goals (The Global Goals, 2022)¹. The agenda reflects this evolution by incorporating a comprehensive framework that addresses not only the needs of current and future generations, as in the report, but also the interconnected dimensions of sustainability. Consequently, it is essential to explore in depth the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic (Mondini, 2019).

¹ Cf. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

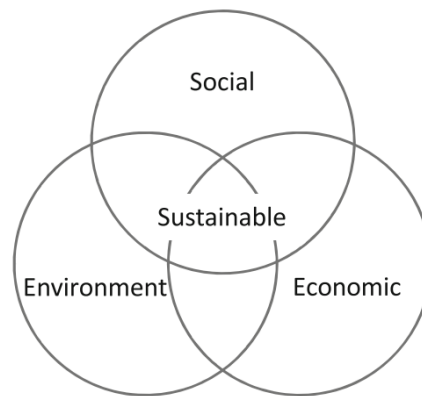


Fig. 1 – Typical representation of sustainability as three intersecting circles²

1.2. The Pillars of Sustainability

Over the past 20 years, the concept of sustainability has evolved in the literature due to being an open concept with multiple interpretations and context-specific understandings. Despite this, a widely accepted definition of the term has emerged that uses the idea of three interconnected pillars. This framework is commonly represented as three intersecting circles (Purvis et al., 2019), as shown in *Fig. 1*.

The first representation of this widespread circles diagram can be attributed to the work of Barbier (1987) during his studies on sustainable economic development. The core idea was that sustainable economic development maximizes the goals of all these systems through an adaptive process of trade-offs. Each circle represents a system with its own unique set of goals, and according to Barbier (1987), these were: a) Biological system goals; b) Economic system goals; c) Social system goals.

The modern concept of sustainability dimensions originates from Agenda 21 - the main results of the *United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (UNCED), also known as the *Earth Summit*, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 – which “is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment”³. In the declaration, the three dimensions were mentioned for the first time, as member states were asked to develop systems to monitor progress toward achieving sustainable development across economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Agenda 21, 1992, p. 66).

² Purvis, B., Mao, Y., Robinson, D., 2019. Three pillars of sustainability: in search of conceptual origins

³ Cf. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/outcomedocuments/agenda21>

Economic Sustainability

The definition of Economic Sustainability is the key pillar that decides the financial success of a business, and it includes financial costs and benefits focused not about profit at any cost, but ethically founded in the idea of efficiency, that is, non-wastefulness, in the use of scarce resources (Baumgärtner and Quaas, 2010; Muthu, 2020). This pillar is strictly connected to the other two pillars. The primary concern about economic sustainability is that the implementation of environmental and social sustainability practices should not negatively affect the economy. In fact, it offers advantages such as job creation and increased profitability, but also issues related to long-term planning, cost savings, and development and smart growth (Muthu, 2020).

Environmental Sustainability

One of the core pillars of sustainability is Environmental Sustainability, which involves a comprehensive evaluation of environmental aspects, including resource consumption and environmental polluting. Environmental sustainability supports human health by being intricately related to the quality of the environment and therefore efforts to preserve and restore the ecosystems also contribute to the well-being and the health of the territory. Efforts to improve environmental sustainability can support the economic sustainability, since practices such as the recycling valuable materials can reduce operating costs and minimize the need to extract resources⁴ (Muthu, 2020).

Social Sustainability

The final pillar and focal point of this document is Social Sustainability, which focuses on people and their welfare (Muthu, 2020). McKenzie (2004) gave us the definition of Social Sustainability as both a life-enhancing condition within communities and a process through which communities can achieve that condition. Having analyzed the definition, we can now examine the main characteristics that derive from this concept.

McKenzie (2004) has identified indicators of the condition, and below we see the most relevant ones:

- Equity of access to essential services, including healthcare, education, transport, housing, and recreation.
- Equity between generations, ensuring that future generations will not be disadvantaged by the actions of the present generation.

⁴ Cf. <https://www.treehugger.com/what-are-the-three-pillars-of-sustainability-5189295>

- A system of cultural relations where the positive aspects of disparate cultures are valued and protected, and in which cultural integration is supported and promoted when it is desired by individuals and groups.
- Sense of community ownership and responsibility for maintaining that system of transmission.
- Mechanisms that enable a community to meet its own needs through community actions whenever possible.

These indicators are crucial for fully understanding social sustainability, as they not only clarify its definition, but also allow to identify with precision the sectors in which it operates. In addition, they highlight the policies and actions that can be taken to ensure its proper implementation. Social Sustainability, therefore, enforces the confirmation of the existence of people's basic necessities, identified by Muthu (2020), and this includes promote fair labor practices, combat gender bias and child labor, punish sexual harassment, prioritize education, ensure equal opportunities, community development, increasing work-life balance, health and safety standards, high protection, human rights and wellness.

Even though Social Sustainability has always been represented as equal in size to the other two pillars in practice, as we saw in *Fig. 1*, this has not reflected the reality (McKenzie, 2004). The lack of theoretical and empirical studies may have influenced this difference in importance; the 'social' was integrated late into debates on development sustainability (Eizemberg and Jabareen, 2017). Much of the public and business efforts tend to focus primarily on economic and environmental concerns. As a result, these issues often dominate sustainability discussions, overshadowing the social dimension (Ajmal et al., 2017). Only with the growing influence of social ecology frameworks did the debate shift towards recognizing that a massive portion of humanity is vulnerable to environmental challenges and risks. Today, social sustainability is integrated across many sectors and companies, with dedicated departments focusing on ethical implications as part of the strategic business vision (Eizemberg and Jabareen, 2017; Muthu, 2020).

1.3. Social Sustainability in Enterprises

Currently, many companies are increasingly interested in building sustainable organizations. Environmental changes, greater social awareness often promoted by the mass media, and the destruction of natural habitats have contributed to increased focus on sustainability issues. In this study, we will focus on the analysis of Social Sustainability, one of

the aspects of sustainability that has received less attention and depth in the literature (Pfeffer, 2009).

In his book *Power: Why Some People Have It and Others Don't* (2010), Jeffrey Pfeffer describes the 2008 case of Walmart, in which Doug McMillon, then CEO of Sam's Club, introduced a new rectangular, stackable milk jug. McMillon proudly highlighted how this innovation had reduced the product's cost by 10-20 cents and eliminated more than ten thousand shipments, generating significant savings for the company. However, during the same period, Walmart was paying its employees about 15% less than other major retailers. Considering this example, Pfeffer asked himself: "Is a milk jug more important than the workers?" (Pfeffer, 2009).

Companies are beginning to understand that their management practices profoundly influence both the social environment and people. In the United States, there have been cases where many organizations have removed health insurance from their employees, creating difficulties in accessing medical care. Another example is the reduction of retirement contributions by companies. All these actions, aimed more at corporate profit and improving the physical environment rather than the well-being of workers or society, have increased financial stress and economic insecurity. Pfeffer (2009) emphasizes the importance of considering organizational effects on the social world with the same attention given to impacts on the physical environment. Workplace stress, cuts to health insurance and pension funds, and an insufficient number of vacation or sick days generate externalities for society. The idea that organizations influence the health and wellness of workers is well known; society itself recognizes the link between work stress and management practices. However, these effects are often ignored, as there is a lack of adequate discussion regarding the consequences that business decisions have on society, especially when the aspect of sustainability is not considered (Pfeffer, 2009). Efforts to resolve these challenges are often hindered by the ambiguity of the concept, the divergent priorities of stakeholders, and the absence of a clear and consistent understanding of sustainability (Ajmal et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2015). Outcome measures may be required to guide business agendas in a positive direction, with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commonly used by firms to evaluate social sustainability (Ajmal et al., 2017).

