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"Guiding University Students towards Sustainability": A Training to Enhance Sustainable Careers, Foster a Sense of Community, and Promote Sustainable Behaviors

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Abstract: Professional development involves facing numerous challenges. It is a complex process, susceptible to personal aspects (e.g., health, happiness, productivity), but also contextual aspects (e.g., recognition of the complexity and unpredictability of the labor market, and of the need to have a positive impact on the community). The life design paradigm views individuals as active agents in their career construction. Although this approach strongly emphasizes individual agency, it also underscores the importance of addressing broader issues related to sustainability. Indeed, career counselling can stimulate actions that favor sustainable development, benefiting society and enhancing the well-being of all people. To this end, we developed a training to stimulate reflections on sustainable careers, sense of community, and sustainable behavior. The study involved 44 university students divided into an experimental (n = 22) and a control group (n = 22). The first group participated in 16 online activities, interspersed with three in-person meetings. After the training, the experimental group exhibited improvements in sustainable careers, sense of community, self-efficacy in implementing sustainable behavior, and the perceived importance of promoting sustainability. These findings suggest that career counselling activities can significantly increase the personal resources of university students, equipping them to contribute to society and promote a sustainable world.

Keywords: sustainable careers; sustainability; university students; training; sense of community; sustainable behavior

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1. Introduction

Professional development is a dynamic process over time that encompasses all domains and contexts of people's lives, and it is not exclusively focused on career choices [1]; in fact, it starts during childhood [2,3] and influences people's general well-being [4]. This process is complex and intertwined with various aspects of an individual's life (e.g., health, family, values, etc.), including contextual ones (e.g., recognition of the complexity and unpredictability of the world of work). In light of these considerations, career development approaches that empower individuals to envision their futures through active engagement within their context have emerged. For these reasons, recent research in career counseling has adopted a holistic approach, focusing on developing individuals' personal and positive resources in order to promote career planning that benefits everyone [5,6]. Life design is a notable example of such an approach.

Life design focuses on the enhancement of personal resources and considers individuals as active agents in building their careers [7]. Recently, some authors using this approach have emphasized the importance of and the need to look at global issues, such as those related to sustainability [8–10], which means preserving and enhancing resources

rather than depleting them [11]. Indeed, with career counselling it is possible to stimulate actions in favor of sustainable development [12] and promote actions in favor of all people [13,14]. In this way, career counseling becomes a tool for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the 2030 Agenda, which can complement the missions of career counseling [15] and make it a supportive activity [16]. The 2030 Agenda, the comprehensive global action plan for sustainable development adopted by the United Nations in 2015, outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to create a more equitable and prosperous future for all. To achieve these ambitious goals by 2030, career guidance and counseling can play a crucial complementary role [15]. Guidance interventions have the potential to foster critical consciousness, empowering individuals to design work activities that contribute positively to sustainability [9,10,15]. Through career guidance activity, therefore, it is possible to stimulate interest in a future sustainable career, as well as promote a sense of community responsibility and sustainable behaviors.

Meta-analyses and systematic reviews [17–19] highlight the significance of career counseling, particularly in the current era characterized by a rapidly evolving job market and pandemic-related uncertainties [20]. The health crisis has exacerbated university students' concerns about their future careers, negatively impacting academic performance and expectations. Despite these challenges, university remains a pivotal time for constructing a life project [21,22]. Career counseling can support students in acquiring job market-relevant skills and defining a professional path that is both personally fulfilling and socially responsible [23,24]. This approach can foster a concept of sustainable careers that balance individual well-being and positive societal impact.

