

The Emirati Vision for Activating Islamic Principles in Natural Resource Management

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DOI Link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i12/27107>

Published Date: 10 December 2025

Abstract

This study examines the integration of Islamic jurisprudence and sustainable development from an Emirati perspective, focusing on activating Islamic principles in natural resource management. The research addresses the challenge of aligning traditional Islamic environmental ethics with modern sustainability concepts to enhance resource governance. The main objective is to analyze the Islamic legal and ethical framework related to environmental stewardship and evaluate its compatibility with contemporary sustainability principles. Islamic values such as stewardship (khalifah), prevention of corruption (fasad), balance (mizan), and moderation provide a strong ethical foundation for sustainable development, offering a valuable approach to global environmental challenges. Methodologically, the study conducts a comprehensive literature review of Islamic environmental ethics alongside a case study of the UAE's policies and initiatives. The UAE exemplifies the successful fusion of advanced scientific planning with Islamic ethical values, resulting in a balanced model that supports economic growth while protecting environmental resources. Notable examples include clean energy projects, water management, waste reduction, Masdar City, and supportive environmental legislation. The findings indicate that integrating Islamic jurisprudence with UAE environmental policies presents a promising, holistic model based on both science and ethics. This approach is a strategic, practical choice that can lead to sustainable outcomes. The study recommends further research on Islamic environmental jurisprudence and encourages the development of educational and media policies to promote environmental awareness grounded in ethical values, contributing to balanced and comprehensive development.

Keywords: Environmental Jurisprudence, Sustainable Development, Environment in Islam, Natural Resource Management, Sustainability in the United Arab Emirates, Environmental Governance, Islamic Principles

Introduction

In recent decades, the world has witnessed rapid environmental changes linked to the degradation of natural resources and the escalating impacts of climate change. This alarming trend has motivated scholars and policymakers alike to seek value systems capable of redefining the human-environment relationship in a sustainable manner. Islamic law (Sharia) has long emphasized principles that uphold resource preservation, advocate moderation, and prohibit corruption of the earth. These principles align closely with the modern concept of sustainable development, which seeks to protect the rights of future generations and maintain ecological balance (Jumaa, 2020; Al-Wanda, 2018). This Islamic legal perspective corresponds with contemporary environmental literature exploring Islamic environmental ethics, which connects religious values with human duties toward the natural world, as affirmed by recent studies in Islamic environmental ethics (Fakhar & Batool, 2022; Kamali, n.d.). Thus, Islamic environmental jurisprudence offers a cognitive and ethical framework capable of addressing current environmental challenges by integrating religious principles with modern scientific approaches.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) exemplifies a contemporary model that combines modern developmental vision with Islamic values in natural resource management. The country has adopted advanced environmental policies centered on resource conservation, clean energy, and protection, reflecting Sharia principles that call for moderation, avoidance of wastefulness, and ecological balance (Al-Dhahiri, 2021; Belmushri, Bin Awali, & Haddoush, 2021). Initiatives like Masdar City illustrate this integrated vision, leveraging science and technology within an ethical framework rooted in Islamic values, while promoting community participation in environmental preservation. Recent studies highlight the importance of incorporating Islamic ethics into environmental policies, noting their contribution to more comprehensive sustainability consistent with justice, compassion, and respect for cosmic order (Ali & Agushi, 2024; El Gammal & Abozaid, 2021). Accordingly, the UAE experience serves as a practical case for studying how religious values can be activated in natural resource management within a modern civilizational model.

