



Ethical Challenges of Environmental Policies in Urban Societies: From Individual Responsibility to Climate Justice

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Abstract

Introduction: The intensification of environmental crises in urban societies, particularly in the context of accelerating climate change, has turned environmental policy into one of the most important arenas of public decision-making. Cities are, on the one hand, major centers of pollution generation and resource consumption, and on the other hand, they concentrate the highest levels of social inequality and environmental vulnerability. Within this context, urban environmental policies face complex ethical challenges related to the distribution of responsibilities, costs, and benefits among citizens and institutions. Drawing on the literature of environmental ethics and climate justice, this article seeks to rethink the concept of individual responsibility, examine the tension between environmental efficiency and social justice, and analyze the role of urban institutions and structures in the redistribution of responsibilities.

Material and Methods: This research was conducted as a narrative-analytical review article. To this end, reputable scientific sources published in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE, and Google Scholar were systematically searched. The information obtained from the studies was analyzed and conclusions were drawn based on the analyses.

Conclusion: The analytical findings indicate that an exclusive focus on individual responsibility, without due attention to structural and institutional constraints, can lead to the reproduction of urban inequalities and undermine the legitimacy of environmental policies. Climate justice, as a normative framework, enables the integration of environmental efficiency, social justice, and institutional responsibility, and redefines the criteria for policy evaluation. The article concludes that the design of just urban environmental policies requires a multidimensional approach in which citizen empowerment, institutional accountability, and the reduction of social inequalities are pursued simultaneously. Such an approach constitutes a fundamental condition for achieving environmental sustainability and social justice in contemporary cities.

Keywords: *Ethics, Responsibility, Climate Justice*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the intensification of environmental crises such as climate change, air pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource scarcity - particularly in urban societies - has transformed environmental policymaking into one of the most

critical domains of public decision-making. Cities, as centers of population concentration, energy consumption, and pollutant production, play a central role in the formation of environmental crises while simultaneously experiencing the greatest vulnerability to their

consequences [1]. In this context, urban environmental policies confront not only technical and economic challenges but also fundamental ethical questions concerning the distribution of responsibilities, benefits, and costs among individuals and social groups.

One of the central dimensions of these challenges is the relationship between individual responsibility and collective responsibility in the protection of the urban environment. On the one hand, approaches grounded in individualistic ethics emphasize changes in citizens' behavior - such as reducing energy consumption, using public transportation, and waste separation - and regard the "responsible" citizen as the primary agent of sustainability [2]. On the other hand, critics of this approach argue that excessive emphasis on individual responsibility can obscure the role of economic, political, and institutional structures in producing environmental crises and may even lead to a form of "blame-oriented moralism" that reproduces social inequalities [3].

Within this debate, the concept of climate justice has increasingly attracted attention as an ethical and political framework for analyzing urban environmental policies. Climate justice emphasizes that the impacts of climate change and the policies designed to address it are not distributed equally across social groups. Low-income populations, marginalized communities, and socially excluded urban groups typically play the smallest role in generating pollution, yet they bear the greatest burdens of air pollution, heat waves, and environmental risks [4]. From this perspective, urban environmental policies must move beyond environmental efficiency and address considerations of distributive justice, procedural justice, and social recognition.

The core ethical challenge in this field lies in balancing the emphasis on individual responsibility with the necessity of designing just structural policies. Measures such as carbon

taxes, traffic restrictions, or increases in energy prices may be environmentally effective, but if they fail to account for class-based and spatial inequalities within cities, they may exacerbate social injustice and inequality [5]. Therefore, ethical analysis of urban environmental policies requires a critical examination of questions such as "Who is responsible?", "Who bears the costs?", and "Who benefits from the green transition?"

Accordingly, addressing the ethical challenges of environmental policies in urban societies—from individual responsibility to climate justice—is essential not only for enriching theoretical debates in environmental ethics, but also for designing legitimate, effective, and just policies in pursuit of sustainable urban development. This introduction aims to provide a conceptual foundation for examining these challenges and to demonstrate that without simultaneous attention to individual ethics and structural justice, urban environmental policies risk inefficiency and injustice.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research was conducted as a narrative-analytical review article. To this end, reputable scientific sources published in international databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, IEEE, and Google Scholar were systematically searched. The information obtained from the studies was analyzed and conclusions were drawn based on the analyses.

