

# *The Right to the City and Laudato Si' Ethics: An Integrated Framework for Sustainable Urban Development*

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## Abstract

This article undertakes an analysis of the alignment between the right to the city and Laudato Si', an encyclical issued by Pope Francis in 2015 to critique the global damages resulting from unchecked growth. The Laudato Si' perspective offers a means to integrate ethical considerations into human rights law, providing a normative framework for sustainable development. Within these concepts, this article argues that incorporating the right to the city and Laudato Si' may bridge the perspectives that are often understood as opposite, while demonstrating the need to develop a new understanding of sustainable cities. Additionally, by integrating these perspectives, it could increase awareness that cities serve as a prevalent home for multiple species, thereby necessitating a shift away from anthropocentrism. The interests of humans and ecology within the right to the city will contribute to improving the quality of life. To achieve this equilibrium, the development of the right to the city concept should provide a normative framework to: (1) curb the rapidification trend in urban development conflicting with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution, (2) eliminate the privatization of spaces restricting citizens' access to basic needs, and (3) reinforce community participation, especially among the poor and vulnerable, in urban planning. Undoubtedly, the realization of such a normative framework faces challenges within a developmentalist state oriented towards high economic growth.

Keywords: right to the city, Laudato Si', sustainable development



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## I. INTRODUCTION

This article arises from the urban issues that are often overlooked in legal studies. Urban issues, including public transportation, housing, access to drinking water, and sanitation, have long been the focus of technical research. However, law serves as the backbone in the implementation of sectoral policies in urban areas, which affect life on a micro scale.<sup>1</sup> In fulfilling its role, the law can provide guarantees of the right to the city for citizens.

Unlike most legal research that primarily views issues of rights as solely human concerns, this paper seeks to go further by examining the relationship between law and the right to the city as inseparable from other non-human entities. This study also considers previous research. Shingne and Reese argue that humans are not the only “animals” in cities, which are increasingly populated by other “animal species”.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, cities should accommodate these “other animals”. Hubbard and Brook also note that non-human species in urban areas often fall victim to gentrification. Gentrification sometimes involves the violent and unjust displacement of non-human animals, leaving them without guarantees of the right to the city.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, according to Yigitcanlar, Foth, and Kamruzzaman, urban policies should shift from being anthropocentric to creating shared living spaces that sustainably and inclusively accommodate both humans and non-humans.<sup>4</sup>

Various previous studies have highlighted a gap in the research regarding the need to strengthen the ethical foundation and environmental management responsibilities within urban law. The aim is to ensure that ethical considerations in law provide a normative framework for sustainable development. This article addresses this gap by incorporating the perspective of *Laudato Si'*, an encyclical by Pope Francis published in 2015, to establish an ethical foundation and responsibility for urban environmental management.

This article is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the development of the concept of the right to the city. The second section discusses the fundamental principles of *Laudato Si'* and the urban rights issues highlighted by it. The third section examines how the right to the city aligns with these principles of *Laudato Si'*.

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<sup>1</sup> Päivi Kymäläinen, ‘Legal Geography I: Everyday Law’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 4 March 2024, 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03091325241237352>.

<sup>2</sup> Marie Carmen Shingne and Laura A. Reese, ‘Animals in the City: Wither the Human-Animal Divide’, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 44, no. 2 (2022): 114–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2020.1779006>.

<sup>3</sup> Phil Hubbard and Andrew Brooks, ‘Animals and Urban Gentrification: Displacement and Injustice in the Trans-Species City’, *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 6 (2021): 1490–511, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132520986221>.

<sup>4</sup> Tan Yigitcanlar et al., ‘Towards Post-Anthropocentric Cities: Reconceptualizing Smart Cities to Evade Urban Ecocide’, *Journal of Urban Technology* 26, no. 2 (2019): 147–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10630732.2018.1524249>.

## II. THE RIGHT TO THE CITY: A THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION ON DEVELOPMENT IMPLEMENTATION

The city is not merely an administrative or spatial entity; it has become a global issue garnering attention from numerous international organizations. UN-Habitat and UNESCO are two examples of institutions that, over the past two decades, have focused on urban issues, particularly the right to the city. Countries like Brazil even have laws regulating urban planning to ensure access and equity in significant cities.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that the right to the city is not merely a discourse but has evolved into a policy.

What is meant by the right to the city, and how has the concept developed? The conceptualization of the right to the city cannot be separated from Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, was the first to introduce the concept of the "right to the city", "*Le Droit à la ville*". According to Lefebvre, the city is not merely a physical space but is also intertwined with the social relations of everyday life. As a Marxist, Lefebvre viewed the city as an entity inherently influenced by industrialization. Observing the European context, he noted how industrialization transformed the political cityscapes, reminiscent of those of Greek and Roman civilizations, into bustling urban centers. Urbanization then followed, driven by the concentration of capital in cities.<sup>6</sup>

When urbanization occurs repeatedly over a long period and the influence of capitalism intensifies, it significantly impacts urban spaces. Lefebvre observed that urban space under the influence of capitalism is massively commodified. The urban space, which should serve social purposes, is instead produced for the interests of buying and selling. Space becomes a site for the creation, realization, and distribution of surplus value in industrialization. Ultimately, space is consumed as a commodity.<sup>7</sup> Lefebvre criticizes the commodification of urban space for viewing it from the perspective of exchange value. Commodification strips the city of its function as a common good—a place for emancipation and collective freedom.<sup>8</sup>

To counter the commodification of space, Lefebvre proposed the concept of the right to the city. This right is not an individual right but a collective one, aimed at reclaiming the city as a space created together. The right to the city highlights the importance of reconfiguring power relations in the creation of urban space.<sup>9</sup> The city

