

## ECOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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### ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION OF FUTURE SOCIAL WORKERS AS A COMPONENT OF THE ETHICAL PARADIGM OF SOCIAL WORK

У статті досліджується трансформація етичних стандартів соціальної роботи в умовах сучасних соціально-екологічних викликів, глобальних криз та цифровізації. Особлива увага приділяється інтеграції екологічного виміру у професійну діяльність соціальних працівників, що передбачає поєднання принципів соціальної справедливості та екологічної відповідальності. Розглядаються концепції «зеленої соціальної роботи» та екологічної соціальної роботи як міждисциплінарного напрямку, спрямованого на забезпечення рівного доступу до безпечного довкілля, захист природних ресурсів та підвищення якості життя населення. Аналізуються міжнародні стандарти та практики, зокрема Глобальна програма соціальної роботи та філософія «Buen Vivir», що акцентують увагу на гармонійному співіснуванні людини, громади та природи, а також на необхідності формування екологічної свідомості серед громадян.

В статті окреслено основні завдання сучасного соціального працівника як екологічного агента змін: підтримка вразливих груп населення, реалізація екологічних програм і проектів, захист прав на безпечне довкілля та формування сталих моделей поведінки. Розглянуто підготовку майбутніх соціальних працівників через інтеграцію екологічного виховання та трансформаційного навчання, що сприяє розвитку критичного мислення, професійної чутливості, етичної рефлексії, системного мислення та компетентностей, необхідних для роботи в умовах ризикогенних ситуацій.

Результати дослідження підтверджують важливість формування нової професійної ідентичності соціальних працівників, здатних ефективно поєднувати гуманістичні цінності з принципами сталого розвитку. Стаття підкреслює, що екологізація професійної практики та освіти є ключовим чинником забезпечення соціальної та екологічної справедливості у сучасному суспільстві та розвитку стійких громад.

**Ключові слова:** екологічне виховання, екологічна справедливість, екологічний соціальний працівник, зелена соціальна робота, професійна етика, соціальна робота, сталий розвиток.

The article examines the transformation of ethical standards in social work in the context of contemporary socio-ecological challenges, global crises, and digitalization. Special attention is given to integrating the ecological dimension into the professional activities of social workers, which involves combining the principles of social justice and ecological responsibility. The concepts of "green social work" and ecological social work are considered interdisciplinary approaches aimed at ensuring equal access to a safe environment, protecting natural resources, and improving the quality of life of the population. International standards and practices are analyzed, including the Global Social Work Program and the philosophy of "Buen Vivir," which emphasize the harmonious coexistence of humans, communities, and nature, as well as the need to foster ecological awareness among citizens.

The article outlines the main tasks of the modern social worker as an ecological agent of change: supporting vulnerable population groups, implementing environmental programs and projects, protecting the right to a safe environment, and promoting sustainable behavior patterns. The preparation of future social workers is examined through the integration of ecological education and transformative learning, which contributes to the development of critical thinking, professional sensitivity, ethical reflection, systems thinking, and competencies required to work effectively in risk-prone situations.

The study results confirm the importance of forming a new professional identity for social workers capable of effectively combining humanistic values with sustainable development principles. The article



emphasizes that the ecological dimension of professional practice and education is a key factor in ensuring social and ecological justice in contemporary society and in fostering resilient communities.

**Key words:** ecological education, environmental justice, ecological social worker, green social work, professional ethics, social work, sustainable development.

**Statement of the problem.** Contemporary social work faces a range of complex challenges that combine social, economic, and environmental dimensions. The growing anthropogenic pressure on the natural environment most caused by industrial activity, urbanisation, and climate change directly affects the social well-being of communities. Vulnerable population groups, including children deprived of parental care, the elderly, internally displaced persons, and persons with disabilities, are most severely affected by the consequences of environmental pollution, ecological disasters, and unstable natural conditions. In such circumstances, traditional social work approaches focused solely on social support to prove insufficient for ensuring the comprehensive well-being of both individuals and communities.