DISCUSSION

Rethinking the Concept of Individual Responsibility in Urban Environmental Policies

Individual responsibility is one of the central concepts in contemporary urban environmental policies and is often employed as a self-evident assumption in the design and implementation of policy interventions. Behavior-change campaigns, civic education programs,

encouragement of responsible consumption, and promotion of green lifestyles are all based on the assumption that individual actions play a decisive role in addressing urban environmental crises. However, recent theoretical and empirical findings suggest that this dominant understanding of individual responsibility requires critical reconsideration, as its absolutization can lead to moral simplification, unjust transfer of responsibility, and neglect of the role of urban structures [3, 6].

In conventional policy approaches, individual responsibility is often interpreted within the framework of liberal ethics and rational choice theory. Citizens are viewed as autonomous agents who are capable of - and obligated to - contribute to environmental goals through “correct” choices, such as reducing energy use, recycling, or using public transportation [2]. While this approach normatively emphasizes individual agency, it implicitly assumes that all citizens have equal access to opportunities, resources, and capacities for responsible action. Urban research demonstrates that this assumption is empirically flawed, as economic, spatial, and institutional inequalities severely constrain the range of individual choices [7].

One of the most significant ethical critiques of excessive focus on individual responsibility is the risk of “responsibilization.” This process occurs when structural and systemic issues - such as unsustainable patterns of urban development, dependence on fossil fuels, or inadequate public infrastructure - are reduced to the level of individual behavior [6]. Under such conditions, low-income citizens or residents of marginalized areas, who often contribute least to pollution, may be unjustly held responsible for outcomes that lie beyond their real control. From an ethical standpoint, this situation conflicts with principles of justice and fairness.

Recent literature in environmental ethics suggests that individual responsibility should be

redefined in relation to the concept of “structural responsibility.” Young [8], in her theory of social connection and structural responsibility, argues that in the face of systemic injustices - including urban environmental inequalities - moral responsibility cannot rest solely on isolated individuals, but must be distributed among actors who contribute to the creation, maintenance, or benefit from unjust structures. Within this framework, individual responsibility is neither eliminated nor absolutized; rather, it gains meaning within a network of institutional, economic, and political relationships.

From the perspective of urban policymaking, this rethinking has important implications. First, individual responsibility should be understood as “empowered responsibility,” meaning that urban institutions are obligated to provide the material and institutional conditions necessary for citizens to act responsibly. For example, encouraging the use of public transportation is ethically justified only when efficient, affordable, and accessible infrastructure exists for all social groups [5]. Otherwise, such policies result in moral blaming rather than empowerment.

Second, rethinking individual responsibility requires attention to climate justice and urban inequalities. Studies show that vulnerable urban groups often face the greatest exposure to environmental risks while simultaneously possessing the least capacity to change their behavior [9]. Therefore, just environmental policies must define individual responsibility in a differentiated manner, proportional to citizens’ social, economic, and spatial conditions.

Ultimately, rethinking the concept of individual responsibility does not entail denying the moral role of citizens, but rather situating this role within a realistic and just framework. Individual responsibility can be ethically and practically meaningful only when it is defined in conjunction with institutional responsibility, structural justice, and democratic participation.

Such an approach not only reduces unjust blaming of citizens but can also enhance the legitimacy, social acceptance, and effectiveness of urban environmental policies.

The Ethical Tension Between Environmental Efficiency and Social Justice

One of the most central ethical debates in urban environmental policies concerns the tension between environmental efficiency and social justice. Environmental efficiency generally refers to the extent to which a policy effectively reduces pollution, resource consumption, or greenhouse gas emissions at the lowest possible economic cost, whereas social justice focuses on how the benefits, costs, and risks of these policies are distributed among different social groups [10]. Although these two objectives may appear theoretically complementary, in practice they often come into conflict, particularly within the complex and unequal context of urban societies. From a policy perspective, many commonly used environmental instruments - such as carbon taxes, energy pricing, traffic restrictions, or the removal of fuel subsidies - are considered highly efficient due to their economic logic. By employing market mechanisms, these policies steer actors' behavior toward reduced resource use and pollution and are therefore regarded as "optimal" from the standpoint of environmental economics theories [11]. However, numerous studies have shown that such policies often produce unjust distributive effects and impose disproportionate burdens on low-income urban populations [12].

This tension becomes more pronounced when existing structural inequalities in cities are taken into account. Low-income groups, residents of informal or marginalized areas, and social minorities typically live in neighborhoods with higher levels of pollution, limited access to clean public transportation, and lower-quality urban infrastructure. Consequently, policies that

increase energy or transportation costs, while potentially effective from an environmental standpoint, may exacerbate "energy poverty" or restrict these groups' access to essential urban services [13]. From an ethical perspective, this situation conflicts with the principles of distributive justice, as the burden of environmental transition falls disproportionately on those who have contributed least to the creation of environmental crises.

