CREATING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES AND CAREERS: ANALYSIS OF ENTREPRENEURS' LIFE STORIES THROUGH THE LENS OF CAREER SUSTAINABILITY

Criando negócios e carreiras sustentáveis: análise de histórias de vida de empreendedores sob a ótica da sustentabilidade de carreira

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to analyze how the career-building process of sustainable entrepreneurs occurs from the perspective of sustainable careers and how the influential factors in their career decisions are related to the dimensions and characteristics of sustainable careers.

Design/methodology/approach: This is a qualitative study carried out by analyzing three Brazilian entrepreneurs' life stories. Subsequently, the data were submitted to narrative analysis using the Atlas.ti software and then interpreted using sustainable career's dimensions and characteristics.

Findings: The study corroborates the literature on entrepreneurship, sustainability, and careers, shedding new light on the career decision process of sustainable entrepreneurs from the assumptions of the sustainable career perspective. We identified the emergence of influential categories as a disorienting dilemma, the importance of agency and meaning dimensions and the career coherence with values, quality of life, and self-fulfillment. In addition, sustainable entrepreneurship appears to be in line with the ideals of decent work, allowing for individual well-being, matching life and career values, and long-term employability.

Originality: The sustainable career perspective offers an innovative, dynamic, and systemic perspective to understanding the professional trajectories of sustainable entrepreneurs, considering their learning along their trajectory, crossing different social spaces, experiences, and creations, which allow them to improve the adaptability necessary for the sustainability of their careers.

Keywords: Sustainable Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship. Sustainable Careers. Life stories. Sustainability.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo teve como objetivo analisar de que forma ocorre o processo de construção de carreira de empreendedores sustentáveis na perspectiva teórica de Carreiras Sustentável e como os fatores influentes em suas decisões de carreira estão relacionados às dimensões e características da Carreiras Sustentável.

Desenho/metodologia/abordagem: Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo realizado a partir da análise das histórias de vida de três empreendedores brasileiros. Posteriormente, os dados foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo por meio do software Atlas.ti e interpretados a partir das dimensões e características da Carreira Sustentável.

Resultados: O estudo corrobora a literatura sobre empreendedorismo, sustentabilidade e carreiras, lançando luz sobre o processo de decisão de carreira de empreendedores sustentáveis a partir dos pressupostos da perspectiva de Carreira Sustentável. Identificou-se a emergência de categorias influentes como dilema desorientador, a importância das dimensões de agência e significado e a coerência da carreira com valores, qualidade de vida e autorrealização. Além disso, o empreendedorismo sustentável parece estar alinhado com os ideais de trabalho decente, permitindo o bem-estar individual, combinando valores de vida e carreira e empregabilidade de longo prazo.

Originalidade: A perspectiva de Carreira Sustentável oferece uma perspectiva inovadora, dinâmica e sistêmica para compreender as trajetórias profissionais de empreendedores sustentáveis, considerando seu aprendizado ao longo de sua trajetória, atravessando diferentes espaços sociais, experiências e criações, que lhes permitem aprimorar a adaptabilidade necessária para a sustentabilidade de suas carreiras.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo Sustentável. Empreendedorismo. Carreiras Sustentáveis. Histórias de Vida. Sustentabilidade.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world of work, which has an essentially changeable nature, more and more individuals assume responsibility for their trajectories and professional success while seeking to manage not only their careers but their businesses, resulting in entrepreneurial careers (Barley et al., 2017). More recently, the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship was considered to address the contribution of entrepreneurial activities to the sustainability of the planet, given the possibility of it generating significant solutions for businesses and society and propelling regions and countries towards higher levels of socioeconomic development (Urbano et al., 2019)

Therefore, sustainable entrepreneurship incorporates sustainability into the organization's value proposition, seeking to contribute not only to the organization itself but also to the environment and society (Abdelkafi and Täuscher, 2016). Challenges such as global warming, food shortages, and waste management are topics commonly addressed by this type of business (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011). Despite the growing interest in the literature and society concerning sustainable entrepreneurship (Bajdor et al., 2021; Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021), and papers related to entrepreneurial attitude and motivation, barriers, and drivers to the sustainable entrepreneurial process (Horisch et al., 2017; Bogatyreva et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2021; Tunio et al., 2021), scholars and policymakers still need to know what factors can explain the societal and developmental orientation of entrepreneurship and the reasons why professionals choose careers linked to sustainable entrepreneurship (Urbano et al., 2019; Muñoz and Cohen, 2018). Additionally, little is discussed about the employability of entrepreneurs over time, that is, the construction of sustainable entrepreneurial careers (McDonald and Hite, 2018), even though the approach has been used to analyze other careers (for example, Chudzikowski et al., 2020; Bozionelos et al., 2020; Hirschi et al., 2020; Kossek and Ollier-Malaterre, 2020; Richardson and Mckenna, 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2020).

Thus, Welter et al. (2017) emphasized the importance of discussing effective strategies that involve the diversity of entrepreneurship and collaborate with society's well-being and devel-

opment. The discussion becomes even more urgent in a context of great tragedies, catastrophes, climate change, and the need to collaborate with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations (UN) in the 2030 Agenda (Caiado et al., 2018), in which organizations and entrepreneurs play a key role (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021; Martins et al., 2020).

Given this scenario, this study sought to fill this research gap by analyzing sustainable entrepreneurs' decision process and career construction using the perspective of sustainable careers proposed by Van der Heijden and De Vos (2015). Unlike contemporary career conceptions focused on individual action in the search for employability, the discussion on sustainable careers assumes that the complete understanding of careers permeates the awareness regarding the influences of the various actors and contexts involved (Akkermans and Kubasch, 2017). Therefore, the concept of a sustainable career offers a dynamic and systemic perspective to understand the professional trajectories of entrepreneurs.

