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Ecotheology in Public Procurement: Systematic Review in Reshaping Interrelationships Between Religion, Nature, and Humanity to Answer Economic Challenges in the Digital Era

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Abstract: The relation between the digital economy, procurement, and ecotheology is complex and contradictory. The digital economy provides powerful tools to make procurement more sustainable, aligning with ecotheological goals. However, it also presents significant environmental and ethical challenges, such as energy consumption and e-waste, that procurement must address to uphold ecotheological principles. This study examines the ecological approach in public procurement further. This study is a literature review as an application of a qualitative approach with several reasons. Especially, when done well, it makes it possible synthesis combine dissimilar discoveries to produce new theoretical frameworks or conceptual models, transforming existing knowledge into a fresh contribution. The conclusion is that in order to match government expenditure with long-term ecological, social, and economic health, embracing this viewpoint is not just a "nice-to-have" but rather a basic requirement. However, in order to redefine success beyond short-term cost savings, considerable institutional and cultural barriers must be overcome. Even while this strategy provides a strong moral foundation for building a just and sustainable economy, there are substantial institutional and cultural obstacles to overcome before its full potential can be achieved.

Keyword: Digital Economy, Ecotheology, Public Procurement

INTRODUCTION

Economy in the digital era or also called "digital economy" (Xia, Baghaie, & Sajadi, 2024) describes a group of business and economic endeavors that make use of electronic communications and digital technologies. Activities including e-commerce, digital marketing, digital financial services, digital content creation, software, computer games, cloud services, and more are frequently included in this kind of economy (Wirtz, 2024). There has been a significant movement towards online and digital business contacts in the Digital economy, where economic and commercial activities are carried out via digital technologies and electronic communications (Sabbagh, 2021). In certain nations, this new

economy has been identified as the main force behind economic development and growth. It is expanding and growing as a result of the unique significance of digital technologies.

As a result, the digital economy gives consumers and companies the chance to obtain goods and services more swiftly and easily, as well as to enjoy better user experiences overall. Numerous economic, social, and cultural spheres are greatly impacted by the rapidly changing digital economy (Imamov & Semenikhina, 2021). The global economy is becoming more digital as a result of technological and electronic communications advancements. The digital economy is expanding and developing due to the unique significance of digital technology, and in many nations, it has been identified as the main force behind economic growth and development (Zang et al., 2022).

For the public sector, the challenges of the digital economy need to be addressed with innovation strategies. In a context of rising public expectations, a growing population, and economic uncertainty, governments are under pressure to improve the cost-effectiveness of public services (Monteiro, Hlacs, & Boéchat, 2024). At the same time, governments must address complex challenges such as climate change, public health crises, educational service needs, and digital transformation (Goniewicz, Burkle, & Khorram-Manesh, 2024; Eom & Lee, 2022). The phenomenon shown by this literature has relevance to the Indonesian context, especially with the latest policies implemented by the government in the form of budget efficiency (Farida, 2025; Kusuma & Syarif, 2025).

In the midst of these conditions, innovation becomes very important in overcoming the above problems and increasing the effectiveness of the public sector. If we refer to the literature, one area that can be given attention is the procurement. Procurement in the public sector plays a central role in encouraging innovation because governments can stimulate innovation by actively seeking new products, services and technologies (Edler & Georghiou, 2007; Uyarra et al., 2014). In implementation, procurement has played many roles in the public sector such as being a catalyst for public-private collaboration, having value for business (for example, by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) or stimulating innovation), and can bring new resources, services, solutions, and methods directly into government operations (Monteiro, Hlacs, & Boéchat, 2024). In addition, procurement is the largest platform for government interaction with the private sector, because the government is the main buyer of various categories of goods, services and public works.

However, procurement faces common problems include supply chain disruptions, high costs, and inefficient processes (Wankmüller & Reiner, 2021). Other issues include inaccurate needs analysis, poor supplier management, lack of spend visibility, and risks like quality control and delivery problems (Olaleye et al., 2024). Inefficient, manual processes and poor internal communication also frequently lead to delays and errors. Integrating sustainability into procurement faces challenges including high initial costs, a lack of knowledge, and resistance to change from suppliers and internal stakeholders. Public procurement is especially vulnerable to corruption and mismanagement, which hinder progress toward sustainable development goals (Hope, 2022). Environmentally and socially responsible products and services are often more expensive upfront than conventional options, creating a perception that sustainable choices are not economically viable. For example, green products often exceed budgetary limits, leading to the selection of cheaper, conventional alternatives (Orfanidou et al., 2023).