The purpose of CSR is to create a system for businesses that allows them to generate profits while also taking responsibility for their employees, consumers, and society (Ali and Khan, 2022). Due to the growing interest from both public and private companies in the topic (Ajmal et al., 2017; Dias-Sardinha and Reijnders, 2005), leading companies in many

manufacturing sectors have begun to create reports on their CSR activities, many of them referencing the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) guidelines (Ajmal et al., 2017). The idea of CSR is closely related to the three concepts of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), which are People, Planet, and Profit. The first refers to the commitment that a company makes to positively influence the economy, while the latter is a framework for assessing a company's performance by considering economic, environmental, and social factors (Ali and Khan, 2022).

Analyzing the Italian context regarding Social Sustainability, according to ISTAT data for 2022, it is estimated that 59.5% of manufacturing companies in Italy have undertaken sustainability actions. Of these, 44.6% focused on social sustainability, while 50.3% adopted measures for environmental protection and 36.8% dedicated themselves to economic sustainability. However, most of the interventions are conducted by large companies (around 80%), while among micro and small enterprises (MSEs), the percentage drops to 36.1%⁵. According to Confartigianato, in Italy, in the two-year period 2021-2022, among MSEs that invested in social sustainability, 84.3% prioritized monitoring the health and safety of workers, followed by 48.9% that monitored product safety. Furthermore, 32.0% implemented plans for employee well-being, 24.3% collaborated with local associations for social and cultural initiatives, 12.1% promoted plans for equal opportunities, and 10.7% extended parental leave and leave for serious reasons. With these data, we can clearly identify the principal areas of social sustainability and the areas of focus for companies to meet the social requirements of workers⁶. It is of great interest to examine whether these areas align with the priorities of workers, as this could influence their job choices and their quality of life.

1.4. Social Sustainability in the Workplace

Understanding the key areas of Social Sustainability in the Workplace (SSWP) is essential to effectively address the needs of workers and society. This approach not only promotes a fairer and more inclusive work environment but also helps satisfy the growing expectations of employees about their welfare and the social responsibility of companies.

SSWP is a relatively recent concept that is still evolving in terms of its definition and explanation (Kobal Grum and Babnik, 2022). As mentioned in *Paragraph 1.1.*, companies must do their best to align with the SDGs introduced by the UN by 2030. According to Contreras et al. (2022), three SDGs are closely related to SSWP: SDG-3, guarantee healthy lives and

⁵ Cf. <https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Pratiche-sostenibili-delle-imprese.pdf>

⁶ Cf. <https://www.confartigianato.it/2024/04/studi-il-372-delle-mpi-migliora-la-sostenibilita-ambientale-e-il-328-la-sostenibilita-sociale/>

promote well-being for all at all ages; SDG-5, achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and SDG-8, encourage sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, ensure full and productive employment, and provide decent work for all (The Global Goals, 2022). In the last two years, after significant events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, there has been an increased sense of concern, particularly among the European population, about two other SDGs: SDG-11, develop cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, and SDG-16, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (Kobal Grum and Babnik, 2022; The Global Goals, 2022).

Thanks to these objectives and the data we analyzed in *Paragraph 1.3.*, we can identify the principal areas of social sustainability in the workplace:

- Health and Safety
- Decent Work and Professional Development
- Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance
- Equality and Inclusion

According to Randstad report (2024), the five most relevant factors in job selection in Italy, based on a sample of seven hundred and sixty-four people, are work-life balance, salary level, job security, a sense of personal fulfillment through work, and flexible working hours. These elements highlight that Italian workers place significant importance not only on economic benefits, but also on the quality of life that their job allows them to maintain. On the other hand, it is equally interesting to analyze the factors that might lead employees to leave their current jobs. Among the main reasons are an unpleasant work environment, a job that does not align with the employee's personal life, insufficient pay, and a lack of career growth opportunities (Randstad, 2024). After analyzing the data, for companies, it is crucial to create a positive work environment that supports employee well-being and promotes an inclusive culture, thereby attracting employees who are motivated to join the company because of these favorable conditions.

CHAPTER 2: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

2.1. Social Sustainability for Workers

Whenever social sustainability frameworks are evaluated within companies, indicators such as absenteeism rates or training days are analyzed, without considering the perspectives and opinions of employees. Despite this, employees are often regarded by companies as the main resource, although they are sometimes overlooked when it comes to improving their working conditions and increasing corporate social sustainability (J. Pfeffer, 2010). Recently, many companies have started conducting surveys and obtaining sustainability certifications to prepare sustainability reports; however, these reports are often used as "business cards" rather than being created for their primary purpose (Daub, 2007). Such evaluations do not take into account the position of employees as internal actors, thereby limiting corporate information (Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė, 2018).

It is therefore important to assess these indicators by also including employees' opinions, which could reveal paradoxes and tensions in the relationship between the organization and workers. Companies should not underestimate their collaborators, as if their needs and desires are not respected, they are free to leave the organization (Helfat et al., 2007). According to Zaugg (2009), employees should be considered by the company as actors of utmost importance. In the context of social sustainability, employees' perceptions should be crucial, as they contribute to organizational objectives and can influence business decisions (Staniškienė and Stankevičiūtė, 2018).

Having a broad perspective that also includes that of workers enriches the company's view on social sustainability. Measuring social sustainability by incorporating employees' viewpoints creates value for the organization. Having information about them helps the company assess its social impact on them and manage challenges such as resource decline, increased transparency, and increasing stakeholder expectations (Laszlo and Zhexembayeva, 2011).

The goal of companies should be to improve social sustainability, starting with workers and their opinions. Creating a work environment that does not ignore the needs and perceptions of collaborators not only promotes individual well-being, but also helps generate value and increase organizational effectiveness, thereby enabling the company to deal with the challenges of today's society.

2.2. Theories and Models

The analysis of theories and models, supported by the literature, represents an essential element to understand the issue of sustainability and human motivation. Through theoretical references, it is possible to construct a conceptual framework that allows the measurement and evaluation of situations that are often difficult to quantify. The literature offers various perspectives that allow us to explore the dynamics governing the relationships between social, motivational, and behavioral factors, contributing to a greater understanding of these topics.

2.2.1. The Binary Theory

In their essay *Sustainability Quotients and the Social Footprint* (2008), McElroy et al. proposed a theory to make Sustainability more measurable, defined as the Binary Theory of Sustainability. Within this theory, we find an approach called the Binary Orientation, which is based on a sustainability assessment characterized by a clear distinction: an activity can be considered fully sustainable or not sustainable, with no intermediate shades. It establishes a boundary on a scale of sustainability performance, beyond which an activity is sustainable and, below, it is not. The Binary Orientation differs from the Absolute Orientation, which is based on the same ideal of sustainability but leaves room for interpretation. This introduces an element of relativity, as it allows for intermediate interpretations, such as in the case of a product that, while producing lower emissions than the average, does not achieve full sustainability. An activity may be considered ‘more or less’ sustainable, even if it is not completely so. The Binary Orientation, on the other hand, eliminates this graduality and relativity, establishing a clear and unequivocal boundary. Thus, an activity is either sustainable or not sustainable, with no gray areas: if it does not fully meet the criteria for sustainability, it falls into the ‘non-sustainable’ category, as we can see in *Fig. 2* (Widok, 2009).