Accordingly, we aimed to answer two research questions: 1) How does the career-building process of sustainable entrepreneurs occur from the perspective of sustainable careers? 2) How are the influential factors in their career decisions related to the dimensions and characteristics of sustainable careers?

Based on these questions, this paper seeks to contribute to consolidating the area given its innovation in associating the themes of sustainable entrepreneurship and sustainable careers. Likewise, it contributes to the practical field by addressing elements that can guide public policies and organizational strategies that encourage the creation of businesses that combine economic, social, and environmental aspects, both in the organization itself and individuals' career.

2 SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Due to climate change and other issues arising from the Anthropocene era, businesses are also changing and focusing more on sustainability and ecological issues (Ebrahimi and Mirbargkar, 2017). One can observe that economic and technological progress at any price is unsustainable and no longer viable; companies must consider social development and environmental impact. As a direct consequence, these aspects will help transition towards a sustainable economy (Horisch et al., 2017). It is in this perspective that the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship is highlighted, which emphasizes the creation of a business that contributes to the sustainability of the economy, society, and the planet (Parastuty and Bögenhold, 2019).

The concepts of sustainable entrepreneurship are highly diverse. For Piwowar-Sulej et al. (2021), sustainable entrepreneurship (also called eco-entrepreneurship) can be defined as the process of creating businesses that solve environmental problems or operate sustainably. Furthermore, the concept links sustainable development to entrepreneurship. Kuckertz and Wagner (2010) conceptualized the sustainable entrepreneur as the individual - most often a businessperson - who discovers and uses emerging opportunities, considering the ecological and social impacts. Hockerts and Wustenhagen (2010) also highlighted the innovation aspect, defining sustainable entrepreneurship as innovative activities that result in new services and products that bring economic benefits to organizations and society through social and environmental innovations.

Correspondingly, admitting the various definitions addressed in the literature, we considered the definition given by Shepherd and Patzelt (2011, p. 142), in which sustainable entrepreneurship focuses on "preserving nature, supporting life, and the community in the pursuit of perceived opportunities to bring future products, processes, and services into existence" in order to achieve economic and non-economic benefits for individuals, the economy, and society.

It is relevant to differentiate sustainable entrepreneurship from social entrepreneurship. The first one is associated with the structure of the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1998), while the second one can be defined as a kind of entrepreneurship focused on socioeconomic improvement for the benefit of the poor, providing them with products and services, offering them employment, and implementing activities that contribute to social progress and ethics (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021).

Recently, there has been a growing interest in analyzing the causes and factors that influence sustainable entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial motivations can be diverse and are significantly influenced by life contexts, acquired experiences, and the learning carried out by individuals (Dvouletý and Blažková, 2021). Other studies have been carried out on sustainable businesses from crowdfunding (Tenner and Hörisch, 2021), rural companies (Soleymani et al., 2021), digital training and motivation (Kummitha and Kummitha, 2021), technologies (Gregori and Holzmann, 2020), and base of the pyramid (Musona et al., 2021). However, little is discussed about the career construction of these entrepreneurs. The need to explore influential factors through new lenses emerges, including sustainable careers, which will be described below.

3 SUSTAINABLE CAREERS

Career sustainability emerges as an unfolding of the discussion on sustainability and the perspective of longevity. Through this lens, we seek to shed more light on the influence of multiple contexts that influence and affect professional trajectories and how changes over time impact and constitute elements of careers. Hence, a sustainable career can be defined as "the sequence of an individual's different career experiences, reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, crossing several social spaces, and characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual" (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015, p. 7). From this definition, four central elements emanate: time, social space, agency, and meaning.

The dimension "time" concerns the individual's movement in interaction with their context over the years. In other words, it is necessary to understand careers as a temporally and historically situated phenomenon, considering the various events that lead to structural changes at work and consequent impacts on individual trajectories (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015). The "social" space aspect covers the influence of the context: careers reflect the relationship between people, organizations, or institutions and how these relationships fluctuate over time; it includes employment arrangements, including full-time, part-time, or self-employed work and non-work-related environments such as home, friends, and leisure (Clarke, 2013; Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014; Lee et al., 2011).

The "agency" element considers the individual as the main agent responsible for conducting their career, influencing, and being influenced by the social spaces or contexts around them. To such a degree, agency can be defined as an individual's ability to mobilize the necessary resources and take steps for career development in order to face environmental constraints and achieve their goals (Lam and De Campos, 2014). Finally, the "meaning" factor refers to the particularities of each individual regarding the subjective criteria of success. Therefore, it recognizes that career sustainability is not only directed towards skill development but also making sense of career activities and events (Van der Heijden and De Vos, 2015).

From this perspective, a sustainable career has four main characteristics. 1) It is integrated into a satisfying personal and family life, adjusting to career and life values and an individual's preferences and affinities. 2) It provides a sufficient sense of security and employability to meet the individual's economic and well-being needs. 3) It allows flexibility and possibilities in career choices to meet individual needs and interests that may change over time. 4) It provides regular opportunities to renew specific and generic knowledge and skills, combating the obsolescence of capabilities and

protecting sustainable employability (Newman, 2011; Chin et al., 2021). Moreover, other important elements that stand out in the literature in favor of a sustainable career are resilience, well-being, decent work, longevity, social justice, and interdependence between the environmental, social, and economic domains (McDonald and Hite, 2018).

It is essential to recognize that building a meaningful career involves tensions, conflicts, and ambiguities for the individual (Baruch and Vardi, 2016; Hoyer and Steyaert, 2015). Considering these observations, a sustainable career perspective requires understanding how people deal with these issues as they build alignment between their career and professional demands (Chudzikowski et al., 2020).