Therefore, the thought arises that procurement needs to adopt an ecotheological approach because it provides a deep moral and ethical foundation that elevates purchasing decisions beyond mere cost and compliance, viewing the planet and its resources as a sacred or divinely mandated trust (Masoga, 2024). While "sustainable procurement" focuses on the economic, environmental, and social aspects (the Triple Bottom Line), an ecotheological approach injects a spiritual and moral urgency, ensuring commitment to sustainability is non-

negotiable and long-term. Therefore, this study examines the ecological approach in public procurement further.

METHOD

This study is a literature review as an application of a qualitative approach. When a literature review is the methodology, it goes far beyond simply summarizing sources; it involves a rigorous, systematic, and critical analysis to answer a specific research question. A literature review acts as a compass, an inventory of knowledge, and a source of credibility from this study. This study examines credible and rigorous literature sources (especially for a thesis, dissertation, or journal article)

Literature reviews are used for several reasons. A literature review gives a comprehensive understanding of what is already known about topic study, including its historical development and current state. This is arguably the most crucial advantage. By synthesizing existing knowledge, this study can pinpoint what has not been studied, what remains inconclusive, or where existing theories fail to explain a phenomenon. This gap then justifies the need and originality of this study. Literature review helps identify the main theories, models, and concepts that drive study. This allows to place study within a relevant theoretical framework. A literature review clarifies how key terms and concepts have been defined and operationalized by other scholars, ensuring use precise and widely accepted language. When done rigorously, it allows to synthesize disparate findings to create new conceptual models or theoretical frameworks, turning existing knowledge into a novel contribution.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ecotheology Concept

Ecotheology is a field of study that integrates theology and ecology, reinterpreting religious teachings through the lens of environmental concerns to promote stewardship and responsibility for nature (Şencan, 2025). It argues that religious worldviews have a profound impact on our relationship with the environment and seeks to address ecological crises by grounding ethical behavior in faith. Ecotheology reexamines religious texts and traditions to find a spiritual basis for environmental protection, viewing the Earth as a divine creation or trust that humanity is tasked with caring for (Abadi et al., 2022).

Ecotheology reinterprets texts suggesting human dominion over nature to mean stewardship or caretaking, not domination and exploitation. It emphasizes that humans are a part of creation, not its absolute owners (Ibe & Anthony, 2023). It argues that a relationship exists between humans, God, and all of creation, both living and non-living. This view challenges theological traditions that have focused too heavily on the human soul at the expense of the rest of the natural world. Caring for the environment is presented as a moral and spiritual imperative rooted in faith, not just a secular concern. Protecting the Earth is seen as an act of worship and a reflection of a religious commitment. Ecotheology uses scripture as a foundation to develop an environmental ethic that guides human actions and responsibilities toward the Earth (Anabaraonye et al., 2024). It seeks to identify and offer solutions for environmental degradation.

In ecotheology, the interrelationships between religion, nature, and humanity are viewed as deeply interconnected and mutually influencing (see Table 1). This framework posits that religious worldviews shape human attitudes and behaviors toward nature, which in turn affects the state of the environment. These dynamics are complex and can either contribute to ecological problems or offer pathways toward restoration.

Table 1. Interrelationships Between Religion, Nature, and Humanity in Ecotheology