In the literature on environmental ethics and climate justice, this issue is often analyzed as a conflict between outcome-oriented efficiency and normative justice. Utilitarian approaches tend to emphasize the maximization of overall benefits - such as total reductions in carbon emissions - even if this leads to unequal cost distributions. In contrast, justice-oriented approaches argue that policies must consider not only aggregate outcomes but also the manner in which these outcomes are distributed [4]. From this perspective, an environmental policy may be technically "successful" yet ethically "illegitimate."

Climate justice, as a conceptual framework, seeks to reconceptualize this tension. It emphasizes that environmental efficiency should not be evaluated independently of historical, social, and economic contexts. According to this approach, urban policies must simultaneously address three dimensions of justice: distributive justice (who bears the costs), procedural justice (who participates in decision-making), and recognition justice (which groups and needs are acknowledged) [9]. Findings from urban studies indicate that policies that ignore these dimensions often encounter social resistance, declining public trust, and ultimately reduced environmental effectiveness [5].

Therefore, the tension between environmental efficiency and social justice should not be regarded merely as a "side effect" of policymaking, but rather as a fundamental ethical

issue. Some scholars argue that social injustice ultimately undermines environmental efficiency itself, since unjust policies lack social legitimacy and face non-cooperation from citizens [7]. Accordingly, a rigid separation between efficiency and justice is not only ethically problematic but also practically ineffective.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that urban environmental policies require an ethical framework in which environmental efficiency and social justice are treated not as competing goals, but as interrelated dimensions of a sustainable transition. Such an approach necessitates a rethinking of the criteria for policy success and simultaneous attention to both pollution reduction and the alleviation of social inequalities in cities.

Climate Justice as an Alternative or Complementary Framework in Urban Policymaking

In response to the limitations of conventional environmental policymaking approaches - which often prioritize technical efficiency, cost reduction, and economic optimization - the concept of climate justice has gradually emerged as an important analytical and normative framework in urban policymaking. Climate justice addresses not only the physical and environmental consequences of climate change, but also the fundamental questions of “who” bears the greatest harms, “who” holds the greatest responsibility for creating the crisis, and “who” is included or excluded in decision-making processes and climate transitions [4]. From this perspective, climate justice can function both as an alternative to purely efficiency-oriented approaches and as a necessary complement for reforming and ethically grounding existing urban policies.

In urban contexts, the significance of climate justice is amplified, as cities are both major sources of greenhouse gas emissions and sites

where social, economic, and spatial inequalities are concentrated. Research shows that the impacts of climate change - such as heat waves, urban flooding, and air pollution - disproportionately affect low-income groups, the elderly, children, and residents of marginalized neighborhoods [14]. Under such conditions, urban policies that focus solely on aggregate emission reductions or technical resilience, without regard to the social distribution of harms and benefits, are ethically insufficient.

As a theoretical framework, climate justice goes beyond classical distributive justice and emphasizes three interrelated dimensions: distributive justice (the allocation of benefits and costs of climate policies), procedural justice (the degree of meaningful participation by citizens and marginalized groups in decision-making), and recognition justice (the acknowledgment of cultural, social, and historical differences among groups) [4]. This multidimensional approach shifts urban policymaking from a narrow focus on “what should be done” toward the broader question of “for whom and through which processes.”

As an alternative framework, climate justice can fundamentally redefine the logic of urban policymaking. Rather than evaluating policy success solely through indicators such as emission reductions or economic savings, criteria such as inequality reduction, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and the enhancement of democratic legitimacy are incorporated into policy assessment [15]. This paradigmatic shift is particularly important in cities characterized by deep class divisions, as it underscores that a just climate transition is not a secondary outcome but an objective equal in importance to environmental protection.

At the same time, many scholars argue that climate justice need not entirely replace existing approaches; instead, it can serve as a complementary framework that addresses the

ethical shortcomings of efficiency-driven policies. For instance, instruments such as carbon pricing or urban traffic restrictions, when accompanied by compensatory mechanisms, local participation, and targeted support for vulnerable groups, can be both environmentally effective and socially just [12]. In this sense, climate justice helps urban policymaking bridge environmental objectives and ethical imperatives. From an institutional perspective, adopting a climate justice framework requires redefining the role of local governments and municipalities. Just climate policymaking depends on participatory processes, decision-making transparency, and attention to the knowledge and lived experiences of residents across different urban neighborhoods [5]. Such an approach can strengthen public trust and reduce social resistance to environmental policies, thereby enhancing their long-term effectiveness. Ultimately, the analysis of climate justice in urban policymaking demonstrates that the transition to low-carbon and resilient cities, without attention to social justice, is not only ethically problematic but also practically unsustainable. Climate justice - whether as an alternative or a complement - provides the means to design urban environmental policies that respond simultaneously to the climate crisis and to deeply rooted social inequalities in cities.