4 METHODS

4.1 Research design

In order to understand contextually and temporally situated subjective phenomena, new research methods emerge and are strengthened, allowing the use of different perspectives under a plural and non-reductionist perspective; the life story method and narrative technique are some of these alternatives. Life history is a written record based on personal narratives of significant parts of a life or an entire life collected through conversations or interviews (Denzing, 1989), with personal, historical, social, institutional, and/or political contextualization of the narratives (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995).

A common characteristic in research involving the life story method and the narrative technique is that they include a small number of participants, sometimes involving only one interviewee (Fors and Lennerfors, 2019), given that it does not aim to observe statistical representativeness or recurrence of phenomena, but the richness of the interviewees' reports (Mallimaci and Béliveau, 2006). A single life story can reveal behaviors, techniques, values, and ideologies, important aspects of their society and group (Ferrazza and Antonello, 2017).

4.2 Data collection

Interviews were conducted with three Brazilian entrepreneurs who work in different business segments in different Brazilian regions. The meetings took place via videoconference through the Google Meet app and lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour. The participants were selected given the relevance of their work in their regions and areas of activity; they were indicated by researchers in the area of sustainable entrepreneurship.

Interviewee 1 is a 31-year-old accountant with two children, married, works in the controllership section of a large company, and has a business that sells eco-friendly diapers. Interviewee 2 is a 26-year-old forestry engineer, single, and owns a company that combines agroecology, the commercialization of organic products from family farming, and sustainable tourism. Interviewee 3 is 58 years old, has two children, is married, and is the CEO of a sustainable fashion business that operates by circular economy principles. The participants signed the free and informed consent form and ethical procedures necessary for the proper conduct of all stages of the research were considered.

Regarding the conduction of the interviews, only one triggering question was used to guide the participants' narratives: "Tell me about your life story and your professional trajectory." It allowed them to talk freely about their lives and, when necessary, additional questions were asked to solve points that raised doubts from the participants' narratives. After completing all the interviews and their transcripts, data analysis was carried out, in which we sought a complete understanding of the stories even if they were not told linearly.

4.3 Data analysis

For data analysis, we opted for narrative analysis (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). Narrative has also been largely neglected in business and entrepreneurship papers (Hamilton, 2014), yet emphasized in studies such as those by Vlasov (2021), Fors and Lennerfors (2019), and Muñoz and Cohen (2018). Nevertheless, the exploration of narratives used by sustainable entrepreneurs to make sense of their ventures in society is promising, as it allows a detailed examination of how entrepreneurs understand and make sense of sustainability, as well as the experiences they have lived and the construction of their professional trajectories (Poldner et al., 2017). To this extent, narratives contribute to the constitution of the social reality of sustainable entrepreneurs and represent the "hypotheses about how the world can be and how the future can look like and act" (Gartner, 2007, p. 614).

To support the analyses, transcripts of the narratives were compiled and analyzed using Atlas.ti software (version 8.4). Ergo, the entrepreneurs' narratives were coded, resulting in 204 citations and 34 codes distributed into three categories: 1) Characteristics of sustainable careers, established with deductive codes; 2) Dimensions of sustainable careers, established with deductive codes; and 3) Influential factors, elaborated from inductive codes.
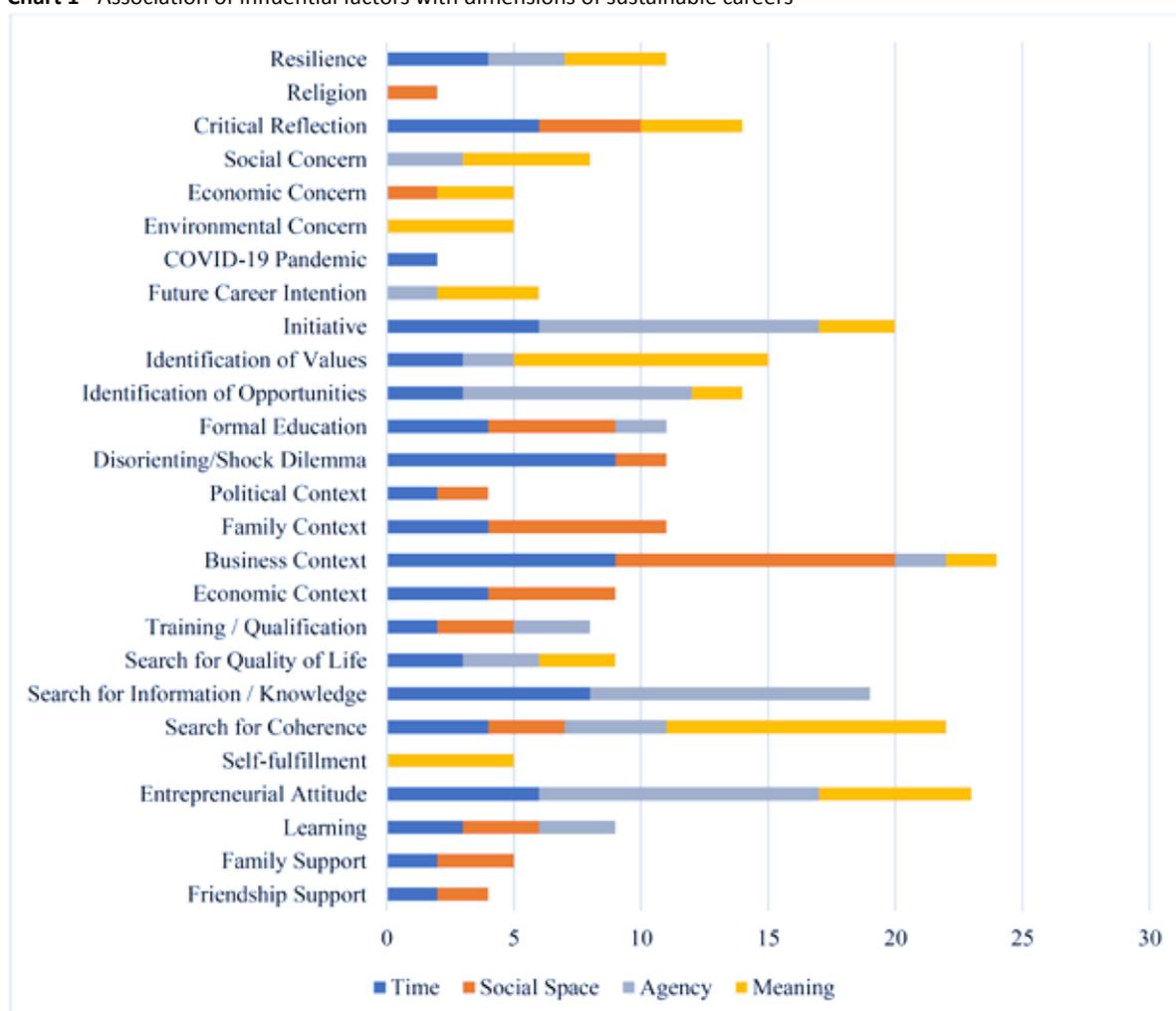
5 RESULTS

