

Article

# Definitions of Sustainability in the Context of Gender

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**Abstract:** The notion of sustainability is of paramount importance for long-term survival; it is also about keeping up, moving on, and not jeopardizing the future of life on earth or the future itself. It is about tangible strategies for the reproduction and long-term existence of our own species that may be supported by the mundane everyday life practices and consumer or citizen choices that are often linked directly or indirectly to gender. Sustainable development relies on innovation and innovative social solutions. Without them, sustainability would not persist. This paper sets its research perspective within a systematic review of the literature and theory to develop a sustainability definition within the context of gender as a seed for sustainable innovation. This paper is divided into sections that cover various issues, such as: sustainability and gender in demographics (social justice, increase in number of pensioners, labor market); environment/ecology (education, ecofeminism); and corporate responsibility (consumer decisions and leadership). In each section, a definition is developed, being supported by evidence from existing studies and a discussion on how sustainability may be defined in the context of gender concludes the paper. The paper suggests that gender has a clear social impact, which constitutes a relevant and important seed for the achievement of sustainable development.



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**Keywords:** gender; women; ecofeminism; CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility); leadership; education; consumerism; environment; equality; social justice; human rights; exploitation; power

## 1. Introduction

Sustainability can be seen as a set of environmental, social, and economic values, which are built on the early Brundtland statement that sustainable development is all about meeting present needs without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations [1]. His definition is widely used in multiple discussions regarding sustainability. Leach [2] conducted a comprehensive review of available sources, and it shows the richness of the literature available. There are also numerous articles that focus on comprehensive review of specific theme, such as sustainability in healthcare [3], circular economy [4], or gender sustainability in corporate boards [5], which provide a wide range of sources, showing that sustainability is a popular subject of scientific enquiry. Diverse social groups may have different and possibly opposing interests, priorities, and perspectives, which makes the matter highly politicized and an object of continual negotiation and renegotiation. This negotiation is particularly observable when considering gender issues across cultures and generations. Gender inequality is still a significant challenge globally and, without addressing it, sustainable development cannot be achieved [6]. A definition of gender equality by OSAGI boils down to achieving a situation where the rights, responsibilities, and life opportunities of a person are not affected by their gender [7]. Sustainability is built on the notion of our responses to environmental challenges and changes. It is now clear that environmental sustainability is interdependent with social sustainability, and vice versa. These two are also intersected with the economic and political sustainability that are themselves linked. The edited volume by Melissa Leach is one of the most comprehensive sources of knowledge about gender and sustainability, where stereotypes of women as sustainability survivors or sustainability victims, especially in developing

countries, are discussed and dismantled, in favor of empowering models of women's roles in sustainability, roles that are supported by the UN, UNICEF, and UNESCO [2]. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development is a good example, which highlights the roles and needs of women. Moreover, it establishes several initiatives to promote gender equity worldwide: UN Development Fund for Women—UNICEF-em.org, WomenWatch—un.org/womenwatch; un.org/instraw—UN International Research and Training Centre, Institute for the Advancement of Women; and FAO—Food and Agriculture Organization [8]. Later, the UNESCO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was implemented, highlighting the fifth goal, dedicated to gender equality [9]. The first evidence of positive outcomes in pursuance of this goal have become increasingly noticeable. Esquivel and Sweetman described them by showing the positive outcomes of women's involvement in the development of political sustainability agendas [10]. This, in Leach's view, is highly dependable on private and public individuals and communities, businesses, governments, and NGOs, who should look for opportunities to build alliances to further gender-progressive sustainable development [11].