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Purcell, 'Possible Worlds: Henri Lefebvre and the Right to the City', *Journal of Urban Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2014): 141–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/juaf.12034>.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities* (Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Magali Fricaudet, 'Is the Right to the City a Right or a Revolution', in *Social Ecology and the Right to the City: Towards Ecological and Democratic Cities*, ed. Federico Venturini et al. (Black Rose Books, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Mark Purcell, 'Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant', *Geojournal* 58, nos 2–3 (2002): 99–108, <https://doi.org/10.1023/b:gejo.0000010829.62237.8f>.

should be a work of art. In this place, people with diverse ideas come together to shape their city. For Lefebvre, the struggle of citizens to determine the city's direction is crucial because the city formed by industrial capitalism simultaneously harbors the seeds of capitalism's destruction. He viewed the right to the city as a struggle to “eliminate the alienation” of urban space and reintegrate it into the network of social relationships.<sup>10</sup>

Lefebvre then emphasized the importance of radical participation in the production of urban space. The concrete forms of this radical participation include the guarantee of the right to inhabit the city, the right to create urban life in new ways that are unconstrained by the demands of capitalism. The right to remain unalienated from urban life. In the context of capitalism, guaranteeing the right to the city represents an effort by the working class to reclaim the city that has been alienated from them.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, every citizen should have an equal opportunity to actively participate in shaping public policies related to the city.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of the right to the city implies issues of injustice that frequently arise in the struggle over urban space. This disparity is evident in the contrast between the urban poor, who often live in slums or the working class, and access housing in distant suburbs, and the upper class, who reside in luxury housing near city centers with full amenities. This illustration illustrates how neglecting the right to the city affects the urban poor and working class, resulting in spatial injustice.

In connection with spatial injustice, David Harvey is one of the thinkers who further developed Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city, expanding it into the theory of spatial justice. According to Harvey, the issue of space, including injustice, is a matter of the right to the city. This right is not merely about accessing the resources within urban spaces. The right to the city is the right to change oneself or collectively by transforming urban space, thereby addressing issues of spatial injustice.<sup>13</sup> Harvey's interpretation highlights that the right to the city serves as a necessary framework for reclaiming urban spaces that have been damaged and unequal due to the effects of capitalism.

The concept of the right to the city has evolved further, extending beyond theoretical discussions to practical applications. More recent developments emphasize the need to establish the right to the city as part of the human rights framework, particularly in relation to economic, social, and cultural rights in urban contexts. This framework is documented and serves as a foundation for implementing these rights in political decisions.

A significant step in integrating the right to the city within the human rights framework is the development of the World Charter on the Right to the City, coordinated by the Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and other bodies. The

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<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*.

<sup>11</sup> Kafui A. Atttoh, ‘What Kind of Right Is the Right to the City?’, *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 5 (2011): 669–85, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132510394706>.

<sup>12</sup> Shingne and Reese, ‘Animals in the City: Wither the Human-Animal Divide’.

<sup>13</sup> David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City (Revised Edition)* (The University of Georgia Press, 2009).

formulation of this Charter involved the participation of various grassroots movements, NGOs, professional associations, forums, and national and international civil society networks, all of which are committed to the social struggle for just, democratic, humane, and sustainable cities. The Charter aims to consolidate commitments and actions that civil society, local and national governments, parliamentarians, and international organizations must take to ensure that everyone lives with dignity in urban areas. This initiative began during the preparatory activities for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the “Earth Summit”, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. The National Forum for Urban Reform (FNRU) and the Continental Front of Communal Organizations (FCOC) collaborated to draft and sign an urbanization agreement titled “For Just, Democratic, and Sustainable Cities, Towns, and Villages”.<sup>14</sup>

Another significant event leading to the formulation of the World Charter for the Right to the City was the First World Assembly of Urban Inhabitants held in Mexico in 2000. Participants in the meeting debated the concept of collective aspirations as the foundation for creating democratic, inclusive, educational, habitable, sustainable, productive, and safe cities. One year later, during the first World Social Forum, the process of formulating the Charter began.<sup>15</sup> The concept of the right to the city, as outlined in the World Charter for the Right to the City, was further refined through subsequent World Social Forums and the World Urban Forum.

Article 1 of the World Charter for the Right to the City defines the right to the city as the enjoyment of the city in a manner that respects the principles of sustainability, democracy, and social justice, and it is a collective right of all urban residents, particularly the vulnerable and disadvantaged. The city should be a place where all human rights and fundamental freedoms are realized, and where the dignity and collective well-being of all individuals are guaranteed under conditions of equality, justice, and fairness with complete fulfillment of social responsibility towards the habitat (Article 2). To achieve this, everyone has the right to participate directly or through representation in the control and implementation of urban policies and budgets (Article 2).