Accordingly, the present study aims to design and evaluate the efficacy of a training intervention to foster positive attitudes towards social, environmental, and career sustainability among university students. Specifically, our research questions are: Can participation in a training program lead university students to (R1) enhanced perception of sustainable careers, (R2) a heightened sense of community responsibility, (R3) greater self-efficacy in implementing sustainable practices, (R4) a stronger belief in the importance of promoting sustainability, and (R5) increased adoption of sustainable behaviors?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Career

Career sustainability was defined by De Vos et al. [25,26] as the sequences of career experiences reflected through various patterns of continuity over time, across different social spaces, characterized by proactive and meaningful individual actions that enhance one's health, happiness, and productivity. Russo et al. [27] extend this concept by introducing social impact as a key dimension of sustainable careers: They propose that sustainable careers are characterized not only by subjective career success (happiness), physical and mental well-being (health), and strong job performance (productivity) [25], but also by contributing to societal well-being (social empowerment). This new consideration in life design challenges career counseling interventions to focus on promoting a "good life, with and for others, in just institutions, to ensure the sustainability of a genuine human life on earth" [8] (p. 23). Consequently, to cultivate a truly sustainable career, personal career goals must harmonize with broader societal and environmental responsibilities.

Theories and research support this expanded view, highlighting that sustainable careers should benefit both individuals and their broader context [28]. Sultana et al. [29] discuss the role of career guidance in sustainable employment, emphasizing that career guidance should promote social justice through ethical and morally responsible paths. McDonald and Hite [30] stress that addressing inequalities and promoting decent work is essential for career sustainability. Rochat and Masdonati [31] emphasize ethical considerations and the societal impact of career decisions. Bal et al. [32] argue for a focus on collective dignity and social justice, suggesting that sustainable careers should respect the intrinsic value of individuals and the planet.

2.2. Sense of Community Responsibility

Nowell and Boyd [33] defined a sense of community responsibility "as a feeling of personal responsibility for the individual and collective well-being of a community of people not directly rooted in an expectation of personal gain" [33] (p. 231). A sense of community responsibility is a predictor of engagement behavior, organizational citizenship behavior, and participation [33–36]. Sense of community responsibility shows a positive relationship with psychological well-being [35].

A sense of community responsibility may impact people's pro-environmental behavior because communities act more frequently to protect and sustain environmental resources when their sense of community is strong rather than weak [37]. Furthermore, a recent study [38] showed a positive association between a sense of community responsibility and recognition of personal growth opportunities after COVID-19 pandemic. This implies that even at the level of planning one's future, a sense of community responsibility can play an important role.

2.3. Sustainable Behaviors

Although various definitions exist, sustainable behaviors can be considered as behaviors which reduce damage to the environment, tend to its protection, or attempt to reduce the consumption of resources [39–41]. One of the most recognized factors involved in resource consumption is human behavior [42,43]: Human activities such as daily transportation, building heating and cooling, appliance usage, and food choices and habits all significantly impact environmental problems [42,43]. In the Italian context, for example, transportation is responsible for 26% of CO_2 emissions at a national level [44]. Several studies in the psychological fields have been conducted to understand the intra- and inter-individual factors that explain people's pro-environmental behaviors [45]. An important psychological factor related to behavior change is self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks or behaviors [46]. In fact, a number of studies have highlighted the relationship between self-efficacy and sustainable behaviors in various domains, such as water consumption, and particularly complex behaviors, such as those related to modal choices [47–49]. This has led researchers to the consider the importance of acting on individual self-efficacy in order to obtain desired behavioral changes.

2.4. Rationale and Study Hypotheses

Following the theoretical framework of life design [7] and the need for career counseling intervention that promotes sustainable development [8–11], the present study developed and investigated the effectiveness of a training program to enhance university students' attitudes towards social, environmental, and career sustainability. Specifically, the study hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1. *The training program will positively impact students' perceptions of developing sustainable careers, defined as careers that promote health, happiness, productivity, and social empowerment [27].*

Hypothesis 2. *The training program will enhance students' sense of community responsibility, recognizing that communities with a strong sense of belonging are more inclined to actively protect and preserve their environment [37].*

Hypothesis 3. *The training program will positively influence students to adopt sustainable behaviors, defined as actions that mitigate environmental harm, contribute to its preservation, or aim to minimize resource depletion [39,41,42]. Given the established relationship between self-efficacy and sustainable behaviors [47–49], we anticipate participants will exhibit increased self-efficacy in implementing sustainable behaviors and a heightened frequency of such behaviors, exemplified by increased public transport usage.*