In earlier years, Leach et al. developed the concept of a 'gendered pathways approach', which challenged status quos and offered alternatives with innovative elements of sustainability in mind [11]. These areas, highlighted by Leach et al. 2010 as areas for reconsideration, included: employment, population, nutrition, earth, clean water management, and sustainable energy. Their approach also revealed the injustice of misinterpreting the voluntary work of women as sustainability survivors in developing countries or bestowing environmental chores on women as the sole caretakers of nature and, therefore, responsible for its decline. Narratives that position women in a certain place on the sustainability map indicate how important gender is as a factor in sustainability discussion. In some communities, overpopulation is considered to be the primary cause of environmental and economic problems, and it is often blamed on the excessive fertility of women. Whilst, in other communities, women are considered to be the makers of green circular economies through their commitment to recycling, waste picking, mending clothes, and careful management of food resources. There is also evidence that suggests that female members of company boards and the involvement of women in policy making provides more consideration for green, ecological solutions, and for the protection of natural resources [2]. Despite controversies regarding the above positioning of women in different cultural contexts, the discourse shows the relevance of gender in the sustainability discussion, and this paper is aimed at providing supporting evidence for the latter.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study that is presented in this paper is anchored in the interpretative research paradigm, based on exploratory enquiry, which was conducted with the use of secondary sources. Therefore, it consists of a literary review, followed by a classical desk research analysis. Information sources were purposely selected, based on their currency and the inclusion of the two main categories that were essential to be considered in this paper. The sources considered were only the ones available in English, and there was no limitation regarding the countries they pertain to. Three databases were used for the lexical search: Researchgate, EBSCO, and Academia.edu (accessed on 16 June 2021). Only the articles and book chapters that included the following terms were used for qualitative analysis. These were 'gender' and 'sustainability' or gender and 'sustainable development'. In total, 50 articles and book chapters were selected for analysis, categorized by main theme, and these were used to form the search for a definition of what sustainable development is, in the context of gender. The categories that were built from the text, which is the bottom-up approach, were not predetermined, they were derived from the selection of papers and chapters. These definitions were based on selected themes (categories), which are indicated by each chapter's title. The categories that are reflected in these titles include: leadership, consumer choices, demographic issues, social justice, migration, education, eco-activism, corporate responsibility, and innovation. Please find the table with the categorization of

the works quoted. Some of the works fitted in more than one leading category and, in cases where the two or three had the same weight, it is repeated in Table 1 [2–58].

**Table 1.** Categorization of articles.

Category	Article Identified by the Reference Number *
Leadership	[5,12–19]
Consumer choices	[2,10,13,20–23]
Demographic issues	[19,22–25]
Social justice	[2,11–33]
Migration	[34–41]
Education	[18,42–46]
Eco-activism	[2,10,47]
Corporate responsibility	[5,13,48–54]
Innovation	[12,58]
GENERAL with no specific categorisation	[6,7,11]

Source: Self-Generated 2021. \* The original table was adjusted to save space and to match the reference numbering used in the article.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Leadership and Gender in Sustainable Development

Marshall advocated for engendering notions of leadership for the achievement of sustainability [12]. Simone et al. investigated who and what influenced female leaders across Global South, and found that the struggle for democracy, environmental protection, and the defense of human rights prevailed [13]. Nevertheless, underrepresentation of women in positions of power is a phenomenon of global dimension and ongoing consequences [14]. This topic has been highlighted at the international level, in the 17 sustainable development goals by UNESCO Agenda 2030 and the EU regulations on gender equity that focus on equality of opportunity of access, pay, and participation of women in education, labor market, and politics. How do these regulations connect to the issue of sustainability and, in particular, to the sustainability of social innovations? To answer this question, one must explore the definition of sustainability in the context of gender and discuss the multifaceted, intersectional dimension of gender for sustainability in the perspective of demographics, social justice, and social corporate responsibility.

Feminist political ecology focuses on what gendered knowledge of the environment is and how it is produced and reproduced. It also highlights that environmental rights and access to resources are heavily gendered, and this leads to the ‘genderization’ of responsibilities [15,16]. Finally, gendered politics and public activism are at the heart of feminist political ecology, critically assessing social positions, power relations, and bargaining strategies that are affected by gender. Warth and Koparanova remind us of the statements from the Rio Declaration, that women play a vital role in environmental management and development; therefore, their full participation is necessary for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) [17]. These authors successfully documented their claim that in 2012 women have still had less control over their lives than men in many parts of the world, and that they remain economically, socially, and politically disadvantaged on a global scale. For instance, the authors demonstrate that women are more likely than men to provide unpaid domestic work, care for children, sick or disabled family members, and the elderly; therefore, less women than men enter and maintain paid employment; this translates into an economic disadvantage over their lifetime. At the same time, women contribute to the socialization and education of their children, comparatively more than men and, therefore, play a vital role in transmitting the message of care and responsibility for natural resources. Furthermore, the research conducted by Warth and Koparanova shows that being less involved in policy and decision

making may lead to the detachment of policy from community and place the entire burden of responsibility for sustainability on men alone. Furthermore, researchers suggest that women are more sensitive to certain types of pollution, which creates danger to their own health and increases infant mortality. However, they are highly underrepresented in decision-making bodies that address pollution issues [17]. The same applies when considering the low number of women serving on forest, water, and energy boards. This is odd when one considers that female activists outnumber their male counterparts in pro-ecological civic organizations and awareness movements (Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), Women and Environment Organization (WEDO), Women's Environmental Network (genanet), Women for Climate Justice (GenderCC), Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), and the Gender and Water in Central Asia Network (GWANET)).