First, the processes of the entrepreneurs' career construction and the relations observed with the dimensions of sustainable careers are presented, followed by the observed relationships with the characteristics of sustainable careers.

5.1 Associations between the entrepreneurs' career-building process and the sustainable careers dimensions

When performing the co-occurrence analysis, we observed the predominant association of some influential factors in relation to the dimensions of sustainable careers; in order to better demonstrate these results and their implications, a general parameter of the associations is presented in Chart 1 below. It is worth mentioning that codes in which none or only one co-occurrence was identified were not considered in this analysis.

Chart 1 - Association of influential factors with dimensions of sustainable careers

Source: Prepared by the authors.

From Chart 1, it can be observed that the main emerging factors associated with the time dimension were: business context, disorienting/shocking dilemma, search for information/knowledge, entrepreneurial attitude, initiative, and critical reflection. As for the social space dimension, business context, family context, economic context, formal education, and critical reflection were shown to stand out. As for the agency dimension, the emerging factors were entrepreneurial attitude, search for information/knowledge, initiative, and identification of opportunities. Lastly, for the meaning dimension, search for coherence, identification of values, entrepreneurial attitude, self-fulfillment, environmental concern, and social concern are highlighted. Next, the results found in the light of the dimensions of a sustainable career are discussed.

5.1.1 Time

Regarding the time dimension, in the trajectory of Interviewee 1, there is a history of involvement with sustainability. At eight years of age, she helped her parents, who were farmers, to sell their products at fairs. At that time, they were transitioning into agroecological production, receiving certificates from organic producers. In high school, due to her family's financial hardships,

she reconciled her studies with work, and this situation lasted throughout her college years (she studied Accounting Sciences). The course was chosen due to belief in the need for training in an area with employability and market demand.

During her college years, she studied at night and worked in an accounting office during the day. Close to graduating and unsatisfied with the work environment of the accounting firms she worked in, described as "toxic and competitive," she was hired by a large company in the region and has been working for it for eight years now. For the past two years, she has reconciled her work hours with her sustainable business.

When she had her first son, she used disposable diapers and considered the amount of money spent on this product to be substantial. One day, while taking out the garbage, she dropped a diaper on the floor and noticed that it "swelled excessively" upon touching water. This intrigued her and led her into a disorienting dilemma or shock (Van der Heijden et al., 2020). According to Akkermans et al. (2018, p. 4), career shocks are "disruptive and extraordinary events that are, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual's control and that trigger a deliberate thought process concerning one's career." It may have positive and/or negative effects of the sustainability of the career.

Returning home, the interviewee searched the internet about the composition of diapers and discovered the number of substances that constitute them. She found that the decomposition time of a typical disposable diaper is 250 years and that a child, on average, generates a ton of waste. This shocked her deeply: "It is a lot for a child. It is a choice they don't even have the power to make, a burden they carry."

From there on, she began to pay attention to the subject. She read reports, watched interviews, and observed an alternative: eco-friendly diapers. Hence, together with her husband, she decided that they would use this type of diaper when they had their second child. When it was time for her baby shower, her friends started asking her about the eco-friendly diaper, its feasibility, benefits, and where to buy it; she then realized that people were unaware of the product and perceived a gap in the market. Thus, she and her husband thought eco-friendly diapers would be a good business opportunity and began looking for suppliers. In January 2020, the company was founded and she currently reconciles entrepreneurship, work, and caring for her two children. Nonetheless, she stresses that she is preparing for a career transition, scheduled for 2022, in order to work only in her business.

Interviewee 2, a few years ago, applied for a university in the courses of Agronomy and Forestry and ended up enrolled in the second course. The application to the first course was because some family members were agronomists. As for the application to the second course, even though he did not know the profession's activities, he thought it was related to the same field of study; additionally, the minimum wage level drew his attention.

Upon entering the Forestry course, he began to observe that teaching in the area was "extremely technical and focused on an unsustainable business model, which is agribusiness." Furthermore, he only studied three species of crops: pinus, eucalyptus, and acacia. At a certain point during the course, he was tagged in a video on a social network that showed "a different, responsible, and ecological type of agriculture." It was then that he thought: "I want to work with it because it matches my values. It is everything I imagine, you know, being able to feel part of a system." Here, too, a disorienting dilemma occurred in his career, emerging in the process of discovering, evaluating, and exploring economic opportunities present in market failures that undermine sustainability (Cogen and Winn, 2007).