Hypothesis 4. *The training program will promote a concept of sustainability that encompasses the idea that creating a sustainable future necessitates implementing positive behavior that benefits all individuals, aligning with the recent literature [13,14].*

We expect the training to positively impact the specified dimensions; specifically, the experimental group is anticipated to score higher than the control group in sustainable career orientation, sense of community responsibility, self-efficacy in implementing sustainable practices, and sustainable behaviors.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Design, Participants, and Procedure

Psychology students were invited to complete a sign-up form to participate in a research study that involved participating in specific activities. The sample was not randomly selected; instead, it was formed based on convenience sampling and participants' availability. The study employed a posttest-only design, which utilizes a control group and an experimental group but does not include a pretest assessment. This research design is comparable to other experimental designs [50] and has the advantage of eliminating pretest effects. Pretest effects refer to the phenomenon where participants' scores on a variable change due to prior exposure to the assessment of that variable and the possibility that the intervention is aimed at enhancing that variable.

Being a posttest-only design, it is necessary to ensure equivalence between the control and experimental groups [51]. To achieve this result, age and gender were controlled. The choice to control these two variables lies in the fact that the literature suggests that age and gender are associated with differences in the variables of interest for the training [52,53]. Consequently, matched sampling was employed, which involves making the two groups equal on the basis of the two chosen variables (gender and age). Despite the non-random nature of the selection, the use of matched sampling mitigated threats to internal validity, particularly selection bias. For each subject of a specific gender and age in the experimental group, there was a corresponding subject of the same gender and age. It was not possible to match all students; therefore, some unmatched participants were not excluded from the study but were not included in the analyses. The final sample consisted of 44 participants, divided into a control group and an experimental group. Each group consisted of 4 males and 18 females between the ages of 22 and 28 (M = 23.64; SD = 1.38). The sample size for our study was calculated a priori using G*power software (version 3.1), using a *t*-test for the difference between two independent means (two groups) [54]. Assuming an acceptable alpha error of 0.05, aiming for 80% power, and considering a large effect size of 0.80 [55], the minimum sample size was found to be 21 for group 1 and 21 for group 2. All students, at the time of their participation in the research, were enrolled in the first year of a master's degree in psychology. The gender imbalance, favoring females, is consistent with statistics on psychology students in Italy, where only 17.2% of students are male [56]. At the time of their enrollment in the study, all students were part of two different classes. One class (the experimental group) was offered the opportunity to participate in the program, while the other (the control group) was not. Nevertheless, following the completion of the posttest research protocol, the control group was also offered the opportunity to participate in a program aligned with the research topics, in accordance with ethical and inclusive principles.

The experimental group participated in the activities described in the "training" section. Upon completion of the activities, this group completed an evaluation protocol. The control group was only invited to complete a research protocol when the experimental group completed the activities. Students did not receive any financial incentives for participating in the study.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP) code of ethics and was submitted to the ethics committee of the university where it was conducted. The ethics committee approved the study as it did not pose any risk to the health of the participants (approval number: Ierb-Edunict-2024.03.07/08).

3.3. Measures

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training we used a research protocol with the following sections:

Biographical Section. In this section, participants were asked to indicate age and gender.

Sustainable Career Orientation Scale (SCOS) [57]. This scale consists of 16 items that assess participant perception of a sustainable career in the future, based on the model of Russo et al. (2023) [27]. The four dimensions assessed are: happiness (example item: 'During my future career, I will feel fulfilled as a person'), productivity (example item: 'My future career will allow me to express my talents and abilities'), health (example item: 'My future career will not cause me anxiety'), and social impact (example item: 'I feel that with my future career I can contribute to improving the quality of life of society'). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). It is possible to calculate a total score for the perception of having a sustainable career in the future. Cronbach's alpha in this study is 0.89.

Sense Of Community Responsibility (SOC-R) scale [35] (Italian adaptation by Prati et al. [58] for the local community). This measure consists of 6 items that assess sense of community by referring to the participant's local community. An example item is 'One of the best things I can do to improve my community is to be of service to community members'. Participants should read the statements and respond by indicating their level of agreement/disagreement on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Cronbach's alpha in this study is 0.77.