The World Charter for the Right to the City delineates two types of rights: (i) rights relative to the exercise of citizenship and participation in the planning, production, and management of the city; and (ii) rights relating to the economic, social, cultural, and environmental development of the city. This means that the right to the city is not only about how citizens can participate in shaping urban policies, but also about how they can radically influence them. On one hand, there are guarantees of the city's commitment to developing planning, regulation, and management of urban environments with the participation of all its inhabitants (Article 5), the right to information (Article 6), freedom and integrity (Article 7), political participation rights

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<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Mathivet, ‘The Right to the City: Keys to Understanding the Proposal for “Another City Is Possible”’, in *Cities for All. Proposals and Experiences towards the Right to the City*, ed. Ana Sugranyes and Charlotte Mathivet (Habitat International Coalition, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Mathivet, ‘The Right to the City: Keys to Understanding the Proposal for “Another City Is Possible”’.

within the city's scope (Article 8), and other rights related to citizenship and participation. On the other hand, the right to the city also serves as the basis for protecting several rights of citizens, including the right to water and sanitation (Article 12), the right to inclusive public transportation (Article 13), the right to adequate housing, especially for the poor and vulnerable (Article 14), the right to inclusive employment opportunities (Article 15), and guarantees of the city's commitment to environmental preservation (Article 16). The interpretation of the right to the city demonstrates its alignment with the goals of sustainable development and can even be translated into concrete policies in urban development.<sup>16</sup>

According to Marcuse, the interpretation of the right to the city into various specific rights undoubtedly aligns with the demands for the right to the city. On one hand, the inclusion of multiple types of rights in charters or normative documents may create a perspective that is incomplete or partial in understanding the right to the city. Interpretations of the right to the city may continue to evolve, giving rise to various new rights.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, the normative framework appears ideal in the context of legal protection for urban residents and achieving sustainable development goals. However, we need to evaluate the framework: to what extent has it placed urban space in a holistic perspective, as criticized by Lefebvre, who argued that the city should not just be space but should also involve social relations? Furthermore, we aim to develop a more radical concept of the right to the city. In that case, the city is not only about human-human relations but also about human relations with the environment beyond humans. This is where we can use the perspective of *Laudato Si'* to examine, critique, and further develop the right to the city.

This section has demonstrated what the right to the city entails. Before further discussing it from the perspective of *Laudato Si'*, it is necessary first to explain what *Laudato Si'* is and what urban rights issues are also addressed by *Laudato Si'*.

### III. *LAUDATO SI'* AND RIGHT TO THE CITY

*Laudato Si'* (which means "Praise Be to You, My Lord" in Central Italian) is the second encyclical letter by Pope Francis. An encyclical is a letter from the Pope to the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, typically containing the Church's official moral stance on a current issue. Because it includes the official opinion of the Roman Catholic Church, an encyclical has influence in shaping opinions—not only within the Catholic community but also among those who read and study it. Before *Laudato Si'*, several

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<sup>16</sup> Wojciech Kęłowski et al., 'Moving Past the Sustainable Perspectives on Transport: An Attempt to Mobilise Critical Urban Transport Studies with the Right to the City', *Transport Policy* 81 (September 2019): 24–34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranpol.2019.05.012>.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Marcuse, 'Rights in Cities and the Right to the City?', in *Cities for All: Proposals and Experiences towards the Right to the City*, ed. Ana Sugranyes and Charlotte Mathivet (Habitat International Coalition, 2001).

previous encyclicals also had significant influence, such as *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth). This encyclical, issued by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, contained essential messages about the urgency of developing social entrepreneurship.<sup>18</sup>

Pope Francis succeeded Pope Benedict XVI on 13 March 2013. After releasing his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*, in June 2013, Pope Francis subsequently issued his second encyclical, *Laudato Si*, on 24 May 2015. Unlike *Lumen Fidei*, which primarily addressed matters of faith, *Laudato Si* represents the Church's social teachings in the realm of environmentalism and critiques of development. Coincidentally, Pope Francis published *Laudato Si* just before the United Nations ratified the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. The global media highlighted this encyclical because, for the first time, the Catholic Church clearly stated its response to severe socio-economic and environmental crises.<sup>19</sup> The encyclical employs the term “Our Common Home” to refer to the Earth, which is currently experiencing damage.

Another reason why this encyclical is essential lies in its geopolitical significance. The issuance of *Laudato Si* was deliberately timed to coincide with the crucial United Nations 21st Conference in Paris and the UN Sustainable Development Summit, occurring at a time marked by insufficient progress on these issues. In this context, the encyclical aims to inspire more government action on the environment. The “soft power” of the Catholic Church throughout history has demonstrated its global influence and can influence world leaders. Given the magnitude of the ecological crisis, this encyclical plays a significant role.<sup>20</sup>

We cannot read *Laudato Si* as a separate entity from the previous encyclicals related to the Church's social teachings. Therefore, the criticisms expressed in *Laudato Si* are also inseparable from the criticisms of the Catholic Church in various encyclicals by previous Popes. The phenomena of concern addressed by *Laudato Si* are closely tied to the Catholic Church's critique of individualism, liberalism, and both excessive capitalism and socialism, which subsequently sacrifice personal freedom.<sup>21</sup>

*Laudato Si* contains six important chapters: an overview of the ecological crisis occurring worldwide, theological reflections on this crisis, the human roots of the environmental crisis, integral ecology, guidelines for action in addressing the situation, and ecological spirituality. This section will briefly discuss the ecological crisis highlighted in *Laudato Si* and its relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals.

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<sup>18</sup> Aditya Simha and Michael R. Carey, ‘The Encyclical Letter ( *Caritas in Veritate* )—A Shout-out to Social Entrepreneurship?’, *The Journal of Entrepreneurship* 21, no. 1 (2012): 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097135571102100101>.

<sup>19</sup> M. Carmen Molina and Magui Pérez-Garrido, ‘LAUDATO SI’ and Its Influence on Sustainable Development Five Years Later: A First LOOK at the Academic Productivity Associated to This Encyclical’, *Environmental Development* 43 (September 2022): 100726, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2022.100726>.

<sup>20</sup> Steven C. van den Heuvel, ‘The Theocentric Perspective of *Laudato Si*: A Critical Discussion’, *Philosophia Reformata* 83, no. 1 (2018): 51–67, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23528230-08301004>.

