Sustainability Leadership Development Among Students in Higher Education: Evidence From Ukraine

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DOI
https://doi.org/10.18690/um.epf.7.2026.8

ISBN
978-961-299-166-1

Higher education serves as an essential platform for developing sustainability leaders; therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the potential, gaps, and directions for strengthening sustainability leadership among students. In a survey, the attitudes of management students were investigated regarding components of sustainability leadership potential, including cognitive, learning, value-oriented, behavioural, and leadership identity, as formulated by the authors based on relevant leadership concepts. The study also focused on the peculiarities of students' perceptions of sustainable development priorities in a country at war. The results indicate greater awareness and a greater willingness to learn more about sustainability among master's students, recognition of the high importance of a sustainable approach to management, but also significant concern about the realism of its implementation. A high intentional component positively impacts the sustainability leadership position. The phenomenon of a more active stance on the role of a sustainable leader, coupled with low awareness of the sustainability concept, warrants further research. The research explores challenges in developing sustainability leaders within higher education institutions and suggests corresponding responses.

Keywords:
sustainability leader, leadership intention, leadership identity, sustainable development, leadership in wartime, higher education

University of Maribor Press

1 Introduction

Sustainable development focuses on developing humanity by using resources in a regenerative way while protecting natural systems. Sustainability leadership is based on prioritising actions for sustainable development to ensure implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability leadership is implemented at the individual, organisational, national, and global levels. The willingness of top management to include the broadest possible range of external stakeholders (Tal & Gordon, 2016) in the focus of strategic decision-making determines the critical importance of responsible leadership (Maak & Pless, 2006; Marques et al., 2018) in implementing the current agenda for the transition to sustainable business models (Barcellos-Paula, 2021). While institutional progress is notable, the real achievement of SDGs depends on how individuals and organisations manifest these principles in their daily activities and personal lives (Williams, 2021). The greater effectiveness of training in developing leadership skills in students, compared to already practising managers (Muff et al., 2022), identifies higher education institutions as an important platform for accelerating sustainable development. This perspective assumes that, to implement sustainable development, universities must undergo a process of change towards greater sustainability, and, according to change management theory, leadership is essential to this process.

The focus of our research borders on the individual and organisational levels of sustainability leadership, on the one hand, determining the potential for such leadership in students, which, on the other hand, is the reflection of the level of sustainability leadership at the organisational level - the level of a higher educational institution. Thus, the study aims to identify the potential and areas for strengthening sustainability leadership among students in higher education.

The war in Ukraine has significantly transformed the management priorities for sustainable development: in conditions of physical threat, infrastructure destruction, loss of markets and human capital, the focus of companies has shifted from long-term sustainable development strategies to issues of survival, operational continuity and financial stability (KPMG Ukraine, 2025). Sustainability leadership practices - particularly the integration of ESG principles into strategy, the institutionalisation of social responsibility, and environmental innovations - often fade into the background due to limited resources and high uncertainty. At the same time, it is

this reduction in attention to systemic approaches to sustainability that increases the relevance of scientific analysis of the drivers for the potential of sustainability leadership in future managers for the transformation of leadership practices in crisis conditions, because the ability of Ukrainian companies to combine adaptability with value-based management depends on their long-term competitiveness and contribution to post-war recovery.

2 Background

2.1 Sustainable Development and Leadership

The most widely accepted academic definition of sustainable development, established by the Brundtland Report, describes it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p. 42). The United Nations has established 17 Sustainable Development Goals that address various aspects of life, particularly those that require urgent attention and action (United Nations, 2015a). These 17 interrelated goals constitute a universal call to action to eradicate poverty, protect the environment, and ensure equal opportunities for the world's citizens.

Overall, the Sustainable Development Goals serve as a comprehensive blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. However, as noted by Leal et al. (2024), the concept has been viewed from several perspectives, which have changed its meaning and led to numerous definitions (Leal et al., 2024, p. 1). In comparing historical frameworks, sustainable development has evolved from the Millennium Development Goals, which primarily targeted poverty in developing countries, to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (United Nations, 2015b).