Self-efficacy in implementing sustainable behaviors. To evaluate self-efficacy in implementing sustainable behaviors, we used a single item. Single-item measures are often viewed as psychometrically suspect; because it is not possible to calculate the internal consistency reliability, single items are more vulnerable to random measurement errors and to unknown biases in meaning and interpretation. Nonetheless, the use of single-item measures has advantages, including shortened survey length and reduced research costs [59]. They may lead to greater survey effectiveness [60], are more easily developed than multiple-item scales [61], and may be more adaptable to different populations [62]. From the psychometric point of view, single-item measures reduce the chance of common method variance [61]. The use of single-item measures to evaluate self-efficacy is well-documented in the literature [63]. In the present study, we asked participants to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement with the following statement: 'I consider myself capable of implementing sustainable behaviors'. The Likert scale used ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Behaviors in favor of sustainability. To evaluate sustainable behaviors, we used 2 single-items. With the first we evaluated the *frequency of sustainable behaviors*, and with the second the use of sustainable transports (specifically, public transport rather than the use of one's own car). To assess the frequency of sustainable behaviors, we asked 'Have you implemented sustainable behaviors in the last few weeks?'. Participants were asked to respond on a Likert scale from 1 (no, none) to 5 (yes, many). To assess *public transport usage*, we asked, 'In the past few months, how often have you used public transport?'. Participants had to respond using the following scale: from 1 (never) to 5 (often).

The idea of sustainability. To evaluate the idea of sustainability, we included an open-ended prompt in the questionnaire: 'What do you think 'sustainability' is?'.

3.4. Training

The sustainability training program was focused on social, environmental, and career sustainability, aiming to help students become conscious and effective agents of change in promoting sustainability within their communities and beyond. The training was structured with three in-person meetings of 1 h 30 min each and twelve online modules of 15–20 min each. This type of training is known in the literature [53]. Although online counseling already existed, the COVID-19 pandemic has compelled many practitioners to conduct their counseling sessions online. In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, career counseling programs focused on pandemic-related dimensions such as fear [64], risk management [53], and mindfulness [65]. This shift highlighted the advantages of online career counseling activities: the ability to involve large groups of participants in a short time and the use of audiovisual supports to enhance interventions [66], the possibility of conducting interventions at any time of the day [67], the guarantee of greater accessibility, and cost-effectiveness [68].

Our training was conducted between March and May 2024, a period during which the immediate threat and fear of the pandemic were receding, yet individuals were still grappling with the long-term occupational impacts of the crisis [69]. Given these circumstances, and in light of the recent global challenges explored in the introduction, we focused on developing activities aimed at designing and building a sustainable future.

The twelve online modules were conducted in asynchronous mode and delivered through Google Classroom, spaced every three days. These modules were designed to provide a comprehensive exploration of specific sustainability topics. Each online module featured readings, videos, and interactive assignments to participate in reflective exercises and apply the concepts in real life.

The training started with an initial in-person session, which introduced the key concepts of sustainability and set the stage for the program.

The second in-person meeting was held midway through the program, serving as a checkpoint to review progress and delve deeper into the practical applications of sustainability concepts. Specifically, after a review and feedback session on the first six online activities, the concept of sustainable careers was explained in depth. After that, participants were asked to match each of 10 given case studies to a corresponding United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to understand how the profession of psychologist can contribute to achieving that specific goal. Following that, an activity based on the photolanguage technique [70] was proposed: Students were presented with evocative images and asked to reflect on the question "How do I feel about the possibility of building a sustainable career?"; they then shared their responses with the group.

The concluding in-person session focused on reviewing the last six online activities and included a group discussion. The last activity was planned as follows: identifying the most important goal of Agenda 2030 for sustainable development for each participant; dividing into small groups of 4–5 participants based on the chosen goals; and reflecting in these small groups on how individual or group actions can contribute to promoting social, environmental, and career sustainability; finally, career sculpture was done [71]; this is an activity that requires participants to describe a concept (in this case sustainable career) using their bodies and creating, in group, a 'sculpture'.

