

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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Summary:

If food and energy, in contrast to a fast-growing population, should suffice for everyone the industrial countries have to reduce their consumption, which contains a change of our habits, accompanied with consequences for our lifestyle and the present industry.

Economical and political precursors are still rare.

Do-It-Yourself subcultures try to take on that role. Confronted with an energy crisis and, even worse, a following food crisis these young activists try to improve society's well-being while suggesting new revolutionary concepts to set a good example. They offer a possibility of conservation- and energy conscious consumption, and raise awareness of the current problems while facing the latest developments with alternative businesses and a good piece of idealism.

Essay:

These are grievous times for optimists.

Economists are alarmed of falling stocks since the American "credit crisis", NGO's are afraid of an increasing poverty and hunger in developing countries, caused by rising food prices, and ecologists are suspecting an imminent climate change with also long range effects on the economy and our quality of life. People of the developed world are shocked about higher oil prices and the huge injustice in our world, but we are actually not deeply touched, because hunger, crisis and climate change are not a real part of our daily life.

At the same time it is becoming harder to repress the signals around us. Solutions are in demand, without losing ourselves in the mess of economical, social and ecological arrays which seems to act as three separated systems with contrary ambitions. The economic with its idea of maximizing and selling, the social pursuit of fairness and equality and the ecological needs of our environment to survive our alteration, have to be balanced. Due to the fact that the crisis affects all three sectors the solution has to happen as a unity. No matter which way we are going to choose: Crisis demands change and that causes the fear of losing our status quo.

"Are we going to loose our well-being?"

Different institutions tried to compose well-being in words and numbers, even though it is a physical, psychological and mostly subjective condition that makes it a complicated endeavor. As the most common value of economic well-being GDP can be regarded, measuring the market value of our goods and services in contrast to other indices that are focusing more on a subjective estimation of people's happiness (Happy Planet Index). According to Richard A. Easterlin is it very likely that economic growth and substantial income does not necessarily mean a higher quality of life.

As optimists we know that every crisis contains opportunities, but solutions are not appearing of their own volition. To change our habits by living a life, which harmonizes with the overstrained biocapacity of our planet and our taken to abundance, while saving 923 million people from hunger (FAO 2008), is it definitely not enough to separate the garbage.

With the words of Richard Buckminster Fuller: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”

These new models need not replace the old ones completely, but they are calling for ideas, that get along with our economical system and simultaneously need some kind of idealism and bravery.

A good result affords for example the Grameen Bank, founded by Muhammad Yunus in 1983, with their concept of giving microfinance to the world’s poorest, mostly women (97%), and by that fighting poverty and gender inequality. To strengthen the power of women and their possibility to make choices (birth control, marriage) both on political and private level has very likely a positive impact on the whole society by containing economic growth and a reduced poverty.

But microfinance is only one way of changing the present conditions into something more efficient for people’s well-being.¹

A lot of new subcultures are doing a great job in calling attention to global grievances like hunger, poverty and environmental damage and by demonstrating new concepts of living.

DIY – Do it yourself

The **Do-It-Yourself**-concept, following partly the ethics of the “Arts and Craft movement”, motivates subcultures to start their own business by “producing” products and services by their own, instead of conventional industrial production. Creativity, individualism as well as a critical point of view on passive overconsumption, mass products and the influence of mass-media are taking a centre stage. It veers away from pure blockades of daily reality and instead creating a new life style and alternatives that in the length of time maybe have the ability to change our way of life positively.

The concept founded itself in the appreciation of resources and materials as well as their sustainability, all living beings and nature, with a strong impact of individualism and delivery of self-abilities. **Do-It-Yourself** means production that is focused on its process; it is the art of creating. Examples are to be found in various industries. There are some start-up entrepreneurs who establish shops with fair-trade clothes made of biological cotton, successfully. They are offering a real alternative for common textile industry with fewer effects on nature, less demand of water and energy, and higher social standards for the workers. Their way of producing is transparent and they offer trust and quality (often supported by certified labels that guarantee certain sustainability) which gives an incentive to the customers that is needed to make a market. The relation from producer

¹ With standards as having all children of school age in school, all household members eating three meals a day, a sanitary toilet, a rainproof house, clean drinking water and the ability to repay a 300 taka-a-week (around 4 USD) loan.(www.grameenfoundation.org)

to consumer is much closer than in the common industry and mostly stimulated by idealism in place of maximisation.

Other DIY-ideas vary from radio, TV and Internet projects, like the Wikipedia Foundation, that spreads information freely for everyone, from “Critical Mass” events, supporting cycling as a non-polluting way of travelling, to “Cassette Cultures” and “Couch surfing”, from “Cloth -changing-Communities”, to “Flash Mob” Actions.

But what are these new DIY cultures able to arrange and change?

On a continuing basis these companies and collectives could effect a change of tendency, at least in our western economical system. While offering better models that compete with our large companies (that are orientating on profits at the expense of human rights and nature), they have the possibility to evoke a shift in direction. That new direction contains among other things a consistent change to sustainable agriculture, more services instead of disposable products and fair trade regulations for our producers in developing countries. But we should hurry, because our biggest disputant in searching solutions for our growing demands of energy and food stays time.