The Role of Urban Institutions and Structures in the Redistribution of Responsibilities

One of the key issues in the ethics of urban environmental policies concerns the manner in which responsibilities are distributed and redistributed among different actors - responsibilities that extend beyond the individual level and are closely tied to urban institutions, structures, and governance mechanisms. Contemporary literature in environmental ethics and climate justice demonstrates that an exclusive focus on individual responsibility is not

only insufficient but also ethically problematic, as it overlooks the role and power of urban institutions in shaping patterns of consumption, production, and environmental vulnerability [3, 8]. From this perspective, the redistribution of responsibilities requires recognition of the structural role of urban institutions in both producing and addressing environmental crises. Urban institutions - including municipalities, city councils, planning agencies, and urban service providers - play a decisive role in directing citizens' environmental behaviors. Decisions made by these institutions in areas such as land use, transportation development, housing policy, and energy infrastructure shape the practical frameworks within which individual choices are made [16]. For example, the choice between using a private car or public transportation is often not merely an individual preference, but rather the outcome of the quality, accessibility, and affordability of infrastructure provided by urban institutions. Accordingly, attributing moral responsibility to citizens without considering these structures constitutes a form of ethical simplification.

In theoretical discussions, the "social connection" or "structural responsibility" approach proposed by Young [8] offers a useful framework for analyzing the role of institutions in redistributing responsibility. According to this approach, responsibility for structural injustices - including urban environmental inequalities - is collectively distributed among actors who benefit from these structures or contribute to their reproduction. In this sense, urban institutions, due to their decision-making power and wide-ranging influence, bear a greater share of moral responsibility and are obligated to create more just conditions for environmental action.

The redistribution of responsibilities also requires attention to the role of markets and private actors in urban governance. The privatization of urban services, the development

of large-scale urban projects, and the influence of energy and transportation corporations in policymaking have blurred the boundary between public and private responsibility [17]. Under such conditions, environmental policies that focus solely on changing consumer behavior conceal the structural responsibility of powerful economic actors. From the perspective of climate justice, urban institutions must establish mechanisms of accountability and regulation for these actors in order to distribute responsibilities more equitably [5].

Another important dimension of responsibility redistribution concerns the role of urban institutions in creating participatory and democratic processes. Procedural justice requires that vulnerable and marginalized groups have meaningful participation in urban environmental decision-making [4]. By designing mechanisms for public participation, ensuring information transparency, and strengthening institutional accountability, urban institutions can shift responsibility from mere “compliance with policies” to “participation in shaping policies.” This shift is not only ethically desirable but also contributes to greater legitimacy and effectiveness of environmental policies.

In practice, empirical research shows that cities with stronger institutional capacity and multilevel governance structures are more successful in redistributing environmental responsibilities. Cooperation among local governments, national institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector makes it possible to prevent the burden of environmental transition from falling disproportionately on less powerful citizens [18]. By contrast, institutional weakness and excessive centralization can lead to the downward transfer of responsibility to the lowest social strata and the intensification of environmental injustices.

Overall, analysis of the role of urban institutions and structures in redistributing responsibilities

indicates that the ethics of urban environmental policymaking requires moving beyond individual-centered approaches toward a structural understanding of responsibility. Urban institutions, by virtue of their regulatory authority, planning capacity, and resource mobilization power, play a central role in creating just conditions for environmental action. Without acknowledging and institutionalizing this structural responsibility, urban environmental policies risk reproducing inequality and undermining climate justice.

Normative Implications of the Findings for the Design of Just Environmental Policies

The findings of the present study indicate that urban environmental policies, regardless of their level of technical or economic efficiency, inevitably carry normative implications, as they implicitly or explicitly take positions on questions such as “Who is responsible?”, “Who bears the costs?”, and “Who benefits from the environmental transition?” From this perspective, the design of just environmental policies requires translating empirical and analytical findings into clear normative principles that can guide the ethical orientation of urban policymaking [4]. This section outlines the most important normative implications of the findings for the design of such policies.