Aspects	Roles	Descriptions
Religion	Shaping a worldview (Ives et al., 2024; Luetz, 2024)	Religion provides a narrative about humanity's place in the cosmic order. An anthropocentric (human-centered) interpretation can lead to a sense of human dominance over nature, viewing it merely as a resource for human use. In contrast, an ecocentric interpretation emphasizes humanity's role as part of a larger interconnected web of life, fostering a sense of reverence and responsibility for the natural world.
	Providing ethical guidance (Hidayat, 2023; Poudel, 2025)	Religious ethics can offer moral guidance for how humans should interact with nature. Concepts such as "stewardship" in Christianity, khalifah (trusteeship) in Islam, and ahimsa (non-violence) in Hinduism frame environmental care as a spiritual duty and an act of faith.
	Influencing social norms (Hahne, 2024; Sabir, Tennhardt, & Home, 2025)	Religious institutions and teachings play a significant role in shaping community values and social norms. By integrating ecological values into sermons, education, and social action, religions can raise collective awareness and foster environmentally conscious attitudes and behaviors within their communities.
Nature	Sacred and symbolic value (Odey et al., 2023)	Across many religious traditions, nature is not just a backdrop for human life but is imbued with sacred meaning. Mountains, rivers, forests, and other natural phenomena are often seen as manifestations of the divine or as sacred places. This perspective gives nature an intrinsic value beyond its utility to humans, making its protection an act of spiritual significance.
	A source of revelation (Anthony, 2022)	For many, nature serves as a "book of revelation," a way of understanding God or the divine. The beauty, order, and complexity of the natural world can inspire a sense of wonder and connection to a higher power. This experience can foster deep ecological awareness and a motivation to protect creation.
	Shaping human experience and culture (Mics, 2025; Şencan, 2025)	The natural environment has profoundly shaped human societies, cultures, and religious practices. From agricultural cycles influencing religious calendars to specific landscapes becoming pilgrimage sites, nature and human life are inextricably linked. Ecotheology recognizes and affirms this deep historical and cultural symbiosis.
Human	As agents of change (Lahtinen, 2025; Poudel, 2025)	Humanity acts as a central agent in this interrelationship, with the power to cause both immense destruction and profound restoration. An exploitative, anthropocentric worldview can lead to environmental degradation and imbalances, threatening not only other species but also human well-being.

Aspects	Roles	Descriptions
	As co-creators and partners (Sollereeder, 2021)	Ecotheology calls for humanity to see itself not as a master of nature, but as a co-creator and partner in the ongoing process of creation. This involves actively working toward ecological restoration, promoting sustainability, and advocating for policies that protect the environment.
	As moral agents (Lahtinen, 2025; Şencan, 2025)	By reinterpreting religious texts and embracing ecological ethics, humanity can become a moral agent for change. This includes challenging consumerism, fighting for environmental justice, and transforming lifestyles to align with a more sustainable and just world.

In essence, ecotheology views the health of nature, the spiritual state of humanity, and the integrity of religious traditions as a single, interdependent reality. The environmental crisis is thus seen not just as a technical or political problem but as a spiritual crisis rooted in a broken relationship among religion, humanity, and nature. The solution, therefore, requires a spiritual and ethical transformation alongside practical actions.

Why Does Public Procurement Need to Adopt an Ecotheological Perspective?

Adopting an ecotheological perspective in procurement moves beyond merely meeting sustainability targets to grounding procurement decisions in a deeper ethical framework. Instead of viewing natural resources as limitless assets for human use, ecotheology sees them as elements of a sacred, interconnected creation that must be protected. This reframing of purpose provides a more profound and robust motivation for sustainable and ethical sourcing.

An ecotheological perspective transforms procurement from a cost-driven function into a vehicle for enacting a greater ethical vision. It gives shifts from tactical to purposeful procurement with indications:

1. Beyond risk mitigation (Masoga, 2024). Traditional sustainable procurement often focuses on mitigating risks associated with regulations, reputation, or supply chain volatility. An ecotheological approach goes further, seeing environmental and social harm as a moral failure, not just a business risk.
2. From compliance to moral imperative (Langdon, 2025). Companies often adopt sustainable practices to comply with laws or stakeholder demands. While effective, this can lead to "greenwashing." An ecotheological perspective creates a moral imperative for authentic action, driven by a conviction that responsible stewardship is the right thing to do.
3. A "whole-of-life" approach (Gordon, 2023). Ecotheology pushes procurement to consider the entire lifecycle of a product or service, from the ethical sourcing of raw materials to the impact of its disposal. This shifts the focus from a transaction to a long-term commitment to ecological responsibility.

Adopting an ecotheological perspective in public procurement elevates it from a purely logistical and economic function to a tool for achieving a moral and spiritual imperative of responsible stewardship. This reframing is essential for public procurement due to its scale, its use of public funds, and its responsibility to serve the common good. This study explains three core drivers for adoption ecotheological perspective in public procurement (see Table 2).