Then, he began to seek information on the subject but found numerous obstacles, given the traditional curriculum of his course. Even so, he took a complementary course in agroecology. When it was time to complete the final stage of the course, he had difficulties finding a company that worked within the principles envisioned by him. When conducting some research, he discovered a

professor at a university in Florianópolis, the capital of Santa Catarina State, in Brazil, who worked with agroforestry systems and was willing to receive him. There was already a friend of his living in the city, who is now his business partner.

Considering these events, he would talk with his friend about his desire to undertake and work with agriculture in his spare time. After a few conversations, he remembered his uncle - who had been working with ecological tourism for about 20 years. Interviewee 2 always wanted to learn from his uncle and help him. At one point, he met a person who lived in Costa Rica for a period and knew that the country was a reference in agroecology and agroforestry. He talked with his friend and, influenced by the changes in the Brazilian political context, they began to plan a trip to the country to get to know and learn about the subject, as well as to try something new. Notwithstanding, the COVID-19 pandemic began before they could purchase the tickets.

Hence, the interviewee returned to his mother's house in Santa Maria, a city in Rio Grande do Sul State, and completed the course. Talking to his friend, who was still working in Florianópolis, he thought this was the time to start a business. His mother inherited land from his grandfather in the city where his uncle worked, and then he and his friend had the "space, knowledge, and will" to start the business. In mid-2020, the company was created. It is currently expanding since they observed a niche in commercial agroecological products from family farming.

Interviewee 3 is the daughter of small farmers and lived with her parents and six siblings until she was 13 years old. After that, given the family's financial conditions, she had to look for work in the city. She worked in family homes, clothing factories, canning and food factories, and a basic health unit, always in general service positions. In addition, she participated, for a few years, in the Catholic Youth Worker Movement. During this period, she moved to São Paulo and acted in the coordination of the Movement. She also met her husband and married.

Afterward, she and her husband moved to Ceará State (northern Brazil) to strengthen the Movement in the region, which also led her to work in two factories. She later returned to Rio Grande do Sul State and worked in a food factory for five years "until she began to experience a different process." During this period, she experienced a disorienting dilemma in her career:

> A lady who worked with me in the same section was honored for completing twenty-five years at the factory. I watched her receive the reward [...] I thought: "oh my God, twenty-five years and she hasn't seen her children grow up, she hasn't seen her grandchildren grow up, she hasn't met her neighbors." [...] And I didn't know my neighbors at the time either, you know? Sometimes, on our patio, the grass grew a lot; we didn't even notice it, you know? Because life was work.

Interviewee 3 got involved in the union struggle, got pregnant, had two children, and as soon as the period of maternity leave had passed, she was fired from the company. From there on, she began to sew at home. She did not know how to practice the craft, so she trained with her relatives' clothes until she did. During this period, she was also involved in the participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre, the capital of Rio Grande do Sul State.

Afterward, in a conversation with two other sewists, the idea of sewing for a large hospital in the region came up. When talking with the director to offer the services, they knew that they would have to constitute, at least, a group of 20 people, organized in the form of an association or cooperative to provide for the activity. She and her colleagues managed to gather the necessary number of sewists and formed the group's first cooperative. Over time, they established relationships with associations and cooperatives across Brazil, working with the fashion industry collectively and sustainably throughout its chain, from cotton planting through agroecology to scrap disposal. In addition, they started to worry about the local impact of the organization, offering professional

courses to the community, implementing community banks, distributing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic, among other actions.

5.1.2 Social space

As for the social space, the influence of the economic, family, and business context on the career choices of Interviewees 1 and 3 is observed. The fact that their families did not have the financial means to support them during their studies made them work from an early age and seek professions of easy employability.

The family context is considered a powerful influence on people's behavior throughout their lives and affects their career choices (Zellweger et al., 2011); it was also the first place for Interviewee 1 to understand the concept of sustainability. This space succeeded because of its current organization, which values strategic decisions in favor of the environment and the well-being of its employees.

When Interviewee 1 arrived at the company, a major restructuring was being carried out. A substantial decision was to abandon producing one of its best-marketed products; the company no longer wanted any ties to organizations that could harm humanity or the planet. One can note that promoting specific values in employees, such as altruism and empathy, helps individuals build connections with others that are useful in maintaining a culture of sustainability (Florea et al., 2013). Interviewee 1 reported that:

> Working there broadened my view, you know, on the issue of sustainability in a much more ample way than I had until then. [...] There, they have a very strong vein of educating employees, educating for life, you know, not educating simply so that they do what the company wants them to do. [...] And that sure makes a lot of sense to me.

The company encourages employees to think "What do we want for life? They encourage employees to think about their lives without living only for the company." They ask: "What makes your heart flutter? What would you do if you did not need money?" These questions led the interviewee to some reflections that impacted her career choices:

> For me, who chose to major in accounting because I wanted to be employable, what would I choose if I didn't need money? And one of the things I wanted to do was to help people; I always liked to feel useful, but I never saw it from a business perspective. After I founded the company, I saw how much I can help people.

In this regard, this organization has a culture focused on sustainable careers, as it cultivates policies and practices that meet the varied needs and life goals of employees, supporting their long-term employability (McDonald and Hite, 2018).