Building on this foundation, the present study titled “Environmental Jurisprudence and Sustainable Development: An Emirati Perspective on Activating Islamic Principles in Natural Resource Management” is motivated by the pressing need to bridge traditional Islamic legal frameworks with contemporary environmental policies to advance sustainability in the UAE. The key contribution of this research lies in providing a scientific and methodological framework that links Islamic environmental jurisprudence with developmental practices, by analyzing relevant Sharia principles related to environmental protection and resource sustainability, and assessing their alignment with national policies aimed at enhancing quality of life and conserving nature (Al-Khurman, 2020). Furthermore, the study draws on international literature examining the Islam-environment relationship, affirming that contemporary Islamic perspectives can formulate an integrated model of sustainable development based on a comprehensive ethical and humanistic vision (Greer, 2024). By doing so, this research aspires to build a methodological bridge between Islamic values and modern developmental efforts, clarify the role of jurisprudence in enriching environmental policies, and promote societal awareness of resource protection within a holistic framework balancing development and conservation.

The Emirati Vision for Natural Resource Management

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has established a prominent role in environmental protection and sustainable development over recent decades by adopting advanced policies and initiatives grounded in scientific planning and environmental governance. The UAE serves as a leading Arab model in transitioning toward a green economy, developing national renewable energy programs, managing water resources, reducing emissions, and creating sustainable smart cities. This vision is deeply rooted in the principle of balancing economic growth with the protection of natural resources, which closely aligns with Islamic principles advocating moderation in consumption and prohibiting corruption on earth (Al-Dhahiri, 2021). The Emirati experience demonstrates that combining modern technology with ethical values is an effective path to sustainability.

Masdar City stands as a prominent global example of a sustainable urban project, relying on renewable energy, reducing emissions, and employing innovative water and waste management technologies. This project aligns with the Islamic view that environmental preservation is a human religious duty (Jumaa, 2020), and regards resource protection as a shared responsibility of the state and society. Contemporary literature underscores the importance of embedding ethics in environmental policy, clearly reflected in the UAE's application of Islamic values to build societal awareness through education, legislation, and national campaigns. Environmental studies indicate that the UAE has developed an advanced environmental governance system that fosters community participation and supports innovation in clean energy (El Gammal & Abozaid, 2021).

Moreover, the Emirati experience shows the capacity of environmental policies to engage with the social and cultural context, deriving from a profound understanding of local customs and values, which are reshaped within a national vision compatible with contemporary requirements. Real-world outcomes reveal that the UAE's success is not solely policy-driven but stems from Islamic values that emphasize environmental justice, moderation, and stewardship (Al-Wanda, 2018). International literature recognizes the UAE as a regional model for operationalizing sustainability across sectors, with success attributed to the integration of scientific knowledge and value-based cultural vision (Ali & Agushi, 2024). This integration offers a practical model for translating theoretical concepts into effective policies, making the UAE's experience a source of inspiration for sustainable development in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Integration of Islamic Principles and Emirati Environmental Policies

The integration of Islamic principles with Emirati environmental policies represents a unique model that combines religious values with modern applications. The UAE has effectively leveraged its religious heritage to enhance environmental awareness and develop sustainable development strategies. This integration is grounded in fundamental jurisprudential principles such as harm prevention, public interest, and moderation in resource consumption, which resonate with contemporary development needs to conserve resources, reduce pollution, and protect biodiversity (Al-Khurman, 2020). By adopting this approach, the UAE pursues a dual path that merges science and values, strengthening the legitimacy and public acceptance of environmental policies. Environmental literature confirms that incorporating ethical dimensions in policy formulation contributes to more sustainable long-term outcomes (Kamali, n.d.).

Emirati environmental practices demonstrate the successful application of religious values in formulating effective policies, evident in initiatives focused on water and energy conservation, waste reduction, and legislation protecting terrestrial and marine life. This approach exemplifies “value-based governance,” which integrates social, cultural, and ethical dimensions alongside technical aspects. Studies like Fakhar & Batool (2022) highlight that Islamic values provide a powerful ethical framework shaping environmental behavior at individual and community levels, making their inclusion in policies a strategic imperative rather than a cultural choice. Consequently, the UAE has revived the ethical dimension of development in harmony with global environmental thought seeking models that blend science and human values.