The problem is further compounded by the fact that contemporary ethical standards in social work frequently fail to account for the close interrelationship between the social and natural environments. The professional practice of social workers has traditionally been grounded in humanistic values, principles of social justice, and respect for human rights. However, without the integration of an ecological dimension, these principles remain incomplete. Indeed, disregarding the impact of environmental conditions on clients' quality of life limits the effectiveness of social assistance and does not contribute to the sustainable development of communities. At the same time, global transformations, including the consequences of the climate crisis and socio-ecological inequality, are increasing the demand for professionals capable of combining social and ecological competencies.

The current situation calls for a revision of professional standards and educational programmes in social work. What is required is the integration of the concepts of "green social work" and ecological social work as key elements of the preparation of future social workers. This makes it possible to form a new professional identity in which social justice is combined with ecological responsibility, and human rights are inseparably linked to the right to a safe environment. Only through a comprehensive approach that considers the interrelationship between social and ecological problems can the effectiveness of professional practice be ensured and communities' capacity to adapt to contemporary challenges be strengthened.

**Review of Recent Research and Publications.** The relevance of integrating an ecological dimension into social work is confirmed by a range of scholarly publications and international standards. Research by T. Semyhina [6] underscores the role of the social worker as an intermediary between the community and natural resources, oriented towards ensuring every person's right to a safe environment. An analysis of the global agenda for social work indicates that environmental sustainability has become one of the key priorities of professional development [2]. Scholarly works [3; 5; 9] emphasise the importance of developing ecological competence in future social workers through transformative learning, practical placements, and ecological education that integrates knowledge, values, and practical skills. At the same time, a gap exists in the standardisation of approaches to "green social work" within educational programmes, which requires further research and methodological development.

**The purpose of this article** is to identify contemporary trends in the transformation of the ethical paradigm of social work in the context of integrating an ecological dimension; to characterise the concepts of ecological social work and "green social work"; and to substantiate methodological and educational approaches to developing the ecological competence of future social workers.

**Outline of the main material.** The contemporary ethical paradigm of social work is formed at the intersection of philosophical ethical concepts, social policy, and the practice of professional assistance, fulfilling normative, regulatory, and ideological functions. Within this framework, particular significance is acquired by the concept of ecological justice, which highlights the interdependence between human activity and the state of the natural environment. Anthropogenic impact determines transformations in both the social and natural spheres, while ecological changes shape behavioural patterns, value orientations, and the social development of the individual. This dialectical interdependence forms the theoretical and methodological foundation for integrating the ecological dimension into the professional practice of social workers and for developing the corresponding competencies.

In this context, the significance of ethics as a system-forming factor in social work increases substantially. Ethical principles serve as professional guidelines, ensuring that considered, unbiased, and responsible decisions are made in situations of heightened complexity, and facilitating the reconciliation of the interests of various social groups with the imperatives of environmental preservation. The integration

of ecological consciousness into the system of professional values gives rise to a reorientation of social work towards combining the principles of social justice with those of ecological responsibility.

As a consequence, the professional activity of social workers acquires a comprehensive character that extends beyond traditional social support. It encompasses responding to the consequences of armed conflicts, ecological disasters, and crisis situations, and involves participation in practices aimed at environmental conservation, including supporting ecological initiatives, protecting ecosystems, reducing levels of pollution, and implementing the principles of sustainable development [1].

Contemporary challenges are characterised by the integration of social and ecological problems, which heightens the need to ensure equitable access to natural resources and to uphold the principles of ecological justice [9]. Under these conditions, the methodological foundation of the social worker's activity is a moral approach grounded in professional ethics, which guarantees objectivity, impartiality, and responsibility in decision-making. At the same time, one of the key tasks remains the preservation and strengthening of public health, which presupposes the holistic integration of social and ecological dimensions in professional practice.

In this regard, ecological social work is today acquiring particular relevance, as evidenced by its gradual inclusion in national and international social work and social development programmes. This inclusion reflects the growing recognition of the importance of combining social assistance with ecological responsibility as an integral aspect of contemporary professional practice. In summarising the foregoing, it is appropriate to outline the essence of ecological social work through an original definition of the concept.

Ecological social work, in our view, is an interdisciplinary field of professional activity that combines the principles of social work and ecological ethics and is aimed at ensuring social justice through the rational, responsible, and equitable use of natural resources, environmental preservation, and the improvement of population living standards. It presupposes the integration of ecological knowledge into social support practice, an orientation towards the prevention of socio-ecological risks, the development of ecological consciousness in communities, and the protection of vulnerable population groups from the adverse consequences of ecological change.