As for Interviewee 3's career, in addition to the economic, family, and business contexts, two other factors that influenced her choices were her participation in the Catholic Youth Worker Movement and the Participatory Budgeting process in Porto Alegre (Rio Grande do Sul State). In the Movement, she worked with the "See-Judge-Act" method, which helped her "analyze reality, understand why people live this reality, and try to change it" and understand exploitation in the work world. "Actually, we hoped that the day would go by quickly, so that we could get home, and that the week would go by quickly, and that the month would go by quickly, to get to the end of it and get paid." This showed her the need for change in her career. For this reason, when she left the company, she started working as a sewist. Afterward, she became involved in the Participatory Budgeting process, assisting in numerous community demands. This fact showed her the importance of teamwork for effective societal changes, which made her look for other sewists and start the cooperative.

As for Interviewee 2's career, we could observe that his choices were influenced by the family, economic, and political context, support from friends, formal education, critical reflection, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Critical reflection from the visualization of new perspectives, such as watching a video about a different way of agriculture, taking a complementary undergraduate course on agroecology, and getting in touch with a new student profile student at another university showed him the "possibility of another world."

5.1.3 Agency

The entrepreneurs analyzed in this study, when suffering the impact of the disorienting dilemma or shock, began to seek information and training on what caused this kind of effect. Such evidence was also found by Seibert et al. (2013), who observed that individual agency and career shocks together served as antecedents of further career decisions. To open her sustainable business, Interviewee 1 identified a market opportunity allied to her beliefs and looked for suppliers and consultants who could help her company grow. Likewise, Interviewee 2, when defining that he would work with agroecology along with his friend and uncle, found that there were species with high demand, high added value, and low offer. Thus, he carried out a market analysis, visited producers, and invested in the business. More recently, when noting that the commercialization of family farming was a market gap, he decided to focus on the resale of these products as a market opportunity. The ability to assess the consequences of ideas that add value and the effect of entrepreneurial action on the target community, the market, society, and the environment is one of the essential competencies of a sustainable entrepreneur (Piwowar-Sulej et al., 2021).

In the narrative of Interviewee 3, we noticed that her leaving the company where she worked led her to open a sustainable business, even though there was no explicit demand and qualification. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that for Hussain et al. (2021), in sustainable entrepreneurship, the individual's inclination to start a new ecological business greatly influences the perception of personal capacity and self-efficacy. In addition, we verified in the careers of the three entrepreneurs the presence of initiative, willingness to change, and the disposition of assuming a leading role. They looked for jobs in line with their values and made changes when this did not occur. According to Van den Groenendaal et al. (2021), engagement in proactive career behaviors refers to people who take charge to anticipate opportunities and overcome risks throughout their careers.

Interviewee 3, for example, when recalling the company she worked for, reported: "I did not want this for my life, I did not want to celebrate that I stayed there for so many years. It's not something that fulfills me." After leaving, she said: "Now I'm going to do something I like". At the same time, when she started to work as a sewist, she did not want to work alone. This networking (i.e., exchanging information and resources through social contacts, informal connection with other self-employed workers, or through participation in interest groups) is a proactive way of creating access to social resources and seems valuable to the self-employed without the support of an organizational career system (Van den Groenendaal et al., 2021).

Interviewee 2, in turn, with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, visualized the opportunity to undertake with his uncle to isolate himself from the virus, learn, and stand idle: "Let's live from it, right? Let's get to know the burden and the bonus, like, we want to work with agriculture, how is it better to learn than being the farmer yourself? To feel the weight of the mattock daily." In this aspect, entrepreneurial activities depend on opportunities in the environment and the person's willingness to take risks with new ideas (Tunio et al., 2021).

Agency can also be noticed in interviewee 1's story concerning the career transition to full dedication to sustainable entrepreneurship:

> I'm preparing to make a career transition. So, our revenue has been increasing every month, and I'm making reservations to make this career transition over the next year. [...] So what I desire, well, is to have this time to do what I like, to have my own choices, you know, business, in short, life.

McDonald and Hite (2018) listed career transition as one of the challenges of sustainable careers, considering that individuals must reconcile investments in their current job with preparation for their future employability and career development. Therefore, the importance of resilience is highlighted (Mishra and McDonald, 2017), an essential attribute for global sustainability and sustainable careers (McDonald and Hite, 2018).

5.1.4 Meaning

As for the meaning dimension, the search for career coherence with the values of entrepreneurs was evidenced, as emphasized by Interviewee 3, who, after going through the shock of her career, began to question herself:

> How can we, like, spend our whole lives hoping that life will pass? There is no satisfaction from work in this case, right? [...] It always bothered me a lot [...] the idea of people selling their lives that way. And I always thought that no salary would compensate for that, even though I've always earned a low salary. I thought that there had to be something that would fulfill me best as a person, you know. Something that no matter if I worked as employed or owning a business I would like and would feel like I was producing something.

We also identified in the entrepreneurs' narratives the belief in sustainable entrepreneurship and career sustainability. Interviewee 1 highlighted: "I strongly believe in the issue of entrepreneurship focused on sustainability, having businesses that take care of this. And I think it's something that will still grow a lot." Interviewee 2 reported that "It's painstaking work, it's really hard, we're not rich, we're unlikely to be, but we feel like we're doing the right thing, you know?" Interviewee 3 said: "I am convinced that the ecological issue is not because it is a niche market, you know? It is because the planet really screams and demands that we have concrete attitudes of care and preservation."

In addition, Interviewee 2 mentioned the importance of demonstrating the economic viability of this type of business: "It's no use not talking about it and closing your eyes. If it's not talked about, it won't go forward." He reported that conventional farmers who use pesticides, for instance, have their own expenses and will only change their production method if they identify that it will be profitable. Thus, this is one of the challenges for their business, to balance the triple result (environmental, economic, and social), in addition to manual and little mechanized work, that is, the difficulty in integrating technology with the innovation of the business model, which is in line with the barriers reported by Veleva and Bodkin (2018) and Geissdoerfer et al. (2018).

