

Legal Protection of Environmental Sustainability and Basic Needs Under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030: An Analytical Doctrinal Study

Dr. Aisha Mohamed Ismail Elamin^{1*}

^{1*} Assistant Professor of Civil Law, College of Business Administration,
Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University, Al-Kharj, Saudi Arabia
E-mail: a.elamin@psau.edu.sa

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7148-5872>

(Received 21 May 2026; Revised 02 July 2026, Accepted 13 August 2026; Available online 29 September 2026)

Abstract – This study investigates the legal structure safeguarding the environmental sustainability and basic needs in the Saudi regulatory system and how it is consistent with the principle of sustainable development and Saudi Vision 2030 goals. The present research has a doctrinal-analytical approach with a supporting approach in normative-institutional analysis, based on the Environmental Law of 2020, the Water Law, the Waste Management Law, the Personal Status Law of 2022, the Investment Law of 2024, and supporting regulations. The results show that the Saudi framework has been significantly modernized and introduced the internationally recognized principles of prevention, precaution, polluter-pays, and intergenerational equity in a framework of an integrated regulatory system. Convergence between environmental legislation and basic-needs legislation puts into practice a multi-layered protection system harmonized with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Persistent gaps are, however, in the areas of inter-institutional coordination, specialized environmental adjudication, open environmental data, and public legal awareness. The paper proposes to apply integrated regulatory governance, based on inter-ministerial coordination, specialized adjudication, open-data infrastructures, and structured societal engagement. The study proposes a more cohesive application of two lenses, the environmental sustainability lens and the protection of basic-needs lens, into a single analytical perspective and framework, thus creating evidence-based recommendations for the modernization of regulation in the context of Vision 2030 as well as a transferable analytical map that can be applied to contexts in the Gulf and emerging-economy regions that are dealing with comparable transitions toward a more sustainable relation with the environment.

Keywords: Basic Needs, Environmental Sustainability, Saudi Regulatory System, Sustainable Development, Vision 2030

I. INTRODUCTION

Preserving environmental sustainability and protecting basic human needs have come into focus as key priorities of modern regimes, especially in those aiming for more comprehensive socio-economic change. In the face of growing pressures from the environment, resource scarcity, climate change, and growing social demands, legal systems are increasingly taking on the function of acting as a constitutional force between the economic development imperatives and the protection of the ecological and human

basis on which it is founded. This is an intermediary role that has been witnessed in the international documentation that has been more and more adopted in the past few years, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, which impose clear sustainability aspirations as enforceable normative obligations on state and non-state actors alike.

This is a worldwide trend, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is no exception. The Kingdom is rolling out an integrated strategic approach for regional regulatory modernization with the themes of environmental sustainability, economic diversification, and social welfare as part of Vision 2030 (Creutzig et al., 2024). It has resulted in the promulgation of a new generation of laws, including the Environmental Law of 2020, the Waste Management Law, the Water Law, the Personal Status Law of 2022, and the Investment Law of 2024, that create strong connections between law creation and sustainability priorities. Overall, the trend has been towards a new normatively organized approach, moving away from a piecemeal sectoral approach and towards a new approach that is centered on the convergence of ecological protection, social welfare and investment governance, (Almulhim & Cobbinah, 2023).

Although these advances have been made, there are certain questions that have not been sufficiently studied. Doctrinal analysis of the structural connection between environmental legislation and the legal protection of basic needs, the institutional framework for the implementation of protection, and the compatibility between national law and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the implementation gaps in the context of the modernized normative framework, are all systematic aspects that require examination. The increased number of sectoral laws brings up a valid concern on coherence, consistency, and functionality, especially in the context of the swift socio-economic changes linked to Vision 2030 (Alfehaid et al., 2024). There is no scholarly work that has combined these overlaps in doctrine and compared the Saudi regulatory framework to the integrated sustainability-governance models of other similar regimes in the Gulf.

This article will fill this gap by combining doctrinal analysis with the normative-institutional inquiry. How is the Saudi legal system conceptualizing the protection of environmental sustainability and basic needs? (2) What are the main definitions of the concept of environmental sustainability in the Saudi regulatory system? (3) What are the fundamental regulations governing environmental sustainability within the Saudi regulatory system? and (4) What are the legal implications of environmental sustainability on the Saudi regulatory system? (2) How is the Saudi environmental and socio-economic legislation compatible with sustainable development and SDGs? (3) How does Vision 2030 influence the architecture of regulations and institutions in this area? (4) What are the legal, institutional, and implementation changes that strengthen the Saudi sustainability ecosystem?

The paper situates the paper against the backdrop of three well-known academic discussions: the doctrinal development of environmental law in the Anthropocene, the human-rights expression of environmental protection and the right to a healthy environment; and the regional character of the process of regulatory modernization in the Gulf Cooperation Council. The study not only contributes to the doctrinal discussions around sustainability law but also remains rooted in the operational aspects of the Saudi regulatory framework.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section II establishes the conceptual foundations of legal protection, environmental sustainability, and basic needs, and identifies the protected interests within the Saudi framework (illustrated in fig. 1). Section III examines the statutory architecture protecting environmental sustainability, centered on the Environmental Law of 2020 (illustrated in fig. 2). Section IV analyses the statutory architecture safeguarding basic needs across consumer, family, investment, labour, and health legislation. Section V evaluates Vision 2030 as a strategic legal framework. Section VI offers a cross-instrument synthesis and a comparative snapshot of GCC regulatory convergence. Section VII presents policy considerations and reform proposals. Section VIII discusses the theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future research directions. Section IX concludes. Overall, the paper argues that aligning the existing legislative framework more closely with normative principles, strengthening inter-institutional coordination, and reinforcing open environmental-data infrastructures can position the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a regional model for integrated sustainability governance and environmental rights-oriented regulation.

II. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Doctrinal Reconstruction of Legal Protection

According to modern legal theory, legal protection is the ensemble of positive laws, institutions, and rules of procedure by which a legal system preserves the substantive interests, which are considered essential to individual dignity, social order, and public welfare. It is not only through sanctions and remedies, but also through prevention or regulation,

institutional oversight, and the enforcement of rights. It is a two-dimensional concept, one substantive, based on protected interests, and the other procedural, involving the means by which these interests are enforced in the face of administrative and judicial authorities.

