

## URBAN JUSTICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: ADDRESSING INEQUALITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE URBAN PLANNING

### 21. YÜZYILDA KENTSEL ADALET: KAPSAYICI KENT PLANLAMASI YOLUYLA EŞİTSİZLİĞİN ELE ALINMASI

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fahri ÖZSUNGUR<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Mortaza Chaychi SEMSARİ<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Erdal BAYRAKTAR<sup>3</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

Urban areas are increasingly coming to the forefront in addressing systemic inequalities caused by complex social, economic, and environmental challenges. The study examines justice-oriented urban development as a transformative framework that prioritizes equity, participation, and sustainability. By ensuring equitable access to quality education, healthcare, public services, affordable housing, and transportation, cities can reduce disparities and promote social mobility. Procedural justice and accountability in governance further strengthen urban systems by fostering trust and supporting inclusive decision-making processes. Global examples such as participatory budgeting, inclusive zoning, and community-driven revitalization projects demonstrate how justice-centered approaches can bridge socio-economic divides and create vibrant urban spaces. Despite these opportunities, the implementation of justice-oriented policies faces significant obstacles, including limited resources, political resistance, and institutional constraints. Overcoming these barriers requires a paradigm shift that positions equity and inclusion as core principles in urban planning and governance. The study argues that justice is not merely an ideal, but also a practical tool for addressing urban inequalities and shaping a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future. As urban populations grow, cities must adopt innovative and collaborative approaches to transform systemic inequities and empower communities.

**Keywords:** Urban Justice, Equity in Urban Development, Inclusive Governance, Sustainable Cities, Participatory Urban Planning.

**JEL Classification Codes:** R58, R51, O18, H41, D63.

#### ÖZ

Kentsel alanlar, karmaşık sosyal, ekonomik ve çevresel zorlukların neden olduğu sistemik eşitsizlikleri ele almak için giderek ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bu makale, eşitlik, katılım ve sürdürülebilirliği önceliklendiren dönüştürücü bir çerçeve olarak adalet odaklı kentsel kalkınmayı incelemektedir. Kaliteli eğitim, sağlık hizmetleri, kamu hizmetleri, uygun fiyatlı konut ve ulaşım imkanlarına eşit erişim sağlanarak, şehirler eşitsizlikleri azaltabilir ve sosyal hareketliliği teşvik edebilir. Yönetişimde usuli adalet ve hesap verebilirlik, güveni artırarak ve kapsayıcı karar alma süreçlerini destekleyerek kentsel sistemleri daha da güçlendirmektedir. Katılımcı bütçeleme, kapsayıcı imar ve topluluk odaklı yenileme projeleri gibi küresel örnekler, adalet merkezli yaklaşımların sosyo-ekonomik uçurumları nasıl kapatabileceğini ve canlı kentsel alanlar yaratabileceğini göstermektedir. Bu fırsatlara rağmen, adalet odaklı politikaların uygulanması, sınırlı kaynaklar, siyasi direnç ve kurumsal kısıtlamalar gibi önemli engellerle karşılaşmaktadır. Bu engellerin aşılması, eşitlik ve kapsayıcılığı kentsel planlama ve yönetişimde temel ilkeler olarak konumlandırılan bir paradigma değişikliği gerektirir. Bu makale, adaletin yalnızca bir ideal değil, aynı zamanda kentsel eşitsizlikleri ele almak ve daha eşitlikçi, dirençli ve sürdürülebilir bir gelecek şekillendirmek için pratik bir araç olduğunu savunmaktadır. Kentsel nüfuslar büyüdükçe, şehirler sistemik eşitsizlikleri dönüştürmek ve toplulukları güçlendirmek için yenilikçi ve iş birliğine dayalı yaklaşımları benimsemelidir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kentsel Adalet, Kentsel Kalkınmada Eşitlik, Kapsayıcı Yönetişim, Sürdürülebilir Şehirler, Katılımcı Kentsel Planlama.

**JEL Sınıflandırma Kodları:** R58, R51, O18, H41, D63.

<sup>1</sup>  Mersin University, Vocational School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, Türkiye, fahriozsungur@mersin.edu.tr

<sup>2</sup>  Bağımsız Araştırmacı, Türkiye, alimortezacaycisemsari@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>  İstanbul Nişantaşı University, Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Türkiye, erdalbayraktar88@gmail.com