This field reflects contemporary challenges associated with the need to ensure the harmonious coexistence of society and the natural environment, as well as the cultivation of a responsible attitude towards natural resources among citizens.

In examining the essence of ecological social work, it is appropriate to consider international experience, which reflects current trends in integrating the ecological dimension into the professional activity of social workers.

International standards in social work today require practitioners to recognise the inseparable link between human well-being and the state of the natural environment. In this context, social work is gradually moving beyond a purely anthropocentric approach and is acquiring the features of ecocentrism, in which the protection of the natural environment is regarded as an ethical obligation to future generations [4].

In particular, within the Global agenda for social work and social development, "ensuring environmental sustainability" has been identified as one of four key strategic priorities for the development of social work at the international level. This underscores the necessity of integrating the ecological component into the professional preparation of social workers and highlights the importance of developing innovative approaches to addressing environmental challenges in society [2].

An important conceptual reference point is the global priority of "Buen Vivir" (Good Living), which envisions the harmonious coexistence of the individual, the community, and nature. The realisation of this philosophy necessitates the incorporation of an ecological dimension into the work of social professionals and the support of initiatives aimed at cultivating ecological responsibility and sustainable development [8].

International experience thus attests to the gradual consolidation of the ecological approach in social work as an integral component of professional practice oriented towards sustainable development and intergenerational responsibility.

Taking into account the outlined international approaches to integrating the ecological dimension into social work, it is appropriate to examine in greater detail the theoretical and ethical foundations of professional social work activity in the context of contemporary transformations.

Traditionally, the professional ethics of the social worker rests on a synthesis of the deontological approach, which defines the system of professional duties and standards, utilitarianism, oriented towards achieving maximum social good, as well as virtue ethics and care ethics. Understood in this way, professional ethics constitutes an integrated system of professional-ethical values, principles, and norms of conduct that are reflected in the consciousness of practitioners and regulate their interaction with clients,

colleagues, and society as a whole [5]. In the context of contemporary social and ecological challenges, such ethics acquires new connotations. It begins to consider social and ecological problems as interrelated phenomena requiring an integrated approach to their resolution. The transformation of professional ethics demands the cultivation of a particular culture, in which "an inalienable component of professional culture is ethical culture, in which the moral requirements for the personality of the specialist are expressed". The professional and ethical culture of the social worker, in turn, is defined as "a distinctive system of professional-ethical qualities that regulate socially oriented relations in professional interaction" [3].

However, rapid global transformations and ecological crises necessitate the expansion of these standards through the integration of an ecological context. In this regard, the concept of "green social work" acquires significant relevance as a response to the challenges of our time, offering a revision of traditional approaches to professional practice.

Green social work is not merely the addition of ecological themes to educational programmes and curricula; it represents a fundamental shift in the focus of practice towards preventiveness, disaster resilience, and the struggle against ecological racism and social inequality. T. Semyhina emphasises that the ecological social worker acts as "an intermediary between the community and natural resources, ensuring everyone's right to a safe environment as a basic human right" [6], which underscores their responsibility for integrating the ecological dimension into professional practice. Green social work should therefore be understood as an integrative concept that combines social support and ecological responsibility. It treats social and ecological problems as interrelated phenomena, involves accounting for the impact of the state of the environment on social well-being, and is aimed at forming sustainable behavioural models and practices both in society at large and in the activity of individual specialists.

On this basis, we propose to regard the ecological social worker as a specialist in the field of social work who, in their professional practice, integrates the ecological dimension, takes into account the interrelationship between social well-being and the state of the environment, and carries out activities aimed at supporting vulnerable groups, preserving natural resources, and cultivating ecological consciousness in society.

The central element of the renewed ethical paradigm of social work is the concept of ecological justice, which presupposes equal access to a safe and healthy environment, as well as the equitable distribution of ecological risks. Vulnerable population groups suffer most from pollution, climate change, and natural disasters; consequently, social work must adapt its key imperatives. This transformation takes place at the level of foundational categories: social justice is supplemented by ecological justice, professional responsibility is extended to encompass intergenerational solidarity, and human rights are inseparably linked to the right to a safe environment. This expansion of principles demands systematic ecological education for future social workers, which we regard as a process of developing ecological consciousness, value orientations, and responsible behavioural practices. As has been noted, "the moral and ethical component plays a dominant role in shaping the professional competence of future social workers" [3].

