

## Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

ID number: 518

**"Faced with today's food and energy crisis,  
how can society improve its well-being?"**

### **Summary:**

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The essay points out why society has not yet been able to solve the food and energy crisis. Several sub-systems like law, economy and politics do neither have the possibility to communicate together in a functional way nor to find a solution that is accepted in society as whole. The essay shows how this problem may change, if the systems of education and mass media get to produce and communicate a society-wide meaning and consciousness for the necessity and advantage of a solution. This would force the more powerful sub-systems politics, law and economy to jump at this process.

### **Essay:**

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*"Today's food and energy crisis"* is not new. We know and try to handle this problem for decades, but we have not found a solution yet. On the contrary, it seems that a solution is more urgent than before. And it should be clear that to *"improve society's well-being"* should not mean the increase of disparity between rich and poor.

So it is necessary to understand why society has not yet been able to solve the crisis, and to think about how to get over the reason for this.

As Sociology points out, the modern society is functionally differentiated. There is no more central power, but sub-systems as economy, law, politics, education, science and mass media. Each sub-system fulfills functions for society in general, like economy helps to solve problems of scarceness. The basic operations for these functions are constituted within each sub-system, by specially codes and media of communication.

As every sub-system operates with an own logic which hampers cooperation between the sub-systems, it is so difficult to solve the crisis. So economy works with the media "money"; but this does not work in the system of politics which communicates with the media "power". This fact may explain why there is no solution yet: Each sub-system

can only devise its own solution but not a general one for the whole society. Even if there is a consciousness in the society for the crisis, this happens only in a dysfunctional way (criticism or protest), without a society-wide crisis-solving resonance.

But why can't the sub-systems simply cooperate to find a solution?

*Economy* communicates by prices. So the crisis would have to be translated into prices for the actors to be able to react. Unfortunately, just those economical actions pay off which produce high prices. This means high costs for the buyers and disadvantages for the already poor population in the world. The consequences of a change of economy in general may be too complex to anticipate right now.

*Law* communicates by the code "legal" or "illegal". A "new" but practicable law that aims to solve the crisis would have to react to already existing law, so the law as social system would become more complex. It had to be unambiguous to abridge the augmentation of complexity. To avoid this, law itself could say that is not their competence, but of the politics.

As *politics* work after an own code, too (to have or not to have the power), the allocation of responsibility to this system is a collision of external necessity with internal possibilities. It is known that political actors are inclined to hold off on unpopular decisions which compromise their (democratic) power.

Scientific communication - coded as "true" or "wrong" - is seldom accepted society-wide, because other sub-systems can react only by their own specific codes. And scientific results can be totally ignored. So the ability of *science* to solve the crisis is very restricted.

To solve the crisis, it is helpful to know that *education* has got the exclusive possibility to influence people's consciousness. By investing time and reflexion under the use of anticipation of future development, it could be possible to reach a change of actual trends in society. This could happen in a global dimension, by concentration on regional capacities. This must not be mistaken that education should take the "leadership" for the solution of the crisis. Modern society cannot be controlled anymore by only one sub-system, it controls itself by social evolution. But education has got the possibility to integrate knowledge and consciousness of future development,

accounting for the fact that a cooperation of social sub-systems is difficult but necessary.

Modern *mass media* can play a central role in this process of changing or constructing the future society by spreading a sensitive and necessary new consciousness and meaning for the crisis. The increasing trend of “entertaining” documentaries (e.g. “An Inconvenient Truth”) even in cinema proves this possibility. Mass media is connected to economy, politics and of course to society as whole.

The media of communication or meaning could be “climate protection”. It already touches communication in economy, politics, science, law and education. So a future development based on today’s awareness is possible. Scientists like Marcel Mazoyer point out that the nutrition of the increasing global population is possible, if market structures and consumer habits change.

These facts are related to the energy crisis, because production of energy plants is not a solution of the energy crisis, but another cause of the food crisis. Considering the energy crisis, market structures would have to change, too - actors could learn that costs for alternative energy resource development do not mean spending money, but to invest it in order to save costs in the future. This would have a positive effect on the climate as well – the circle would close, and the vicious circle of the food and energy crisis would be broken.

Education would not just mean to teach people in school and university, but the ability to learn how things depend together. Right now the world is just the way it is. But this does not mean that it cannot be different in the future. There are alternatives, and the way economy, politics and law are coupled reveals the knowledge that this coupling is necessary itself, but it remains changeable.

I think mass media is able to take a role of “social education” by showing not only critics and causes, but possible solutions, actual problems and dependences. Economy might jump at this by presenting future possibilities, science by presenting trends etc. Politics (which play a key role in solving the problem), could not refuse to this trend, earlier “unpopular decisions” would change, and politics could present itself to the more sensitive public society by a more sensitive and “educating” mass media.

Unfortunately, my analysis shows that society cannot solve the crisis right now. But in the future it can, and by sharing this consciousness and meaning, society could make the solution of the crisis a self-fulfilling prophecy.