The current Sustainable Development Goals framework is broader and more integrated, promoting global action across all countries regardless of income status. Academically, sustainability is understood through the sustainability tripod, which requires a continuous balance among three pillars: environmental quality, economic prosperity, and social justice (Klein et al., 2022, p. 2).

Unlike conventional development methods, which often fell short of ecological constraints, the modern SDG framework accounts for technological, lifestyle, and governance changes to minimise trade-offs among these pillars.

Leadership is a complex phenomenon defined by the ability of individuals to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of their organisations (Eustachio et al, 2023, p. 2). Van Seters and Field (1990) explored an evolutionary perspective and created an evolutionary tree of leadership theory. They identified nine evolutionary epochs and outlined the requirements for a tenth epoch of leadership theory, each comprising multiple periods and encompassing a wide range of theories and conceptual approaches (Van Seters & Field, 1990). Therefore, researchers investigating this domain encounter a diversity of definitions, reflecting the breadth of perspectives within the field (Muff et al., 2022; Eustachio et al., 2023; Arokiasamy et al., 2025). In comparing modern leadership paradigms, researchers distinguish among several key styles: transformational leadership, ethical leadership, and responsible leadership.

Transformational leadership is commonly described as a process in which leaders inspire colleagues and followers to reframe their work and view it from a new perspective. It focuses on the how-to of leading internal stakeholders by motivating colleagues to drive a specific change. Transformational leaders prioritise developing their subordinates' full potential, values, higher-order needs, moral principles, and intrinsic motivations. Transformational leadership encourages individuals to collaborate, reframe their perspectives, and place organisational objectives above personal interests (Muff et al., 2022, p. 275). Arokiasamy et al. (2025) identify four core dimensions of transformational leadership: articulating an inspiring vision, fostering intellectual stimulation, demonstrating idealised influence, and showing individualised consideration.

Ethical leadership is characterised by the leader's moral integrity, strong values, and the consistency between these values and their actions. It emphasises cultivating a favourable organisational climate by encouraging ethical behaviour, self-awareness, and moral responsibility. This is important because it contributes to the creation of a constructive psychological atmosphere among employees, increases creativity, and strengthens emotional commitment (Arokiasamy et al, 2025; p. 46).

Responsible leadership extends beyond the organisation, viewing leadership as a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process aimed at positive social change. Alongside previous concepts focusing on the internal stakeholders, the notion of responsible leadership adds a new perspective to leadership thinking. It includes the reasoning that one of a leader's responsibilities is to act as a citizen and public servant, weighing the interests of all parties, adding value to the solution, and prioritising the most affected first, before their own or their organisation's interests. This external, societal orientation calls for a leader to be a custodian of social, moral, and environmental values and resources, summarising that he is a citizen committed to all parties, including those underrepresented, unheard, or unable to speak (e.g., the planet or future generations). The societal focus of responsible leadership connects to a sustainability concept that describes truly sustainable organisations. (Muff et al., 2022, p. 275).

In the context of Higher Education, leadership is identified as the primary engine for large-scale, sustainable reform. It is recognised that universities play a pivotal role in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Higher Education Institutions have an inherent responsibility to generate knowledge and develop the next generation of leaders capable of delivering the SDGs (Findler et al., 2019; Eustachio et al., 2023; Filho et al., 2024; Vesperi et al., 2024). The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) further outlines this role through four key activities: generating knowledge, cultivating current and future leaders, demonstrating measurable impact, and fostering cross-sectoral collaboration (UN SDSN, 2017).

2.2 Sustainability Leadership

Sustainability leadership is considered an integrating concept of modern approaches to leadership, grounded in responsibility, ethics, and a long-term development perspective, with a focus on active action in a specific context (Visser & Courtice, 2011). A sustainable approach to management typically involves enduring, resilient leadership that focuses on succession planning, maintaining a cycle of positive energy, and building a culture that persists beyond a specific leader’s tenure.