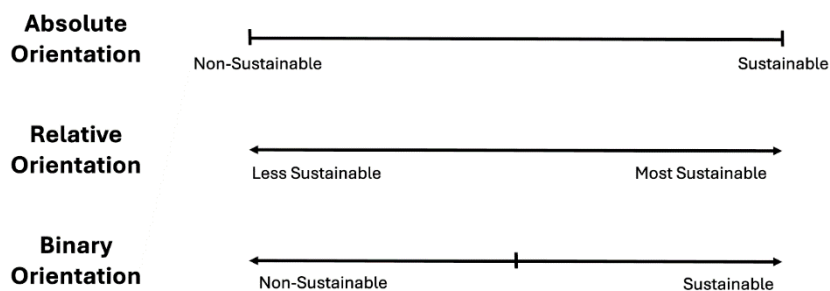


Fig. 2 – Representation of the Binary Theory of Sustainability⁷

⁷McElroy, M.W., Jorna, R.J., Van Engelen, J., 2008. Sustainability quotients and the social footprint

2.2.2. Hierarchy of Needs

The Hierarchy of Needs (HON) is a developmental psychology theory proposed by Abraham Maslow (1954), developed through the analysis of numerous previous studies on human motivation. This theory argues that individuals progress through a series of hierarchical motivations in a specific order, driven by both physiological and psychological needs. Maslow distinguishes these needs into two main categories: Deficiency Needs and Growth Needs – as we can see in *Fig. 3*. In this hierarchy, lower-level needs must be satisfied before one can move on to the higher levels. If, at a later time, deficiencies occur in the lower levels, the individual will act to address them. Deficiency Needs include the first four fundamental needs according to Maslow: 1) Physiological Needs; 2) Safety Needs; 3) Belongingness and Love Needs; 4) Esteem Needs. One cannot advance to the higher levels of the hierarchy without having fully satisfied the previous needs.

Initially, Maslow grouped all these needs under one major concept: Self-Actualization. However, as his studies progressed, he divided this concept into two distinct levels: the level of Self-Actualization (Maslow and Lowery, 1998) and a level focused on growth beyond that oriented towards self (Maslow, 1971). In this phase, we find: 5) Cognitive Growth; 6) Aesthetic Needs; 7) Self-Actualization; 8) Self-Transcendence. According to Maslow, as individuals reach the levels of Self-Actualization and Self-Transcendence, they become increasingly wise, gaining the ability to act wisely in a wide range of situations (The Rotary Leadership Institute, 2016).

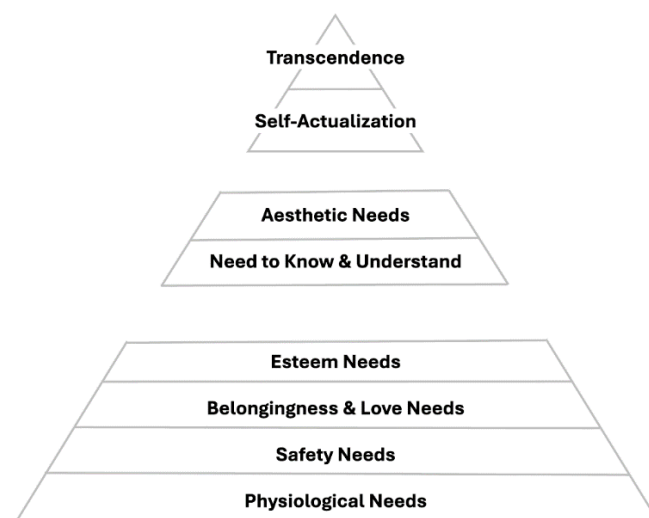


Fig. 3 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs⁸

⁸ Cf. https://www.rlifiles.com/files/en/2015_Grad_F.pdf

While Maslow's HON is widely recognized and often depicted as a pyramid, this representation is not without its flaws. Critics argue that the pyramid does not capture the complexity of human motivation and does not consider individual variations and cultural differences. In his original writings, Maslow did not use the pyramid metaphor, which has led to significant debate within the literature (King-Hill, 2015).

Wahba and Bridwell (1976) conducted a comprehensive review of the HON and concluded that upholding Maslow's strict hierarchical order of needs is minimal, and thus challenged the idea that a rigid sequence of needs applies universally to everyone. Similarly, Hofstede (1984) expanded on this critique by asserting that the hierarchy reflects an ethnocentric viewpoint deep rooted in western ideology. He argued that the HON does not accommodate the diverse cultural needs of various societies and their specific social and intellectual contexts.

Moreover, Cianci and Gambrel (2003) criticized the HON for its oversimplification, suggesting that it does not consider societal needs during historical moments, such as periods of recession or war. Research by Tay and Diener (2011) further supports this notion, demonstrating that the prioritization of needs can differ by age and does not remain consistent across different demographic groups. These critiques highlight the need for a more comprehensive understanding of human motivation that transcends the limitations of Maslow's original framework.

2.2.3. Attraction-Selection-Attrition

In organizational sciences, a significant distinction exists between studies focusing on the individuals who work, and studies centered on the characteristics of the organizations where they work. The Attraction-Selection-Attrition (ASA) model, developed by B. Schneider in (1987), offers a framework to bridge these perspectives, emphasizing how individual characteristics and organizational attributes collectively influence organizational behavior. ASA proposes that dynamic and interdependent processes of attraction, selection, and attrition are an essential key to understanding the composition of an organization's workforce, thus defining the organization's structures, processes, and culture.

The ASA model begins with the Attraction Process, suggesting that individuals are drawn to organizations that align with their personal attributes and values. This alignment is based on an implicit judgment of fit between individual and organizational characteristics, although the specifics of these characteristics remain undefined within the model. The second process in the ASA model is the Selection Procedures that involves the informal and formal

organizational recruitment and hiring practices that aim to identify candidates whose attributes align with the organization's desired qualities. Lastly, the Attrition Process suggests that individuals who do not find an adequate fit within the organization are more likely to leave, leading to greater homogeneity among remaining members (Schneider et al., 1995).

While the ASA model suggests several empirical propositions, Schneider leaves some key issues undefined. For instance, the model proposes that people are attracted to organizations based on a certain "fit between personal and organizational characteristics" but does not specify exactly what these characteristics involve. Similarly, it does not explain how to measure this fit or determine the level of homogeneity, or which aspects are the most important. However, turnover literature clearly indicates that people who do not feel adequately matched within an organization are more likely to leave it (Schneider B and Schneider JL, 1994).

The ASA model places primary emphasis on the people within an organization – particularly the founders and top management – who influence its goals, culture, and identity. The model suggests that organizational goals and culture are implicit or explicitly reflections of the unique characteristics of the founders and early members, determining the types of people who are attracted, selected, and retained with the organization. By hypothesizing that organizational behavior is a function of these collective personalities, ASA emphasizes the significant role of human characteristics in defining the structure and culture. In this sense, ASA serves as a person-centered model, suggesting that an organization is the result of the ongoing influence of those who choose to join and remain within it (Schneider et al., 1995).

2.2.4. Psychological Contract

The Psychological Contract is a model that has generated considerable interest among numerous researchers, offering a perspective for understanding employee motivation and commitment (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006). In particular, the concept has been further developed by Rousseau (2001, 1995, 1989), contributing to a significant expansion of its scope.

The origins of the psychological contract can be traced back to Blau (1964), who emphasized that the focal point of this theory is centered on the fact that social relationships have always been characterized by reciprocal social obligations and the unequal distribution of resources and power. Psychologist Argyris (1960) introduced the term 'Psychological Work Contract' to describe how the perceptions and values of both parties — the organization and the employee — are deeply rooted in the employment relationship. Levinson et al. (1962) defined the psychological contract as "a set of mutual expectations, of which the parties involved may not be fully aware, but which nevertheless influence and regulate their mutual relationship."

Finally, Schein (1978, 1965) further expanded the concept, asserting that the expectations between the organization and the individual do not only relate to the amount of work and compensation, but also include obligations, privileges, and rights not directly related to the tasks performed.

Increased attention to the psychological contract emerged in the 1990s, in response to the need for innovative practices during a period of economic transformation and shifting labor market dynamics. Based on earlier theories and the economic context of the time, Rousseau (1990, 1989) introduced the concept of 'Transactional Psychological Contracts', characterized by a view of employment no longer based on a long-lasting relationship with the organization, rooted in loyalty and job security, but rather on a transaction where long working hours are exchanged for variable compensation and training hours. Rousseau placed particular emphasis on the subjectivity of the employee, an approach that has subsequently drawn criticism. Current literature continues to debate if it is appropriate to include the perspectives of both employees and employers within the Psychological Contract (Cullinane and Dundon, 2006).