Legal protection does not only apply to the classic property rights and contract rights but is also applicable to collective rights and interests, intergenerational rights, and ecological integrity when it comes to environmental and basic-needs issues. In the same way, the scope of protection has also gone beyond identifiable property rights to encompass protection of the diffuse public goods such as clean air, healthy ecosystems and equitable access to water which have increasingly required new approaches to the recognition of water including procedural approaches such as public interest litigation, environmental impact assessment and participatory governance.

Follows doctrinally to the current definition of 'earth system law,' a normative paradigm that is centered around the concept of planetary boundaries, ecological complexity, and intergenerational obligations, all contained within one legal framework (Alamoudi et al., 2023). This paradigm should be broadly adopted to the extent of doctrinal and institutional development that the emerging-economy regulators have seen, particularly in those jurisdictions where a concurrent socio-economic change is taking place. One of the illustrative cases where these doctrinal changes come into conflict with the nation's priority is the Saudi regulatory system, which spawns a full sustainability ecosystem.

2.2 Environmental Sustainability as a Binding Normative Concept

Environmental sustainability has shifted from programmatic to a normative objective, with it being made an international commitment, soft law, and national legislation. The principles of sustainable development adopted to implement the Brundtland definition of sustainable development, including the principles of prevention, precaution, polluter pays, and intergenerational equity, are now the doctrinal pillars of modern environmental law (Alqahtany, 2025).

This normative architecture is complemented at the international level, where the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals play a key role across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The standing of environmental sustainability within general international law has been reinforced by the Paris Agreement and by the development of international jurisprudence in climate-related cases. At the national level, these principles have been incorporated into legislation, regulatory bodies, and national plans, creating multi-layered systems of environmental governance. This global direction is fully reflected in the Saudi regulatory framework, which is grounded and referenced in internationally acclaimed principles in the Environmental Law of 2020.

2.3 Basic Needs within Sustainable Development Theory

Access to water, food, shelter, health and a healthy environment have long been acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of human dignity and a precondition for people to be able to participate in social and economic life. In the field of Sustainable Development theory, basic needs play a crucial role as link environmental sustainability with social justice and inter-generational equity and are the substance of many SDGs. With the UNHRC 2021 recognizing environmental rights as a 'right to a healthy environment', the structural connection between protecting the environment and the realization of basic needs is reinforced and sustainability becomes a 'rights-based' concept (Yigitcanlar et al., 2019).

The legal protection of basic needs does not exist as a single law; it is the result of a system of laws and institutions that provides social protection, both at the constitutional level and through sectoral and program laws and institutional arrangements (water, food, health, housing). The Saudi context is the main driver behind this architecture, namely Vision 2030, sectoral regulations, and the Basic Law of Governance (El-Rawy et al., 2023). The link between environmental sustainability and protection of basic needs is a structural need and a policy choice that is highlighted by the geography and climate and the demographic profile and high socio-economic change appetite of the Kingdom.

2.4 Protected Interests in the Saudi Sustainability Framework

The Saudi sustainability framework has three intersecting interests. The first one is ecological integrity, which is the maintenance of the air, water, soil, and biodiversity as a basis for the future availability of resources. The second is human dignity: that water and food, shelter, health, and a clean environment are all key components in a meaningful life and must therefore be protected. Thirdly, there is intergenerational equity, which is the responsibility to protect ecological and resource situations for future generations. The following interests are linked: ecological integrity is lost, loss of access to basic needs, and loss of intergenerational equity. The Saudi regulatory landscape is articulating these interests more and more as a coherent normatively integrated whole, which is organized around Vision 2030 and the Saudi Green Initiative.

This combination of the three interests within Saudi law is doctrinal as it makes sustainability a programmatic goal and puts it on the legislator's agenda, but more importantly, it establishes it as a principle that governs substantive obligations in sectoral regulation. When the investment governance, family law or consumer protection principles are linked to environmental or resource issues, the three principles of the framework (taxonomy, protection of the environment and resources, and protection of the consumer) offer an interpretative framework to reconcile competing claims. The Saudi model is different from the other regulatory models where sustainability is a by-product of

other models and functions because it is an integrative function as in fig. 1.

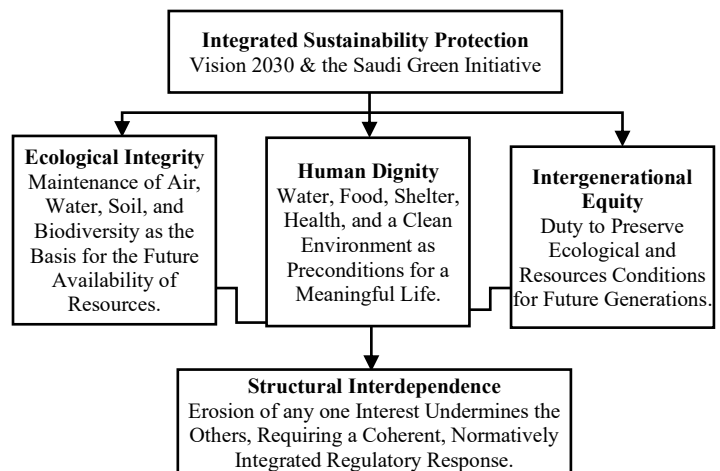


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of Protected Interests in the Saudi Sustainability Model

The framework integrates three interdependent protected interests — ecological integrity, human dignity, and intergenerational equity — under the strategic umbrella of Vision 2030 and the Saudi Green Initiative. Source: Author's analysis.

III. STATUTORY ARCHITECTURE PROTECTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

3.1 The Environmental Law of 2020 as Cornerstone Statute

The current environmental legislation of the Kingdom is based on the Environmental Law (Royal Decree No. M/165 dated 1441AH/2020). It sets a benchmark for the protection of elements of the environment, pollution prevention, control of activities of environmental activities, and environmental quality improvement. To accomplish these, the executive regulations are adopted, which set up the specific conditions and requirements for air quality, water resources, biodiversity, waste management, and environmental impact assessment (Altouma et al., 2024).