Table 2. Core Drivers for Adopting Ecotheological Perspective in Public Procurement

No.	Core Drivers	Indicators	Descriptions
1.	Moral responsibility to protect creation	Stewardship of common resources	Public procurement uses taxpayer money to acquire goods and services on behalf of all citizens. From an ecotheological view, this money is entrusted to the government as a sacred trust to protect and improve the common good, including the natural environment. This expands the definition of stewardship from financial accountability to encompass ecological health.
		Beyond efficiency to intrinsic value	While public procurement traditionally focuses on value for money and efficiency, an ecotheological perspective demands that environmental and social factors be considered as part of the intrinsic worth of the purchase. This means that a product's true value includes its impact on climate change, pollution, and biodiversity, not just its price.
		Upholding human rights	Ecotheology inherently connects ecological issues with social justice. This means public procurement must actively avoid suppliers involved in unethical practices, such as exploitation, unsafe labor conditions, and modern slavery, which violate the dignity of human life as part of creation.
2.	Influencing market behavior for the greater good	Market signaling and innovation	As a major buyer in any economy, the public sector has enormous purchasing power. By adopting ecotheological principles, it can signal a strong, consistent demand for sustainable and ethical products and services. This encourages private companies to innovate and invest in greener alternatives, such as circular economy models and eco-friendly products, creating a positive ripple effect throughout the market.
		Leading by example	When governments demonstrate a deep ethical commitment to the environment and social well-being in their procurement, it can increase public awareness and set a standard for corporate and individual action. This can build citizens' trust in government spending and policy decisions.
3.	Enhancing public policy outcomes	Strategic alignment with sustainability goals	Many governments have commitments to sustainable development, decarbonization, and conservation. An ecotheological lens provides a deeper ethical and moral foundation for these policies, ensuring they are not treated as mere political promises but as sacred obligations.
		Integrating environmental costs	Ecotheology encourages a "whole-of-life" or circular economy approach, which considers the environmental costs and benefits throughout a product's existence, not just at the point of

No.	Core Drivers	Indicators	Descriptions
			purchase. This leads to better long-term decisions and greater resource efficiency.
		Improved public health and quality of life	Sustainable public procurement can result in improved services that directly benefit the public, such as cleaner public transport, less toxic cleaning supplies in public facilities, and greener urban spaces. These changes improve air and water quality and lead to a healthier environment for all citizens.

Implementing an ecotheological perspective in public procurement faces challenges, including the perception that "green" products are more expensive and the complexity of assessing broader environmental impacts.

Public Procurement Mechanisms in Ecotheology Perspective

Applying an ecotheological perspective transforms public procurement mechanisms by integrating environmental stewardship and social equity as core, non-negotiable principles. This moves beyond conventional "green" or "sustainable" public procurement (GPP/SPP) to a more profound, ethics-driven approach that re-evaluates the very purpose of purchasing public goods and services. The mechanisms that need to be implemented when adopting an ecotheological perspective in public procurement can be seen in Figure 1.

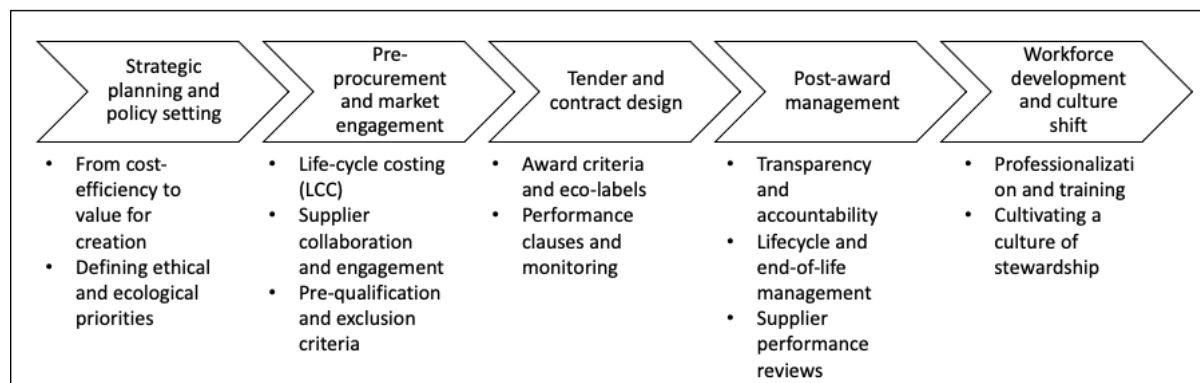


Figure 1. Public Procurement Mechanisms in Ecotheology Perspective

The descriptions of the mechanisms that need to be implemented when adopting an ecotheological perspective in public procurement are as follows:

First, strategic planning and policy setting. The mechanisms required in this aspect include:

1. From cost-efficiency to value for creation. An ecotheological lens shifts the primary evaluation metric from focusing on the lowest financial cost to a "value for creation" model. This redefines "best value for money" to include the long-term ecological, social, and spiritual benefits or harm caused by a product over its entire life cycle.
2. Defining ethical and ecological priorities. Governments can establish national action plans and policies that make environmental considerations mandatory, not just optional. These strategies would prioritize areas like:
 - Climate change mitigation: Setting ambitious, legally-backed targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through procurement.
 - Biodiversity protection: Implementing specific criteria to prevent habitat destruction or sourcing from areas with high ecological value.