In cross-population studies in Europe, women were found to be more likely to declare taking steps to reduce waste, embrace a circular economy, recycle, and promote more sustainable water management [17]. What is more, Meinzen-Dick et al. found that implementing gender-blindness policies with regards to recruitment in sustainable development led to working primarily with men [18]. Whilst, if the focus on issues of sustainable development was viewed through a gendered lens, it was not perfect either, and led to targeting mainly women and leaving men behind. If the companies decided to run women-focused projects, they reinforced stereotypical thinking regarding gender divisions and induced new divisions between men and women. In order to address the difficult challenge of involving both men and women without disregarding gender, the authors propose starting with sex-disaggregated studies on livelihood strategies, seasonal migration, property rights, and participation in resources user groups. Cruz-Torres and McElwee argue that the connection of gender and livelihoods is the most explored factor in the developing economies of the world [19]. Gender plays a vital role in shaping and influencing access to natural resources and control over them. This interplay of access and control over natural resources is also characteristic of other social dimensions of societal structuring, being a field of ongoing negotiations. In light of this, sustainable development translates into openminded, responsible, wise, widely consulted, gender sensitive, and inclusive decision making. Consumer choices may also be considered to be a factor in sustainable development, particularly in highly developed economies of the world. Purchasing power and decision making are once again linked to both gender and household bargaining.

### *3.2. Consumer Choices, Gender and Sustainability*

There are gender differences in sustainable consumption, which are based on gender stereotypes and norms that are mitigated by lifestyles driven by intersectionality with an overpowering influence of gender [20]. A 2007 Scandinavian report carried out by Gerd Johnsson-Latham shows that “women globally, live in a more sustainable way than men, leave a smaller ecological footprint and contribute less to climate change [21]”. The report considers global statistical analysis of women's and men's mobility, transport needs, and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Furthermore, it investigates health provisions, strains on health services, and consumer choices for sustainable consumption and lifestyle. The concluding note advocates for more egalitarian societies, with equal access and smaller wealth gaps between genders and social strata. In fact, it proposes that diminishing the gap between rich and poor has a positive impact on sustainable development and climate change. Bloodhart and Swim investigated environmentally relevant behaviors, in order to reveal that more sustainable consumption is linked to gender differences in consumption patterns, motivations, and solutions [20]. It is also linked to marginalized group statuses. They further supported the idea of improving gender equality for sustainable patterns of consumption based on a comprehensive review of scientific evidence. Aside from their claims, that females are, in a global view, more conserving of resources, Meinzen-Dick et al. found that preservation depends on tangible and intangible factors that are beyond gender itself [18]. These include the cultural context and local ecology, underpinning the enticements and

capacity to adopt practices to support sustainability. In conclusion, consumption and its gendered dimensions are a significant factor for sustainable development.

### 3.3. *Demographics, Gender and Sustainability*

When considering sustainability from a demographical perspective, multiple studies suggest that western women make more ecological and more healthy dietary choices than western men, and that, in general, they lead more active and, therefore, more healthy lifestyles [22]; they also take less life risks and rarely chose physically dangerous jobs [23]. This translates into a lower life expectancy of men when compared to women in western countries, and may also translate to a worsening of the economic stability of women when widowed. Moreover, health system sustainability partially relies on citizen awareness and responsible life choices. Mothers, as primary care takers of children, should promote healthy lifestyles of their children ensuring the sustainability of the health system and, in the long run, the economy. Protection of the environment is not the only issue for sustainability. State debts that are passed on to future generations and sustainable social protection systems for ageing societies cannot be overlooked in this discussion, as future generations may face not only over-depleted natural resources, but also debt accumulation, unforeseen increased numbers of pensioners, and unprecedented numbers of elderly per working-age citizen. If the gender situation does not improve, women (the primary carers, less active in labor market) may become the greatest victims of irresponsible planning. In this light, it is natural to show the findings presented by Yuan, who discusses the issues pertaining to the aging population of China, which is leading to rapid demographic transformation and challenges for the sustainability of society through the deterioration of care for elderly women who may end up living in poverty [24]. This does not only apply to widowed, divorced, and single women in the countryside, but also to familial care patterns that tend to favor caring for male family members, as they are often considered to be both more dependent on care and more deserving. This lack of social sustainability comes, in the authors view, from gender inequality and disregard for ecological consciousness.

