

# Everyday Justice

Exploring Urban Sustainability through Food, Mobility, and Lifestyle

REXCEL RIDWAN AND VYUSTI KUMAAR IN CONVERSATION  
WITH ANON<sup>1</sup>

Anon is a thoughtful student originally from Germany, currently pursuing her second semester in Critical Urbanisms at the University Of Basel, Switzerland. Though she's still early in her academic journey, Anon brings a grounded, lived perspective to our conversation on climate justice, one that is shaped by her studies, her experiences working in a vegan restaurant, and her daily observations in cities like Basel and Hamburg. We interviewed her to understand the challenges and opportunities that a well-meaning student faces when engaging with climate justice.

In our conversation with her, Anon was sensitive in her approach to climate justice. Anon spoke quite passionately about equity and justice, emphasizing that no one region or group of people should disproportionately suffer from pollution or resource extraction. In theory, for her, climate justice means more than reducing emissions: it was about rethinking the way we treat people, resources and the planet as a whole.

## What is Climate Justice?

Anon was first introduced to the deeper dimensions of climate justice through a course on urban climate change, where she learned how the global North often contributes heavily to environmental degradation, while the global South bears the brunt of the consequences. She said:

A lot of man-made climate disasters are produced in the global [North], and the effects are then shown [...] in the global South. So, there definitely is this [disequilibrium]... Climate justice would be that nobody has to be more affected than another country, or [...] another region and that we [...] all strive to

not create more pollution, and to also not outsource this pollution. If we look at a lot of manufacturing or mining companies, [...] a lot of these places are located in the South. But they're actually located there for the gain of the North. (Anon, 2025).

Her statement cuts into many facets of climate justice.

Responsibility refers to the questions of “who is called upon to deliver that which is owed to those who are owed” (Moellendorf, 2015 p.173). The principle of historical responsibility implies that current climate change is caused by previous emissions and, thus, historically responsible emitters should pay the costs of addressing measures to address climate events and mitigation (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Tied to this is the polluter-pays principle to address current emissions. People who have produced and continue to benefit from the problem, and who can afford to pay for the problem, should be held responsible (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014). Although not stated plainly, her statement strongly implies responsibility lies with the global North.

Vulnerability can refer to exposure to the risk of climate change as well as to a lack of resources to adapt to that risk (Moellendorf, 2015). Distributive justice entails the just allocation of costs and benefits on different regional and temporal levels in society. It includes identifying what is being distributed, between whom and how to go about distribution (Newell et al., 2021). Clearly, to Anon, the global South is the vulnerable party in a “disequilibrium” with the global North (Anon, 2025). Gains from environmental exploitation are skewed towards the North while the negative effects of climate change are skewed towards the South. On how to go about distribution, Anon

says pollution should be stopped, not simply outsourced. Linking pollution to fossil fuel usage, Anon's stance evokes that taken by the Declaration of the Klimaforum in 2009; namely, moving away from fossil fuels and redistribution based on historical accountability (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014).

She goes further to say that justice includes seeing people in the global South not just as providers of resources, but as human beings who deserve dignity and fairness. Consequently, climate justice is reliant on underlying economic and social injustices that inform climate change (Newell et al., 2021). For Anon, this would specifically be the North-South injustice based on historical oppression. While it remained unstated, presumably the injustice she refers to is marked on colonial, racial, and capitalist lines.

### How to be Climate Just?

In terms of solutions, Anon is pragmatic but hopeful. She believes in the power of small, conscious actions like checking where products come from, supporting sustainable brands, or even reconsidering the need for exotic fruits. She also marks with surprise how friends especially in Basel are increasingly turning to vegetarian or vegan lifestyles, and how discussions around sustainability are becoming more common. Though she's not vegan herself, Anon sees value in all forms of climate advocacy and not just dietary choices. Anon's reflections bridge the personal and the political while showing how climate justice begins with individual choices but must be supported by systemic change. Her emphasis on conscious consumption and growing cultural shifts in Basel, like more plant-based diets and sustainability discussions reflects how local awareness can drive broader societal transformation. Roberto (2025) talked about the efforts being directed towards awareness and campaigning on such actions in Switzerland.