- Social equity: Aligning procurement with ecotheology's focus on eco-justice by requiring fair labor practices and ethical sourcing across the supply chain.

Second, pre-procurement and market engagement. The mechanisms required in this aspect include:

1. Life-cycle costing (LCC). Public bodies can mandate the use of LCC, which evaluates all costs associated with a purchase—including energy, maintenance, and disposal—not just the initial price. This mechanism inherently favors more durable, resource-efficient, and recyclable products, reflecting the ecotheological emphasis on long-term stewardship.
2. Supplier collaboration and engagement. Instead of just soliciting bids, contracting authorities would engage in proactive dialogue with suppliers.
 - Supplier development Public bodies can support suppliers in improving their sustainable practices through capacity-building programs and sharing best practices.
 - Innovation partnerships: Public authorities can act as a "lead consumer" to stimulate the development of new, environmentally friendly solutions and create a market for them.
3. Pre-qualification and exclusion criteria. Ecotheological principles can be codified in pre-qualification criteria. Authorities can use mandatory and exclusionary clauses to bar suppliers with a history of environmental law breaches, human rights violations, or unsustainable practices, affirming the moral integrity of the procurement process.

Third, tender and contract design. The mechanisms required in this aspect include:

1. Award criteria and eco-labels. Procurement documents can include clearly weighted award criteria that prioritize ecological and ethical factors, such as:
 - Resource efficiency: Higher scores for products with lower energy and water consumption.
 - Materials sourcing: Preferential treatment for products made from recycled, renewable, or low-impact materials.
 - Fair labor practices: Evaluating suppliers on their ethical sourcing policies and treatment of workers.
 - Eco-labels: Accepting credible third-party eco-labels as proof of environmental compliance.
2. Performance clauses and monitoring. Contracts can include performance clauses that require ongoing adherence to sustainability standards throughout the contract's lifetime, with regular monitoring and reporting requirements. This ensures that the commitment to environmental protection and social equity continues after the contract is awarded.

Fourth, post-award management. The mechanisms required in this aspect include:

1. Transparency and accountability. Ecotheological principles demand radical transparency in public procurement to ensure accountability to citizens, who are viewed as co-stewards of public resources and creation. This can be supported by digital platforms and e-procurement systems that track and publish sustainability metrics.
2. Lifecycle and end-of-life management. Beyond delivery, the government should consider a product's full lifecycle. This could involve contractual obligations for suppliers to take back products for recycling or safe disposal at the end of their useful life.
3. Supplier performance reviews. Incorporating ecotheological metrics into regular supplier performance reviews ensures continuous improvement and holds partners accountable to their ethical and environmental commitments.

Fifth, workforce development and culture shift. The mechanisms required in this aspect include:

1. Professionalization and training. Investing in training for procurement officials is crucial. This goes beyond understanding legal frameworks to internalizing the ethical dimensions of ecotheology and viewing their roles as a form of "creation care".
2. Cultivating a culture of stewardship. The ultimate mechanism is a cultural shift within government and procurement agencies that embeds the values of stewardship, reverence for nature, and eco-justice into the organizational ethos. This ensures that sustainable practices are adopted not just for compliance, but out of genuine moral conviction.

CONCLUSION

From an ecotheological perspective, public procurement is more than a cost-driven administrative task; it is a profound moral and strategic tool for advancing the common good through responsible stewardship of creation. The conclusion is that adopting this perspective is not merely a "nice-to-have" but a fundamental necessity to align government spending with long-term ecological, social, and economic health. However, realizing this vision requires overcoming significant institutional and cultural resistance to redefine success beyond immediate financial savings.

An ecotheological perspective transforms public procurement from a transactional, lowest-cost function into a moral and strategic tool for responsible stewardship. The conclusion is that while this approach offers a robust ethical framework for creating a sustainable and equitable economy, its implementation faces significant institutional and cultural challenges that must be addressed for its potential to be fully realized.

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