## EXTENDED SUMMARY

### **Purpose and Scope:**

The primary aim of the study is to understand the structural inequalities produced by urbanization in the twenty-first century and to evaluate the concept of urban justice as an analytical framework for addressing these inequalities. Contemporary cities have become focal points of population density, socio-economic segregation, environmental risks, and spatial injustice. These dynamics generate multi-layered pressures, particularly on poor and disadvantaged groups, thereby constraining cities' capacity to provide equitable living conditions. Consequently, in the pursuit of sustainable cities, justice must be recognized not merely as an ethical principle but also as a strategic priority in urban policy-making. Within this context, the study discusses the theoretical foundations of urban justice through concepts such as the "right to the city" and "spatial justice," and analyzes how inequalities manifest across different domains. The multidimensional nature of justice is examined through key urban issues, including the right to housing, accessibility in transportation, environmental equity, access to public spaces, and the spatial distribution of services. In addition, inclusive planning approaches supported by the principles of participation, transparency, and accountability in governance processes are comprehensively addressed. The study also aims to reveal both the potential of local governments to ensure urban justice and the structural limitations they face in this process. The allocation of municipal resources, land-use and zoning practices, the use of tools that encourage social participation, and environmental policies are central to efforts to establish urban justice. However, political, financial, and institutional barriers encountered in practice hinder the full realization of this potential. In this respect, the study not only analyzes the existing conditions but also seeks to offer policy recommendations for decision-makers and practitioners.

### **Design/methodology/approach:**

The study adopts a qualitative approach and is based on a comprehensive review of the literature. The study evaluates secondary data, including academic articles, policy reports, and documented case studies. A systematic search is conducted using academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science with keywords including "urban justice," "participatory planning," and "sustainable cities," through which up-to-date and theoretically robust sources relevant to the topic are identified. The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis and organized around the practical dimensions of urban justice and the challenges encountered in its implementation. No primary data (such as interviews or surveys) are collected; rather, the study is grounded in the synthesis of existing theoretical and empirical knowledge.

### **Findings:**

The findings of the study indicate that urban justice becomes particularly visible in the following key domains: **Housing and Land-Use Justice:** Processes of gentrification often lead to the displacement of low-income groups from central urban areas. In response, policy instruments such as rent control, social housing programs, and inclusive zoning and land-use regulations aim to mitigate these effects and promote more equitable urban development. **Access to Transportation:** Equitable access to urban transportation infrastructure enhances social mobility by facilitating low-income individuals' access to employment opportunities, education, and healthcare services. Investments in public transportation and the implementation of pedestrian-friendly urban design emerge as prominent practices in this regard. **Environmental Justice:** Low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental risks. These inequalities can be addressed through environmentally oriented urban policies, including investments in green spaces and the promotion of clean energy use. **Access to Public Spaces:** The unequal distribution of parks, libraries, and social services across income groups generates spatial and social inequalities. Participatory planning approaches can contribute to alleviating these disparities by ensuring more inclusive decision-making processes. **The Role of Local Governments:** Local governments play a critical role in advancing urban justice through tools such as inclusive zoning policies, social housing provision, environmentally sustainable transportation strategies, and participatory budgeting. However, political pressures, financial constraints, and limited institutional capacity constitute significant barriers to effective implementation. **Community Participation:** More just and inclusive urban policies can be developed by enabling citizen participation in decision-making processes through mechanisms such as neighborhood meetings, advisory councils, and surveys.

### **Conclusion and Discussion:**

The study demonstrates that justice-centered urban planning, examined through multidimensional themes such as housing, transportation, the environment, access to public spaces, and local governance, both makes existing inequalities visible and offers pathways for addressing them. Housing crises, spatial segregation, environmental injustice, and disparities in access to public services reveal that planning processes are not solely technical in nature but also deeply social. In this context, the realization of urban justice requires that urban residents have equal access not only to physical spaces but also to decision-making processes. Instruments such as participatory budgeting, inclusive zoning practices, and community-based regeneration projects hold the potential to transform not only the built environment but also social relations. Local governments are key actors in this transformation; however, the implementation of justice-oriented policies is often challenged by resource constraints, political pressures, and limited institutional capacity. Therefore, strong political will, long-term strategic planning, and trust-based relationships with local communities are among the most critical factors for enhancing the practical feasibility of urban justice. Centralizing urban justice not only in resource allocation but also within governance processes is of vital importance for urban sustainability.

## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### Amaç ve Kapsam:

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, 21. yüzyılda kentleşmenin ortaya çıkardığı yapısal eşitsizlikleri anlamak ve bu eşitsizliklerle mücadelede kentsel adalet kavramını analitik bir çerçeve olarak değerlendirmektir. Günümüzde şehirler, nüfus yoğunluğunun, sosyo-ekonomik ayrışmanın, çevresel risklerin ve mekânsal adaletsizliğin merkezinde yer almaktadır. Bu dinamikler, özellikle yoksul ve dezavantajlı gruplar üzerinde çok katmanlı baskılar oluşturmakta ve şehirlerin adil yaşam alanları sunma kapasitesini sınırlandırmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, sürdürülebilir kentler hedeflenirken adaletin yalnızca bir etik ilke değil, aynı zamanda kentsel politika üretiminde stratejik bir öncelik olması gerektiği ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, kentsel adaletin kuramsal temellerini, “şehir hakkı” ve “mekânsal adalet” gibi kavramlar üzerinden tartışmakta; eşitsizliklerin farklı alanlarda nasıl ortaya çıktığını analiz etmektedir. Barınma hakkı, ulaşım erişilebilirlik, çevresel eşitlik, kamusal alanlara erişim ve hizmetlerin mekânsal dağılımı gibi temel kentsel meseleler üzerinden adaletin çok boyutlu yapısı ortaya konulmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, yönetim süreçlerinde katılım, şeffaflık ve hesap verebilirlik ilkeleriyle desteklenen kapsayıcı planlama yaklaşımları da kapsamlı biçimde ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışma ayrıca, yerel yönetimlerin kentsel adaleti sağlama yönündeki potansiyelini ve karşılaştıkları yapısal sınırlılıkları ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir. Belediyelerin kaynak dağılımı, imar uygulamaları, toplumsal katılımı teşvik eden araçlar kullanımı ve çevre politikaları, kentsel adaleti tesis etme süreçlerinin merkezinde yer almaktadır. Ancak uygulamada karşılaşılan siyasi, mali ve kurumsal engeller, bu potansiyelin tam olarak gerçekleşmesini zorlaştırmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, sadece mevcut durumu analiz etmekle kalmayıp, politika yapımcılar ve uygulayıcılar için çözüm önerileri sunmayı da amaçlamaktadır.