Researchers of relevant leadership concepts identify different core components and competency dimensions essential for Sustainability Leadership. Muff et al (2022) connect responsible leadership with a sustainability concept. They structure it around five primary dimensions: systems thinking (understanding interconnectedness), ethics and values (a values-based stance), stakeholder relations (developing long-term relationships), self-awareness (inner knowing), and change and innovation (driving impact for society and the planet).

Based on Michael Fullan's framework, sustainability leadership for organisational improvement comprises five "action-and-mind sets" for effective leaders: a robust sense of moral purpose, an awareness of the dynamics of change, emotional intelligence for nurturing relationships, a dedication to cultivating and sharing new knowledge, and an ability to create coherence (Fullan, 2002).

Sustainability leadership is a promising concept for educating students to develop specific competencies needed to implement sustainable development (Eustachio et al, 2023). The literature also highlights sustainability leadership in higher education institutions. The findings concluded that management staff (e.g., programme coordinators, directors, deans, etc.) are sustainability leaders and explored their traits, behaviours, knowledge, and other qualities they should possess to successfully promote change towards sustainability. Teaching staff can be considered leaders and followers at the same time, as they may be influenced by their superiors (e.g., programme coordinators, directors, etc.) and act as leaders when interacting with students and external stakeholders (e.g., civil society). In addition, students can be seen as sustainability followers in the classroom context, where they may experience different sustainability teaching and learning approaches and practices chosen by teaching staff, with the hope that they will eventually become sustainability leaders (Eustachio et al., 2023, p. 2).

Stek et al. (2025) developed a competency-based course structure that presents an innovative educational framework, preparing students to excel in leadership roles that drive sustainability and innovation. The course structure aims to provide the necessary basic knowledge and competencies: analytical skills; creativity and curiosity; holistic thinking; critical thinking; cross-functional teamwork; digitalisation skills; negotiation; leadership and communication; risk management; strategic thinking; and stakeholder management.

3 Research Context

Ukraine pursues a consistent policy in sustainable development, reflected in its accession to the UNESCO High-Level Steering Committee for SDG 4: Education 2030. This decision gave the state a voice in shaping global educational priorities and strengthened its position in the international arena. Participation in the Committee ensures Ukraine's integration into the definition of strategic directions for education development, monitoring progress on SDG4, and formulating goals after 2030 (Interfax-Ukraine, 2026).

A necessary confirmation of Ukraine's international influence is the initiative to establish the International Science Day for Sustainable Development, which is celebrated annually on November 27. This initiative demonstrates the potential of young researchers and opens opportunities for universities to develop "scientific diplomacy" and foster a leadership identity among students (National Council of Ukraine, 2025).

Integration programs into the EU Green Deal, such as the "Green Deal Ukraine," demonstrate the combination of educational policy, European integration, and climate priorities. The project "Green Transformation in Ukrainian Universities", implemented jointly with NAWA and a consortium of technical universities, provides for green standards, a "green campus" model, specialized courses, and a micro-certification system. The initiative forms an "ecosystem of excellence" that prepares students for infrastructure modernization and strengthens the role of universities as centres of social and environmental innovation (National Agency, 2025).

Despite 42% of Ukrainian company leaders confirming full commitment to previously defined ESG priorities, the pace of their implementation is significantly behind global trends, where companies are moving to the scaling and transparent reporting stage (KPMG Ukraine, 2025). In Ukraine, there is a shift in management focus to anti-crisis competencies – flexibility, speed of decision-making, and risk management – while climate responsibility and inclusion are not considered as top priorities. More than half of Ukrainian leaders do not take ESG projects into account in investment processes, underscoring the need for research on the transformation

of sustainability leadership practices during the war and in post-war recovery (KPMG Ukraine, 2025).