According to the Brundtland Commission report, “physical sustainability cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to such considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits”. Even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation [1]. This intergenerational equity resonates with Janusz Korczak’s concept of children that were treated as equal citizens, already right now, not only in the future when they reach adulthood [25]. This progressive view from the beginning of the twentieth century found its reverberation in the Convention of the Rights of Children (1989). Cruz-Torres and McElwee explain how social sustainability may be defined through the impact of social capital, reciprocity, local knowledge, principles of social justice, and investment in the human rights agenda, whilst the economic one may be defined by livelihood strategies (that are based on individual choices shaped by local and global conditions), labor mobility, and capital penetration, and this is also linked to neoliberal economic restructuring or development projects [19]. When considering population and changes in regional and global demographics, the sustainable development definition goes beyond natural environmental concerns, and it includes many different socio-demographic factors. Amongst them, predictable and unpredictable strains on welfare systems, social care, social support services, sustainability of pension schemes, working age cohorts, birth rates, national debts, and shared burdens, all of which encompass a significant gender dimension.

### 3.4. *Gender and Social Justice Agenda*

Sustainable development, at its core, focuses on social justice, including gender equity, human wellness, and ecological interdependency addressed at the individual, local, and regional levels. The latter requires the challenging of discrimination, violence, and irresponsible depletion of natural resources. It may be argued which political system is



best suited for protecting and promoting the ideals of sustainable development. Western writers lean towards democratic, liberal, and open societies with centralized public services in support of equal access to quality care, health support, education, water/waste management, energy services, and sanitation, in order to secure social reproduction [2]. Power relations and social disparities often pertain to gender and, therefore, it is important and most relevant to consider gender and its intersections with other independent variables, such as age, social class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability. For example, the elementary factors for the protection of human rights. Sustainable development is not possible without human rights protection. Governments play a key role in promoting and protecting human rights, and, amongst them, gender equality, and work more efficiently to achieve this goal if they form partnerships with the civic and private sectors.

Liberal oriented people are more dedicated to the protection of human rights and individuality, whilst those that are conservatively oriented focus more on binding people into groups and institutions [25,26], according to Haidt and Graham and Graham et al. If we agree that the initiators of world religions were male, and that the initiators of states, justice systems, and guilds were male, as history tells us, then perhaps women advocating for their rights were and still, to some extent, are more liberal due to their 'subaltern' position [27]. Does this position women as a more liberal gender? Elkington is convinced that sustainability involves social equity, environmental integrity, and economic prosperity [28]. These can be found in the Norwegian welfare model, which is thought to improve the overall welfare state sustainability through gender sustainability in the labor market and in pension schemes, leading to a thriving economy and supportive social system that eradicates social exclusion and poverty, and it guarantees positive migration rates for stable economic growth [29]. In the context of migration, Houte and Davids discuss the role of NGO assistance and government policy for promoting return migration, which, in their view, has an impact on sustainability and development [31]. They propose a transnational approach to the sustainability of return, concerning refugees and economic migrants, through the concept of mixed embeddedness and issues pertaining to this embeddedness that should contribute to return migration and overall global sustainability. The situation of migrant women around the world and the promotion of the integrity of family units play a vital role in this aspect. Similarly to the Norwegian premise on limiting the gap between the rich and the poor, Anglo-Saxon researchers advocate for the economic and social mobility of children within societies [32]. Other studies show that the coincidently widening income disparity, both within and between countries, reduces health, increases crime, and weakens social cohesion [33]. Large-scale migration may significantly exacerbate both trends. Social justice in the twenty first century is built upon human rights principles and, therefore, sustainable development should be seen as being reliant on the improvement of the lives of all people, decreasing gaps between rich and poor, and supporting equal opportunity, regardless of gender, ethnicity, and other individual characteristics, thereby promoting cultural diversity and social inclusion.