### Yöntem:

Bu araştırma, nitel bir yaklaşım benimseyerek kapsamlı bir literatür taramasına dayanmaktadır. Çalışmada; akademik makaleler, politika raporları ve uygulama örneklerini içeren ikincil veriler değerlendirilmiştir. Google Scholar, JSTOR ve Web of Science gibi akademik veri tabanlarından “kentsel adalet,” “katılımcı planlama,” “sürdürülebilir şehirler” gibi anahtar kelimelerle yapılan tarama sonucunda, konuya dair güncel ve teorik temeli güçlü kaynaklara ulaşılmıştır. Toplanan veriler tematik analiz yöntemiyle değerlendirilerek, kentsel adaletin uygulama boyutları ve karşılaşılan zorluklar çerçevesinde yapılandırılmıştır. Herhangi bir birincil veri (görüşme, anket vb.) toplanmamıştır; çalışma, mevcut kuramsal ve pratik bilgilerin sentezine dayanmaktadır.

### Bulgular:

Araştırmanın bulguları, kentsel adaletin başlıca şu alanlarda görünür hale geldiğini ortaya koymaktadır: Barınma ve İmar Adaleti: Soylulaştırma süreçleri, düşük gelirli grupların merkezden dışlanmasına neden olurken, kira kontrolü, sosyal konut uygulamaları ve kapsayıcı imar politikaları bu durumu dengelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Ulaşım Erişimi: Kent içi ulaşım altyapısına adil erişim, düşük gelirli bireylerin istihdam, eğitim ve sağlık hizmetlerine ulaşmasını kolaylaştırarak sosyal hareketliliği artırır. Toplu taşıma yatırımları ve yaya-dostu düzenlemeler öne çıkan uygulamalardır. Çevresel Adalet: Düşük gelirli topluluklar, çevresel risklere daha fazla maruz kalmaktadır. Bu durum, çevreci kentsel politikalarla (yeşil alan yatırımları, temiz enerji kullanımı) giderilebilir. Kamusal Alanlara Erişim: Parklar, kütüphaneler ve sosyal hizmetlerin gelir düzeyine göre dağılımı eşitsizlik yaratmaktadır. Katılımcı planlama bu sorunu dengelemeye yardımcı olabilir. Yerel Yönetimlerin Rolü: Yerel yönetimler; kapsayıcı imar, sosyal konut üretimi, çevreci ulaşım politikaları ve katılımcı bütçeleme gibi araçlarla kentsel adaleti destekleyebilir. Ancak siyasi baskılar, finansal kısıtlar ve kurumsal kapasite eksiklikleri uygulamada önemli engeller oluşturmaktadır. Toplum Katılımı: Mahalle toplantıları, danışma kurulları ve anketler gibi araçlar yoluyla, karar alma süreçlerine vatandaş katılımı sağlanarak daha adil ve kapsayıcı kent politikaları geliştirilebilir.

### Sonuç ve Tartışma:

Bu çalışma, barınma, ulaşım, çevre, kamusal alanlara erişim ve yerel yönetim gibi çok boyutlu temalar üzerinden, adalet merkezli kentsel planlamanın hem mevcut eşitsizlikleri görünür kıldığını hem de çözüm yolları sunduğunu göstermiştir. Barınma krizleri, mekânsal ayrışma, çevresel adaletsizlik ve kamusal hizmetlere erişimdeki dengesizlikler; planlama süreçlerinin yalnızca teknik değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal boyutları olduğunu kanıtlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, kentsel adaletin sağlanması, kentlerdeki bireylerin yalnızca fiziksel alanlara değil, aynı zamanda karar alma süreçlerine de eşit katılımını gerektirir. Katılımcı bütçeleme, kapsayıcı imar uygulamaları ve toplum temelli yenileme projeleri, sadece fiziksel çevreyi değil, toplumsal ilişkileri de dönüştürme potansiyeline sahiptir. Yerel yönetimler bu dönüşümde kilit aktörlerdir. Ancak karşılaştıkları kaynak kısıtları, siyasi baskılar ve kurumsal kapasite eksiklikleri nedeniyle adalet odaklı politikaların hayata geçirilmesi her zaman kolay olmamaktadır. Bu nedenle, güçlü bir siyasi irade, uzun vadeli stratejik planlama ve toplumla kurulacak güvene dayalı ilişkiler, kentsel adaletin uygulanabilirliğini artıran en önemli unsurlar arasında yer almaktadır. Kentsel adaleti yalnızca kaynak dağılımında değil, yönetim süreçlerinde de merkezileştirmek, kentsel sürdürülebilirlik açısından hayati önemdedir.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary urban literature, sustainable cities are defined within a governance structure that encompasses not only environmental dimensions but also economic and social dimensions. This multilevel governance model incorporates a fair and participatory approach in decision-making processes related to cities (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2005). This approach can be explained in terms of the definition of urban justice.