<sup>21</sup> Koerniatmanto Soetoprawiro, *Bukan Kapitalisme Bukan Sosialisme* (Kanisius, 2003).

What happens to “Our Common Home” according to *Laudato Si*? According to *Laudato Si*, the ecological crisis occurring worldwide stems from the continuous acceleration of changes affecting both humanity and the planet, coupled with an increasing pace of life and work. *Laudato Si* employs the term “*rapidación*” or acceleration in Spanish to describe this phenomenon. Change is certainly unavoidable. Change is something desired, but on the other hand, it becomes a source of concern when it leads to loss for the world and a decline in the quality of life for most people.<sup>22</sup>

Countries engage in rapid development to pursue growth through industrialization. For example, the transformation in China has resulted in urbanization and industrialization occurring on a scale 100 times larger and ten times faster than in England in previous centuries. This consequently leads to the growth of populations in industrial cities, which also means the emergence of new consumers.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, this phenomenon will lead to increased consumption. Growth then requires increasingly higher fossil fuel consumption accompanied by increased waste production. Meanwhile, governments in various countries also must address environmental issues due to this increased consumption.

Pope Francis elucidates this issue in *Laudato Si* by pointing to its impact on global warming, which affects the carbon cycle. This creates a vicious circle that exacerbates the situation, as it will impact the availability of crucial resources on Earth. Large cities requiring substantial water reserves have experienced periods of water scarcity. The lack of water for the general populace is primarily a problem in urban areas of Africa, where a significant portion of the population lacks access to safe drinking water. Ironically, some countries have regions with abundant water resources.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, there is also an issue with the primary need for humans: the availability of affordable housing. Shortages of housing, particularly for low-income individuals, are closely linked to human dignity and family well-being. No family can live with dignity without a home, especially a healthy one. Urban poor communities, lacking many options to access housing upon moving to the city, often resort to illegally occupying land in slum settlements. On the other hand, there are developments of luxurious business districts juxtaposed with slum areas.<sup>25</sup>

In the Indonesian context, although the 2011 Housing and Settlement Law introduced new provisions encouraging the government to assist low-income residents through tax incentives, insurance permits, land and public utility provision, as well as land title registration, access to homeownership remains a persistent problem for

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’ [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter], 2015, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>23</sup> S. H. A. Koop and C. J. van Leeuwen, ‘The Challenges of Water, Waste and Climate Change in Cities’, *Environment, Development and Sustainability* 19, no. 2 (2017): 385–418, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-016-9760-4>.

<sup>24</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’ [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter].

<sup>25</sup> Pope Francis, ‘Laudato Si’ [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter].



people experiencing poverty. In 2024, the Ministry of Housing and Settlement reported that 9.8 million Indonesian families did not own a home, while approximately six million people resided in slum areas.<sup>26</sup> A similar phenomenon has also occurred in the Philippines. Since the 2000s, state protection in the Philippines has been pursued through market-driven policies, which have proven inadequate. Local governments and private developers have relocated slum dwellers to make way for luxury housing projects, forcing them to purchase relatively expensive social housing on the urban periphery, which often lacks sufficient infrastructure and limited livelihood opportunities.<sup>27</sup> As a result, by 2024, the Philippines faced a massive housing deficit of 6.5 million units, projected to increase to 22 million by 2040 if not addressed seriously.<sup>28</sup> This illustrates that in certain countries, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, normative guarantees provided in legislation are insufficient to resolve this issue.

The critique in *Laudato Si'* indicates that even if the law guarantees the right to private ownership, especially of property, it will be of no use if people with low incomes cannot afford it. The lack of affordable housing is one of the most pressing issues facing urban poor communities.<sup>29</sup> Low-income families must rent homes even as their incomes stagnate or decline due to rising housing costs. They increasingly must spend a significant portion of their wages on rent and utilities. The majority of low-income families renting homes in America spend more than half of their income on housing.<sup>30</sup>

The neglect of public transportation is also highlighted in *Laudato Si'*. The use of private transportation has led to an increasing reliance on non-renewable energy and has also contributed to pollution. The mobility of citizens must be ensured. However, public transit often becomes a source of suffering for citizens. Pope Francis highlights the excessive use of private transportation by only one or two individuals, which circulates in cities, contributes to traffic congestion, and exacerbates pollution levels in major cities. Ironically, many cities' governments neglect to provide public transportation.

Since 2016, the transportation sector has overtaken the electricity sector as the primary source of greenhouse gas emissions, and it is expected to remain the dominant emission sector in the future. Unlike the electricity sector, transportation faces much

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<sup>26</sup> Dandi Bajuddin, 'Indonesia's Housing Backlog: Over 50 Million People Do Not Own Homes', TEMPO, 2025, <https://en.tempo.co/read/2037484/indonesias-housing-backlog-over-50-million-people-do-not-own-homes>.

<sup>27</sup> Shinji Miyagawa, 'Categorising the Urban Poor: Undermined State Protection for Informal Settlers in the Philippines', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 55, no. 4 (2025): 541–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2024.2402766>.