Moreover, since graduation, Interviewee 2 noted that he did not want to work in large companies such as multinationals, which was the goal of 90% of his colleagues. Nevertheless, friends who followed this career path currently receive expressive salaries but take antidepressants: "I think it was something that weighed heavily on my decision: to have mental and physical health, right?" From this perspective, we highlight that the quality of life and alignment of values are paramount for the constitution of their career.

Interviewee 1 expressed the feeling of self-fulfillment by choosing sustainable entrepreneurship: "You know that thing you do that makes you happy, extremely happy, for me that's it. Oh my! I just like it." Interviewee 3 also reported this feeling when starting her sustainable business career: "It started to give me great pleasure, like, to see a finished piece of garment, you know? [...]

I would walk around the house, I would cry because I had done the entire piece." And now she says: "I am a deeply fulfilled person; you have no idea how happy I am to be where I am."

Interviewee 2's values of life and commitment to the environment are also evident in this excerpt:

> I know why the world is sick, why the environment is sick. I know what causes it as a forestry engineer. So how am I going to recommend something that I know causes the disease, makes it sick, I feel unethical. So, I have my conscience very clear that I'm playing my role.

Note, therefore, that technique alone, without ethics, does not make sense to the entrepreneur. Likewise, Interviewee 1 stated that: "When we are environmentally conscious, there is no going back." Similarly, Interviewee 3 reported: "When you take a step, you feel the need to take others, to be totally consistent with what you have decided." In addition, she says that uniting environmental and social concerns "was the great turning point that we had in our lives, of being able to make a product that, in addition to not having any capitalist in its process, also has no poison." Still, "today the cooperative is 100% viable, it does not depend on anything, it does not depend on the project, it does not depend on public resources, it is totally sustainable." Hence, the business combines environmental, social, and economic concerns throughout the production chain.

Another relevant factor is the commitment of Interviewee 1 to her customers, in the sense that she does not recommend the product to a customer "just for her to buy it, it has to make sense for her, for her routine":

> It's not like that. The matter that the person needs to have a certain product because without it they won't have a good baby shower - no [...] is it really necessary to have everything that the baby shower lists tell us to purchase?

This understanding is also highly evident in the career of Interviewee 3, whose central concern is the well-being of the community in which she is inserted:

> This area used to be heavily disputed by drug trafficking, so it was necessary to make the counterpart, not of direct confrontation, but to seek harmonization in the area. And we created a community bank, [...] we have courses for the community of caregivers for the elderly, manicure, knitting, crochet, sewing, IT, so people can meet again after the pandemic and also generate income for people.

In addition, Interviewee 1's business helps new companies that are starting up: "This is very important, it is very cool for us to be a gateway for people to be able to have this partnership, to start their brand." In this regard, just as sustainability encourages a mindset that values the greater good, a sustainable career perspective considers the needs and interests of others (McDonald and Hite, 2018).

5.2 Associations between the entrepreneurs' career-building process and the characteristics of sustainable careers

Upon analyzing the association between the influential factors and the dimensions of sustainable careers, it is necessary to discuss the characteristics of sustainable careers. As illustrated in Figure 1, factors such as entrepreneurial attitude, the search for coherence, information/knowledge, and quality of life, as well as training/qualification, family context, formal education, identification of opportunities, and initiative are associated with the characteristic of flexibility and possibilities in career choices. This evidence corroborates Bogatyreva et al. (2019), who observed the effects of both individual and contextual factors in choosing an entrepreneurial career, especially entrepreneurial attitude and formal education.
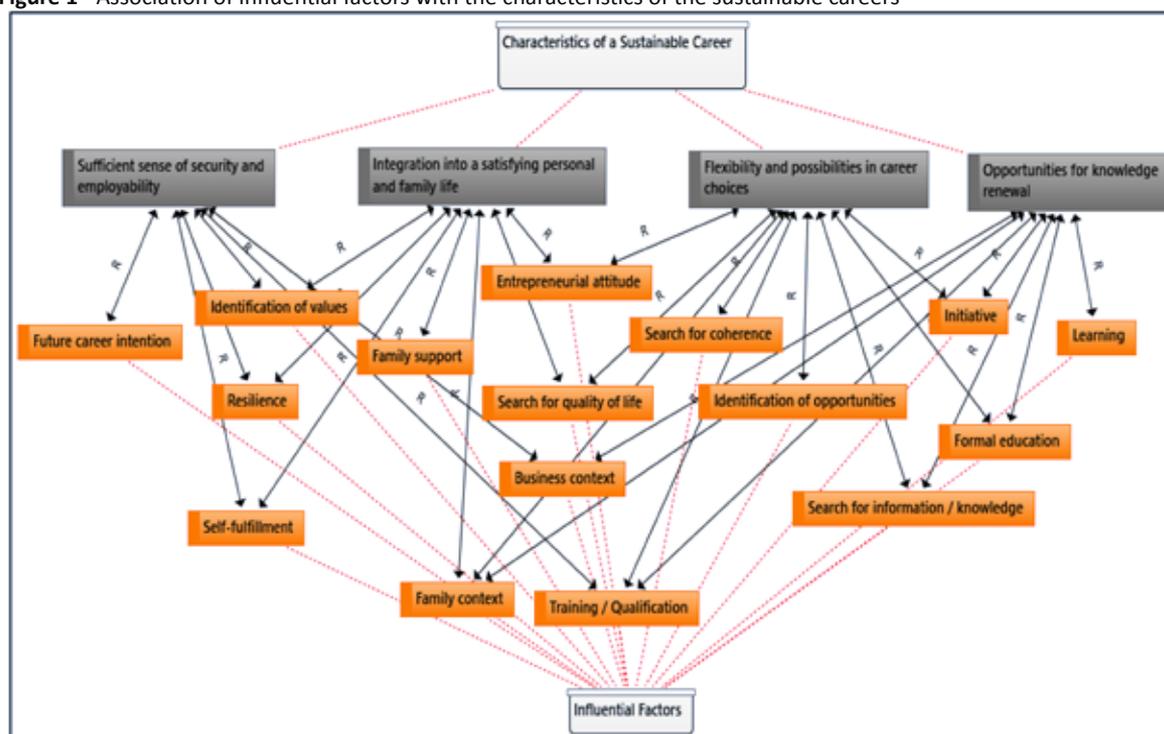
As for the characteristic concerning the integration to a satisfactory personal and family life, we verified that it is associated with factors related to family support, entrepreneurial attitude, self-fulfillment, search for quality of life, family context, and identification of values and resilience. These elements agree with constructing a sustainable career based on the individual's well-being, long-term success, and positive relationships between work and family (Ehnert and Harry, 2012; Powell and Greenhaus, 2010).