One of the most personal parts of the interview was when Anon talked about waste. She sees it everywhere: in her daily routines, in the supermarket and especially in her previous job at a vegan restaurant. The job helped her become more aware of the constant production of waste, especially plastics, and how tricky proper recycling is really. She also pointed out the differences between cities she has lived in: for instance, while Switzerland appears cleaner and more orderly, Germany may have a more active or visible waste separation system. Therefore, in Switzerland, even in spaces that are meant to be environmentally conscious, like a vegan restaurant, waste management can continue to be a struggle. Still, she appreciates how that restaurant also tried to do good like collecting

donations to plant endangered tree species.

As pointed astutely by Pickerill et al. (2023), neoliberal urban environments, led by the framing of waste as a logistical flow problem as opposed to a consumption problem, continue to encourage increasing material consumption levels to support economic growth. Infrastructural support focuses on basic recycling rather than on systems that might allow restaurants to decrease their usage of plastic altogether. Pickerill et al. (2023) point out that the problem is not the individual actor itself- the restaurant or the workers- but governance that prioritises maintaining a profitable business climate over centering sustainable urban revitalisation. Such forms of voluntary commitment- choosing to sell vegan food, sorting recycling and donating to plant endangered trees- while admirable on part of the restaurant and the workers, lack the teeth and scalability that would come from governance that moves away from neoliberalism to, for example in their argument, collective ownership of resources.

Anon does advocate for collective action as well. She wishes that systems like public transport in Basel were more accessible (price-wise) and better supported, even joking about a boycott to push for change. She also appreciated Hamburg's better bike infrastructure but found Basel less safe and less supportive of biking, something she believes should change to make the city more climate-friendly. Her call for improved infrastructure, affordable public transport and safer biking conditions points to the need for the government to meet individuals halfway. In the context of Basel, a city with the resources to lead on sustainability, these gaps highlight how climate justice is not only about reducing emissions but also about ensuring equal access to low-carbon lifestyles which was discussed during the public panel. By linking lifestyle habits to public policy, Anon underscores a similar point to that of Schubert (2025) from FHNW: climate justice requires both empowered citizens and responsive systems, not just in Basel, but globally.

It is important to address parts of the discourse that popped up in class discussions, but seemed missing in our conversation with Anon. While she acknowledged the "disequilibrium" (Anon, Transcript) that exists in North-South capitalist supply chains, for Anon, Basel's responsibility on a city level lay simply in improving transportation to combat pollution. Following from that, while Anon does center justice when envisioning the climate movement on a global level, she, apparently unknowingly, centers environmentalism rather than climate justice when thinking of her role in Basel. Urban environments are often built for the exclusion of "the disabled, non-white and non-

wealthy” (Chitewere and Taylor, 2010 as cited in Pickerill et al., 2023 p.170). Sustainable development initiatives that do not query these social inequalities in their planning end up reproducing them under the banner of being more environmentally friendly (Pickerill et al., 2023). Anon is not disabled, white, and working with a student budget. Her position affords her a certain privilege that shields her from other climate justice topics such as housing, accessibility of public spaces, access to quality food, and land ownership to name a few.

She wonders, “If I had the financial means, would I have a car maybe? or would I have a motorcycle? I don’t know. So it’s also maybe I’m being a bit more environmentally friendly because I don’t have the financial means to not be” (Anon, 2025). Her acknowledgement raises the question of how one addresses underlying social and economic injustices crucial to climate justice when there is a possibility to profit from privilege. Even someone who thoughtfully thinks about climate justice as a global issue, might require guidance on how to center social injustice in the local when it comes to climate justice.

Anon admits that she does not think she is doing much for climate justice. Through all her thoughts, one thing remained very clear, Anon genuinely cares. Climate justice, for her, is a personal and evolving understanding. She reflects, questions and learns, and she does so with humility and openness. However, she is in a system that limits her to individual voluntary actions without many opportunities to self-reflect on her position in the climate justice fight. Resources that guide her on local involvement and actionable decisions could allow her to change her lifestyle in a more meaningful way. Similarly, avenues for discussions of injustice and inequality in everyday life in Basel might lead to reflections on locally applicable climate justice (Pickerill et al., 2023). Anon does believe that while climate justice is not yet a reality, it’s a vital goal to strive for despite political obstacles and rising nationalism. And while she may not see the world as fair just yet, she firmly believes in working toward a better, more equitable future for everyone. Anon would just want some help in where to start.

<sup>1</sup> Name changed to maintain anonymity.  
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