<sup>28</sup> Arnel Casanova, 'Public Rental Housing: A Viable Solution to PH Housing Crisis', *The Manila Times*, 2024, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2024/11/05/opinion/columns/public-rental-housing-a-viable-solution-to-ph-housing-crisis/1996909>.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Desmond and Monica Bell, 'Housing, Poverty, and the Law', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 11, no. 1 (2015): 15–35, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-120814-121623>.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Desmond, 'Unaffordable America: Poverty, Housing, and Eviction', in *The Affordable Housing Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Mueller and J. Rosie Tighe (Routledge, 2022).

greater challenges in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Studies have shown that switching to electric vehicles is not the ultimate solution. Major cities also need to invest in and modernize their public transportation systems to significantly increase usage.<sup>31</sup> The transition to electric cars has also generated new challenges in the mining sector. The growing demand for electric vehicles has prompted the Indonesian government to grant permits to nickel mining corporations in various regions. However, these nickel mines have created new environmental problems and have also impacted the sustainability of the agricultural and plantation sectors in several parts of Indonesia.<sup>32</sup>

*Laudato Si'* also critiques the privatization of space. The privatization of specific spaces has restricted public access to beautiful places, as they can only be accessed by elite groups. Beautiful spaces are created to serve them. People with low incomes are not only unable to access “green” living environments, but they are also prevented from entering these spaces because they are considered to disrupt the artificial tranquility that characterizes these private areas. Beautiful cities, full of well-maintained green open spaces, are found in some “safe” places, but not many in less visible outskirts. Yet most residents in large cities live there, and most of them are poor and marginalized.<sup>33</sup> These situations can be found in various countries that marginalize poor people from participating in city planning.

A study in Bangladesh, for example, demonstrates that the urban poor living in informal settlements face significant challenges in claiming urban space due to local laws, regulations, and development plans.<sup>34</sup> People with low incomes are compelled to negotiate with a range of formal and informal stakeholders to exercise their rights to urban space. They also encounter social and institutional barriers that restrict their ability to participate effectively in decision-making processes. These difficulties further exacerbate their marginalization from urban development planning.<sup>35</sup>

Pope Francis's critique of the privatization of space clarifies that this phenomenon is the antithesis of the principle of “The Universal Purpose of Goods”, which is a fundamental principle of the Catholic Church. This means that the Catholic

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<sup>31</sup> Deborah L. Bleviss, ‘Transportation Is Critical to Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the United States’, *WIREs Energy and Environment* 10, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1002/wene.390>.

<sup>32</sup> Irvan Aditya Tela and Zhang Yu, ‘Examining the Global Perception of Nickel Mining Environmental Impact: A Case Study of China-Indonesia Public Opinion on Earth’s Sustainability’, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Strategic and Global Studies (ICSGS 2024)*, Atlantis Press, 2025, 22–42, [https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-646-8\\_3](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-646-8_3).

<sup>33</sup> Pope Francis, ‘*Laudato Si'* [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter]’.

<sup>34</sup> Shamsul Arefin, ‘Right to the City in the Age of Neoliberal Development: A Case Study of Two Slum Communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh’, *Society Register* 7, no. 2 (2023): 49–70, <https://doi.org/10.14746/sr.2023.7.2.04>.

<sup>35</sup> Arefin, ‘Right to the City in the Age of Neoliberal Development: A Case Study of Two Slum Communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh’.

Church acknowledges the right to private property. However, this right is subordinated to the right to collective use for the common good of humanity.<sup>36</sup>

The critiques in *Laudato Si'* are aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is a United Nations program. One prominent aspect shared between them is the diminishing enthusiasm for massive development in the 20th century. Instead, human civilization now faces the expansive destruction of modernity. Although the 2030 Agenda and *Laudato Si'* share the view that the current global economic model can be considered outdated, there is a significant difference between the two.

The 2030 Agenda seeks to significantly improve the existing international economic model, whereas *Laudato Si'* calls for an end to economic hegemony and an increase in ethical responsibility at all levels.<sup>37</sup> The critiques in *Laudato Si'* indicate the Catholic Church's stance on the need for more radical change to address the current damage. What *Laudato Si'* offers anew is a change in perspective in the post-capitalist era. The following section will discuss the perspectives offered within *Laudato Si'*.

The various issues outlined above then form the basis for a theological reflection that the solution to the complex ecological crisis and its myriad causes cannot arise from a singular ecological approach alone. While there are various approaches, each ecological approach must refer to a social perspective that considers the fundamental rights of impoverished communities. In the context of the Catholic Church, the Universal Purpose of Goods serves as the "golden rule" of social behavior, being the first principle of all social-ethical regulations, and can serve as a universal perspective to be applied.<sup>38</sup> For Pope Francis, a proper ecological approach must always also be a social approach that integrates issues of justice into environmental discourse, to heed the cries of the Earth as well as the cries of the poor.

Therefore, in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis offers integral ecology to translate how to utilize rights for the common good (*bonum commune*). The integral ecology approach connects environmental concerns with impoverished communities, who are the primary and foremost victims of the current paradigm of earth exploitation. This approach offers a broad dialogical perspective that encompasses all individuals, ranging from scientific and secular forces to impoverished communities and indigenous peoples. Disadvantaged communities, with their diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, as well as their varied beliefs, traditions, and creativity, play a crucial role in this integral ecological movement, not only as recipients of justice but also as agents

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<sup>36</sup> Rochus-Antonin (Roman) Gruijters, 'Solidarity, the Common Good and Social Justice in the Catholic Social Teaching within the Framework of Globalization', *Philosophia Reformata* 81, no. 1 (2016): 14–31, <https://doi.org/10.1163/23528230-08101002>.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfgang Sachs, 'The Sustainable Development Goals and *Laudato Si'*: Varieties of Post-Development?', *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 12 (2017): 2573–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1350822>.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, '*Laudato Si'* [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter]'.

of transformation.<sup>39</sup> This approach also illustrates how *Laudato Si'* views the importance of inclusive participation in urban transformation.