The article by A. Achasova (2024) emphasises that science and education are key pillars of the transition to sustainable development. Higher education institutions should integrate the components of the European Green Deal – emissions trading, renewable energy, and biodiversity restoration – into their curricula. This ensures the development of "green" competencies in future specialists, necessary for the restoration of the industrial and energy sectors and for Ukraine's inclusion in the European ecological system. Artyukhov (2021) examines the Ukrainian university model through the prism of Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), emphasising the link between technology transfer and the popularity of "green" educational programs. The study emphasises that since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Ukrainian curricula have increasingly focused on energy efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Ukrainian universities are actively implementing projects that promote the Sustainable Development Goals. Among the Erasmus+ initiatives (2024-2025) are those aimed at the circular economy and digital transformation. An example is the Jean Monnet EUNanoGreen module, which integrates the European Green Deal's "zero pollution" provisions into the curriculum. The project combines nanotechnology with environmental policy and builds interdisciplinary competencies, contributing to the development of sustainable leadership and responsibility among students (National Erasmus+, 2025). The UCU Leadership Centre report (2022) emphasises that sustainable leadership development is not only an environmental or economic issue but also a matter of psychological and social resilience. Ukraine is described as a "social laboratory" for powerful transformations, suggesting that leadership development among students and faculty must move beyond steady-state theories to a virtue-based leadership model that can withstand "hostile contexts" (UCU Centre, 2022).

The physical environment of universities is becoming a platform for sustainability leadership practices through participatory planning. Research by Vietrova et al. (2025) shows that involving students in the design of learning spaces in Poland and Ukraine strengthens social capital and responsibility. The campus is transformed into a "living laboratory" where students propose ecological and inclusive solutions,

forming social awareness and civic responsibility. This demonstrates that sustainability leadership is a practical behaviour grounded in interaction with the community and the environment.

Sustainable leaders in higher education institutions combine visionary leadership with student empowerment. Lytovchenko et al. (2021) show that integrating sustainability into university curricula is possible through specialized courses and the use of digital interactive platforms. This demonstrates that sustainability awareness can be developed across all disciplines, integrating professional learning with the development of leadership competencies.

The integration of leadership, innovation, and sustainable development in the Ukrainian context is further developed by conference discussions. Combining academic theory with practical knowledge, the events demonstrated how science and education stimulate progress in leadership and management, shaping a more sustainable and promising ecosystem. For Ukrainian students, this means developing in an interdisciplinary ecosystem that combines innovative business processes with conflict management skills in war and post-war environments (CEEMAN, 2025). Thus, the Ukrainian context adds a unique dimension: leadership in sustainable development is linked to post-war recovery, resilience, and integration into the EU.

4 Methodology

The study employed a cross-sectoral survey design to examine students' perceptions of sustainability leadership. A voluntary, anonymous survey was conducted among management and marketing students at one of the leading economic universities in Ukraine, which enrolls students from all regions of the country. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire completed by 82 students. The questionnaire was distributed to management students, with the suggestion that they pass it along to other students. The result was that 16% of marketing students were included in the sample. Given the related nature of the two fields of study and the inclusion of elective courses on sustainable development in both specialisations' curricula, the sample can be considered homogeneous. Therefore, the analysis was conducted on the complete set of responses without differentiating results by field of study.

Given the lack of a specialised sustainability leadership course in the curriculum and the random sampling method, it was considered unreasonable to conduct a detailed exploration of possible traits, skills, competencies, value orientations, etc.

Focusing on the various components of concepts related to sustainability leadership (sustainable, ethical, responsible, transformational leadership) and recognising the limitations of research on students outside the contextual conditions of practice, as only the potential for its formation at educational institution can be examined, the study focused on the following selected components by the authors:

1. The cognitive component, reflecting students' awareness and knowledge of the sustainability concept.
2. The learning component, capturing their willingness to deepen and expand sustainability-related knowledge.
3. The value–oriented component, indicating the perceived importance of sustainable development principles.
4. The behavioural (intentional) component, representing the intention to implement sustainable practices in future professional activities.
5. The leadership identity component, reflecting the aspiration to assume the role of a sustainability leader.