2.2.5. Final Considerations

The theories and models analyzed in this chapter provide a deep understanding of social sustainability and human motivation. The Binary Theory of Sustainability by McElroy et al. (2008) offers a clear and defined framework for measuring the sustainability level of individual activities. On the other hand, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1954) highlights the importance of fundamental needs in influencing individuals' motivation, suggesting that a complete understanding of motivational dynamics can attract the right workers to the company.

Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition model (1987) integrates individual analysis with organizational analysis, emphasizing how personal characteristics influence the composition and culture of organizations as well as the worker's own choices. For example, a doctor may choose to affiliate with hospital A rather than hospital B based on his or her assessment of the compatibility between his or her personality and the values he or she believes characterize the two hospitals (Schneider et al., 1995). Finally, the Psychological Contract provides an articulated view of the mutual expectations between employees and organizations, revealing how the ongoing advancement in social sustainability has redefined work relationships.

2.3. Decision-Making Path in Job Selection

Whenever an individual is faced with the choice of a new job, the decision-making process is influenced by a set of personal preferences that can vary significantly from person to

person. It is now established that the choice of work is a subjective process that changes over time.

According to Gretchen Adams (2014), this process is constantly changing because only through experience does the individual begin to understand what interests, talents, and values are important to him. Adams hopes, therefore, that personal misinformation will be replaced by more precise knowledge, thanks to the increasingly accurate expectations that the individual learns over time after various jobs, occupations, and experiences (Adams, 2014; Greenhaus et al., 2018). The choice is certainly influenced by personal characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, as well as personal or social expectations (Rice, 2003). There are also other social factors that play a role in this decision, such as the individual's status in society, health, personal wealth, and lifestyle (Dick and Rallis, 1991).

Some people encounter difficulties in making career choices, struggling to plan their careers effectively, leading to career indecision. Career indecision refers to the inability or difficulty that individuals may face when making effective career decisions (Adams, 2014; Gati et al., 2011; Osipow, 1999). Kleiman et al. (2004) argue that career indecision is primarily caused by an individual's lack of readiness, insufficient information, and inconsistent information flow. This issue is connected to social sustainability, as guiding individuals toward clear career paths aligned with their personal goals and interests can improve job satisfaction and reduce turnover.

2.3.1. Literature Review

The Office of Career Strategy at Yale University (2022) has developed a list that describes the most suitable decision-making process for its students. This method is based on reflection and personal self-assessment, and each phase – from identifying options to evaluating and prioritizing them, followed by action and final reflection – is essential for making informed decisions. The author emphasizes the importance of a structured approach, which allows for exploring different scenarios and adapting choices to personal needs and values⁹. An alternative approach is proposed by the Career Center at Florida State University, where greater importance is placed on the individual and their opinions rather than on criteria for evaluating and prioritizing various job opportunities¹⁰. Another model is from the University of Liverpool, which promotes a balanced approach that considers both objective aspects and individual emotions and aspirations. This model includes creating a list of pros and cons for each job

⁹ Cf. <https://ocs.yale.edu/blog/2022/12/11/explore-five-step-career-decision-making-process/>

¹⁰ Cf. <https://career.fsu.edu/students/undergraduate-students/plan-your-career/career-decision-making>

opportunity, along with developing a decision matrix, a method that is particularly useful for more rational individuals¹¹.

After reviewing the relevant literature (Florida State University; Liverpool University; Yale University, 2022), it is possible to develop a list that summarizes the key phases of the decision-making process. This list consists of the main steps present in various ideologies and aims to be of a general nature. The structure is as follows:

- Decision Analysis
- Awareness, Self-Assessment, and Reflection on Values
- Evaluation and Option Selection
- Consult and Engage Others
- Emotional Evaluation and Reflection

2.3.2. Key Features in Job Selection

After analyzing the decision-making process that each individual takes, let us now identify the main factors that influence the choice. As discussed in *Paragraph 1.1.*, we have already identified four main macro-areas in which these characteristics can be grouped together. Each author adopts his own view on these factors, which differs due both to the variety of studies conducted and to their different specific usefulness. In this document, we have selected some key authors (Non et al., 2022; Randstad, 2024; Thompson et al., 2004) to create a list of the main factors of choice, useful for subsequent analysis. The characteristics and macro-areas are illustrated in *Tab. 1*.

2.4. Work Preferences in Social Sustainability

Before moving on to the next chapter, it is important to dive deeper into the analysis of work preferences in relation to social sustainability. In the current chapter, we have examined the different theories and models that form the basis for understanding this area, identifying the fundamental characteristics to consider in the career choice.

We will focus on three research studies conducted by Thompson et al. (2004) and Omar et al. (2015). These studies provide valuable information on the work preferences of students and workers, while also considering the national differences of the authors and participants, a crucial aspect for a comparative analysis.

¹¹ Cf. <https://prosper.liverpool.ac.uk/postdoc-resources/reflect/decision-making/>

Macro-area	Characteristic	Source
<i>Health and Safety</i>		
	Job Security	Non et al., 2022; Randstad, 2024
	Health Insurance	Non et al., 2022
<i>Decent Work and Professional Development</i>		
	Salary	Non et al., 2022; Randstad, 2024; Thompson et al., 2004
	Growth Potential	Randstad, 2024; Thompson et al., 2004
	Job Responsibility	Thompson et al., 2004
	Job Variety	
	Job Complexity	
	Travel Opportunities	
	Travel Requirements	
	Training	
	Company Size	
	Composition Salary	Non et al., 2022
	Workload	
	Control over Work	
<i>Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance</i>		
	Work Arrangements	Non et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2004
	Job Flexibility	Randstad, 2024; Thompson et al., 2004
	Job Distance	Thompson et al., 2004
	Benefits	
<i>Equality and Inclusion</i>		
	Focus of the Company	Non et al., 2022; Thompson et al., 2004
	Social Responsibility	Thompson et al., 2004
	Environmental Responsibility	
	Work Environment	Randstad, 2024

Tab. 1 – Work Characteristics divided into the four macro-areas

Next, we will explore two additional studies by Lin and Efranto (2023) and Hamid (2020) that will help us understand how work preferences can vary by gender and age. In particular, Hamid's study will allow us to identify young adults' specific expectations regarding the career selection and job opportunities they seek.

2.4.1. Thompson et al. & Omar et al. studies

Thompson et al. (2004) conducted a study on 241 American undergraduate students in the field of economics, aiming to examine the importance of 20 job characteristics to understand their professional preferences. The participants indicated that the benefits package, job variety, growth potential, and responsibility are the most relevant aspects when evaluating a job

opportunity. The study also highlighted that work culture is particularly important for female students, while geographic location appears to be one of the least significant characteristics for male students. Additionally, the influence of experience on the ranking of these attributes was analyzed. The researchers observed that the four attributes 'Ease of Commute', 'Work Flexibility', 'Company Recognition', and 'Work Culture' hold varying importance depending on the level of experience. Specifically, experienced people tend to emphasize factors that promote good work-life balance, while recent graduates place greater importance on job security, preferring companies with strong brand recognition that can ensure future career advancement opportunities.

In the article by Omar et al. (2015), *Job Selection Preferences of Accounting Students in Malaysian Private Universities*, the factors influencing job selection among Malaysian university students are analyzed. Using the independent variables 'Starting Salary', 'Employer Reputation', and 'Working Environment', the researchers aim to understand the importance assigned to each factor by students. The text cites Bundy and Norris (1992), who found that American students do not consider starting salary a determining factor in their job selection. On the contrary, the study by Bathula and Karia (2011) revealed that New Zealand students place significant importance on the working environment as a key factor in job choice. Omar et al. then conducted a survey of 200 undergraduate students from three Malaysian private universities: UCSI University, Sunway University, and HELP University. Data analysis showed that, in general, these three factors are considered important in choosing an ideal job, with the working environment emerging as the factor with the highest preference average among Malaysian students.