From a doctrinal point of view, the Law embodies a conscious combination of generally accepted principles in environmental protection. The prevention principle calls for the early identification and mitigation of environmental risks before cause harm; the precautionary principle allows for regulatory action where there is scientific uncertainty; and the polluter-pays principle introduces environmental costs into economic actors, while the principle of intergenerational equity links economic use of the environment with the legitimate expectations of future generations. The principles are not only declarative, but also form the content of the obligations imposed on regulated entities, the powers of the institutional framework of the supervisory bodies, and the procedural guarantees for the respective stakeholders affected as showing in fig. 2.

The legislation also lays the groundwork for the institutional framework of environmental governance, such as the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture and specialized centres for environmental compliance, meteorology and waste management. This is a significant improvement over the previous disjointed regulatory

environment (Alatawi, 2022). The incorporation of environmental impact assessment as an ex-post sanctioning process is, critically, a structural innovation, moving environmental protection "from an ex-post sanctioning process to an ex-ante regulatory discipline in the framework of investment, urban and industrial decision-making.

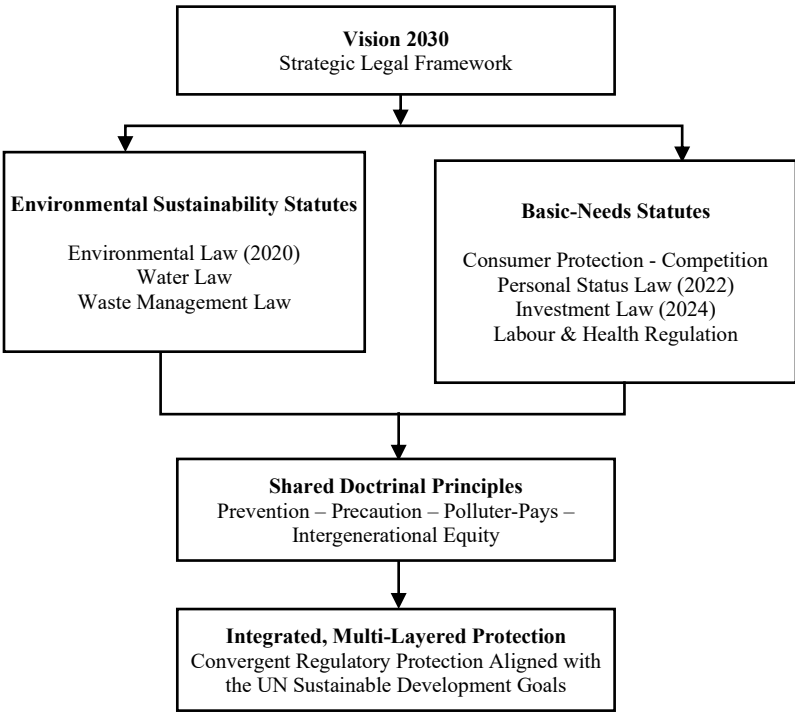


Fig. 2 Statutory Architecture Protecting Environmental Sustainability and Basic Needs

Under the strategic umbrella of Vision 2030, environmental-sustainability statutes and basic-needs statutes converge through shared doctrinal principles to deliver integrated, multi-layered protection aligned with the SDGs. Source: Author’s analysis.

3.2 Sectoral Statutes on Water, Waste, and Resource Use

Complementary legislation is used to broaden the scope to individual environmental elements. The Water Law is used for the management, allocation and protection of water resources and is influenced by priorities due to water scarcity and ensuring equity in access (Alotaibi et al., 2023). The importance of the Water Law in Saudi Arabia can be emphasized in terms of the doctrinal role played by it, as it operationalizes the structural relationship between environmental sustainability and the right to water, incorporating scarcity-sensitive principles in the management of water resources, pricing mechanisms and conservation practices. Empirical evidence shows that there have been measurable efficiency gains in the implementation of water-management reforms in line with Vision 2030, but problems remain in implementation.

In the Waste Management Law, a comprehensive regime for waste classification, treatment, and recycling, based on the principles of the circular economy, is introduced. The law's content changes the paradigm of waste management from

linear to circular, from being based on disposal to permanent value retention, and from externalizing to internalizing the environmental costs of waste production. It also contains extended-producer-responsibility (EPR) features that require the producer to take responsibility for products and services after use and provide an economic incentive for the design of products and services to take recyclability and durability into account.

The laws establish a multi-sectoral regulatory environment, which is translated into environmental sustainability in the primary sectors of resource consumption and ecological impacts. A clear legislative approach is seen, which aims to integrate environmental issues into a comprehensive and consistent legislative framework and underlines the principles of Vision 2030 and the Saudi Green Initiative. The doctrinal implications of this are that it fills the regulatory void, clarifies the meaning of a definition in a statute, and serves as a common institutional language between agencies for implementation.

3.3 Institutional Foundations of Environmental Governance

Some special institutions also implement the rules and regulations in this context, such as the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture; the National Center for Environmental Compliance; the National Center for Wildlife; the Saudi Water Authority; and courts, which have

the expertise and knowledge to solve environmental, commercial, and administrative quarrels. To coordinate these actors' actions, there must be coherence of their actions. All institutions have a definite mandate, but each works together to constitute a backbone that is functional for environmental governance in the Kingdom.

The institutional design has always been an indicator of a profound modernization, and doctrinal commentary showed that inter-institutional fragmentation, the absence of specialization of environmental cases and the uneven enforcement capacity are still present. There is an ongoing process of developing integrated regulatory governance, still on the agenda, to improve the effectiveness of operations, including the establishment of multi-ministerial committees, platforms for information sharing, and special courts. The experience of other environmentally advanced jurisdictions indicates that setting up environmental courts with scientific support and procedures tailored to the technical nature of environmental cases can have a positive impact on the deterrent value of substantive environmental laws.

3.4 Climate Governance and the Paris Agreement Interface

Saudi Arabia's ratification of the Paris Agreement and its NDC has placed an extra normative obligation on the country that can directly impact its domestic environmental framework. The sectors will be regulated, incentivized, and planned for over a longer time horizon that will be determined by the Kingdom's ambition to become a net-zero emissions economy by 2060. The two interfaces between international climate obligations and domestic environmental legislation are the transposition of international principles into the national legislation and the harmonization of the national procedures with international expectations and requirements, such as reporting, verification, and review.