### 3.5. Migration and Sustainability

Rees discusses the impact of expanding international trade and migration on prospects for global sustainability from a biophysical/ecological/behavioral perspective [34]. Rees' starting premise is that a techno-industrial society is inherently unsustainable. Humans have a natural propensity to expand to occupy all accessible habitats and use all available resources. Thus, global sustainability is most likely to be achieved through policies that foster increased regional self-reliance, encourage greater investment in local natural capital, and favor the development of strong, diverse local economies 'in place.' Such measures will raise local (and, therefore, global) bio-capacities and reduce both the pull and push factors in international migration.

The discrimination of migrants in the global scale is not only a function of unconscious biases [35] that are held by individuals, but also a systemic disadvantage that is not sufficiently addressed by international law [36]. Likić-Brborić controversially indicates that

migration from poorer to richer countries helps to both gain financially and achieve stability and sustainability as well as address economic gaps and demographic demands for both the host country and the country of origin [36]. This would perhaps be especially true in the face of return migration. Unfortunately, migrants are amongst the most vulnerable and exploited groups, forming a disposable and flexible labor force, with limited rights and opportunities for social mobility. She calls for the global governance of migration to combat the progressing and oppressive neoliberal agenda that led to this situation and to promote a humanitarian one, represented by 17 SDGs [37]. Critiques of globalization as the source of all environmental evil argue that ‘trade-oriented globalization leads inevitably to ecological unsustainability through the accelerated erosion of natural capital’ [34]. Jover and Diaz-Parra hold a critical view of migration, who write that tourism may reshape historic urban areas that become socially unsustainable, excluding local communities [38]. The authors blame this phenomenon of transnational gentrification of public space on over-tourism, which occurs when the tourist infrastructure clashes with the needs and lives of local residents and, due to its intensity, takes over their spaces.

An opposite view is taken in a Portuguese context for both the tourism industry and return migration. In a study conducted by Santos et al., tourism is considered to be a positive factor for return migration, growth, and sustainable development in rural areas [39]. Return migration, in this case, means purchasing a small piece of land in rural area and turning it into small family business that is supported by tourism. However, the positive outcomes rely heavily on cooperation between the private sector, municipalities, civic organizations, and government. The study argues that small and medium size enterprises should prevail over the large, intercontinental ones in order to sustain the development of rural areas [36]. In the context of reducing consumption of natural resources, through labor migration from rural areas to city areas in China, Chen et al. writes that “mechanisms by which different forms of capital are substituted for one another should be considered in improving global sustainability” [40]. Unfortunately, the recipe for how to do it is missing. When looking into regional patterns of migration, there are voices for greater control of the expansion of farms, in countries that are suffering from deforestation [41]. This is caused by lack of food for a growing population, the depletion of land fertility, and, therefore, a growing need to increase farming lands. Ouedraogo notices that claiming land for farming by destroying forests endangers environmental and social sustainability in Burkina Faso in the long run and expects institutional intervention [41]. For the migration aspects, sustainable development relies on improving the quality of life and access to services across regions, addressing disproportions in wealth and access to resources, promoting the value of family bonds, and increasing the incentives for return migration.

### *3.6. Equality of Educational Opportunity and Sustainability*

In the recent report that was conducted by UNESCO (Futures of Education 2021), focus was placed on the survival of humanity and the planet at risk [42]. The report emphasized the importance of education for health, wellbeing, fostering diversity, protection of natural resources, and responsible citizenship. New educational eco-systems were foreseen alongside the changing role of higher education institutions as coaching and mentoring the tutees, rather than teaching in a traditional sense. Amongst scientists, who tried to answer the question if and how being male or female influences the motives, means, and opportunities to contribute to environmental sustainability, Meinzen-Dick et al. provided a comprehensive review of natural resource management cases, including eco-feminist theory, which proposes a closer natural bond between nature and women due to their biological relation to reproduction [18]. Feminist political ecology links women’s liberation with ending the exploitation of nature and intrahousehold studies that look at income disparity between households and show different consumption and preservation practices [43]. They focused their attention on evidence that gender may diversify closeness to nature, preservation/conservation, rights to exploit resources, or constraints in adopting sustainable practices. However, they notice a potential bias that forms this conviction. In

their view, studies that capture gender differences may be more easily publishable than studies that indicate no difference. An important point made by the authors is that the ownership of resources and land is statistically more prevalent amongst men and, therefore, they are the curators of the major decisions on the use, exploitation, and preservation of this land.