2.4.2. *Lin and Efranto & Hamid studies*

According to Lin and Efranto (2023), in their article *Do Age and Gender Change the Perception of Workplace Social Sustainability?*, social sustainability must be integrated into the workplace to increase the overall level of corporate sustainability, and each indicator should consider employees' perspectives. This study conducted a survey on 643 workers with the aim of analyzing employees' preferences on social sustainability and how they can vary based on gender, age, type of industry, industrial sector, and level of education. The results showed that the hypothesis that employees' perceptions depend on the industrial sector and gender was confirmed by the research. Furthermore, it was found that women place greater importance on comfort in the workplace than men. While age and education level lead to similar opinions or perceptions, they remain significant factors to consider meeting employee expectations, as organizations may sometimes hold stereotypes related to these aspects.

Starting Salary (SS), Employer Reputation (ER), and Working Environment (WE) are the three factors that influence Job Selection Preferences (JSP) according to Hamid (2020), in their article *Job Selection Preferences: What Do Young Adults Want?*. With a questionnaire administered to 443 accounting students from various public and private universities, they concluded that SS, ER, and WE are in fact the factors that influence the JSP of young adults. Among these, the primary factor, that is, the one with the highest average score, turned out to be WE. This study helps professional organizations and potential employers in designing a business environment that integrates processes and physical space, thereby influencing service performance.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we will focus on designing and implementing a questionnaire to put into practice of the theoretical concepts analyzed in the previous chapters. The aim of the questionnaire is to understand the impact of social sustainability on job selection and to identify the most relevant characteristics according to respondents' preferences. The goal is to explore which specific aspects of social sustainability are most significant to respondents when choosing a new job opportunity and how these aspects influence their decisions.

Another central objective of the questionnaire is to understand how the perception and evaluation of these characteristics are influenced by external factors, such as gender and age. These aspects are crucial since workforce diversity and expectations related to different life stages and gender roles may lead to varying interpretations of what makes a job sustainable. By analyzing these factors, we hope to identify potential trends and differences that could inspire future studies and future research on these variables.

In terms of age, our aim is to examine if there is a different sensitivity toward social sustainability themes based on generational affiliation. We want to verify if preferences and expectations regarding a sustainable work environment vary significantly between people under or over the age of 35. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H₁: People over 35 will evaluate work characteristics differently than people under 35.

At the same time, we intend to analyze how gender influences job choice preferences. As we previously noted, in the study by Thompson et al. (2004), no significant gender-based differences in preferences were observed; thus, it is possible that our study may show a similar trend, as the characteristics included in our questionnaire are also generic and partly derived from their analysis. Therefore, our second hypothesis is as follows.

H₂: Female candidates will evaluate work characteristics differently than male candidates.

The importance of this analysis lies in providing an empirical basis that can help define job preferences in relation to social sustainability themes. If the data confirms our hypotheses, we will contribute to the existing literature by suggesting the need to consider age and gender variables in recruitment processes and corporate sustainability plans.

3.1. Measurement Instrument

The instrument used for this analysis is a questionnaire, entirely described in *Appendix A*, that asks respondents to rank various job characteristics according to their relevance. In the first part, respondents were asked to rank three job characteristics by importance, organized in triads as shown in *Fig. 4*. This approach enhances the quality of multi-attribute judgments by reducing the risk of cognitive overload, which often occurs when comparing large sets of attributes simultaneously (Shirland et al., 2003).

Job Satisfaction

Salary
Job Flexibility
Workload

Fig. 4 – Example of a question with three different job characteristics choices

In the second part of the questionnaire, three different employment contracts were presented, each characterized by distinct categories of influence. In this section, participants were asked to rank the options according to their first, second, and third choices, as shown in *Fig. 5*.

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	1800€ net per month	1600€ net per month	1600€ net per month
Work Environment	The work is carried out independently	Work is conducted in teams	Work is conducted in teams
Workload	The workload is appropriate for the working hours	The workload is appropriate for the working hours	High workload that requires extra work outside of working hours
Control over Work	You have no influence or decision on what you have to do or how you have to do it	You decide what to do and how to do it	You decide what to do and how to do it

Fig. 5 – Example of a question with three different job selection options

The questionnaire was created using Microsoft Forms, through which all responses and questions were collected. In total, the questionnaire included fourteen questions, nine of which related to the first part and the rest to the second.

It is also important to note that, in addition to the questions, other demographic and personal data of the respondents were collected, which will be useful in the analysis phase to gain insights and clarifications on potential results. These data will allow us to verify the validity of our hypotheses on gender and age, further exploring the relationship between these variables and job choices.

3.2. Sample and Data

Our sample consists of 155 people, interviewed over 28 days of survey activity. Respondents were selected without specific criteria, as there was no predefined reference category. However, we obtained balanced responses across all age and gender groups.

From the collected data, we can state that among the 155 participants, the most represented category is Italian (95.48%) female (65.16%), with a majority age between 18 and 24 (40.65%) and a High School Diploma (48.39%).

As shown in *Tab. 2*, there are 54 men (34.84%) and 101 females (65.16%). Dividing the age ranges into two groups, under and over 35 years, we have 77 people under 35 (49.68%) and 78 people over 35 (50.32%), resulting in an almost equal distribution between the two age classes. The most common level of education is a high school diploma (48.39%), followed by a bachelor's degree (20.65%), while the remaining 30.97% is distributed among other education levels. The origin is Italian, with 148 people (95.48%), while foreigners account for 4.52%. Finally, in terms of employment status, 83 people are employees (53.55%) and 58 are students (37.42%).

For a correct statistical evaluation, it is important to specify that the sample size obtained is not large enough to guarantee the desired results with the level of confidence. According to Cochran's formula (1977) for calculating sample size, the minimum number of participants for this survey having a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 5% is 271. However, the collected sample only reached 155 respondents. With this number of respondents, keeping the margin of error fixed at 5%, the actual confidence level drops to approximately 78.5%, as below formula shown.

$$n = \frac{(1.244)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 154.754 \cong 155$$

We use this formula because we are working with a theoretically infinite population.¹²

¹² Cf. <https://www.myrelab.com/learn/sample-size>

	Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>	Female	101	65.16
	Male	54	34.84
<i>Age</i>	18 – 24	63	40.65
	25 – 34	14	9.03
	35 – 49	36	23.23
	50 – 64	39	25.16
	65+	3	1.94
<i>Place of Birth</i>	Italy	148	95.48
	Europe	4	2.58
	America	2	1.29
	Africa	1	0.65
<i>Level of Education</i>	Middle School Diploma	14	9.03
	High School Diploma	75	48.39
	Bachelor’s Degree	32	20.65
	Master’s Degree	14	9.03
	Postgraduate Degree	1	0.65
	Professional Qualification	19	12.26
<i>Occupation</i>	Student	58	37.42
	Self-employed	4	2.58
	Freelancer	2	1.29
	Employee	83	53.55
	Student and Employee	1	0.65
	Homemaker	2	1.29
	Retirement	5	3.23

Tab. 2 – General Sample Statistics

Additionally, another limitation, besides sample size, concerns the origin of the respondents. The sample for this questionnaire is non-probabilistic, as it is not possible to use random sampling techniques that allow calculating the probability of obtaining a particular sample (Vehovar et al., 2016). Our non-probabilistic sample was composed by selecting individuals based on two sampling techniques: Convenience Sampling and Snowball Sampling.

Convenience Sampling involves including only the most easily accessible elements in the sample, as they were selected because they were the simplest to recruit for the study (Sedgwick, 2013). This method is the cheapest and quickest way to create such a sample.