At present, the ecological social worker performs not merely the function of providing assistance, but also acts as a defender of people's rights and lawful interests, ensuring the realisation of the principles of social and ecological justice. This dual role forms a distinctive character of ethical requirements for the profession, encompassing not only professional competence but also moral responsibility for decisions taken. Being a just and in this sense ecological social worker means acting consistently in an objective and impartial manner, taking into account the needs and interests of all parties, and demonstrating professional attentiveness and critical thinking.

In this context, the ecological social worker puts the principles of ecological justice into practice. They initiate and implement ecological programmes and projects, participate in civic and environmental movements, and encourage local communities to defend their rights to a safe and healthy environment. They act as an intermediary between people and natural resources, promoting the development of ecological consciousness, a sustainable way of life, and the integration of the principles of social justice with ecological responsibility.

The broadening of the ethical paradigm through the ecological dimension is closely correlated with the fundamental characteristic of the profession responsibility. As has been noted, "the social worker takes responsibility for their actions, for compliance with ethical norms, and for achieving positive results in their work with clients" [7]. The introduction of the principles of "green social work" demands from practitioners not only knowledge, but also a developed system of values that aligns with societal expectations. This approach treats social and ecological problems as interrelated phenomena. The ecological social worker functions not only as an intermediary in the provision of assistance, but also as an active agent of change

capable of influencing the structural causes of population vulnerability and promoting the development of ecological consciousness in communities.

As the analysis of international experience shows, the global agenda for social work for the current decade identifies ecological sustainability as one of four key pillars of professional development, requiring knowledge of climate change and risk management [6]. The realisation of this global agenda presupposes not only a change in approaches to professional practice, but also a transformation of educational programmes aimed at preparing specialists capable of integrating the ecological dimension into social work.

According to recent scholarly investigations, "investment in the quality education of social workers should be regarded as a strategically important factor in strengthening societal resilience". A specialist of the new type is "not merely a provider of services, but an active subject of sustainable development" who must "not only help individuals overcome difficulties, but also work at the community level, promoting their development, supporting ecological initiatives, and championing human rights in the context of global challenges" [8]. This approach makes it possible to maximally integrate the ecological component into the strategies of the country's social recovery.

In the educational context, the preparation of future social workers presupposes the integration of the principles of ecological justice and the concept of "green social work" into curricula. The primary aim is to develop in students not only knowledge about the interrelationship between social and ecological problems, but also competencies that ensure the capacity to act responsibly and ethically in professional practice. This includes the development of ecological consciousness, value orientations, critical thinking, and skills for making objective and impartial decisions in complex situations.

Particular attention in education should be devoted to cultivating future specialists' capacity to act as agents of change: to implement ecological programmes and projects, to engage communities in defending their rights to a safe environment, and to combine social support with the principles of ecological responsibility. This approach makes it possible to ensure not only professional competence but also moral responsibility, forming a social worker capable of realising the principles of social and ecological justice in practical activity.

In this context, ecological education becomes a key component of the preparation of future social workers. It is regarded as a systemic process of developing ecological consciousness, value orientations, and responsible behavioural practices necessary for the realisation of the principles of social and ecological justice. The primary aim of such education is to develop in students the capacity to understand the interrelationship between social and ecological problems, to evaluate the impact of human activity on the environment, and to make decisions that promote the sustainable development of communities.

As researchers note, ecological education is a process of developing in a person a humanistic, responsible, and caring attitude towards nature as a value of particular significance. It involves embedding in consciousness, convictions, and moral orientations the principles of rational use of natural resources, as well as developing a readiness for active environmental protection activity [1].

Ecological education encompasses the development of ethical, professional, and practical competencies: the capacity to act responsibly and ethically, to plan and implement social and ecological projects, to promote community participation in the protection of the environment, and to integrate the principles of preventiveness and resilience into everyday practice. This approach ensures the harmonious combination of knowledge, values, and practical skills, forming an ecological social worker capable of acting as an agent of change in both society and the environment.