An interesting conclusion that was drawn by Meinzen-Dick asserted that education, access to knowledge, and awareness in creating sustainable practices supersede gender divisions per se, highlighting the importance of access to education and including sustainable development within the curriculum content [18]. The fourth SDG focused on access to quality education, contains a goal directly dedicated to sustainable development and global citizenship (4.7), and it states that, by 2030: “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development”. It highlights the role of education in fostering sustainable development and it points once again to human rights, gender equality, and regard for cultural diversity. This goal is monitored using as the indicators that were set out in the SDG Agenda at 4.7.1. These are (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in: (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment (SDG Indicators) [44].

Cultural diversity, according to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), is of paramount importance for sustainable human development [45]. Therefore, it should be seen as central to environmental protection, economic and social development, and promoted through education. As an interesting and innovative example of efforts to connect studies on gender and sustainability, Su considered delivering sustainable environmental education through gaming [46]. In her sample, the ratio of male/female gamers is balanced, and her study does not mention the gender disparity in gaming or the diverse preferences of male and female gamers, which weakens the conclusion that one can learn sustainable development through the use of computer games. Summing up, from the educational perspective, sustainable development relies, in great part, on education and access to high quality information that promotes sustainable lifestyles and fosters gender equity.

### 3.7. Gender and Eco-Protests

“Ecofeminism” as an analytical, political, and sociological term was first used by Françoise d’Eaubonne, a French feminist, in 1974. Since then, the term has evolved towards finding commonalities in challenging inequalities and oppressive power structures towards women, nature, and certain regions. Mies and Shiva describe ecofeminism as the lens through which we can reveal and oppose “the inherent inequalities in world structures which permit the North to dominate the South, men to dominate women and the frenetic plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominate nature ([47], p. 2)”. Women in this view are perceived as victims of direct exploitation and the exploitation of natural resources, but also as active agents of change and social innovation, being consciously and unconsciously invested in ecological conflicts.

According to Mies and Shiva in the global perspective, ecological disasters have a greater negative effect on the lives of women than men, and this may be why it is mostly women who are the leaders and initiators of climate strikes and other protests to stop the ongoing destruction of natural world ([47], pp. 2–3). In summary, sustainable development in the lens of ecofeminists is radical, it relies on the premise that producers should cease to exploit nature beyond its regenerative capacity and not abuse their power over natural resources and living species, including fellow humans (more frequently women), for short-term financial gains with disregard for the long-term future of the planet and its people.



### 3.8. Gender and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Looking into gender equity strengthens the ethical dimension of sustainable development, which is sometimes seen as derived from a pragmatic approach. Whilst, at least in theory, the social responsibility of companies originates from deep philosophical reflection and thinking about long-term, innovative solutions. There is an abundant amount of literature on gender and corporate social responsibility, by Oruc 2020 [48], Criado-Gomis et al. 2020 [49], García-Sánchez et al. 2019 [50], Grosser et al. 2017 [53], and Torres et al. 2018 [52], but we will focus on those that directly relate to the issues of sustainable development. Grosser examined how promoting gender equality within corporate social responsibility programs contributes to EU gender and sustainability objectives [53]. Feminist ethics, ‘ethics of care’, and feminist citizenship through gender mainstreaming strategies lead to a perception of corporate social responsibility as a policy instrument to further gender equality. Independently of it, Miles identified drivers for reporting gender information in sustainability reports when working with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the International Finance Corporation [54]. He argued that those who report sustainability possess an advantage in promoting gender equality through transparent reporting on their organization’s gender-responsive practices. His findings also suggested that businesses that empower women and promote gender diversity stand a greater chance of surpassing those who do not. Gender performance has become an indicator of financial advantage.

Moreover, increased access to this information may have a positive influence on public policy for combatting gender inequalities. Stakeholders have become increasingly interested in the gender performance of companies, such as women in management. In summary, sustainable development and its gender aspects within corporate social responsibility translate into transparent and gender aware, gender sensitive policies, which focus on preventing and counteracting the possible negative impacts that production and service delivery may have on environment and communities.