Urban justice has become a critical concept in addressing the profound inequalities that characterize modern urban environments. Rapid urbanization, combined with increasing socio-economic disparities, has turned many cities into centers of uneven development. Inequalities persist in access to basic resources such as housing, public services, and open spaces, perpetuating systemic disadvantages for marginalized communities. In this context, urban justice emerges as a framework to promote inclusive cities that prioritize equity, social cohesion, and sustainability. The study examines how inclusive urban planning can serve as a tool for achieving urban justice, exploring its role in addressing inequality and creating equitable urban environments.

Urban justice can be defined within the concept of the "right to the city." Lefebvre (2018) interpreted the right to the city as a societal right to use urban spaces. Today, the concept of urban rights has evolved into urban justice, interpreted within the framework of sustainable development as the right to benefit from a development environment inclusive of all, distinct from Lefebvre's anti-capitalist critique. Urban justice is inherently linked to sustainable urban development. As cities continue to grow, demands on infrastructure, services, and resources intensify. Urban justice provides a pathway to address these demands without disproportionately privileging certain groups while rendering others vulnerable. It emphasizes equal access to urban amenities and the active involvement of diverse social groups in decision-making processes. By promoting urban justice, cities can enhance social inclusion, improve access to public resources, and foster a sense of belonging among all residents. This makes urban justice a cornerstone of equitable and sustainable urban development (Fincher & Iveson, 2012).

The rapid pace of urbanization often forces urban planners to contend with unforeseen challenges. In many cities, growth has not been matched by adequate infrastructure or fair resource allocation. Marginalized communities, in particular, frequently face barriers to accessing affordable housing, transportation, and healthcare services. These gaps reflect structural inequalities rooted in historical, economic, and political contexts (Kempin Reuter, 2019). Urban justice challenges these inequalities by advocating for intentional interventions that prioritize equity in development processes. It highlights the need to reassess traditional urban planning approaches, which often perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

Housing affordability is one of the most visible dimensions of urban injustice. Rising property values and rents in urban centers have displaced many low-income residents, forcing them to move to peripheral areas with limited access to services and employment opportunities. This phenomenon, often referred to as gentrification, erodes the social fabric of neighborhoods and exacerbates socioeconomic segregation (Marcuse, 2015). Urban justice initiatives advocate policies that ensure equitable access to housing while protecting vulnerable populations from displacement. Strategies such as rent control, affordable housing mandates, and inclusive zoning practices are integral to these efforts.

Public spaces are another critical area where urban inequalities manifest. Parks, libraries, and recreational facilities often reflect disparities in distribution and accessibility. In many cities, affluent neighborhoods benefit from well-maintained public spaces, while low-income areas suffer from neglect and underinvestment. Urban justice highlights the importance of equitable access to public spaces as a means of enhancing quality of life and promoting social inclusion. Inclusive urban planning aims to address these disparities through deliberate design interventions and participatory governance models that engage local communities in the decision-making process (Fainstein, 2017).

Transportation systems also play a significant role in shaping urban justice. Accessibility and mobility are crucial for ensuring residents' full participation in economic, social, and cultural activities. However, many urban transportation systems remain inequitable, disproportionately benefiting wealthier populations while marginalizing low-income and vulnerable groups. Urban justice advocates for equitable transportation policies that prioritize accessibility for all, including investments in affordable public transit, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, and bike-sharing programs (Lid & Solvang, 2016).

Environmental justice is an equally significant dimension of urban justice. Marginalized communities often bear the brunt of environmental degradation, lacking access to green spaces, clean air, and safe water. Industrial activities and waste disposal sites are frequently concentrated in low-income areas, exposing residents to higher health risks associated with pollution (Mercier, 2009). Urban justice aims to address these disparities by integrating environmental considerations into urban planning and ensuring that all residents benefit from a sustainable and healthy environment.

Despite its importance, achieving urban justice is fraught with challenges. Political resistance, resource constraints, and competing interests often hinder the implementation of justice-focused policies. Local governments, which play a crucial role in urban planning, often face financial constraints that limit their ability to address systemic inequalities (Nahar Lata, 2021). Furthermore, political pressures and vested interests can undermine efforts to prioritize equity in urban development. Overcoming these challenges requires robust policy frameworks, effective governance structures, and active community participation.