The concept of integral ecology also exemplifies a significant evolution in the Catholic Church's social teachings on sustainability. It encompasses various concepts from Catholic social teachings, including integral human development, peace, structural justice, ethics of life, human ecology, and ecological conversion. Thus, integral ecology provides a broader conception of sustainability that applies to various ecologies (environmental, economic, social, cultural, and everyday life) while maintaining a primary focus on justice and the common good. Integral ecology also integrates considerations of justice more comprehensively, thereby enabling Catholic social teachings to avoid some of the pitfalls of unsustainable business practices paradigms.<sup>40</sup>

The common good, which in Latin words is conceptualized as *bonum commune* for cities, requires social peace, stability, and security provided by a particular order that cannot be achieved without special consideration for distributive justice. This concern can arise from ecological conversion, a term first used in *Laudato Si'*, implying a collective attitude towards fostering peace and security for the environment.<sup>41</sup> Society, including the state, has an obligation to defend and promote this. Therefore, the concept of ecological conversion proposed by *Laudato Si'* needs to be embraced not only by the lower echelons of society and individuals within it, but also by elite groups.

*Laudato Si'* also emphasizes the universal communion between humans and other creatures on Earth while acknowledging that humans are unique beings with dignity. Therefore, Pope Francis criticizes anthropocentrism in *Laudato Si'*, based on the understanding that the root of the ecological crisis lies in human-centeredness. Anthropocentrism places humans at the center and prioritizes them as the highest value. The issue is that human interests are generally short-term, and everything else becomes relative to them. The strengthening of anthropocentrism correlates with the strengthening of neoliberalism. Anthropocentrism is then aligned with the concept of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism has reshaped human subjectivity, viewing humans as merely *homo economicus*.<sup>42</sup> As the dominant logic, neoliberalism has significant implications for how each sector aims to make humans the subject whose interests must be understood and satisfied, as only human interests can drive the market and accumulate capital.

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<sup>39</sup> Alexandre A. Martins, 'Laudato Si': Integral Ecology and Preferential Option for the Poor', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 46, no. 3 (2018): 410–24, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12224>.

<sup>40</sup> Jessica Ludescher Imanaka et al., 'Laudato Si' and Integral Ecology: A Reconceptualization of Sustainability', *Journal of Management for Global Sustainability* 5, no. 1 (2017): 39–61, <https://doi.org/10.13185/JM2017.05112>.

<sup>41</sup> Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter].

<sup>42</sup> Peter Burdon and Samuel Alexander, 'Earth Jurisprudence: Anthropocentrism and Neoliberal Rationality', in *The Routledge Handbook of International Law and Anthropocentrism*, ed. Vincent Chapaux et al. (Routledge, 2023).

Anthropocentrism is characterized by technocracy, which employs logical and rational procedures to progressively approach and gain control over objects, in this case, the environment. The development of science then becomes a means for humans to control the objects under study increasingly. However, it is not just about control; humans go beyond that. Humans then use science solely as a tool to conquer the environment without considering the damaging impacts it has on the environment. The use of science as a tool for conquest is closely related to Horkheimer's critique of instrumental rationality, which reduces reason to a mere instrument of exploitation and oppression.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that alongside the dominant technocratic paradigm and the worship of unlimited human power, a line of thought has emerged that views everything as irrelevant if it does not directly serve human interests. The further danger of anthropocentrism is the perception of humans as separate from other species, leading to the view of others solely as objects of exploitation.

Anthropocentrism can even be found in policies that may be considered beneficial. Environmental regulations, whose original purpose is to protect the environment, can also fall into anthropocentrism. Urban sanitation regulations, for example, often explicitly state that their goal is to improve public health and environmental quality. In this case, public health or human interests become the pinnacle of policy decisions and all activities in the sanitation sector. Such regulations may inadvertently lead us to neglect the interests of other species. They may cause us to overlook the importance of river water quality within sanitation waste management facilities, but far from human settlements.

Therefore, humans should no longer view the Earth solely from a human perspective. Likewise, in the context of cities, humans must also shift their paradigm. Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, regards the city as a common good or a prevalent home. When living in cities, humans should feel at home because the city unites or accommodates us and should not be an exclusive place.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, a city, when conceived as a space, should be part of the lived experience formed by social interactions among humans as well as interactions between humans and other species within the urban environment. *Laudato Si'*'s perspective differs from the neoliberal perspective, which views the city as a collection of economic bodies, institutions, and individual interests that play the usual game of self-interest.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to paradigm shifts, *Laudato Si'* also proposes changes in practical realms, namely, adopting a new lifestyle in daily life. This new lifestyle entails collective efforts to abandon excessive consumption to compel corporations to change their unsustainable policies. Shifting lifestyles by forsaking consumerism can be seen as a concrete step towards moving away from anthropocentric perspectives in life.

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<sup>43</sup> Małgorzata Czarnocka, 'Instrumental Reason and Science—Max Horkheimer's View', *Dialogue and Universalism* 32, no. 2 (2022): 175–96, <https://doi.org/10.5840/du202232234>.

<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si' [On Care for Our Common Home] [Encyclical Letter].

<sup>45</sup> Zbigniew W. Paszkowski, 'Who Is Responsible for the Development of the City?', *Przestrzeń i Forma* 40 (December 2019): 203–20, <https://doi.org/10.21005/pif.2019.40.C-05>.

Consumption no longer centers solely on human interests for self-satisfaction. Still, it serves to effect more fundamental changes in the relationships among humans, policymakers, corporations, and other species inhabiting the Earth as a typical home.