### 3.9. Innovation, Gender and Sustainability

Cruz-Torres and McElwee highlighted new areas where sustainability is acknowledged, such as sustainability science with holistic, synergetic approaches that acknowledge complexity and uncertainty, and conditions that form the foundations for reflectivity, critical thinking, and fostering of innovations [18]. An unlikely example of female privilege emerged based on this framework. Giles and Byrne found that people with strong ethnic identity chose to maintain a strong linguistic distinction and are less likely to learn a foreign language or perfect it [55].

Fishman states that it is due to the fear of losing the bond expressed by speaking in native tongue, which is more prevalent in men than women [56]. The latter, combined with slower language acquisition in boys, in general, speaks for less openness to identity change and can perhaps be seen as a sign of lower flexibility and adaptability [57]. This may indicate that women are more adaptable and, therefore, more open to change. The notion of a more flexible, almost liquid, identity of women was initially observed during a study of the impact of acquiring a second language on the social positioning of women [58]. This is in contrast to the evidence of a more solid, more resistant to change and adjustment identity that is connected to masculinity traits [59]. These can be primarily observed in the existing traditions of patrilocality and patrilineality of family names, which prevail in many parts of the world.

In the context of Erikson’s understanding of identity, in which the self-definition of an individual refers to accepted [60], assigned social roles, one can speak of a fluid, ‘liquid identity’ of women due to their more dramatic transition to the role of wife and a mother, often including relocation and the change of surname, which must have an impact for the constitution of self-definition regarding their own location in the public and private sphere.

This notion emerges from feminist criticism and a gender-sensitive social approach to analyzing social structures. Whilst the prevailing feminist discourse attempts to identify areas of neglect towards women and threats to their self-determination, in the case of

sustainable development, more flexibility may translate to more adaptability to natural conditions, climate change, and the necessary change of habits and customer choices. Based on this premise and the achievements of ecofeminism and eco-activism of women, it is foreseen that it is mainly women who will directly or indirectly be the drivers of social innovation for sustainable development.

#### 4. Concluding Discussion

The aim of this article was to look for definitions of gender and sustainable development, for each of the categories that the analyzed papers were divided into. The definitions, based on a systematic review of the literature, were gathered in one place, in this article, to highlight the existing knowledge and summarize it in a form of category-specific definitions.

As discussed, sustainable development is believed to be more realistic if decentralized regional governance takes place with global oversight ensuring the implementation of global standards. This approach leads to greater gender synergy in the process. Sustainable development, as ecofeminists proclaim, relies on challenging unjust power relations in a strive for equality, access, and social justice. Whilst it appears to be impossible to remove power from the centers of global financial capital, as such a revolution would be unlawful, it seems to be more practical to invest in the empowerment of civic movements and organizations, and the empowerment of marginalized communities, to demand social justice and the protection of basic human rights.

Gender plays a role in sustainable development. Control over natural resources, access to power, including consumer power, and unjust divisions of labor, including informal care, all have an impact on intergenerational contribution to sustainable development. Although it is difficult to draw one, single definition of sustainability in the context of gender, using the summary from each section leads to the following working definition.

Sustainable development ensures that the exploitation of nature beyond its regenerative capacity is avoided and that humans adapt to the natural conditions and, thus, reduce activities that cause climate change. This change of habits and consumer choices is vital at both a policy maker/stakeholder level and at the individual level. As discussed above, gender has a significant impact on societal roles and, thus, women (as ecofeminism suggests), in their role of leaders, stakeholders, educators, consumers, mothers, and responsible citizens, should promote sustainable lifestyles, fostering the principles of social justice, gender equity, and sustainability. Global and regional sustainable development relies on improving the quality of life and access to services across regions, addressing disproportions in wealth and access to resources, promoting the value of family bonds, and increasing incentives for return migration.

Empowerment as a tool for ensuring sustainable development was defined by Page and Czuba as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important” [61]. The empowerment process has been observed for the last century in the emancipation and improvement of women’s position in societies. It is now time that the lessons learnt in this process of gaining gender equity cover the sustainable development agenda. There is still a lot to be done in both areas, and they are intrinsically interconnected to one another. The sustainable development agenda will not succeed if we disregard gender aspects.

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