The analysis focused on descriptive statistics and the examination of associations between selected components. The judgment regarding the level of sustainability leadership components was based on the proportion of the sample that agreed with the corresponding statements in the questionnaire. The instrument consisted of closed-ended questions capturing respondents' awareness of the sustainability concept and their attitudes towards sustainability-related practices. It also included an open-ended question for students to reflect on possible educational improvements to enhance their sustainability leadership. To ensure objectivity in the responses regarding awareness of the concept of sustainability, the questionnaire did not define the category. At the same time, the question regarding ambitions to be a sustainability leader was accompanied by the following definition: a sustainability leader is someone who makes responsible, ethical decisions, considering the long-term impact on people, the environment, society, and the planet. It also explored how students in a country experiencing war understand and prioritise the sustainable development of organisations.

5 Findings and discussion

The study involved undergraduate and graduate students studying management and marketing at one of the leading state universities in Ukraine, specialising in the training of economic specialists. 65.4% of female and 33.3% of male students participated in the survey. 37% of the study participants are enrolled in a master's program. As noted in the methodology section, due to the disproportionate distribution of students across both specialities, the close specialisation, and the possibility of studying sustainable development issues through enrollment in relevant elective disciplines in both specialities, the conclusions were drawn for the entire sample.

Further component- and cross-component interpretation of the responses aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' potential for sustainability leadership and to identify gaps and areas for strengthening sustainability leadership in higher education.

5.1 The cognitive component (awareness)

The formation of a sustainable leader with a global vision of sustainable development challenges and an understanding, at the organisational level, of ways to mitigate or address them is based on mastering the principles of sustainable management and appealing to systems thinking.

Analysis of respondents' awareness of sustainable management and leadership issues showed that only 51.3% had studied these issues as part of the curriculum, and 10.3% had not heard of them before. On the one hand, these proportions may indicate a low interest in studying sustainable development issues, given the lack of a related discipline among the mandatory components of the curriculum and, accordingly, the need to enrol in an elective discipline. This conclusion may be more relevant for master's students, since the survey was conducted at the end of the academic year, when studies had already ended. For undergraduate students, not having relevant courses may mean they can elect them later.

Only 38.5% of students reported a complete understanding of the concept of sustainable management, indicating gaps in learning effectiveness, as this proportion is lower than the proportion of students who studied related disciplines (51.3%).

The results show, as noted above, that fewer than 40% of the surveyed applicants fully understand the principles of sustainable management. At the same time, almost half indicated that they studied these issues within the curriculum. Moreover, among the latter, 57% confirmed that they fully understand the sustainable approach to doing business. The remaining 43% agreed with the statement "partially understand". Higher efficiency in mastering the concept is demonstrated by master's students, among whom 70% fully agree with the understanding of the essence of sustainable management, compared with only 42% at the bachelor's level.

5.2 The learning component (willingness to deepen and expand sustainability-related knowledge)

Almost 70% of respondents volunteered to study sustainable management issues in more depth, and 25.6% expressed interest in such knowledge only if it was for their own interest (benefit). In addition, 80% of master's students and 63% of bachelor's degree applicants reported interest in further studying these issues.

The impact of practical mastery of the principles of sustainable development and management on the formation of sustainability leadership is confirmed by the fact that 90% of students who indicated a complete understanding of the concept of sustainability also affirmed its importance and expressed interest in further in-depth study of these issues. Among students who are only partially aware of sustainable management approaches, the percentage interested in further study of this area is already only 50%. At the same time, among students unfamiliar with this concept, almost 67% want to learn more. That is, there is a general interest among students in sustainable development issues, which increases significantly with greater awareness. From the above, we can assume that academic disciplines should not provide segmented knowledge but rather create a clear, holistic picture of the issues in the sustainable development of organisations. At the same time, individual topics or discussion questions in each discipline related to these issues are a promising direction for strengthening sustainable education in higher education institutions. They will also provide a source of in-depth understanding of specific areas of

influence on sustainable development. Generalisation and implementation of a systematic approach to mastering the concept of sustainable management requires a separate specialised discipline. In order to form the appropriate skills, training on management competencies should include special blocks on sustainable management (leadership).