In substantiating the necessity of ecological education, reference should be made to the concept of T. Semyhina, set out in the work "Contemporary Social Work" (2020), where the profession is defined as one oriented towards the social development and cohesion of communities. In this context, the ecological literacy of the future specialist appears not as an additional option but as a foundation for the realisation of the principle of collective responsibility for the sustainable development of society [5].

The integration of ecological education into the educational process has an interdisciplinary character, combining the achievements of pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and ecology. An effective mechanism is cross-disciplinary integration, which involves introducing ecological material into the content of social-humanitarian and professionally oriented disciplines [9]. To achieve lasting results, active learning methods should be employed: training sessions, discussions, debates, the project method, the case-study method, and analysis of specific ecological situations [9].

Contemporary preparation of future social workers presupposes the development of ethical judgement, the capacity to identify conflicts of interest, and the ability to balance humanistic values with social policy. Being a just social worker means acting objectively, impartially, and with due regard for the needs of all parties. Ecological education forms the foundation of professional training for the ecological

social worker, preparing them to fulfil the role of an agent of change in their interaction with people and the natural environment. It is oriented towards the development of key qualities in future specialists in the field of "green social work" notably resilience, flexibility, and adaptability which, allow for effective responses to social and ecological challenges [7].

The implementation of ecological education in curricula promotes the development of ecological consciousness, value orientations, and responsible behavioural practices, as well as preparing social workers capable not only of providing assistance but also of acting as advocates for ecological justice, defending communities' right to a safe environment and contributing to sustainable development [3].

Thus, the integration of ecological education into curricula not only develops value orientations and ecological consciousness in future specialists, but also prepares them for the active role of ecological social worker one capable of acting as an agent of change in communities and ensuring the realisation of the principles of ecological justice.

This makes it possible to cultivate in students systematic thinking and the capacity for ethical reflection in conditions of a risk society. The preparation process must be carried out comprehensively: through updating the content of academic disciplines (introducing courses in eco-social policy and ecological ethics), using innovative methods such as problem-oriented learning and case analysis, and through engagement in practical community activities. Future social workers learn to implement ecological education through the advocacy of clients' ecological rights, public awareness campaigns, and support for local sustainable development initiatives. Despite existing barriers in particular, the insufficient standardisation of the "green" component in education and limited resources the ecologisation of professional training is the key factor in forming a new professional identity of the specialist capable of effectively working in conditions of global ecological challenges.

At the current stage, several theoretical approaches to educating future social workers in the field of ecological social work exist [2]. The first approach involves preparation for activity in emergency and disaster situations. It is oriented towards developing competencies for creating and implementing programmes of assistance to those affected, countering discrimination, and mobilising communities to restore the social and natural environment.

The second approach concerns preparation for work in the sphere of socio-economic and ecological community development. The primary aim of this approach is to teach future social workers to reduce ecological injustice in communities, to form skills of rational consumption, and to develop a readiness to respond effectively to ecological challenges.

The third approach is oriented towards political social work. It involves training students to lobby for the interests of communities subjected to ecological discrimination, to counter social and ecological inequality, and to influence government and administrative structures effectively in order to defend community rights.

All three approaches to the preparation of future social workers in the field of ecological social work require a methodological foundation that makes it possible to integrate theoretical knowledge with practical activity and to develop key competencies. Transformative learning serves as such an instrument, since it ensures the development of critical thinking, self-reflection, and emotional resilience all necessary for the effective performance of the role of ecological social worker. It is directed not only towards the acquisition of knowledge about social and ecological problems, but also towards the development of personal qualities, professional sensitivity, and the capacity for ethical reflection.

Unlike traditional critical pedagogy, which focuses on the analysis of unjust social structures, the transformative approach adds an emphasis on the transformation of internal convictions, worldviews, and personal attitudes towards clients. This allows future social workers to gain a deeper understanding of the problems of vulnerable population groups (including internally displaced persons and victims of violence), to take into account the cultural, social, and psychological dimensions of their needs, and to respond to the challenges of contemporary risk-generating society including crisis situations, ecological disasters, and social inequality [6].

Thus, the integration of transformative learning and ecological education into the preparation of future social workers promotes the development of their systematic thinking, capacity for ethical reflection, and professional sensitivity. The development of ecological competence in future specialists therefore becomes an integral part of their professional and ethical preparation, oriented towards humanism, empathy, and a commitment to self-improvement.