To address these complex issues, the study is organized into several sections, offering a comprehensive exploration of urban justice through inclusive planning. Following the introduction, the next section defines the conceptual framework of urban justice, discussing key principles such as equity, inclusivity, participation, and accessibility. It also examines the multidimensional aspects of urban justice—economic, social, and environmental—and situates these within the broader discourse on the "right to the city."

The discussion focuses on inclusive urban planning as a mechanism for advancing social equity and fair resource distribution. Strategies such as improving access to public spaces, providing affordable housing, and prioritizing mobility and accessibility through equitable transportation policies are analyzed. These strategies are framed within the context of addressing the specific needs of vulnerable populations and fostering social cohesion.

The study contributes to the growing discourse on urban justice by offering a critical analysis of inclusive urban planning as a tool for addressing inequality and promoting sustainability. Through this exploration, the aim is to develop practical solutions for fostering equitable cities that prioritise the well-being of all residents.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the integration of justice into urban development as a tool for addressing structural inequalities and promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable cities. The research is grounded in an extensive literature review of peer-reviewed academic articles, policy reports, and relevant case studies. Databases such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, and JSTOR are utilized to ensure the inclusion of current and high-quality sources.

The literature review focuses on key dimensions of urban justice, including equitable housing, transportation accessibility, environmental sustainability, and community participation in decision-making processes. A systematic search strategy is applied using keywords such as "urban justice," "inclusive planning," and "sustainable cities." To ensure comprehensiveness, the search is supplemented with citation tracking and the inclusion of seminal works on the topic.

The collected data are thematically analyzed and aligned with the study's objectives. Key themes include the challenges of implementing justice-oriented policies, the role of local governments in equitable urban governance, and innovative strategies for addressing urban inequalities.

No primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys, is conducted. Instead, the research relies on secondary data to provide a critical synthesis of existing knowledge and identify gaps in the current discourse. This approach ensures that the findings are grounded in established theories and empirical evidence while offering a practical framework for advancing urban justice.

## **3. DEFINING URBAN JUSTICE AND ITS FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

Urban justice is a concept aimed at addressing inequalities in urban environments by prioritizing justice, inclusivity, and accessibility for all residents. It inherently encompasses the principles of equity, inclusivity, participation, and accessibility, serving as a framework to address systemic inequalities embedded in urban areas. Equity ensures that resources and opportunities are distributed based on need, thereby addressing the structural

vulnerabilities faced by marginalized groups. Inclusivity emphasizes the integration of diverse populations into urban planning processes, ensuring that no one is excluded from enjoying the benefits of urban life. Participation underscores the importance of involving all stakeholders, especially those from underrepresented communities, in the decision-making processes shaping urban policies. Accessibility guarantees that all residents, regardless of socioeconomic status or physical abilities, have equal access to essential services, public spaces, and economic opportunities (Cook & Swyngedouw, 2012). In essence, urban justice operates across multiple dimensions, each addressing specific facets of urban inequality.

The concept of urban justice is deeply intertwined with the "right to the city," a term popularized by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre (2018). The right to the city asserts that all urban inhabitants, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds, have the right to fully participate in urban life and shape the development of their cities. This idea challenges traditional power dynamics, which often concentrate decision-making authority in the hands of elites, excluding marginalized groups from influencing their city's future. The right to the city advocates for democratic governance structures that enable urban residents to engage in planning processes actively, emphasizing collective ownership of urban spaces.

The right to the city goes beyond mere physical access to urban spaces; it also encompasses the ability to influence how these spaces are designed, managed, and utilized (Lefebvre, 2018). This includes participation in decisions related to land use, public infrastructure, and resource allocation. For instance, participatory budgeting initiatives, which allow residents to decide how portions of municipal budgets are spent, exemplify the right to the city in action. Such initiatives empower communities to address their specific needs and priorities, fostering greater accountability and transparency in urban governance.

Urban justice and the right to the city are mutually reinforcing concepts. Urban justice creates the groundwork for realizing the right to the city by ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities (Fainstein, 2014). Conversely, the right to the city provides a framework for implementing urban justice by advocating for inclusive governance and participatory planning. Together, these concepts promote cities that are not only equitable but also resilient and adaptable to the challenges of urbanization.

Achieving urban justice and the right to the city requires a paradigm shift in urban governance and planning (Hendriks, 2014). Traditional top-down approaches often fail to address the complexity of urban inequalities, as they overlook the experiences and needs of marginalized communities. A justice-oriented approach necessitates a bottom-up perspective, where the voices of urban residents are central to decision-making processes. This entails creating platforms for meaningful community participation, where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into urban planning and policy.