Snowball sampling is similar to the previous method but, as occurred in our case, a small initial sample is selected randomly; subsequently, participants are asked to identify others who belong to the target population. In the end, the referred subjects tend to have demographic and psychographic characteristics similar to those of the referrers. This method is applied when it is difficult to access subjects with the target characteristics (Naderifar et al., 2017).

Therefore, we were unable to achieve the expected results in terms of sample size, and this limits the statistical robustness of our results, not allowing us to achieve the desired level of precision. Additionally, the use of certain sampling techniques did not increase the robustness of the results, as it is not possible to make inferences, and the sample remains subjective, potentially subject to selection bias.

3.3. Findings

To analyze the results, we will use specific tests to verify whether there are significant differences between men and women and between the under and over 35 groups regarding the variables considered in the questionnaire. The independent two-sample t-test could allow us to determine, in a statistically significant manner, whether the considered variables differ between men and women or under and over 35.

However, the independent two-sample t-test is used for continuous variables; in our case, since we have categorical variables, we must use the Chi-square (χ^2) test to compare the distribution of responses between the two groups. This test will indicate if there is a significant relationship between the group variable (gender or age) and the categorical responses, providing only evidence of an association or no association, without indicating the effect (Pandis, 2016).

First, we calculate the degrees of freedom using the following formula:

$$df = (r - 1) \cdot (c - 1)$$

where:

- r is the number of rows,
- c is the number of columns.

When analyzing a single factor, the degrees of freedom are equal to 1 [$df = (2 - 1) \cdot (2 - 1)$]; however, if we need to analyze two factors due to a difference in first preference between categories, the degrees of freedom will be 2 [$df = (3 - 1) \cdot (2 - 1)$].

We continue by calculating the expected frequencies for each characteristic. For example, in the case of the "salary" factor for those under 35, which has an observed frequency of 46, we would expect to find the following value:

$$\frac{\text{row total} \cdot \text{column total}}{\text{overall total}} = \frac{80 \cdot 77}{155} = 39.7419$$

In the next step, we calculate the chi-square value using the following formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

where:

- O is the observed cell frequency
- E is the expected cell frequency
- \sum is the sum of all cells in the table

Finally, we calculate the p-value using the chi-square value found, using the chi-square table. Considering an $\alpha = 0.05$ (5%), if the p-value > 0.05 , the null hypothesis \mathbf{H}_0 is accepted, confirming that there is no association between the two variables. If the p-value < 0.05 , the null hypothesis \mathbf{H}_0 is rejected, validating the alternative hypothesis \mathbf{H}_n , which indicates that the two variables are associated.

We will discuss the analysis of the results in more detail in the dedicated subsections and in the Appendices at the end of the document.

3.3.1. Overall Evaluation of Job Attributes

Now let us analyze the first part of the questionnaire, in which the characteristics that most influence the choice of job has been identified. The full analysis is available in *Appendix B*. Wages, which are commonly perceived as a priority criterion, are in fact more important than factors such as flexibility and workload. However, it is surpassed by another characteristic, increasingly valued, and central to the concept of social sustainability: work-life balance. From the results, 123 people out of a total of 155 (79.36%) consider the work-life balance more important than salary. This significant figure can offer companies a strategic point on which to invest to improve the attractiveness and well-being at work.

Continuing with the analysis, other relevant characteristics emerge for work choice, as well as those considered less central by the respondents. On a specific question, which asked to order aspects such as personal well-being, equity and inclusion, and health and safety, only 51 out of 155 people (32.90%) indicated equity and inclusion as an element to be considered, and the percentage is further reduced to 13.55% (21 people) when it is positioned as a top priority. This result may reflect a lower awareness of issues related to the inclusiveness of minorities, also because many respondents were born and live in the same country and do not identify with specific minorities.

Another significant fact is the importance of distance from the workplace, considered fundamental by 60% of respondents (93 people). On the contrary, the availability to compulsory work transfers, as requested by the company, is accepted only by a minority, i.e., 15 people (9.68%).

The analysis also reveals a strong interest in hybrid working methods: 89 people (57.42%) prefer a mixed organization between office and remote work. In addition, there is a significant difference between those who prefer teamwork (29.03%) and those who place it in last place (41.29%), indicating different preferences regarding collaboration.

Finally, a high percentage of respondents (58.06%) put the personal benefits offered by the company first, rather than prioritizing the environmental (23.87%) and social (18.06%) initiatives promoted by the company.

The second part of the questionnaire involved ranking three distinct employment contracts according to various attributes. The results showed that a job with an excessive workload was significantly less chosen than jobs with an adequate workload: only 4 people, or 2.58% of the total, opted for this alternative. Analyzing the responses further, it can be observed that benefits were in many cases the primary preference, with 47.10% of respondents (73 people) choosing a job with more benefits rather than a higher salary. Finally, a relevant fact emerged in the choice between three jobs characterized by equivalent wages, but with specific differences in terms of benefits, security, and type of contract. 114 people, or 73.55% of the sample, preferred to give up benefits in favor of a permanent contract.

3.3.2. Age Effect

In this section, we analyze the results collected, divided by age groups, that is, over and under 35 years, with the aim of verifying if the H_1 hypothesis formulated at the beginning of this chapter is confirmed or not.

Thanks to the data in *Appendix C*, we observe that work-life balance and salary remain two key factors in the choice of work for both age groups. However, some small differences emerge: 12.36% more of those over 35 consider health and security a priority compared to younger people. This is attributable to the fact that, as people age, they tend to place greater importance on health and safety, both for themselves and for their families. On the other hand, younger people prefer personal wellbeing with an increase of 10.89% compared to the over 35s.

A substantial difference also emerges in the preference for job mobility: 75.64% of the over 35s prefer a job close to home, while among the younger ones, this percentage is reduced to 44.16%, as many of them are more likely to consider travel opportunities.

Another difference, even though less marked, is found in professional development: 50.65% of young people are interested in positions that provide continuous training, while the over 35s prefer a job that offers concrete professional growth.

The difference in preference for mobility is also reflected in the second part of the questionnaire, where 58.97% of the over-35s (equal to 46 people) show a clear preference for a job close to home. The type of job desired also varies between age groups: the over-35s prefer positions with stable hours and on-site work, while 49.35% of young people prefer hybrid modes and flexible hours. This last difference is confirmed by the chi-square test, which shows that the characteristics that change with age are Job Distance and Travel Opportunities. Those over 35 do not aim to find a job far from home, unlike younger individuals who would like the opportunity to relocate.

In conclusion, we can confirm the validity of our hypothesis **H₁**: there are significant differences in work preferences between generations, especially in relation to the proximity of the workplace. With age and the greater possibility of having a family, the over 35s tend to prefer jobs that are safer, close to home and oriented towards professional growth.

3.3.3. Gender Effect

Appendix D shows the division of characteristics according to gender, as already examined in *Subsection 3.3.2.* Identifying and understanding these differences allows us to validate or not our **H₂** hypothesis, which asked if female people made different choices than men. As pointed out in the previous paragraph, differences in wellbeing aspects emerge in this case as well: women tend to favor personal well-being, while men prefer health and safety.

There is a small difference relates to the job role: up to 30 women (15.92%) more than men attach greater importance to the level of responsibility in the workplace. This could arise from social stereotypes or, as noted by Valentine et al. (2002), from the fact that employees of both genders who worked under female supervision perceived less job responsibility and showed a greater propensity to leave their jobs, compared to those who had male supervisors.

A further distinction between genders concerns the preference for professional growth: men (48.15%) tend to choose this option, while women (51.49%) prefer to focus on increasing personal training. This could be explained by the fact that, according to Doerr (2022), training

programs are particularly useful for improving women's career opportunities in the labor market.