The doctrinal aspect of this interface affects the development of the ecosystem of regulatory norms on the international, regional, and national levels, which interact with each other dynamically. The Saudi Green Initiative is the main platform of this interaction, and it turns the promises of the Paris Agreement into concrete working goals backed with institutional structures, systems of monitoring and monitoring systems, and sectoral integration. The empirical evidence shows that this multi-layered approach has led to greater capacity for the deployment of renewable energy sources, emissions intensity reduction, and ecosystem restoration (Hegazy & Imam, 2026).

IV. STATUTORY ARCHITECTURE SAFEGUARDING BASIC NEEDS

4.1 Consumer Protection, Competition, and Anti-Corruption Statutes

There is a web of legislation that covers the protection of basic needs; even if not all of it is expressly referred to as 'sustainability measures,' it is still directly linked to the protection of basic interests. Product safety, health, and

information, together with fair commercial practices, are the foundations of the Consumer Protection Law and are closely related to the right to food safety, health, and informed food consumption (Rau & Lorek, 2023). The substantive provisions contain a disclosure requirement for producers and retailers, a remedy for consumers who have been impacted, and powers for regulators to take action in the event of deceptive or unsafe commercial practices.

All these protections are supported by the Competition Law and the Anti-Corruption framework, which can be used to combat distortion from monopolies and misappropriation of public resources. These legislations contribute to equitable distribution of goods and services, affordability of required commodities, and resource conservation towards development priorities (Elzaki & Al-Mahish, 2024). There has been a growing link between the doctrine of competition law and sustainability: competition law results in improved resource use and more speedy sharing of innovations, while anti-corruption laws contribute to the integrity of public sector environmental expenditures.

4.2 Personal Status Law of 2022 and Family-Based Welfare

The Personal Status Law, No. (M/73) of 1443 AH (2022), is a comprehensive codification of family-law rules, which helps to maintain social stability and safeguard the welfare of the family. The statute establishes legal norms of the basic social unit life, i.e., the household, which is the main source of meeting basic needs by regulating marriage and parental responsibilities, custody, and maintenance obligations. Doctrinally, the correlation between family-law modernization and sustainability is important because sustainable basic needs, such as nutrition, education, and health, are realized in the context of sustainable families that are structurally ensured by stable families (Sharifi, 2021).

In addition, the Law has also brought in the aspects of gender equality, parental collaboration and child protection, which coincide with the international human rights conventions and strengthen the substance of social inclusion. The Personal Status Law codifies obligations that were previously scattered throughout the jurisprudential commentary, which increases the strength of the household in the face of socio-economic pressures, and in this way creates predictability, accessibility and procedural clarity. The focus on judicial review mechanisms and alternative dispute resolution and the introduction of standardization in documentation also points to a wider movement in the modernization of family law in the Gulf jurisdictions.

4.3 Investment Law of 2024 and Sustainability-Aligned Capital Flows

The Investment Law (No. M/19 of 1446 AH (2024)) is updated legislation on investment that includes provisions incorporating the investment through sustainability and predictable regulatory guarantees for domestic and foreign investors. The law is doctrinally relevant as it brings together two main fields of economic transition and environmental

governance—namely, investment incentives, screening tools, and disclosure requirements—and gradually incorporates sustainability aspects into investment law, thereby making it a structural tool to finance green and socially inclusive development (Aziz et al., 2024).

Comparatively, the investment regulatory development and sustainability programming are similar to innovations found in advanced regulatory jurisdictions, where the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspect has become part of investment screening. This Saudi model places itself in the path of "sustainability-oriented" investment governance while keeping its specific features to the national priorities and endowments of Saudi Arabia. The law also offers robust guarantees in the areas of dispute resolution, regulatory certainty, and investor protection, all of which are essential to the investment of long-term funds in sustainable energy.

4.4 Labor and Social-Protection Regulations

Another indirect—but significant—aspect is the one related to decent work, social insurance, and access to essential needs of the households as covered by the labor and social-protection regulations. The present interconnection of these laws will lead to an increasingly multi-layered system of laws that will have an impact on environmental sustainability and the protection of the fundamental needs of the population as well as strengthen each other. In other words, basic needs can be translated into welfare for households under the "umbrella" of wage protection and occupational safety and social insurance mechanisms; otherwise, even the most ambitious environmental statutes would not translate ecological achievement into welfare for the households.

This convergence is about the Saudi system's transformation from a collection of sectoral laws to a system of one central law and regulation system focused on sustainable human flourishing. This is the reason this is a coherent ecosystem: each of these laws is independent as a legal instrument, but it serves as a part of the overall framework of laws, with the protection of the environment and the promotion of social justice and economic change reinforcing each other.

4.5 Health and Food-Safety Regulation

Health is complemented by the Saudi Food and Drug Authority, which is responsible for regulating the access to safe pharmaceuticals, food products, and medical devices. The Authority's regulatory activity is overlapping with environmental laws, as it regulates inputs into agriculture and food packaging, which, besides their near intrinsic environmental spillover effects, should be captured by the environmental regulation too (Mihoub et al., 2024). The linkages between health protection and environmental legislation with basic needs protection reflect the coherence of the Saudi health and environmental laws and their compatibility with the paradigm of One Health that is emerging in international sustainability literature.

V. VISION 2030 AS A STRATEGIC LEGAL FRAMEWORK

5.1 Vision 2030 and the Constitutive Architecture of Reform

Vision 2030 is a visionary plan, and it's a normative plan as well, and that's reflected in a broad-based program of legislative reform. While its rich society, economic development, and aspirations are evident in many areas such as quality of life, economic diversification, environment, and institutional efficiency, are all visible in regulatory development (Al-Tamimi et al., 2023). The vision is thus the cement that together creates a single regulatory grammar of environmental and social aspects of sustainability.