The perspective advanced in *Laudato Si'* reflects a significant influence from the context of Latin American liberation theology. The encyclical employs several concepts closely associated with this theological current, such as “common home”, “the cry of the Earth and the poor”, the interdependence of all creatures, the intrinsic value of every being, and “integral ecology”. More specifically, *Laudato Si'* draws substantially on *teología del pueblo* (theology of the people), a stream of liberation theology that rejects its Marxist components.<sup>46</sup>

#### IV. HOW THE RIGHT TO THE CITY ALIGNS WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF LAUDATO SI?

The preceding section has discussed the critiques presented in *Laudato Si'* and the perspectives offered within the encyclical. The critiques in *Laudato Si'* illustrate how the current ecological crisis has affected the right to the city, manifesting in various tangible issues. However, does the perspective offered by *Laudato Si'* align with the right to the city perspective as articulated by Lefebvre and other thinkers? How, then, does the right to the city align with the principles of *Laudato Si'*?

Firstly, we can observe a shared concern regarding the root causes of the current ecological crisis, particularly in urban areas. The concept of the right to the city views industrialization and urbanization as issues that subsequently drive the exploitation of urban space. Capitalism is identified as the root cause of such excessive exploitation. *Laudato Si'* similarly critiques capitalism as a cause of problems but does not explicitly label it as the root cause. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* mentions that the issue of exploitation of humans by other humans arises from a mindset that states: “Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage.” This mindset is also foundational to capitalism, which relies on the “invisible hand” to regulate market mechanisms. In other words, the encyclical aims to assert that the cause of exploitation lies in the thinking rooted in capitalism.

Secondly, both the concept of the right to the city and *Laudato Si'* similarly view the emerging crisis as a problem for people with low incomes. The damage caused by capitalism is a disaster for people with low incomes, as they are the most affected group from one generation to the next. The poor and powerless lose their place and space in the city. For example, policies that entrust housing matters to the market have resulted in housing price structures across major cities that make it impossible for low-income

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<sup>46</sup> Franck Damour, ‘The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the Overcoming of Humanism’, *Journal of Posthuman Studies* 5, no. 2 (2021): 190–205, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jpoststud.5.2.0190>.

and even middle-class individuals to access housing near the city center.<sup>47</sup> *Laudato Si'* also sees one example in terms of housing provision as a central issue in human ecology.

Thirdly, both the right to the city and *Laudato Si'* view the city as a common good that must be upheld. Urban space is not seen from the perspective of exchange value. The city is not merely a region filled with economic stakeholders who circulate and accumulate capital within it. Every space within the city has a social function aimed at achieving this common good. However, *Laudato Si'* presents a fundamental difference in perspective from the thoughts related to the right to the city regarding how we should bring about change.

The first difference lies in where and how we can effect change. From the perspective of *Laudato Si'*, the agenda to change the city is not just a political agenda. *Laudato Si'* also sees it as an ethical agenda. Therefore, we cannot address these issues solely through political actions. Ethical actions at the individual and community levels also become the responsibility of each individual and community. This aligns with Pope Francis's view that if we can overcome individualism, an alternative lifestyle, including combating consumerism, can plausibly become truly developed, and significant change becomes possible in society. In this regard, efforts to overcome individualism need to be undertaken by individuals and communities themselves.

This differs from, for example, Lefebvre, who primarily views change from the perspective of movements by socially critical groups towards urban issues. The first step, according to Lefebvre, is to counter the dominant strategies and ideologies that contribute to the crisis.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Lefebvre argues that city dwellers — residents, intellectuals, activists, and practitioners — need to formulate and implement what he calls “urban strategies.” However, the urban strategy referred to by Lefebvre is not a concrete action proposal. This has led to criticism of the concept of the right to the city, especially in relation to the absence of concrete proposals on how to realize this right. Even the right to the city seems to be trapped in two problematic alternatives. The right to the city can be positioned as a slogan for movements critical of the current crisis, but these movements tend to be fragmented. On the other hand, there is also a tendency for the concept of the right to the city to be co-opted into dominant policy discourses, especially those formulated by international development organizations.<sup>49</sup>

The second difference lies in who is advocated for in the struggle for the “right to the city” and the criticisms in *Laudato Si'*. We can revisit Lefebvre's view, which defines the right to the city as a struggle to “eliminate the alienation” of urban space, to reintegrate it into the network of social relations. Examine the derivation of the right to the city in the World Charter for the Right to the City, and often found that the right to the city is presented as a path of struggle to restore human dignity, both as individuals and as individuals living in communities. Souza also expresses a similar view by

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<sup>47</sup> David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*.

<sup>49</sup> Caleb Althorpe and Martin Horak, ‘The End of the Right to the City: A Radical-Cooperative View’, *Urban Affairs Review* 59, no. 1 (2023): 14–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874211057815>.

asserting that the right to the city for NGOs and official institutions (as well as some social movements) can be summarized as the right to a better and more 'humane' life in the context of capitalist cities, capitalist societies, and based on representative democracy, to improve the current political and economic system.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the focus is on advocating for the quality of human life.

Building on the struggle for the right to the city, it can be understood that the right to the city is an anthropocentric concept. However, the development of thought about the city reveals that urban space is not limited to humans. The city should be viewed as a shared habitat, so urban planning needs to adopt a nature-based approach and incorporate a multi-species perspective.<sup>51</sup>

This differs from the perspective of integral ecology offered by *Laudato Si'*. *Laudato Si'* has asserted that humans and other creatures on Earth are a unity in life without denying that humans are unique beings with dignity. *Laudato Si'* sees that the root of the current ecological crisis is not from species other than humans but from humans themselves, who always emphasize their interests as paramount. Therefore, change cannot be achieved if only human interests are considered. The same mindset also needs to be used when considering the interests of multi-species living within the city.