This integrated vision regards sustainable development as a national, religious, and civilizational project simultaneously. The UAE has not limited itself to enacting environmental legislation but has actively promoted sustainability values through education, media, curricula, and awareness programs. Its sustainability strategies reflect a profound understanding of classical Islamic intellectual traditions, as evidenced by studies such as Greer (2024), which affirm that historically Islamic civilization was deeply environmental in character. Contemporary environmental literature (Ali & Agushi, 2024) further argues that combining science and values enhances societies’ capacity to address global environmental challenges. Hence, the Emirati-Islamic integration emerges as a framework demonstrating how religious values can support modern environmental policies and form a unique, replicable model regionally and globally.

Ethical Foundations in Islamic Jurisprudence and Their Role in Environmental Protection

The ethical dimension in Islamic jurisprudence forms the cornerstone for building a comprehensive framework to manage the environment and natural resources. Ethics serve as a guiding framework for individual and collective behavior, directly influencing environmental protection. Islam has established lofty principles governing humanity’s relationship with nature, such as justice, mercy, and the prohibition of harm. These principles are closely linked to the contemporary concept of sustainability, which aims to manage resources in a way that ensures well-being without harming ecological balance (Jumaa, 2020). Contemporary studies indicate that Islamic ethical values offer practical solutions to global environmental crises by drawing on a holistic spiritual vision that gives meaning to human existence and situates it within a balanced ecological network (Fakhar & Batool, 2022). Hence, ethical values are not merely theoretical constructs but constitute a foundation for practical actions that translate into effective sustainability policies.

The importance of ethics in Islamic jurisprudence is further highlighted by its holistic view of humans as stewards responsible for maintaining ecological balance. The environment is not private property but a trust shared by all, making environmental harm a violation not only of individual rights but also of societal and global rights. Jurisprudential literature emphasizes the principle of “no harm and no reciprocal harm” as a fundamental rule safeguarding the environment from various destructive practices such as pollution and the destruction of flora and fauna (Al-Khurman, 2020). Additionally, the objectives of Shariah, especially the preservation of life and wealth, directly relate to environmental protection since the environment is the habitat and sustainer of life. Recent studies link Islamic ethics to

sustainability policies, affirming that an ethical framework is what grants environmental policies their strength and effectiveness (Kamali, n.d.).

Moreover, modern research in Islamic and environmental thought asserts that ethics are the most influential factor in shaping environmental behavior, as laws—no matter how strict—will not be effective without underpinning moral values guiding individuals and communities. Literature on the relationship between religious ethics and contemporary environmental practices identifies ethical commitment as a primary driver of responsible environmental behavior (Ali & Agushi, 2024). Historical studies, such as Greer (2024), confirm that traditional Islamic thought was based on linking ethics with human development, offering a valuable resource for reinterpreting jurisprudential heritage to reshape environmental consciousness. Therefore, ethical foundations in Islamic jurisprudence represent a critical pillar for enhancing environmental protection today, providing both a moral and legal framework positively reflected in environmental policies across the Islamic world.

Utilizing Environmental Knowledge through Islamic Jurisprudence to Enhance Sustainability In The UAE

The United Arab Emirates is constructing an integrated sustainability model that combines advanced scientific knowledge with the ethical and legal perspectives offered by Islamic law, granting the Emirati experience distinctiveness within the Arab and Islamic worlds. The UAE does not rely solely on modern technology and advanced environmental planning but also draws on a value system deeply rooted in Islamic culture, viewing humans as stewards entrusted with responsible management and protection of the earth—a concept embodied in the principle of “khalifah” central to Islamic environmental thought (Al-Dhahiri, 2021). Thus, integrating environmental knowledge with Shariah principles has become a strategic vision aimed at formulating policies that achieve a genuine balance between developmental progress and resource conservation. This approach manifests in vital projects related to clean energy, water management, resource efficiency, and the development of green cities utilizing innovative technologies that consider carbon footprints and environmental pollution reduction.