The principles of urban justice are inherently intersectional. They recognize that individuals experience oppression and privilege differently based on their unique social identities, such as race, gender, class, and ability (Harvey, 2010). Urban justice and the right to the city also emphasize the transformative potential of collective action. Grassroots movements and community organizations play a vital role in advocating for urban justice, challenging entrenched power structures, and driving systemic change. These movements often arise in response to injustices such as forced evictions, environmental degradation, and inadequate public services. By mobilizing residents and building coalitions, grassroots initiatives can amplify marginalized voices and influence urban policies to promote equity and inclusivity (Harvey, 2019). In this process, policymakers and local governments play a guiding role.

The complementary framework of the right to the city enriches this vision by advocating for collective ownership and participation in shaping urban futures. For policymakers and planners, these ideas provide a blueprint for creating cities that are not only equitable but also resilient to the challenges of rapid urbanisation.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN PROMOTING URBAN JUSTICE**

Local governments play a critical role in promoting urban justice by developing and implementing policies that ensure equitable access to resources, services, and opportunities for all residents. As the administrative tier closest to citizens, local governments are uniquely positioned to understand and address the specific needs of their communities. By prioritizing justice-oriented policies, they can create inclusive cities that foster equity, social cohesion, and sustainability. At the core of their responsibilities are zoning regulations, affordable housing mandates, and ensuring access to public services. These policy tools enable local governments to shape urban environments in ways that address systemic inequalities and promote greater inclusivity.

Zoning policies are among the most effective tools local governments use to advance urban justice. Through zoning regulations, they determine land-use patterns, housing densities, and the distribution of commercial and industrial spaces. Inclusive zoning laws can counter spatial segregation by mandating mixed-income developments, affordable housing quotas, and access to amenities such as parks and public transportation (Lehman-Frisch, 2011). For example, inclusive zoning can require developers to allocate a certain percentage of housing units for low- or moderate-income residents, fostering socioeconomic diversity within urban areas. Such policies help mitigate the negative effects of gentrification, which often displaces low-income families and exacerbates socioeconomic segregation. By embedding equity into zoning decisions, local governments can ensure that urban growth benefits all residents, not just affluent groups.

Affordable housing mandates represent another critical area where local governments have significant influence in advancing urban justice. Rising property values and rents often push vulnerable populations into precarious living conditions or peripheral areas with limited access to essential services and employment opportunities. To address this issue, local governments can implement policies such as rent control, housing subsidies, and the development of social housing. Rent control regulations stabilize rental markets by capping rent increases, preventing displacement caused by sudden price hikes (Roy, 2019). Similarly, social housing programs provide state-subsidized housing options for low-income families, offering long-term solutions that ensure access to safe and affordable living conditions. These measures not only address immediate housing needs but also contribute to broader goals of social inclusion and economic stability.

In addition to zoning and housing policies, local governments are responsible for ensuring equitable access to public services such as education, healthcare, transportation, and recreational facilities. Justice-oriented approaches to service delivery prioritize investments in underserved neighborhoods, closing gaps in resource distribution that have historically marginalized certain communities (Fitzgibbons & Mitchell, 2019). For instance, expanding public transportation networks to connect low-income areas with employment hubs can significantly enhance residents' economic opportunities. Similarly, investing in public education and healthcare facilities in disadvantaged neighborhoods helps reduce disparities in access to essential services, thereby fostering greater equity and social cohesion. The ability of local governments to effectively deliver these services depends on their capacity to address structural barriers and allocate resources in ways that prioritize the needs of vulnerable populations.

Despite their critical roles in advancing urban justice, local governments often face significant challenges and limitations that hinder their ability to implement transformative policies. One of the most pressing challenges is constrained budgets, which limit their capacity to invest in equity-focused initiatives. Many local governments rely heavily on property taxes and other revenue sources that fall short of meeting the increasing demands of urban populations. These financial pressures are further exacerbated by competing priorities, such as infrastructure development and economic growth, which can divert resources away from equity-centered programs (Campbell et al., 2014). To overcome these constraints, local governments must explore innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships, grants, and international development funds to support efforts aimed at promoting urban justice.

Political pressures also present significant obstacles to equity-focused urban governance. Local governments often operate in complex political environments where decisions are influenced by powerful interest groups, partisan agendas, and electoral concerns. These dynamics can undermine efforts to prioritize equity, as policies that challenge entrenched power structures or redistribute resources may face resistance from influential stakeholders (Campbell et al., 2014). For instance, affordable housing mandates or inclusive zoning laws may encounter opposition from real estate developers and property owners who perceive such measures as threats to their economic interests. Overcoming these political challenges requires strong leadership, strategic advocacy, and inclusive decision-making processes that build consensus among diverse stakeholders.

Another limitation faced by local governments is the lack of institutional capacity to effectively implement and monitor equity-focused policies. Urban justice initiatives often require interdisciplinary approaches involving collaboration across various departments and institutions. However, bureaucratic inefficiencies, understaffing, and limited technical expertise can hinder the coordination and execution of these initiatives (Guarneros-Meza, 2015). Enhancing institutional capacity through training programs, knowledge-sharing, and partnerships with academic and civil society organizations can strengthen local governments' ability to design and implement effective urban justice policies.