The first normative implication is the necessity of moving beyond purely individual-centered approaches and embracing structural responsibility in environmental policymaking. The findings show that a unilateral emphasis on individual behavior change - such as encouraging citizens to conserve energy or use public transportation - can lead to the moral blaming of groups that, in practice, have the least power to alter their environmental conditions. Normatively, this is inconsistent with principles of justice, as it shifts responsibility onto actors who have contributed little to the production of

environmental crises [8]. Therefore, just policies should primarily assign responsibility to urban institutions, markets, and powerful economic actors, while defining the role of citizens within the framework of their structural capacities and constraints.

The second normative implication concerns the integration of distributive justice into the design of policy instruments. The findings indicate that many environmentally efficient policies - such as carbon pricing or increases in energy costs - can exacerbate social inequalities in the absence of compensatory mechanisms. From a normative standpoint, just environmental policies must be designed in such a way that the cost burden does not fall disproportionately on low-income and vulnerable groups [12]. This requires the use of complementary measures such as income redistribution, targeted subsidies, and investment in public infrastructure in disadvantaged urban areas.

The third normative implication is the importance of procedural justice and democratic participation in the policymaking process. The findings show that the moral legitimacy of environmental policies depends not only on their outcomes but also on the processes through which decisions are made. Meaningful participation of citizens - especially marginalized groups - in policy design and implementation constitutes a normative requirement rooted in principles of democracy and justice [5]. From this perspective, just environmental policies must institutionalize transparent, accountable, and participatory processes that transform citizens from “objects of policy” into “agents of policy.”

The fourth normative implication concerns recognition justice in urban policymaking. The findings suggest that environmental policies are often designed on the basis of implicit assumptions about an “ideal citizen” and tend to overlook cultural, gendered, age-based, and spatial differences. From the standpoint of

normative justice, ignoring these differences can lead to social exclusion and reduced policy effectiveness [19]. Accordingly, just policies must recognize the diversity of urban lived experiences and adopt flexible, context-sensitive approaches. The fifth normative implication involves redefining the criteria for evaluating the success of environmental policies. The findings indicate that policy evaluation should not rely solely on technical indicators such as emission reductions or economic savings. Normatively, criteria such as inequality reduction, empowerment of vulnerable groups, and strengthening social cohesion should also be incorporated into assessments of policy success [15]. This shift in evaluative criteria guides environmental policymaking toward a more comprehensive and ethically justified approach.

In sum, the normative implications of the findings demonstrate that designing just environmental policies requires linking environmental efficiency, social justice, and democratic legitimacy. Policies that ignore these normative dimensions, even if technically successful, face the risks of injustice, social resistance, and long-term unsustainability. Therefore, integrating normative considerations into the design of urban environmental policies is not an optional choice but an ethical and policy necessity.

Ethical and Contextual Limitations of the Present Study

Any normative analysis of urban environmental policies, even when grounded in established theoretical frameworks and scientific evidence, inevitably faces a set of ethical and contextual limitations that affect the interpretation of findings and their generalizability. Clarifying these limitations is not only a methodological requirement but also an ethical obligation in research, as it prevents hasty generalizations and policy prescriptions that are inappropriate for

diverse urban contexts [20]. This section outlines the most significant ethical and contextual limitations of the present study.

The first limitation concerns the context-dependent nature of the ethical concepts employed in this study. Concepts such as climate justice, moral responsibility, and social fairness, although widely used in global environmental ethics literature, acquire different meanings in diverse cultural, political, and institutional contexts [4]. This study primarily relies on theoretical frameworks developed in Western literature and may not fully reflect the values, norms, and ethical priorities of urban societies in the Global South or in non-liberal cultural contexts. From this perspective, generalizing the findings to all cities requires caution and critical reinterpretation.

The second limitation relates to the analytical focus on the level of urban policymaking and formal institutions. While this focus enables a structural analysis of responsibilities and inequalities, it may overlook informal forms of agency, local networks, and grassroots initiatives. Research shows that many forms of environmental resistance, adaptation, and innovation in cities occur outside formal policymaking frameworks [21]. Ethically, this limitation may result in the marginalization of voices that lack representation in formal institutional structures.

The third limitation concerns the tension between normative analysis and empirical evidence. Like many ethical studies, the present research relies more on theoretical analysis and critical interpretation of existing literature than on extensive empirical data. This may create a gap between normative recommendations and the practical realities of urban policymaking [22]. From a research ethics perspective, this limitation requires that policy recommendations be presented not as definitive prescriptions but as guiding and adaptable frameworks.