5.3 The value–oriented component (the perceived importance of sustainable development principles)

The answers regarding the students' perception of the importance of sustainable management are considered indicative. 31% of respondents agreed that this approach to management is critically important. More than half of the surveyed students (55%) recognized the importance. However, they questioned the feasibility of implementing sustainable management in practice, which may be due to both low business activity in implementing sustainable practices and weak promotion and dissemination of information about successful sustainable development projects. The flagships of sustainable development in Ukraine are international corporations with branches in Ukraine, as well as domestic businesses with active business operations abroad. Students form their own perceptions of standard business practices outside the university to a greater extent, either through their own experience, mainly working in small service-sector enterprises, or through their parents' communication, which is often a limited source of information for various reasons. Under these circumstances, university education is considered an important platform for forming a sustainable worldview, disseminating knowledge and successful business practices to help companies transition to sustainable business models, and training future managers to assume active leadership roles in the sustainable development of organisations and in ethical decision-making.

5.4 The behavioural (intentional) component (the intention to implement sustainable practices in future professional activities)

A positive result indicates that respondents have active plans to apply sustainable practices in their professional activities after graduation. Only 6% answered that they were not sure, 45% and 49% chose the answer options "yes, I want" and "rather yes", respectively. At the same time, from the point of view of future leadership potential, it is striking that every second applicant in the electorate prefers to follow

sustainability standards in their future career but does not state this with confidence. This indicates a need to strengthen students' beliefs in the value of using value-oriented criteria in workplace decision-making. This thesis is also supported by an analysis that found that among applicants who consider further study of sustainable management issues interesting and relevant, 54% are confident in the guidelines for implementing them in practice. Among students who were ready to study sustainable management in depth only if there was personal interest (personal benefit), this percentage of practice-oriented applicants is almost half as low (30%).

The belief influences the activity of the position regarding the standards of future professional activity in the importance and realism of such standards in practice. Thus, 3/4 of students who are undoubtedly convinced of the importance of a sustainable approach to management in the modern world confirmed their readiness to implement sustainable practices in the future. Among those who had doubts about the realistic chances of consistently implementing sustainable practices, such readiness was half as low.

The analysis confirms the positive impact of studying sustainable development courses on the desire to apply sustainable practices in future activities. In particular, among those who have not heard of sustainable practices, only one in four demonstrates a willingness to implement them in their work; among those who know about the principles of sustainable development but have not studied relevant subjects, only one in three; among those who have studied, one in two.

5.5 The leadership identity component (the aspiration to assume the role of a sustainability leader).

The phenomenon of a more active stance on the role of a sustainability leader, compared to the willingness to implement sustainable practices in the future, warrants further analysis: 60% of respondents reported such a desire, while only 45% reported an unquestionable intention to do so in the workplace (see 5.4). Also, an unexpected result shows that the opposite levels of awareness of the sustainability concept are associated with a high desire to be a sustainability leader (Table 1). On the one hand, a higher percentage of respondents who are actively oriented towards sustainability leadership are those who have studied sustainable development issues, compared to those who have heard about these issues but have not studied them

purposefully, which is expected and logical. On the other hand, the highest desire to be sustainable leaders (75% in this group) is observed among those who are not familiar with the concept of sustainability, which may indicate both an idealistic orientation and a lack of awareness of realities. This confirms the importance of researching leadership both in relation to underlying core values and knowledge, and as a separate phenomenon that drives needed changes.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation between Awareness of the Sustainability Concept and Sustainability Leadership Identity (%)

Awareness of Sustainability Management / Leadership	Sustainability Leadership Identity		
	Possibly, if relevant to my field	Yes, I aspire to it	Grand Total
No, not previously aware	25,00%	75,00%	100,00%
Yes, aware but not studied in depth	46,67%	53,33%	100,00%
Yes, studied within an academic program	37,50%	62,50%	100,00%
Grand Total	39,74%	60,26%	100,00%

Source: own

A positive association is demonstrated by the desire to learn more about sustainability management and the guidelines for being a sustainable leader. Thus, if among students with low motivation for in-depth study of the concept of sustainable development, only 25% declared a desire to be a sustainability leader, then among those ready for further study on the condition of their own interest, 55%, and among those definitely interested, 65%.