Factors such as self-fulfillment, training/qualification, business context, identification of values, future career intention, and resilience were revealed to be associated with the characteristic of security sense and sufficient employability. Arieli et al. (2020) stated that individuals who value self-fulfillment tend to be guided by their values in career decisions and in their behavior at work. This is evident in the interviewees' narratives, which emphasize their satisfaction with their choices for sustainable entrepreneurship and long-term career projection.

Lastly, the characteristic of opportunities for knowledge renewal showed to be associated with factors such as learning, searching for information/knowledge, training/qualification, business context, family context, formal education, and initiative. In this regard, McDonald and Hite (2018) accentuated that individual proactivity and organizational and societal policies complement each other in supporting sustainable careers and provide opportunities for renewal and continuous learning for career longevity. Additionally, Ehnert and Harry (2012) believed that a sustainable career promotes safety, reduces stress, and supports employees by reinforcing the ideals of decent work; it also invests in career development and building individual employability.

The relationships found based on the evidence of this study are presented in Figure 1, in which the gray rectangles represent the characteristics of sustainable careers and how they are related to influential factors (presented in orange rectangles). One should note that associations with co-occurrences equal to or less than 1 were not considered in the illustration.

Figure 1 - Association of influential factors with the characteristics of the sustainable careers

Source: Prepared by the authors.

6 FINAL REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS

Sustainable entrepreneurship has been considered a promising force for a paradigm shift in business and entrepreneurship towards sustainable development. Therefore, this study collaborates with the literature on entrepreneurship, sustainability, and careers by bringing a shedding new light on sustainable entrepreneurs' decision-making process and career-building through the perspective of sustainable careers. By associating this with the method of life stories, the paper corroborates the richness and depth of the phenomenon from the perspective of subjectivity and interviewees' experiences.

Based on an in-depth analysis of the participants' narratives, the emergence of influential factors in the decision-making process and career construction of sustainable entrepreneurs was identified, which proved to be strongly related to the dimensions and characteristics of sustainable careers. Ergo, we observed the occurrence of disorienting dilemmas or shocks in the career trajectory of the three entrepreneurs interviewed, which are associated with stories linked to sustainable values. We also noted the influence of the agency and meaning dimensions on the entrepreneurs' career decisions in which they sought the coherence of their careers with their values, quality of life, and self-fulfillment. It is important to recognize that agency is also impacted by the social space, in addition to the characteristics of the individual and their personal proactivity, that is, they can be influenced by parents, friends, the organization for which they work, the cultural alignment of the values with the ones of the organization - categories that were highlighted in the results of this paper. We also identified that the sustainability tripod is fundamental both in the constitution and the maintenance of entrepreneurs' businesses in favor of sustainable development and in terms of values for building their careers from the point of view of longevity. Thus, sustainable entrepreneurship seems to be aligned with the ideals of decent work, allowing the well-being of the individual, the adequacy between life and career values, the long-term employability, the promotion of decent work for employees, decent remuneration for the entire production chain, and a positive impact of entrepreneurial activity on society, environment and economy, contributing to the socio-economic development of regions and countries, and in a global level, in order to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

In practical terms, through the analysis of entrepreneurs' common issues and concerns, this study allows the reflection on the possibility of developing new resources, strategies, and policies if we intend to contribute to changes in the doing and thinking of humanity. To do so, it is necessary to surpass the traditional and conventional notion of work and business as usual, breaking with the socio-cultural heritages of thinking and acting and moving from isolated case experiences towards a collective consciousness. Furthermore, this study also guides a way of thinking about a new entrepreneurial education in schools and universities, which combines concerns with economic gains in the short term with the medium and long term, considering the right of future generations to a sustainable planet and the self-fulfillment of individuals in their career choices.

This study does not seek to exhaust the theme; on the contrary, given a scenario that is little explored in the literature, we intended to encourage debate. Amongst the limitations of this paper, there is a more current version of the software that was used, which allows further analyses and representations to be performed. Hence, as a suggestion for future research, we recommend other methods to be used in order to explore the subject from alternative points of view and analyses. We also recommend studies that analyze social entrepreneurship, cooperativism, and other enterprises of this nature to be carried out.

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1. Definition of research problem	√	√	√	√	√
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√	√	√	√	√
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√	√	√	√	√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√	√	√		
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√		√	√
6. Data collection	√	√	√		
7. Statistical analysis					
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√			
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√	√		√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√	√		
11. Other (please specify)					

Contribution of authors

Conflict of Interest

The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

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