Despite these challenges, many local governments have demonstrated innovative approaches to promoting urban justice through equity-focused policies. Participatory budgeting, for example, involves direct community participation in decisions on how a portion of the municipal budget is allocated. This approach empowers communities to identify and prioritize their own needs, fostering greater transparency, accountability, and trust in local governance. Cities like Porto Alegre, Brazil, have successfully implemented participatory budgeting programs, leading to increased investment in underserved neighborhoods, improved infrastructure, and enhanced social inclusion (de Sousa Santos, 1998).

Another example of equity-focused policy is the adoption of inclusive zoning laws that promote mixed-income housing developments. Cities such as New York and San Francisco have implemented inclusionary housing programs that require developers to include affordable units in new residential projects. These policies help ensure that low- and moderate-income residents have access to housing in high-demand areas, fostering greater socio-economic diversity and reducing spatial segregation (Kuo et al., 2020; Shybalkina, 2022). Inclusive zoning not only addresses housing affordability but also promotes social integration by creating neighborhoods where individuals from diverse economic backgrounds can coexist.

Local governments have also made significant strides in advancing environmental justice through initiatives that address disparities in access to green spaces and environmental quality. For example, Medellín, Colombia, has transformed neglected neighborhoods by creating interconnected parks and green corridors, improving residents' quality of life while addressing environmental concerns (Levy & Dávila, 2017). Similarly, efforts to reduce air pollution and promote renewable energy in urban areas contribute to healthier environments, particularly for communities disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. These initiatives demonstrate how local governments can integrate environmental considerations into urban justice frameworks to ensure sustainable and equitable urban development for all residents.

Transportation equity is another area where local governments have implemented effective policies to advance urban justice. Investments in affordable and accessible public transportation systems enable residents in low-income neighborhoods to connect with economic opportunities, education, and healthcare services. For instance, Bogotá, Colombia, has significantly improved mobility for its residents by developing a bus rapid transit system that prioritizes affordability and accessibility (Guzman & Bocarejo, 2017). Similarly, cities like Copenhagen, Denmark, have introduced pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and bicycle-sharing programs that provide sustainable transportation options for all residents, regardless of income level (Gössling, 2013).

The role of local governments in promoting urban justice extends beyond policymaking to fostering inclusive governance structures that involve communities in decision-making processes. By creating platforms for meaningful participation, local governments can build trust, enhance accountability, and ensure that policies reflect the diverse needs of their constituents. Examples such as neighborhood councils, community advisory boards, and citizen assemblies demonstrate how participatory governance can strengthen local governments' capacity to address urban inequalities effectively.

Local governments bear a crucial responsibility in advancing urban justice through justice-oriented policies and governance. Despite challenges such as limited budgets, political resistance, and institutional constraints, their proximity to communities positions them as key actors of change. By adopting innovative approaches and fostering inclusive participation, local governments can create equitable, sustainable, and resilient cities. Examples such as participatory budgeting, inclusive zoning, and environmental justice initiatives illustrate the transformative potential of local governance in addressing systemic inequalities. As cities continue to evolve, local governments must maintain their commitment to prioritizing urban justice and leverage their unique position to shape inclusive and equitable urban futures.

## **5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATORY PLANNING FOR URBAN JUSTICE**

Urban justice is grounded in principles of equal recognition and protection of the rights of individuals living in cities. It addresses injustices arising from complex social, economic, environmental, and political factors, aiming to promote a fairer and more inclusive urban experience. At the heart of achieving this goal is the active participation of communities in decision-making processes.

Community engagement forms the foundation of urban justice by ensuring diverse voices are heard and integrated into urban policies. Participatory processes help dismantle systemic inequalities by actively involving residents,

particularly those from marginalized groups (Amado et al., 2010). For instance, decisions on zoning, infrastructure, and public services often disproportionately favor affluent populations unless informed by the experiences of local communities. Participation also enhances transparency and accountability, ensuring that decision-makers are responsive to community needs. Transparent governance, combined with inclusive planning, builds trust between urban residents and authorities, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing urban challenges.

A key aspect of community engagement is involving individuals in decision-making processes. Such participation ensures that urban planning reflects the priorities and aspirations of all residents, not just those of influential stakeholders. Participatory mechanisms like public consultations, workshops, and surveys enable communities to voice their concerns and influence urban policies. For example, inclusive neighborhood meetings can reveal critical issues such as inadequate housing, limited green spaces, or transportation barriers that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups. These insights can inform strategies that align urban development with principles of equity and inclusion (Silver et al., 2010).

Transparency and accountability are equally critical components of community engagement. Urban planners and local governments must ensure that decisions are made openly and can be monitored by city residents. Mechanisms such as publicly accessible records, regular project updates, and clear communication channels enhance community oversight. This transparency not only deters corruption but also ensures that urban initiatives remain aligned with community needs. Additionally, accountability mechanisms empower residents to hold decision-makers responsible for their actions, reinforcing the democratic nature of participatory governance (Biswas et al., 2019).