There are three levels to the doctrinal work of Vision 2030. It is a horizon at the constitutive level that the regulatory system is oriented toward: it is a normative horizon. It outlines specific reform priorities on a programmatic level, including sustainability, diversification, and institutional modernization. At the operational level, it is the basis of the individual pieces of legislation, and it provides contextualization to the sectoral legislation when it is considered to be part of a bigger national project. With the three-tiered architecture, Vision 2030 is not a strategic plan like the others, but it has a constitutional-like role in the Saudi regulatory framework, without the constitutional formality.

5.2 The Saudi Green Initiative and Climate Governance

The Saudi Green Initiative in the area of the environment is one of the most tangible expressions Vision 2030 is providing. It establishes ambitious emissions reduction and RE targets with institutional commitments and international cooperation, afforestation, and ecosystem restoration targets. It is aligned to the Paris Agreement and the climate-governance framework, depicting how the national priorities are linked to the international commitments (Almazroui et al., 2021).

Quantitative targets are not the only aspect that matters in the structural significance of the initiative, but its institutional density as well. Cross-ministerial committees, sectoral implementation plans, and ongoing monitoring systems exist to help support the transformation of strategic objectives to measurable outcomes. The Initiative is also a mechanism for cooperation between countries and a pillar for Saudi Arabia to participate in the climate platforms in the region and international multilateral agreements. The empirical analyses indicate that the initiative has helped to speed up the deployment of renewable energy capacity and strengthened the institutional conditions for long-term climate.

5.3 Food, Water, and Energy Strategies as Basic-Needs Instruments

The food-security and renewable-energy strategies offer the link between environment and basic-needs protection, which is put into operation. These strategies help protect and ensure access to water, food, and energy, with the added benefit of increasing the efficiency of water use, supporting domestic agriculture, and supporting the expansion of clean energy,

which decreases the ecological footprint of socio-economic activity. The coincidence of the two fundamental functions of resource-protection legislation and basic-needs realization has led to an innovative aspect of the Saudi regulatory model: the objectives of the ecological and social functions are not separate in the model but are rather combined in a single policy architecture.

A doctrinal significance is given to this integration by the institutional design in the service of this integration. Inter-ministerial coordination, with data-sharing and common performance metrics, brings some coherence to the agency level and puts strategic priorities into practice. The model thus provides a replicable framework for the regulators in emerging economies who wish to embed environmental sustainability and protection for basic needs in their overall national framework.

TABLE I PRINCIPAL SAUDI STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS AND THEIR SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS

Statutory Instrument	Principal Regulatory Function	SDG Alignment
Environmental Law (2020)	Pollution prevention, environmental impact assessment, biodiversity protection	SDG 13, 14, 15
Water Law	Water resource management, allocation, and equitable access	SDG 2, 6
Waste Management Law	Waste classification, treatment, recycling, circular-economy alignment	SDG 11, 12
Consumer Protection Law	Product safety, transparency, sustainable consumption	SDG 3, 12
Competition Law	Market integrity and prevention of monopolistic practices	SDG 8, 10
Anti-Corruption Regulations	Protection of public resources and governance integrity	SDG 16
Personal Status Law (2022)	Family-law codification and social stability	SDG 5, 10
Investment Law (2024)	Investment governance aligned with sustainability priorities	SDG 8, 9
Vision 2030 & Saudi Green Initiative	Strategic framework integrating sustainability across sectors	Multi-SDG framework

Source: Author's analysis based on Saudi statutes and Vision 2030 documents.

VI. CROSS-INSTRUMENT SYNTHESIS AND COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOT

6.1 Integration between Environmental and Basic-Needs Statutes

The Saudi regulatory landscape suggests a convergence in the structure of environmental laws (based on the Environmental

Law of 2020 and its industry-specific extensions) and basic-needs laws through consumer, competition, family and investment laws. This convergence translates an inter-layered system where ecological integrity is being protected as well as human dignity is being safeguarded by different normative ways that are complementary and not parallel.

There are three features of the structure that are worthy of note. Firstly, the domestic framework is grounded in the international doctrinal framework, the principles of which are widely accepted in international environmental law, namely prevention, precaution, polluter-pays, and inter-generational equity. Second, the nature of Vision 2030 as a normative framework translates the connection between environmental and socio-economic goals, thus making sustainability a cross-cutting regulatory priority (Kahia et al., 2024). Third, as mentioned above, the multi-statutory structure of the laws on the protection of basic needs such as consumer protection, family law, and investment regulation can be used to create a multi-layer system of protection, which contributes to the realization of fundamental human interests together with environmental protection.

6.2 Comparative Snapshot: GCC Regulatory Convergence

A comparative perspective adds to this the importance of this regulatory change. The recent regulatory modernization process in the GCC region is a regional process, as national visions are driving the process of environmental and social legal modernization across the region (Alodah, 2023). The UAE's federal sustainability program and Qatar's National Vision 2030 are illustrative of the broader trend: each of the Gulf States has legislated an integrated program of sustainability that is guided by a vision and that includes environmental regulation, investment modernization, and protection of the basic needs, all within a single strategic boundary.

In this regional convergence there are three distinctive features of the Saudi model. The first is that the provisions on pollution prevention, biodiversity, environmental impact assessment, and inter-institutional coordination are integrated into one statute (Environmental Law of 2020), which in the region is one of the most comprehensive single statutes. Secondly, the Saudi Green Initiative offers a level of specificity to climate governance, which is not replicated by many other initiatives in the region, and specific targets and specific implementation mechanisms. Third, the compatibility of the Investment Law of 2024 with the sustainable goals reflects an awareness of the need to introduce the concept of "green investment" into the region's regulatory framework in line with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's efforts to lead the world in sustainability (Faisal et al., 2024).

In the other jurisdictions, it is those that are not in the region but more environmentally advanced, such as the European Union, that have created more specific procedural instruments for settlement of environmental disputes, public participation, and access to environmental information under

the umbrella of the European Green Deal. Some of the procedural innovations are appropriate for selective transition and applied in the Saudi context, such as the environmental data, special adjudication, and PIL.