The two differences in viewing the city from the perspectives of the right to the city and *Laudato Si'* lead to a fundamental difference, yet they can also complement each other. When we discuss the right to the city, we cannot separate it from the concept of rights. The idea of rights is inherently associated with humans; thus, it is anthropocentric. Because rights are guaranteed by law, efforts to advocate for them must also proceed through political avenues, just as the making of laws also involves political processes in parliament.

This differs from *Laudato Si'*, which not only views this "common home" from the perspective of rights but also from the standpoint of human responsibility and community. To ensure the city, as this "common home," can endure, humans within their communities (civil society) are the parties that must actively drive change. While such a change may be accelerated with support from the state through various instruments and apparatus, it should be pursued with or without state endorsement.

The distinction between the two also indicates that *Laudato Si'*, shaped by the theology of the people, is not entirely grounded in Marxist modes of thought and analysis. While *Laudato Si'* does not deny the role of capitalism in the global ecological crisis, it situates the question of the city not merely within the framework of rights guaranteed by the state but also within the dimension of responsibility.

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<sup>50</sup> Marcelo Lopes De Souza, 'Which Right to Which City? In Defence of Political-Strategic Clarity', *Interface* 2, no. 1 (2010): 315–33.

<sup>51</sup> Judy Bush and Andréanne Doyon, 'Building Urban Resilience with Nature-Based Solutions: How Can Urban Planning Contribute?', *Cities* 95 (December 2019): 102483, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2019.102483>.



Thus, the right to the city and responsibility of the town, which constitute the essence of *Laudato Si'* in the context of urban critique, are not two concepts that negate each other. The right to the city can balance human and ecological interests by adopting the town's responsibility as its complementary agenda, rather than exclusively focusing on human interests in the change process. To achieve this balance, the development of the right to the city and the responsibility for the city concept should provide the following normative framework:

1. Legal frameworks, in the form of laws and regulations at the city level, should be able to restrain the rapid pace of urban development that contradicts the slow rate of biological evolution. Laws should impose environmental responsibilities on individuals and corporations to limit production and consumption that have adverse impacts on the ecology. Every corporation should recognize that corporate social responsibility, which aims to balance profit, human, and ecological interests in its practices, cannot restore the environment to its original condition. Corporations should instead be “compelled” to slow down or even eliminate production that has negative impacts, despite fostering economic growth. Every individual should also be “compelled” to eliminate consumption that contradicts urban sustainability.
2. On the other hand, governments in each country need to recognize that, while humans have adapted very quickly to urban life culturally, biological adaptation to urban life is a slow process. Economic growth in each country may satisfy the demands of consumerism among certain economic groups. Still, it does not have an overall impact on the common good of the city as a shared home.
3. The law should eliminate the privatization of space that restricts citizens' access to basic needs. Specifically, the government should enact laws that regulate the responsibility of corporations, especially those controlling large amounts of land, to provide public spaces for the basic needs of the community. Moreover, at a more fundamental level, the law should also provide a normative framework to ensure that any privately owned land related to public interests serves social and ecological functions for the common good.
4. The law should strengthen community participation, particularly among the poor and vulnerable, in urban planning. The poor and vulnerable are often marginalized and face difficulties in opposing government policies that may harm them. They also frequently encounter discrimination in the urban planning process due to the absence of legal instruments providing opportunities for them to voice their concerns, engage in deliberation, and have their opinions considered when they are affected by public policies. Conversely, more powerful groups and corporations should not exploit their strength to hinder the participation of the poor and vulnerable in urban planning, and the law should ensure that such practices are prevented.

Hence, translating the normative framework of the right to the city and the town's responsibility into national law presents its own challenges. The challenge for this agenda lies in the interests of developing countries in economic growth. The principles of *Laudato Si'* may be challenging to translate into a country that is still pursuing economic growth or is solely focused on it. Sustainable development may be a vision in these countries' development plans, but rapid growth remains a primary objective. It seems challenging for a country oriented towards high growth to control its adverse environmental and community effects simultaneously.

## V. CONCLUSION

The discussion in this article highlights criticisms of industrialization put forth by thinkers on the right to the city, as well as by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*. Thinkers on the right to the city, such as Lefebvre and Harvey, critique the commodification of space and spatial injustices resulting from capitalism. Meanwhile, *Laudato Si'* criticizes the global ecological crisis stemming from accelerating changes in human lifestyles and rapid development leading to urbanization, high consumption, and environmental issues. This crisis also affects the right to the city by causing housing disparities, a lack of public transportation, and detrimental privatization of spaces involving people with low incomes.

Lefebvre then emphasizes the importance of radical participation in the production of urban space to prevent urban dwellers from being alienated from urban spaces. His focus is on advocating for human quality of life. On the other hand, *Laudato Si'* offers an integral ecology approach that connects environmental and social justice, emphasizing the importance of inclusive participation in urban transformation. Pope Francis also critiques the anthropocentrism that dominates human thought, stating that humans must view the Earth not solely from a human perspective, including in the context of sustainable cities, and offers lifestyle changes that are more environmentally friendly as concrete steps in safeguarding the typical home, the Earth.

The offerings of *Laudato Si'* are essential to complement the concept of the right to the city so that the agenda for urban change is not only oriented towards humans but also towards ecology. Additionally, *Laudato Si'* indicates that the right to the city cannot stand alone, as the responsibility of the town must complement it. Responsibility for the city, like the right to the city, requires laws that can ensure individuals and corporations consistently fulfill these responsibilities as part of their ethical agenda.

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