From the chi-square test, we did not find significant differences in characteristics between men and women. Therefore, we can conclude that gender differences do not influence the preference for characteristics, as there is no relationship between them.

In summary, we can state that, contrary to what was hypothesized, no significant differences emerge in the preferred characteristics between men and women, thus disproving our hypothesis **H₂**, which suggested different choices between the two genders. Although some trends are observable, such as women's greater interest in personal well-being and men's preference for health and safety, the chi-square test did not show significant differences between the genders. This aligns with the findings in the study by Thompson et al.'s study (2004), which, while examining gender differences, did not find compelling evidence of a marked distinction in job preferences. Therefore, we can conclude that gender differences do not significantly influence the preference for the job characteristics analyzed.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the influence of social sustainability on work choices, demonstrating how sustainable practices can promote a fair and inclusive work environment, and how these aspects influence workers' preferences. Theoretical analysis and review of the literature have shown that social sustainability, although less considered than economic and environmental dimensions, plays a fundamental role in promoting well-being and social responsibility within organizations.

Through a targeted questionnaire, the research investigated workers' preferences for aspects such as work-life balance, professional development, health and safety, equality and inclusion, seeing how these characteristics are increasingly central to career choices. The results show that, among the most valued characteristics, work-life balance and job security stand out, while factors such as equity and inclusion are perceived as less relevant, suggesting a different sensitivity depending on the cultural and personal context of the interviewees.

The analysis also confirmed the hypothesis that the variable age influences work preferences: while younger workers place greater importance on personal well-being and travel opportunities, older workers prefer security and stability. Small differences also emerge based on gender, with women tending to value personal well-being and training, while men prioritize security and professional growth. These results highlight how social sustainability is not a universal concept but requires adaptation to the specific expectations and needs of workers.

Finally, the research highlighted the need for companies to consider social sustainability in their recruitment and management policies, offering opportunities for professional development and flexible and inclusive work environments. The work also provides an empirical basis for future studies, suggesting that additional variables such as educational level and geographical origin could further influence work preferences.

In conclusion, this thesis emphasizes the importance of promoting social sustainability in companies, inviting them to give it the same importance as the other dimensions of sustainability. Responsibility toward workers not only contributes to their well-being, but also to the long-term growth and success of organizations, laying the foundations for a better and sustainable future for the next generations.

APPENDIX A

This appendix shows the entire questionnaire that the interviewees carried out, with an average duration of 13 min 14 sec.

Generality

Gender

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary

Age

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 49
- 50 – 64
- 65+

Place of Birth

- Italy
- Europe
- Other

Level of Education

- No Formal Education
- High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Other

Current Occupation

- Employee
- Freelancer
- Self-employed
- Student
- Unemployed
- Other

First Part: Arrange the following characteristics in order of preference

Job satisfaction

- Salary
- Job Flexibility
- Workload

Professional Wellness

- Salary
- Professional Growth
- Work-Life Balance

Social and Well-being Aspects

- Equity and Inclusion
- Personal Wellness and Work-Life Balance
- Health and Safety

Job Mobility

- Job Distance
- Travel Opportunities
- Travel Requirements

Job Role

- Job Responsibility
- Job Variability
- Job Complexity

Work Arrangements

- Teamwork
- Hybrid Working
- Remote Working

Working Conditions

- Job Security
- Work Environment
- Control over Work

Professional Development

- Professional Growth
- Training
- Company Size

Company Benefits

- Benefits
- Corporate Social Support Initiatives
- Corporate Environmental Sustainability Initiatives

Second Part: Rank the different jobs in order of preference

Choice 1

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	1800€ net per month	1600€ net per month	1600€ net per month
Work Environment	The work is carried out independently	Work is conducted in teams	Work is conducted in teams
Workload	The workload is appropriate for the working hours	The workload is appropriate for the working hours	High workload that requires extra work outside of working hours
Control over Work	You have no influence or decision on what you have to do or how you have to do it	You decide what to do and how to do it	You decide what to do and how to do it

Choice 2

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	2000€ net per month	1800€ net per month	1600€ net per month
Focus of Company	Company focused only on Profit	Non-Profit Organization	Non-Profit Organization
Job Distance	Job far from home, requiring travel and work-related relocations	Job far from home, with the possibility of business travel	Job near the Residence
Job Security	2 year Temporary Contract with 80% chance on Permanent Contract	Permanent Contract	Permanent Contract

Choice 3

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	1800€ net per month	1800€ net per month	1600€ net per month
Focus of Company	Company focused only on Profit	Non-Profit Organization	Company focused on Sustainability
Workload	High workload that requires extra work outside of working hours	The workload is appropriate for the working hours	The workload is appropriate for the working hours
Control over Work	You have no influence or decision on what you have to do or how you have to do it	You have no influence or decision on what you have to do or how you have to do it	You decide what to do and how to do it
Benefits	Health Insurance	Health Insurance, Maternity/Paternity Leave	Health Insurance, Maternity/Paternity Leave

Choice 4

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	2000€ net per month	2000€ net per month	2000€ net per month
Request for Business Trips	Request for travel and work-related relocations	They are not present	They are not present
Growth Potential	There are no opportunities for Professional Growth	There are opportunities for Growth	There are no opportunities for Professional Growth
Job Flexibility	Flexible Working Hours	Fixed Working Hours	Fixed Working Hours
Composition Salary	Fixed Salary	Fixed Salary	Increase or Decrease of Salary by 10% based on Performance
Benefits	There are no Benefits	There are no Benefits	Health Insurance, Maternity/Paternity Leave
Job Security	2 year Temporary Contract with 20% chance on Permanent Contract	Permanent Contract	2 year Temporary Contract with 20% chance on Permanent Contract

Choice 5

	Job A	Job B	Job C
Salary	1600€ net per month	1800€ net per month	2000€ net per month
Job Flexibility	Fixed Working Hours	Fixed Working Hours	Flexible Working Hours
Benefits	Health Insurance, Maternity/Paternity Leave	Health Insurance	There are no Benefits
Work Arrangements	Remote Working	On-Site Work	Hybrid Working (RemoteWorking + On-Site)
Work Environment	Work is conducted in teams	The work is carried out independently	The work is carried out independently

APPENDIX B

This appendix presents the general results of the questionnaire, summarized in the *Tab. 3* to facilitate visualization and consultation of the collected data. The table shows only the frequencies related to the top positions assigned to each attribute.

Topic	Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>			
	Salary	80	51.61
	Job Flexibility	48	30.97
	Workload	27	17.42
<i>Professional Well-Being</i>			
	Salary	32	20.65
	Professional Growth	30	19.35
	Work-Life Balance	93	60.00
<i>Social and Wellbeing Aspects</i>			
	Equity and Inclusion	21	13.55
	Personal Wellbeing	68	43.87
	Health and Safety	66	42.58
<i>Job Mobility</i>			
	Job Distance	93	60.00
	Travel Opportunities	47	30.32
	Travel Requirements	15	9.68
<i>Job Role</i>			
	Job Responsibility	62	40.00
	Job Variability	69	44.52
	Job Complexity	24	15.48
<i>Work Arrangements</i>			
	Teamwork	45	29.03
	Hybrid Working	89	57.42
	Remote Working	21	13.55
<i>Working Conditions</i>			
	Job Security	84	54.19
	Work Environment	62	40.00
	Control over Work	9	5.81
<i>Professional Development</i>			
	Professional Growth	67	43.23
	Training	71	45.81
	Company Size	17	10.96
<i>Company Benefits</i>			
	Benefits	90	58.06
	Corporate Social Support Initiatives	28	18.06
	Corporate Environmental	37	23.88
	Sustainability Initiatives		

Tab. 3 – Overall Evaluation of Job Attributes

APPENDIX C

This appendix presents the questionnaire results divided by age groups, summarized in *the Tab. 4* to facilitate the visualization and consultation of the collected data. The table shows only the frequencies related to the top rankings assigned to each attribute.