6.3 Persistent Implementation Gaps

The aim of the regulatory framework is to be substantive, but its effectiveness is limited by four implementation gaps. The first is the lack of integration, at the policy level, among environmental, water, and food policies and urban policies, with the resulting gaps and overlaps at the operational level. Second, the lack of specialization in environmental adjudication reduces the enforcement of environmental rights and the punishment of violations of the law as it applies to the environment. The third is the comparatively small amount of environmental information that is publicly available, meaning that it is not completely transparent, does not drive academic research, and does not enable civic engagement. The last is the uneven public legal awareness, which limits the sensitivity of the regulatory system to its social context (Mrabet & Sliti, 2026).

These gaps are not unique to the Saudi context, but are those that are faced by regulators in emerging economies in their process of rapid modernization. Their identification, however, is doctrinally significant in that it provides guidance to reform efforts for their attention on reforming the structural rather than the substantive aspects of the regulatory framework. Beautiful statues, but hard to implement; the "stickiness" is in the institutions, information, and culture necessary to make substantive ambition into action.

6.4 Doctrinal Convergence with the SDGs

The third "synthetic dimension" is the linkage of Saudi laws with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. As can be seen in table I, each of the principal statutes is associated with at least one SDG, and many statutes—in particular, the Environmental Law and the Investment Law—are linked to several SDGs at the same time. This multi-goal alignment is doctrinally relevant, as it turns the SDGs into structural references that impact the statutory interpretation and the implementation of regulations.

The SDGs are embedded in the Saudi framework through three mechanisms: doctrinally, policy, and system. The doctrinal embedding of SDGs in Saudi framework is addressed in three ways: doctrinally, policy and system. First, the SDGs are often included in the preambles of the statutes and the executive regulations, which in turn, often refer to principles of sustainability found in international law. Second, institutional requirements are increasingly becoming more aligned with SDG related performance indicators, making regulatory practice a quantifiable part of the SDG. Third and importantly, Vision 2030, and the Saudi Green Initiative, clearly state the links between the national priorities and the 2030 Agenda, thus justifying the sectoral regulation. The Saudi model is unique in its three-tier

alignment system, which goes beyond regulatory models in which SDGs are only aspirational standards.

VII. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS AND REFORM PROPOSALS

The following reform proposals should be considered in order to achieve the Saudi regulatory framework's operational effectiveness and deepen its integration with the strategic priorities of Vision 2030:

1. *Enhance the effectiveness of IREG.* Create linkages between intersectoral policies and establish interministerial coordination mechanisms between environmental, water, and food policies and urban policies; harmonize executive measures in sectoral legislation to reduce overlaps in the operations and promote coherence. As a first step, it would be important to create institutional frameworks for sustainability coordination through the establishment of a national sustainability coordination council, supported by binding inter-agency protocols that would make it easier to align national Vision 2030 priorities with sectoral regulation (Alomari & Heffron, 2021).
2. *Create a specialized environmental adjudication.* Establish specific judicial circuits, judicial training, scientific advisory mechanisms, and rules of procedure for the handling of environmental cases that are scientific and technical in nature. The experience of other countries indicates that using environmental adjudication is an effective way of improving the deterrent effect of substantive environmental laws. Comparative experience indicates that special environmental adjudication has a tangible, positive impact on the deterrent effect of substantive environmental laws.
3. *Increase the scale of open environmental data infrastructures.* Create publicly available databases of permits, emissions, compliance information, and enforcement data to increase transparency and civic engagement and research into sustainability, similar to what has been seen in successful advanced sustainability jurisdictions (Yang et al., 2020). Another structural barrier to regulatory capture and corruption is open data infrastructures.
4. *Consolidate Community Engagement.* Organize a legal-awareness campaign nationwide and sustainability-related education programs, and establish structured partnerships with civil society, academia, and the private sector to foster a sustainability culture within the legal community and the public at large (Steenmans & Lesniewska, 2023). The building up of civic awareness activates the regulated subjects into stakeholders and enhances the deterrent and compliance roles of substantive regulation.
5. *Formalize RIA.* Ensure mandatory pre- and post-legislative scrutiny of all key laws with environmental sustainability and basic needs impacts to drive legislative development and ongoing learning in the

regulatory process. Regulatory impact assessment institutionalizes the doctrinal principles of evidence-based policymaking and helps to improve the statutory instruments based on implementation experience.

6. *Reinforce SDG Alignment.* Establish a systematic mapping process of the domestic laws to the UN-SDGs, perform periodic assessments, and incorporate international best practices into the development of Saudi laws (Zhao et al., 2022). The reporting of an SDG-alignment reports every year would allow the diagnostic discipline underlying the continuous regulatory modernization to be brought together.
7. *Institutionalize Inter-Generational Equity.* Take environmental restoration and climate resilience measures into account within resource management laws and create specific environmental restoration and climate resilience funds based on the principle of intergenerational justice. The codification of intergenerational obligations would put sustainability not only on the agenda programmatically but also make it a constitutional pillar in the Saudi legal system.
8. *Enhance CBRC.* Continue bilateral/multilateral cooperation with regional, international, and Gulf partners to further harmonize sustainability standards and share regulatory practices and green investment across borders. This cooperation strengthens the Kingdom's position in the global sustainability community and boosts the coherence of the work of regional regulatory frameworks.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The analytical framework which has been integrated into the Research in this study makes two contributions to the doctrinal literature on sustainability law, namely: firstly, the perspective and approach to sustainability law are original and new; and secondly, the analytical framework of sustainability law is applied to the specific context of the Philippines. The first is to make the structural link between environmental sustainability and protection of basic needs expressed in one regulatory analysis, moving beyond the sectoral approach of traditional environmental law. The framework illustrates how the three strands of protecting ecological integrity, protecting human dignity and ensuring intergenerational equity are not independent goals, but interdependent aspects of a comprehensive regulatory effort.

What this study brings to the comparative legal scholarship is, on the one hand, the importance of the national strategic frameworks (Vision 2030) for the doctrinal lineage of sustainability law and, on the other, the involvement of the state in formulating sustainability law. The integrated approach presented here takes strategic documents as being part of a regulatory ecosystem, while a traditional

comparative approach will analyze single statutes. Such a transition paves new ways forward in the analytical approach to the study of vision-led regulatory modernization in the Gulf, MENA, and other emerging economies' jurisdictions (Touati & Saad, 2024).