The fourth limitation involves the risk of oversimplifying complex urban inequalities. Although the study emphasizes the role of economic and social inequalities in environmental policies, urban inequalities are often intersectional and simultaneously linked to gender, ethnicity, age, and migration status [23]. Focusing on one or two dimensions of inequality may obscure these complexities and, ethically, lead to the reproduction of a form of “justice blindness.”

The fifth limitation concerns the temporal dimension and the dynamic nature of environmental policies. Urban climate and environmental policies are developed within dynamic and evolving contexts, and their ethical implications may differ in the short, medium, and long term. The present study primarily focuses on short- and medium-term implications and pays less attention to generational change and intergenerational justice, despite the inherently temporal and intergenerational nature of climate justice [24].

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge the normative limitation arising from the positionality of the researcher. Any ethical analysis is inevitably shaped by the researcher’s assumptions, values, and social position. Recognizing this limitation is part of the ethical responsibility of research and can facilitate critical dialogue and plural perspectives in the field of urban environmental policy ethics [25].

Overall, identifying and articulating the ethical and contextual limitations of the present study indicates that the findings should be interpreted within a critical and flexible framework. These limitations do not constitute weaknesses, but rather reflect the inherent complexity of research in environmental ethics and policymaking, and they provide a basis for future research and for deepening theoretical and practical debates.

CONCLUSION

The present discussion, focusing on the ethical challenges of environmental policies in urban societies, has shown that addressing environmental crises - particularly climate change - is not merely a technical or managerial issue, but is deeply intertwined with normative questions of responsibility, justice, and policy legitimacy. Based on the analyses presented throughout the article, it can be concluded that urban environmental policies can operate sustainably and effectively only when they simultaneously address environmental efficiency and social justice, and avoid reducing structural issues to individual responsibilities.

First, rethinking the concept of individual responsibility demonstrates that a unilateral emphasis on citizens' behavior change, without attention to institutional, economic, and spatial constraints, is not only insufficient but also ethically problematic. Individual responsibility becomes meaningful and fair only when defined within an empowering framework - one in which urban institutions, markets, and local governments accept their primary responsibility for providing infrastructure, ensuring just regulation, and reducing inequalities. Otherwise, environmental policies risk morally blaming vulnerable groups and undermining public trust. Second, analysis of the tension between environmental efficiency and social justice shows that these goals should not be treated as mutually exclusive. Policies that focus solely on emission reduction or economic optimization, while neglecting distributive consequences, may exacerbate urban inequalities and ultimately lose legitimacy and effectiveness. The findings of this article confirm that social justice is not an obstacle to environmental efficiency, but rather a necessary condition for the long-term sustainability of urban climate policies.

Third, climate justice, as a normative framework, enables the integration of individual responsibility, institutional responsibility, and

structural justice. By emphasizing distributive, procedural, and recognition justice, this framework shifts urban policymaking from a narrow focus on technical outcomes toward attention to processes, social groups, and unequal urban contexts. Whether as an alternative or a complement to existing approaches, climate justice provides a conceptual tool for redefining the criteria of success in urban environmental policies.

Fourth, examination of the role of urban institutions and structures demonstrates that redistributing responsibilities is a core ethical requirement of just environmental policymaking. Urban institutions, by virtue of their decision-making, planning, and regulatory power, bear a greater share of moral responsibility in environmental transitions and must prevent the disproportionate transfer of burdens onto less powerful citizens. Strengthening multilevel governance, democratic participation, and institutional accountability are among the key strategies in this regard.

Finally, acknowledging the ethical and contextual limitations of the present study indicates that no single normative framework can fully capture the social, cultural, and institutional complexities of different cities. Nevertheless, these limitations highlight the importance of critical dialogue, context-sensitive research, and attention to the diversity of urban experiences, thereby clarifying future directions for research in the ethics of urban environmental policies.

In conclusion, this article argues that the transition toward sustainable and low-carbon cities, without simultaneous attention to individual responsibility, climate justice, and the role of urban institutions, is neither ethically justified nor practically sustainable. Urban environmental policies must be designed in ways that empower citizens, reduce inequalities, and strengthen the democratic legitimacy of decisions. Only within such a framework can the

simultaneous realization of environmental protection and social justice in contemporary cities be achieved.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues (such as plagiarism, conscious satisfaction, misleading, making and or forging data, publishing or sending to two places, redundancy and etc.) have been fully considered by the writers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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