Table 1 summarizes the titles of the modules and activities.

Table 1. Description of the sustainability training.

Section	Title of the Module	Activities	
First in-person meeting			
1	The story of the mouse and the trap	Reflect on the butterfly effect	+Videos
2	A wave of kindness	Perform at least one act of kindness daily for 6 days	
3	Inclusion and attitudes	Promote personal and community inclusion through reflective, actionable steps	
4	Ecological footprint	Assess your ecological footprint and personal and social attitudes towards sustainable behaviors and the factors influencing their adoption	
5	Adopt a social network for sustainability	Adopt a social media page related to sustainability and do an activity to reduce personal ecological impact	
6	Climate change	Reflection on climate change	
Second in-person meeting			
7	Sustainable mobility	Reflect on your daily commutes	+Videos
8	Sustainable mobility 2	Explore options like car sharing and carpooling	
9	Rebirth in Luminaria: a journey towards sustainability	Explore cosmopolitanism and civic engagement	
10	The impact of wars on everyone and our actions towards peace	Reflect on the impact of wars and promote peace	
11	My personal qualities in service of sustainability	Recognize and utilize personal resources	
12	Exploring sustainability in your career	Engage in guided reflection on sustainability in your career, exploring retrospection, introspection, projection, and perspective.	
Third in person meeting			

3.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0 statistical analysis software. To verify the effectiveness of the training, we evaluated whether there were differences between the experimental and control samples in the variables calculated at the end of the training; to do this analysis, we used the independent samples *t*-test [72]. As an additional measure of effect size, Cohen's d was also analyzed. The interpretation of this index involves considering the effect as small (a value less than 0.20), medium (a value less than 0.50), or large (a value less than 0.80) [55,73].

For the qualitative analysis of the responses, we used the NVivo 12.0 software [74]. First, we checked that there were no grammatical errors or words written in dialect. Then, we identified the words most frequently used by participants to describe sustainability. This type of analysis, called word frequency, helps to identify the most relevant themes and, consequently, define the nodes [74]. In this phase we identified the most frequently used words composed of at least four letters and repeated at least five times; all articles and adverbs were eliminated, masculine and feminine words were joined, and verbs were expressed in the infinitive. After completing this phase and identifying the nodes separately for the experimental and control groups, we proceeded to verify any differences in the

definition of sustainability between the two groups. To achieve this goal, we proceeded with a correspondence analysis (CA). This technique allows for measuring the associations (correspondences) between categorical variables (features) and objects, which are coded with 1 (feature mentioned by the participant) or 0 (feature not mentioned by the participant) [75]. The correspondence analysis was conducted using SPSS 25.0. Finally, to confirm the presence of a difference in the description of the concept of sustainability between the experimental group and the control group, we calculated Jaccard's index. Jaccard's index is a measure of similarity between two sets. In qualitative analysis, it is used to quantify the overlap between categories, codes, or themes that emerge from different data sources (such as interviews, documents, and observations). It can take a value between 0 and 1, where 0 means "No overlap between the two sets (absence of similarity)" and 1 means "Complete overlap between the two sets (maximum similarity)". The higher the value, the greater the similarity between the two sets [76].

4. Results

An independent sample t-test showed that there were significant differences between the experimental group and the control group after the training regarding the dimensions of the training. All the effects were large (Cohen's d > 0.50). Table 2 shows the results of these analyses.

Table 2. Differences between experimental and control group after the training.

	Experimental Group		**Control Group**					
	M	**DS**	**M**	**DS**	***t***	**gl**	***p***	**d**
Sustainable Career Orientation	4.28	0.36	4.02	0.47	2.04	42	0.04	0.62
Sense Of Community Responsibility	4.85	0.77	4.27	0.90	2.31	42	0.03	0.69
Self-efficacy in implementing sustainable behaviors	4.18	0.66	3.68	0.72	2.40	42	0.02	0.72
Behaviors in favor of sustainability								
Frequency of sustainable behaviors	4.14	0.71	3.41	1.01	2.77	42	0.00	0.83
Use of public transport	4.09	1.02	3.27	1.42	2.20	42	0.03	0.66

Note. M = mean; DS = standard deviation; *t* = t student; gl = degree of freedom; *p* = level of significance; d = Cohen's d.