Of particular significance in the preparation of future social workers is practical training, since it ensures the formation of key professional competencies through the application of theoretical knowledge in real-world conditions [9]. A necessary condition is the strengthening of the ecological component during

practical sessions, which involves the inclusion of tasks with ecological content in educational placements and internships at social service agencies, civic organisations, eco-initiatives, nature conservation bodies, and volunteer projects. Such conditions allow students to acquire practical skills for working with communities, to learn to implement advocacy campaigns for ecological rights, and to participate in sustainable development programmes at the local level.

Importantly, the ecological orientation of practical training cultivates in future social workers the capacity to act not merely as theorists, but as active agents of change capable of integrating ecological education into professional activity, supporting communities in addressing socio-ecological problems, and promoting the development of ecological consciousness among various population groups. Practical experience at placement sites helps students develop critical thinking, cross-sectoral interaction skills, and the capacity to make objective and ethical decisions in complex and risky situations.

Thus, the combination of theoretical learning with practical activity provides future social workers with comprehensive knowledge and competencies for effective practice in the field of "green social work", forming a professional identity oriented towards social justice, ecological responsibility, and sustainable development.

The developed ethical and professional orientations thus make it possible to define the primary tasks and competencies of future social workers in the field of ecological social work. The central element of the renewed ethical paradigm of social work is ecological justice, which ensures equal access to a safe environment and the equitable distribution of ecological risks. Vulnerable population groups suffer most from pollution, climate change, and natural disasters; consequently, social work must integrate the ecological dimension into professional activity.

In the educational process, this involves developing in future social workers systematic ecological thinking, the capacity for ethical reflection, and the cultivation of value orientations that combine humanistic principles with a responsible attitude towards the environment. The social worker acts not merely as a provider of assistance, but as an agent of change capable of defending clients' rights, taking into account the interests of all parties, and making considered decisions in complex socio-ecological situations.

The integration of ecological education into the preparation of future specialists ensures the development of key competencies: critical thinking, resilience, flexibility, and adaptability. This creates the foundation for the practical activity of the ecological social worker who, through volunteering, placements, and participation in professional initiatives, implements the principles of "green social work" at the level of communities and organisations.

In summary, the contemporary ethical paradigm of social work, enriched by the ecological dimension, establishes new orientations for specialist preparation: it defines the key values, principles, and competencies necessary for ensuring equal access to a safe environment and the equitable distribution of ecological risks all of which constitute the foundation for the practical activity of the ecological social worker.

**Conclusions and Prospects for Further Research.** The analysis conducted makes it possible to outline the key aspects of the transformation of the contemporary ethical paradigm of social work in the context of integrating the ecological dimension. First, the concept of ecological justice becomes the central orientation of the social worker's professional activity, defining the necessity of ensuring equal access to a safe and healthy environment and the equitable distribution of ecological risks. Second, the integration of the principles of "green social work" cultivates in practitioners a new type of professional identity, in which social support is combined with responsibility for the state of the natural environment and the sustainable development of communities.

The third important conclusion is that ecological education constitutes an integral component of the preparation of future social workers, contributing to the development of systematic thinking, professional sensitivity, critical thinking, and the capacity for ethical reflection. Practical activity in communities, participation in volunteer, eco-initiative, and advocacy projects allows students to realise the competencies they have acquired and to fulfil the role of active agents of change, combining social justice with the principles of ecological responsibility.

Finally, international experience attests that the integration of the ecological dimension into social work is a global trend that determines the priorities of professional development, education, and social work policy, orienting practitioners towards ensuring sustainability and intergenerational responsibility.

Further scholarly research should be directed towards several key areas: the development and standardisation of educational programmes in the field of ecological social work, incorporating an interdisciplinary approach, transformative learning, and practical case studies for the development of future

specialists' competencies; empirical investigation of the effectiveness of implementing ecological education in the professional preparation of social workers, and assessment of its impact on the development of ecological consciousness, ethical reflection, and readiness to act as agents of change. The development of methods for assessing socio-ecological risks and the formation of indicators of ecological justice will allow social workers to make well-grounded and ethical decisions in the context of global challenges and crises.

Thus, the integration of the ecological dimension into social work opens broad prospects for the development of professional ethics, educational practices, and scholarly research aimed at forming a sustainable and just society.

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