Third, the study contributes to doctrinal scholarship relating to the rights to a healthy environment, since it shows how this right is implemented in a statutory framework that is integrated instead of through a single constitutional provision. The case of the Saudi framework shows how good coordination of sectoral regulation based on a common strategy can achieve the effective substantive protection of environmental rights (Knox, 2020). This awareness has implications for jurisdictions where the formal recognition of environmental rights is contested, but the modernization of the regulatory framework can still lead to a substantive protection of environmental rights.

8.2 Practical Implications for Policymakers and Practitioners

The study presents four policy directions of policymakers and regulators. The first relates to structural integration—the integration of environmental, water, food, and urban policies in a coordinated governance package of regulatory instruments and inter-ministerial governance processes. The latter is institutional reinforcement, developing scientific capacity in regulatory bodies, and establishing transparent data infrastructure and developing specialized adjudication. The third is the involvement of the society in the mobilization of awareness, education, and civic participation as the multiplier for the effectiveness of the law. The fourth is international alignment that aims at the reinforcement of relations with the international and regional partners with the purpose of harmonizing standards and green investment cross-border (Aloshan & Aldali, 2025).

The integrated framework provides an operational prism for environmental lawyers to provide their clients with an idea of where there is overlap between environmental compliance law and investment governance and basic needs protection. The framework created here enables corporate counsel to tackle the complexities of regulatory issues that are now faced by practitioners, with multiple statutes involved, not piecemeal but in an integrated, comprehensive, and conjunctive analytical manner. The study suggests several potential research priorities for future empirical research: the effectiveness of inter-ministerial coordination, the comparative effectiveness of environmental adjudication models, and the effect of open environmental data on environmental regulatory compliance.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study has a number of limitations, which are recognized. First, the doctrinal-analytical method is appropriate to the analysis of normative coherence and the design of institutions, but it fails to provide empirical data on the outcomes of implementation; future research using a

combination of doctrinal and empirical methods as well as a combination of doctrinal and regulatory effectiveness analysis methods, or a methodological approach that relies exclusively on empirical methods, such as a stakeholder survey or a quantitative compliance assessment, would enrich the present analysis. Second, the Saudi system should be compared with the systems in the Gulf countries and other international systems as well to enrich the empirical base in assessing the distinctive features of the Saudi model.

Thirdly, legislation in Saudi Arabia is constantly being developed, and the analytical lens provided in this research should always be monitored in light of this development, as legislation forming the current framework may be amended, supplemented, or overturned in short periods of time. Fourth, the study has focused on doctrinal analysis rather than empirical case studies; future research based on the combination of document analysis and field-based investigation of regulatory practice would greatly enhance the understanding of the way in which the regime works in practice (Alqahtani et al., 2021).

The following are the avenues of future research suggested by the study: An empirical study of the effectiveness of vision-led regulatory modernization in achieving measurable sustainability outcomes, particularly in the Gulf, MENA, and beyond; An empirical study of the effectiveness of vision-led regulatory modernization in the Saudi courts, which will examine the evolution of environmental rights jurisprudence in the Saudi courts; An empirical study of the impact of sustainability statutes on investment governance, particularly in the Gulf; and an empirical study of the impact of digital infrastructures, including AI and open data platforms, on the implementation of sustainability statutes. All of these directions have fertile ground to continue the scholarly debate on the structural transformation of sustainability law in the twenty-first century.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Saudi regulatory framework has clearly marked a step towards mainstreaming environmental sustainability and ensuring the protection of basic needs in the legislative and decision-making processes. This holistic approach does not only target the updating of individual legal provisions, but the integration of sustainability principles in all sectoral regulations, in line with national priorities and (international) sustainable development standards. The Saudi example presents a possible case study for sustainability transitions in other emerging economies, particularly in the Gulf States. In order to make this framework more effective, ongoing institutional reinforcement needs to take place, such as improving inter-agency coordination, developing specific environmental adjudication mechanisms, establishing accessible data management systems, and establishing an institutional mechanism for the participation of the public. These are all key components of a regulatory assessment to make sure that both economic growth and environmental protection are pursued together for the benefit of current and future generations. While there has been some progress, there

are also implementation, institutional capacity and awareness issues. With the rising importance of sustainability issues and the increasingly complex regulatory framework, addressing these gaps will be key. Areas for future research include an empirical examination of sustainability regulations by way of stakeholder survey and compliance assessment, and comparative analysis with the GCC and international models. Additional areas to be examined might include environmental adjudication effectiveness, digital environmental databases, AI governance tools, and the lasting effects of Vision 2030 regulations on sustainable development. In general, the study provides a practical model of doctrine for emerging economies in a quest for sustainable governance and it strengthens the legal basis of integrated environmental and basic-needs protection in the Saudi legal system.

Acknowledgment

“The authors extend their appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the project number (PSAU/2025/2025/02/36991)”

REFERENCES

- [1] Alamoudi, A. K., Abidoye, R. B., & Lam, T. Y. (2023). The impact of citizens' participation level on smart sustainable cities outcomes: Evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Buildings*, 13(2), 343. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings13020343>
- [2] Alatawi, A. S. (2022). Conservation action in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and opportunities. *Saudi Journal of Biological Sciences*, 29(5), 3466-3472. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sjbs.2022.02.031>
- [3] Alfehaid, F., Omri, A., & Altwaijri, A. (2024). Impact of ICT diffusion and opportunity entrepreneurship on environmental sustainability in Saudi Arabia. *Heliyon*, 10(19), e39009. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39009>
- [4] Almazroui, M., Saeed, F., Saeed, S., Ismail, M., Ehsan, M. A., Islam, M. N., Abid, M. A., O'Brien, E., Kamil, S., Rashid, I. U., & Shrestha, B. S. (2021). Projected changes in climate extremes using CMIP6 simulations over SREX regions. *Earth Systems and Environment*, 5(3), 481-497. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41748-021-00250-5>
- [5] Almulhim, A. I., & Cobbinah, P. B. (2023). Urbanization-environment conundrum: an invitation to sustainable development in Saudi Arabian cities. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 30(4), 359-373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504509.2022.2152199>
- [6] Alodah, A. (2023). Towards sustainable water resources management considering climate change in the case of Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 15(20), 14674. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su152014674>
- [7] Alomari, M. A., & Heffron, R. J. (2021). Environmental Impact Assessment: A Middle Eastern Experience. *Journal of Environmental Law*, 33(2), 309-338. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jel/eqab002>
- [8] Alosan, M. A., & Aldali, K. (2025). The role of regional codes in mitigating residential sector energy demand sensitivity to climate change scenarios in hot-arid regions. *Buildings*, 15(11), 1789. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings15111789>
- [9] Alotaibi, B. A., Baig, M. B., Najim, M. M., Shah, A. A., & Alami, Y. A. (2023). Water scarcity management to ensure food scarcity through sustainable water resources management in Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 15(13), 10648. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su151310648>