Regarding qualitative analyses, the word frequency reported in Table 3 shows the words that participants used most often in describing sustainability.

Table 3. Word frequency analysis for the concept of sustainability.

Environment	19
Respect	11
Sustainability	10
Life	9
Generations	9
Behaviors	8
Resources	7
Planet	6
Well-being	5
Future	5
Satisfaction	5

Based on these words, we identified the following nodes that distinguish the description of sustainability: (1) 'Implement behaviors that benefit the environment.' This node includes answers that refer to the help that individuals can give to the environment and the entire planet (for example, Participant No. 32 described sustainability as "Implementing behaviors that benefit the environment"); (2) 'Implement behaviors that benefit all people.' This node includes answers that refer to the benefit that sustainable behaviors can give to the life and well-being of people (for example, Participant No. 21 answered that sustainability is "A collective resource that allows us to protect the community"); (3) 'Promote a satisfactory future.' This node includes answers that make an explicit reference to the future and to the creation of a satisfactory world for future generations (for example, Participant No. 13, who stated that "Sustainability for me is creating a livable world"). Additionally, three participants did not provide any response, so we created a node called "no response".

Table 4 includes the nodes and references for each of them.

Table 4. Nodes and references for the concept of sustainability.

	References		
	Experimental Group	**Control Group**	**Total**
Implement behaviors that benefit the environment	15	19	34
Implement behaviors that benefit all people	11	4	15
Promote a satisfactory future	6	1	7
No response	1	2	3

In general, all participants agree that sustainability is the implementation of behaviors that are in favor of the environment. Statistically significant differences emerged regarding the other two nodes. In fact, correspondence analysis showed that there were no significant differences for the following nodes: 'Implement behaviors that benefit the environment' (inertia = 0.05; chi-square = 2.07; df = 1, $p = 0.15$), and 'No response' (inertia = 0.01; chi-square = 0.36; df = 1, $p = 0.55$). Instead, significant differences were found for the nodes 'Implement behaviors that benefit all people' (inertia = 0.11; chi-square = 4.96; df = 1, $p = 0.03$), and 'Promote a satisfactory future' (inertia = 0.10; chi-square = 4.25; df = 1, $p = 0.04$).

To further confirm the presence of a difference in the description of the concept of sustainability between the control group and the experimental group, we calculated the Jaccard index, which turned out to be 0.23; this confirms that the two groups describe sustainability in different ways.

5. Discussion

Our results show how the designed training is effective in enhancing university students' attitudes towards social, environmental, and career sustainability. In line with our hypotheses, the training program exerts a positive influence on students' perceptions of pursuing sustainable careers, their sense of community responsibility, their self-efficacy regarding sustainable behavior, and the frequency with which they adopt sustainable behaviors, such as utilizing public transportation. Furthermore, the training fosters a concept of sustainability that emphasizes the need for positive actions benefiting all individuals to create a sustainable future. Similar results have been obtained in other contexts [24,77,78]. Adams [24], for example, emphasizes the need for integrating sustainability across the curriculum to foster a university sustainability culture, and Bilderback [79] highlights the positive impact of integrating sustainability training with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on organizational practices, employee satisfaction, and environmental impact. The originality of this approach should be emphasized, which holistically considers the

pillars of sustainability, integrating them into a single path with career sustainability. Applying this approach, we have assessed the impact of the training on students' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable careers, including a sense of happiness, health, productivity, and social impact [27]; measured changes in students' sense of community, examining how participation in the training lead to a stronger sense of belonging and responsibility towards the community; and evaluated the training's influence on students' adoption of sustainable behaviors, focusing on self-efficacy in implementing sustainable practices and the perceived importance of promoting sustainability. In the present study, the most important results obtained are the change in various dimensions of sustainability related to different life areas (career, community, pro-environmental behaviors). These findings are promising, and it should be interesting for higher education institutions to apply the training throughout the students' journey to enhance their awareness of career, environmental, and social sustainability, as advocated by the major government institutions.