Topic	Characteristic	Under 35	(%)	Over 35	(%)
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>					
	Salary	46	59.74	34	43.59
	Job Flexibility	20	25.97	28	35.90
	Workload	11	14.29	16	20.51
<i>Professional Well-Being</i>					
	Salary	16	20.78	16	20.51
	Professional Growth	15	19.48	15	19.23
	Work-Life Balance	46	59.74	47	60.26
<i>Social and Wellbeing Aspects</i>					
	Equity and Inclusion	11	14.29	10	12.82
	Personal Wellbeing	38	49.35	30	38.46
	Health and Safety	28	36.36	38	48.72
<i>Job Mobility</i>					
	Job Distance	34	44.16	59	75.64
	Travel Opportunities	37	48.05	10	12.82
	Travel Requirements	6	7.79	9	11.54
<i>Job Role</i>					
	Job Responsibility	28	36.36	34	43.59
	Job Variability	36	46.76	33	42.31
	Job Complexity	13	16.88	11	14.10
<i>Work Arrangements</i>					
	Teamwork	16	20.78	29	37.18
	Hybrid Working	47	61.04	42	53.85
	Remote Working	14	18.18	7	8.97
<i>Working Conditions</i>					
	Job Security	40	51.95	44	56.41
	Work Environment	33	42.85	29	37.18
	Control over Work	4	5.20	5	6.41
<i>Professional Development</i>					
	Professional Growth	32	41.56	35	44.87
	Training	39	50.65	32	41.03
	Company Size	6	7.79	11	14.10
<i>Company Benefits</i>					
	Benefits	46	59.74	44	56.41
	Corporate Social Support Initiatives	12	15.58	16	20.51
	Corporate Environmental Sustainability Initiatives	19	24.68	18	23.08

Tab. 4 – Evaluation of Job Attributes by Age

In Tab. 5, the p-value calculation for the preferred variables by age category (under 35 and over 35) is shown, considering a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Characteristic	Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$	χ^2	p - value
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>						
Salary	Under 35	46	39.74	0.986	1.959	0.1 < p < 0.25
	Over 35	34	40.26	0.973		
<i>Professional Well-Being</i>						
Work-Life Balance	Under 35	46	46.20	0.00087	0.0017	0.95 < p < 0.975
	Over 35	47	46.80	0.00085		
<i>Social and Wellbeing Aspects</i>						
Personal Wellbeing	Under 35	38	33.781	0.527	2.556	0.25 < p < 0.5
	Over 35	30	34.219	0.52		
Health and Safety	Under 35	28	33.216	0.819		
	Over 35	38	33.213	0.69		
<i>Job Mobility</i>						
Job Distance	Under 35	34	46.20	3.222	22.265	p < 0.001
	Over 35	59	46.80	3.18		
Travel Opportunities	Under 35	37	23.348	7.983		
	Over 35	10	23.652	7.88		
<i>Job Role</i>						
Job Responsibility	Under 35	28	30.80	0.255	0.678	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Over 35	34	31.20	0.251		
Job Variability	Under 35	36	34.277	0.0866		
	Over 35	33	34.723	0.0855		
<i>Work Arrangements</i>						
Hybrid Working	Under 35	47	44.213	0.176	0.349	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Over 35	42	44.787	0.173		
<i>Working Conditions</i>						
Job Security	Under 35	40	41.729	0.0716	0.142	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Over 35	44	42.271	0.0707		
<i>Professional Development</i>						
Professional Growth	Under 35	32	33.284	0.0495	0.881	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Over 35	35	33.716	0.0489		
Training	Under 35	39	35.271	0.394		
	Over 35	32	35.729	0.389		
<i>Company Benefits</i>						
Benefits	Under 35	46	44.71	0.0372	0.0739	0.75 < p < 0.9
	Over 35	44	45.29	0.0367		

Tab. 5 – Chi-Square Test Results for Preferred Variables by Age Category

APPENDIX D

This appendix presents the questionnaire results divided by gender, summarized in the *Tab. 6* to facilitate data visualization and consultation. The table shows only the frequencies related to the top-ranked positions assigned to each attribute.

Topic	Characteristic	Female	(%)	Male	(%)
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>					
	Salary	54	53.47	26	48.15
	Job Flexibility	32	31.68	16	29.63
	Workload	15	14.85	12	22.22
<i>Professional Well-Being</i>					
	Salary	19	18.81	13	24.08
	Professional Growth	18	17.82	12	22.22
	Work-Life Balance	64	63.37	29	53.70
<i>Social and Wellbeing Aspects</i>					
	Equity and Inclusion	12	11.88	9	16.67
	Personal Wellbeing	48	47.53	20	37.04
	Health and Safety	41	40.59	25	46.30
<i>Job Mobility</i>					
	Job Distance	59	58.42	34	62.97
	Travel Opportunities	34	33.66	13	24.07
	Travel Requirements	8	7.92	7	12.96
<i>Job Role</i>					
	Job Responsibility	46	45.55	16	29.63
	Job Variability	44	43.56	25	46.30
	Job Complexity	11	10.89	13	24.07
<i>Work Arrangements</i>					
	Teamwork	31	30.69	14	25.92
	Hybrid Working	58	57.43	31	57.41
	Remote Working	12	11.88	9	16.67
<i>Working Conditions</i>					
	Job Security	53	52.48	31	57.41
	Work Environment	41	40.59	21	38.89
	Control over Work	7	6.93	2	3.70
<i>Professional Development</i>					
	Professional Growth	41	40.59	26	48.15
	Training	52	51.49	19	35.19
	Company Size	8	7.92	9	16.66
<i>Company Benefits</i>					
	Benefits	58	57.43	32	59.26
	Corporate Social Support Initiatives	18	17.82	10	18.52
	Corporate Environmental Sustainability Initiatives	25	24.75	12	22.22

Tab. 6 – Evaluation of Job Attributes by Gender

In Tab. 7, the p-value calculation for the preferred variables by gender (female and male) is shown, considering a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Characteristic	Category	Observed Frequency (O)	Expected Frequency (E)	$\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$	χ^2	p - value
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>						
Salary	Female	54	52.129	0.0672	0.193	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Male	26	27.871	0.126		
<i>Professional Well-Being</i>						
Work-Life Balance	Female	64	60.6	0.191	0.548	0.25 < p < 0.5
	Male	29	32.4	0.357		
<i>Social and Wellbeing Aspects</i>						
Personal Wellbeing	Female	48	44.31	0.307	1.151	0.25 < p < 0.5
	Male	20	23.69	0.575		
Health and Safety	Female	41	43.006	0.0936		
	Male	25	22.994	0.175		
<i>Job Mobility</i>						
Job Distance	Female	59	60.6	0.0422	0.121	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Male	34	32.4	0.079		
<i>Job Role</i>						
Job Responsibility	Female	46	40.4	0.776	2.287	0.25 < p < 0.5
	Male	16	21.6	1.452		
Job Variability	Female	44	44.961	0.0205		
	Male	25	24.0387	0.0384		
<i>Work Arrangements</i>						
Hybrid Working	Female	58	57.994	0.000001	0.000002	0.99 < p < 0.995
	Male	31	31.00645	0.000001		
<i>Working Conditions</i>						
Job Security	Female	53	54.735	0.055	0.158	0.5 < p < 0.75
	Male	31	29.265	0.103		
<i>Professional Development</i>						
Professional Growth	Female	41	43.658	0.162	2.506	0.25 < p < 0.5
	Male	26	23.342	0.303		
Training	Female	52	46.265	0.711		
	Male	19	24.735	1.33		
<i>Company Benefits</i>						
Benefits	Female	58	58.645	0.00709	0.0204	0.75 < p < 0.9
	Male	32	31.355	0.0133		

Tab. 7 – Chi-Square Test Results for Preferred Variables by Gender

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