- [10] Alqahtani, F. K., El Qasaby, A. R., & Abotaleb, I. S. (2021). Urban development and sustainable utilization: challenges and solutions. *Sustainability*, 13(14), 7902. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13147902>
- [11] Alqahtany, A. M. (2025). Smart cities as a pathway to sustainable urbanism in the Arab world: A case analysis of Saudi cities. *Sustainability*, 17(4), 1525. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17041525>
- [12] Al-Tamimi, K. A. M., Jaradat, M. S., YachouAityassine, F. L., & Soumadi, M. M. (2023). Impact of renewable energy on the economy of Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, 13(3), 20-27. <https://doi.org/10.32479/ijeep.14099>
- [13] Altouma, A., Bashir, B., Ata, B., Ocwa, A., Als Salman, A., Harsányi, E., & Mohammed, S. (2024). An environmental impact assessment of Saudi Arabia's vision 2030 for sustainable urban development: a policy perspective on greenhouse gas emissions. *Environmental and Sustainability Indicators*, 21, 100323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indic.2023.100323>
- [14] Aziz, G., Strielkowski, W., Sarwar, S., & Tiwari, A. K. (2024). Implications of circular economy, digitalization and technological innovation to achieve sustainable environmental goal: Pre and post-vision 2030. *Heliyon*, 10(10). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e30978>
- [15] Creutzig, F., Becker, S., Berrill, P., Bongs, C., Bussler, A., Cave, B., ... & Zekar, A. (2024). Towards a public policy of cities and human settlements in the 21st century. *npj Urban Sustainability*, 4(1), 29. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42949-024-00168-7>
- [16] El-Rawy, M., Fathi, H., Zijl, W., Alshehri, F., Almadani, S., Zaidi, F. K., ... & Gabr, M. E. (2023). Potential effects of climate change on agricultural water resources in Riyadh region, Saudi Arabia. *Sustainability*, 15(12), 9513. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15129513>
- [17] Elzaki, R. M., & Al-Mahish, M. (2024). Food insecurity and water management shocks in Saudi Arabia: Bayesian VAR analysis. *PLoS one*, 19(1), e0296721. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0296721>
- [18] Faisal, S., Khan, A. M., Zulfikar, Z., & Bafaqeer, S. M. (2024). Saudi Arabia's green vision: examining the Kingdom's path to sustainability, covering energy, economy, tourism, and carbon dynamics. *International Journal of Energy Economics and Policy*, 14(3), 154-161. <https://doi.org/10.32479/ijeep.15784>
- [19] Hegazy, I., & Imam, A. (2026). Adapting the low carbon cities framework for Saudi Arabia: a comparative assessment of Riyadh and Jeddah under Vision 2030 and implications for sustainable social housing. *Frontiers in Built Environment*, 11, 1751703. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fbuil.2025.1751703>
- [20] Kahia, M., Jarraya, B., Kahouli, B., & Omri, A. (2024). The role of environmental innovation and green energy deployment in environmental protection: Evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(1), 337-363. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-022-01093-9>
- [21] Knox, J. H. (2020). Constructing the human right to a healthy environment. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 16(1), 79-95. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsoecsci-031720-074856>
- [22] Mihoub, A., Kahia, M., & Alswailim, M. (2024). Measuring the impact of technological innovation, green energy, and sustainable development on the health system performance and human well-being: evidence from a machine learning-based approach. *AIMS Environmental Science*, 11(5), 703-722. <https://doi.org/10.3934/envirosci.2024035>
- [23] Mrabet, M., & Sliti, M. (2026). Advancing Sustainable Urban Development in Saudi Arabia: Assessing Smart-City Initiatives Through a Verification-Oriented Framework. *Urban Science*, 10(5), 251. <https://doi.org/10.3390/urbansci10050251>
- [24] Rau, H., & Lorek, S. (2023). Insights in sustainable consumption: 2022. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, 4, 1281924. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2023.1281924>
- [25] Sharifi, A. (2021). Urban sustainability assessment: An overview and bibliometric analysis. *Ecological Indicators*, 121, 107102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2020.107102>
- [26] Steenmans, K., & Lesniewska, F. (2023). Limitations of the circular economy concept in law and policy. *Frontiers in Sustainability*, 4, 1154059. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsus.2023.1154059>
- [27] Touati, M., & Saad, M. A. (2024). Investment Management as a Mechanism for Economic Diversification in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: between Opportunities and Challenges-Analytical and Foresight Study 2030 Vision. *Management and Economics Review*, 9(3), 470-482. <https://doi.org/10.24818/mer/2024.03-05>
- [28] Yang, S., Zhao, W., Liu, Y., Cherubini, F., Fu, B., & Pereira, P. (2020). Prioritizing sustainable development goals and linking them to ecosystem services: A global expert's knowledge evaluation. *Geography and Sustainability*, 1(4), 321-330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geosus.2020.09.004>
- [29] Yigitcanlar, T., Kamruzzaman, M., Foth, M., Sabatini-Marques, J., Da Costa, E., & Ioppolo, G. (2019). Can cities become smart without being sustainable? A systematic review of the literature. *Sustainable cities and society*, 45, 348-365. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2018.11.033>
- [30] Zhao, W., Yin, C., Hua, T., Meadows, M. E., Li, Y., Liu, Y., ... & Fu, B. (2022). Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the post-pandemic era. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9(1), 258. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01283-5>