An active behaviourally oriented position (with a high intentional component) is important for developing sustainability leaders (Table 2). The results indicate a positive association between the intention to implement sustainable practices in future and the intention to engage in sustainability leadership. Respondents with a firm intention to implement sustainable practices demonstrate substantially higher aspirations toward sustainability leadership (77.14%) than those who are uncertain (20%).

Table 2: Cross-tabulation between Intention to Implement Sustainable Practices and Sustainability Leadership Identity (%)

Intention to Implement Sustainable Practices	Sustainability Leadership Identity		
	Possibly, if relevant to my field	Yes, I aspire to it	Grand Total
Unsure	80,00%	20,00%	100,00%
Rather yes	50,00%	50,00%	100,00%
Yes	22,86%	77,14%	100,00%
Grand Total	39,74%	60,26%	100,00%

Source: own

A less obvious association is observed between the perception of the importance of sustainable management problems and the willingness to solve them, that is, to be a sustainability leader. Approximately half of the respondents who do not have a clear opinion or doubt the practical feasibility of implementing sustainable practices want to become sustainable leaders. 60% of those who want to be leaders are among those who are categorically convinced of the critical importance of applying a sustainable approach to management in today's realities.

5.6 Gender-based analysis and the impact of war

A future discussion is needed to examine the results by gender in the students' answers. In particular, 80% of women are open and interested in further studying sustainable development issues, while this share among men was only 46%. In addition, 12% of men generally stated they were unwilling to learn about these issues further (among women, this share is 2%). At the same time, approximately the same share of women and men surveyed (38% each) assured of a complete understanding of the concept of sustainable development, approximately the same share (47% among women and 43% among men) chose the answer about the desire to implement sustainable practices in their future careers. 65% of women and 50% of men see themselves as future sustainable leaders. Answers to similar questions in research conducted before the war showed that women were more motivated to study sustainable development, while men were more active in their plans to implement sustainable business practices after completing their studies. One possible reason for the greater apathy among male students towards planning sustainable activities is the uncertainty about the future caused by the war.

No notable differences were found among students' opinions regarding the impact of war on the relevance of sustainable development. More than half of the respondents noted the following impacts of war: "Increased the importance of social responsibility and long-term thinking" (61%) and "Increased focus on short-term solutions and crisis management" (67%). 42% of the sample surveyed believe that the war "Increased interest in environmental and ethical standards."

6 Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

Ukrainian higher education institutions actively contribute to peacebuilding and sustainable development, positioning students and teachers as leaders in resilience and social cohesion. The analysis shows the necessity and importance of teaching students about sustainable development issues, which are positively correlated with their orientations to implement such practices in their professional activities. A high intentional component, in turn, strengthens the leadership identity. In addition, a more active leadership identity was demonstrated not so much by students with a high cognitive component as by those with a high learning component. Nevertheless, the study's results showed a significant gap in learning effectiveness. Although the respondents who studied relevant topics reported a high percentage, they still showed insufficient understanding of sustainable development issues. We also observe a notably higher level of mastery of this knowledge at the master's level, which may indicate both a more responsible, value-oriented position and deeper learning in master's programs.

Cross-component analysis deserves special attention. In particular, with a high share of active orientation towards in-depth learning on sustainable development issues, a quarter of respondents are ready to do so if there are personal benefits.

Among the limitations, the small sample of students at one university makes it difficult to generalise about the potential for sustainability leadership among students in Ukraine and in higher education more broadly.

A separate influence on priorities and, accordingly, on the choice of answer options to the questionnaire questions may be exerted by contextual factors, primarily living in Ukraine and studying almost exclusively in conditions of war.

A minor proportion of responses (12%) demonstrated internal inconsistency regarding prior awareness of sustainable development. These cases were retained in the dataset, as such inconsistencies may reflect varying interpretations of the concept rather than systematic response bias.

Further research should deepen understanding of the sustainability leadership concept, its components and external drivers, and how sustainability leaders develop in higher educational institutions. A promising direction of research is the features of the formation of sustainable leaders, depending on the content of the disciplines students study.

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