Inclusivity is another cornerstone of community engagement. Ensuring representation of diverse socio-economic groups in planning processes is vital for achieving urban justice. Marginalized communities often face barriers to participation, such as language differences, socio-economic constraints, or systemic exclusion. Addressing these challenges requires targeted strategies to include underrepresented groups in decision-making processes. For instance, providing translation services, scheduling meetings at accessible times and locations, and offering participation grants can significantly enhance inclusivity (Silver et al., 2010). Inclusive participation fosters mutual understanding and collaboration among different groups, strengthening the social fabric of cities.

Key approaches to advancing urban justice through community engagement include inclusive planning, accessible infrastructure, economic justice, and environmental sustainability. Inclusive planning requires urban authorities to consider the needs of all demographic groups, particularly marginalized populations. This involves incorporating neighborhood-level participatory processes that allow residents to directly influence decisions affecting their lives (Farrelly, 2009). For example, participatory zoning processes can ensure that land-use policies equitably balance housing, commercial, and public needs.

Accessible infrastructure is essential for bridging gaps in urban equity. Transportation, healthcare, and education services must be universally accessible, with special attention to the needs of persons with disabilities, the elderly, and low-income populations. Urban planners can adopt universal design principles to create inclusive and user-friendly infrastructure for all residents (Stafford et al., 2022). Additionally, environmental sustainability is a core principle of urban justice, addressing disparities in access to green spaces and environmental quality. Urban areas often exhibit stark environmental inequities, with marginalized communities disproportionately exposed to pollution, inadequate waste management, and limited access to green spaces. Community participation is critical for identifying and addressing these inequities (Swyngedouw & Heynen, 2003).

To advance urban justice, urban planners and policymakers must adopt strategic approaches that prioritize inclusive and transparent participation. Providing residents with continuous feedback mechanisms, identifying structural barriers to participation in each city, and addressing them can serve as an initial step.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Defining sustainable cities solely in terms of technical indicators may deepen social and political crises and widen inequalities among people. According to this, urban justice is not merely a theoretical framework but a practical necessity for creating inclusive, equitable, and sustainable cities. The challenges posed by rapid urbanization, socio-economic inequalities, and environmental degradation demand innovative approaches to urban planning and governance. Integrating justice into urban development requires a commitment to principles of equity, inclusion,

participation, and accountability to ensure that all residents, regardless of their socio-economic background, benefit from urban growth.

Throughout this discussion, the central importance of community engagement has emerged as the cornerstone of justice-oriented urban development. Involving residents in decision-making processes ensures that urban policies reflect the diverse needs and aspirations of the population. Such inclusivity fosters social cohesion, strengthens trust in public institutions, and empowers communities to play an active role in shaping their urban environments. Participation not only enhances the democratic nature of urban governance but also provides practical solutions informed by local knowledge and experiences.

Addressing systemic inequalities requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes accessible infrastructure, affordable housing, and the equitable distribution of resources. Ensuring that all residents have access to quality education, healthcare, and public services is critical for reducing inequalities and promoting social mobility. Transportation justice further supports these efforts by connecting underserved areas to economic opportunities and essential services. Equitable access to green spaces and recreational facilities enhances quality of life, promotes physical and mental well-being, and supports environmental sustainability.

The integration of justice into urban planning extends beyond resource allocation to include procedural justice and accountability. Transparent governance and participatory processes ensure that all stakeholders have a voice in shaping urban policies. These mechanisms foster trust and accountability, laying the foundation for resilient and adaptable urban systems. Moreover, they ensure that urban development initiatives are not only equitable but also sustainable, addressing the needs of both current and future generations.

Examples from cities around the world highlight the transformative potential of justice-oriented urban policies. Participatory budgeting, inclusive zoning, and community-led revitalization projects demonstrate how inclusive planning can bridge socio-economic divides and create vibrant urban spaces. These initiatives underscore the importance of innovative and adaptable strategies in addressing complex urban challenges. Additionally, they illustrate how justice-oriented approaches can serve as a model for equitable and sustainable urban development on a global scale.

However, efforts to implement equitable policies are often hindered by limited resources, political resistance, and institutional constraints. Overcoming these barriers requires strong political will, cross-sector collaboration, and sustained advocacy. It also calls for a paradigm shift in how cities are planned and managed, emphasizing inclusivity and equity as foundational principles of urban development.

As urban populations continue to grow, the importance of justice-oriented development becomes increasingly evident. Cities must adopt policies that prioritize equity, encourage participation, and support sustainability to meet this challenge. Justice is not merely an ideal but a practical tool for addressing urban inequalities and creating environments where all residents can thrive. By integrating principles of justice into urban planning, cities can build not only equitable but also vibrant, resilient, and sustainable futures.

## DECLARATION OF THE AUTHORS

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## YAZARLARIN BEYANI

**Katkı Oranı Beyanı:** Yazarlar çalışmaya eşit oranda katkı sağlamıştır.

**Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı:** Çalışmada herhangi bir kurum ya da kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.

**Çatışma Beyanı:** Çalışmada herhangi bir potansiyel çıkar çatışması söz konusu değildir.

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