Scientific literature on Islamic environmental thought reveals that relying solely on scientific knowledge is insufficient for long-term sustainability; such knowledge must be reinforced by an ethical framework that reshapes human behavior. Contemporary studies addressing Islam and environmental ethics affirm this necessity (Fakhar & Batool, 2022). In value-oriented and religiously influenced societies, incorporating Shariah principles into environmental policies is essential for raising awareness and fostering commitment, which directly impacts policy success. The UAE emphasizes this by promoting sustainability culture within educational curricula, encouraging community initiatives respecting the environment, and launching educational programs that integrate environmental sciences with ethical values. Studies indicate that Islamic principles related to justice, non-harm, and prudent resource use contribute to transforming individual and collective environmental behaviors (Kamali, n.d.), helping to cultivate a more sustainable environmental culture in society.

The UAE’s experience in applying Islamic principles within a contemporary developmental framework offers a practical model for how Islamic environmental jurisprudence can inform governmental policies. Projects such as Masdar City demonstrate the role technology can play

when managed under a comprehensive ethical vision, illustrating harmony between the Shariah principle of “no harm, no reciprocal harm” and global environmental standards aiming to reduce emissions and pollution (El Gammal & Abozaid, 2021). This confirms that Islamic jurisprudence does not oppose technological progress but guides and regulates it to achieve public interest and maintain ecological balance. Historical studies like Greer (2024) provide evidence that Islamic thought historically linked knowledge with the ethical construction of society, reinforcing the UAE’s ability to offer a modern model that integrates Islamic heritage with contemporary environmental sciences.

In conclusion, applying environmental knowledge through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence not only facilitates sustainable development but also contributes to building a civilizational model that balances human interests with cosmic stewardship. It establishes an environmental culture based on shared responsibility and respect for nature. The UAE experience demonstrates that the integration of science and values can produce a unique, scalable model capable of transforming Arab and Islamic environmental thought. With continued development and wider application of this approach in public policy, the UAE can serve as a reference point for translating Islamic principles into practical frameworks that enhance sustainability and chart a civilizational course reflecting societal identity while addressing urgent global environmental challenges. Hence, ongoing scientific research combining environmental jurisprudence and scientific knowledge is crucial to support development trajectories in the UAE and strengthen its leadership among pioneering environmental models worldwide.

Conclusion

This study indicates that Islamic environmental jurisprudence and sustainable development form an integrated epistemological and ethical system that transcends theoretical boundaries to address practical realities and contemporary environmental challenges. The Sharia texts and jurisprudential interpretations throughout history have clarified that environmental protection is not a secondary option but an intrinsic part of human responsibility as the earth’s steward. The flourishing of the cosmos can only be achieved through balance, moderation, and resource conservation. The reviewed Arabic and international literature confirm that Islam offers a broad value-based and legislative framework that can underpin modern environmental policies addressing pollution, resource depletion, ecosystem degradation, and ensuring the sustainability of life for future generations.

An analysis of the Emirati experience reveals that the UAE has successfully operationalized Islamic principles in natural resource management in a manner aligned with scientific progress, emphasizing environmental governance and innovation while preserving cultural and religious dimensions. National initiatives in clean energy, water management, recycling, and marine and terrestrial environmental protection demonstrate that the UAE is building a balanced model founded on the integration of science and values, conscious planning, and sustainable development. This model affirms that Islamic principles are not merely theoretical values but form the basis for applicable policies capable of guiding societies toward responsible environmental behavior.

Accordingly, the integration of Islamic jurisprudence with the UAE’s environmental vision represents a promising pathway worthy of emulation across the Arab and Islamic worlds. This

experience illustrates that sustainable development cannot be achieved by technical or legislative means alone but requires an integrated system involving ethics, knowledge, policies, and societal awareness. Hence, there is significant importance in deepening research on environmental jurisprudence, strengthening studies linking Islamic principles with contemporary environmental challenges, and leveraging successful experiences like the UAE's to formulate more balanced and sustainable development models. This study opens avenues for further exploration on how to activate religious values in environmental protection and reshape environmental consciousness to achieve prosperity while preserving the trust entrusted to humanity on earth.

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