5.1. Implications for Future Research and Practice

The findings of this study highlight the potential of sustainability training programs to enhance sustainable career orientation, sense of community responsibility, and sustainable behaviors among university students. Future research should consider employing longitudinal designs with follow-up assessments to understand the durability of these changes. Additionally, future studies could investigate potential mediating and moderating variables, such as personal resources like optimism and hope, motivation, and expectations of the program's efficacy, as well as objectively measuring sustainable behaviors. Considering that cultural values can influence the adoption of sustainable and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors [80], cross-cultural studies could also be valuable to compare the effectiveness of sustainability training programs in different cultural contexts.

The positive outcomes of this study suggest that sustainability training programs can be effectively integrated into the academic curriculum, initiating cultural and operational shifts towards sustainability. Researchers have highlighted the applicability of such shifts in both university [24] and organizational settings [79]. Embedding sustainability orientation into educational frameworks and development programs can cultivate a culture of sustainability among future professionals. Additionally, leveraging technology, such as online platforms and interactive tools, can enhance the delivery of these trainings, providing ongoing support and resources for participants during and after the program.

5.2. Limitations

With regard to the limitations of the study, it is important to observe the participant's age and level of education: The intervention was carried out with graduate students attending the penultimate year of a master's course of study. From this point of view, to consolidate and generalize results, younger and undergraduate students should be involved. Graduate students typically have a stronger foundation in the theory and practice of sustainability psychology compared to undergraduates; as a result, had we included undergraduate students, the findings might have reflected lower familiarity with the studied concepts even before the intervention. Moreover, random selection would have provided a more generalized result applicable to the wider population of master's students in psychology. Longer trainings could lead to the development of established habits, a central factor in sustainable behaviors [81]. Similar trainings conducted for the entire duration of the students' academic career could improve not only the consolidation of results, but also the possibility for researchers to observe differences over a long period (generally, in the Italian context the academic career typically lasts 3 to 5 years). The limited duration of the intervention and the relatively small sample size, in fact, limit not only the results obtained but their generalizability, too. There are some limitations to consider. First, the relatively small sample size feature limits the generalization of our results. Both the samples of the experimental and control groups were composed mostly of female students; therefore, the gender disparity does not allow us to compare

the dissimilarities in the effects of our training in males and females. Future studies may use more gender-balanced samples. Second, the use of self-assessment tools can lead to cognitive distortions. An interesting finding, which requires further investigation, is the improvement in the sustainable transport domain. This dimension is rarely addressed in training programs, and the presence of a trainer with expertise in this field seems to positively influence participants' behavior. While establishing causal effects is challenging, the influence of a relevant role model on students is noteworthy, even in the absence of supportive infrastructure (e.g., thinking of possibilities like increased frequency of walking or the use of sharing services; [82]. Other studies, in fact, have emphasized the moderator effect of leaders in training aimed at increase sustainable behaviors [78]. Furthermore, incorporating a pretest–posttest design in future studies would provide further confirmation that the intervention led to the observed changes.

6. Conclusions

Our results show how the designed training is effective in modifying belief and behaviors. As we have observed, various dimensions show significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Similar results have been obtained in other contexts [64,77,78] and despite the limitations, the originality of the approach should be emphasized, which holistically considers the pillars of sustainability, integrating them into a single path. Using this approach, we assessed the impact of the training on various dimensions of sustainability in students' lives, including career sustainability (happiness, health, productivity, social impact; [17,27] sense of community, use of public transport, self-efficacy, and adoption of sustainable behaviors). These promising results suggest that higher education institutions could benefit from integrating this training throughout their students' academic journey to raise awareness of career, environmental, and social sustainability, as advocated by leading government organizations. By incorporating these programs into educational and professional development frameworks, and by conducting further research to build on these findings, we can contribute to the development of more sustainable and responsible individuals and communities.

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