

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition Submission Template

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Summary:

Faced with the generalised crisis that characterises modern society, what is acquired is a widespread shift of emphasis on the common way of living. The adoption of a sustainable and eco-sufficient social model, in combination with an appropriate technology and an ecologically sustainable, decentralising economic system, constitute methods that will contribute to the confrontation of such problems as food and energy crisis. Nevertheless, what is vital in order to guarantee the improvement of society's well-being is people's motivation: only the convenient awareness, the cultivation of new sufficiently attractive lifestyles could accomplish the "transformation" of the cultural identity of modern society.

Essay:

"Faced with a food and energy crisis, how can society improve its well-being?"

Social evolution has always been a question of ensuring man's quality of life, and accomplishing the preservance of his own prosperity, in other words his well-being. According to this, quality of life is the degree of well-being felt by an individual or a group of people. In order to fulfil this aim, we have invented many ways of making profit directly or indirectly out of natural resources. On one hand, technology's evolution, as well as scientific renovating theories, contributed to the continuous improvement of daily's life conditions. On the other hand, the incessant and irrational use of natural supplies led to the generalised crisis that is considered presently as one of the most characteristic panaceas. The existing resources have on their vast majority already being explored and we actually find ourselves in an impasse regarding the invention of methods and techniques that will preserve human prosperity. Finally, the terms of the question are reversed: instead of thinking about how to explore the existing resources, the problem now is how to face the energy and food crisis. How would it be a so called "new" lifestyle which -considering the actual phenomena- could respond to the current situation by introducing a new way of thinking that will aim to the improvement of society's well-being? Can modern society support a sustainable culture and become eco-sufficient?

What kind of technology and economy organisation would support this way of eco-sufficient living?

According to Duane Elgin, "we can describe voluntary simplicity as a manner of living that is outwardly more simple and inwardly more rich, a way of being in which our most authentic and alive self is brought into direct and conscious contact with living."¹ To achieve such a way of living world-wide, we can adopt what is called sustainable culture. It is increasingly clear that only with an omnipresent paradigm of values cohered by principles of sustainability will nowadays civilization escape of the existing crisis. Sustainability can be presented as a means of configuring civilization and human activity so that society, its members and its economies are able to meet their needs and express their greatest potential in the present, while preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems, planning and acting for the ability to maintain these ideals in the very long term. In that case, a comprehensive energy policy must be a critical element of our environmental thinking. In other words, investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency are keys to the formation of a sustainable society. Eco-sufficiency is closely related to issues of quality of life and work-life balance. It requires a reduction of the level of production/consumption in those parts of the world with the highest standards of living beyond reducing the use of natural resources as well as waste and emissions per unit of production/consumption. This might be possible even without reducing the latter, while, for example, increasing leisure and non-material activities for well-being. Eco-sufficiency can to some extent be achieved on the individual level, through energy savings, reduction of transport and change in diets. However, it also requires a change in social frameworks, including measures such as environmental taxes, environmental planning and new concepts of labour. A wide spread of eco-sufficiency will only occur, if people find the new lifestyles sufficiently attractive. It needs to be shown that less material wealth can bring increased well-being or happiness to individuals and societies. At this point an important aspect is related to the so-called work-and-spend cycle. If leisure and forms of work other than employment, such as caring, community work, gain relevance, income - and therefore consumption - would be reduced. Encouraging options, such as living in racially diverse communities could probably contribute to the "transformation" of the common way of thinking by opening the minds of residents to new ideas, new cultures, new historical perspectives, and a

¹ Elgin, Duane (1993). *Voluntary Simplicity*, p. 25.

broader view of life that ultimately can benefit social relations. People examine their emotional reactions to what their needs are. This may allow them to see that things they felt they needed are not really necessary. As a result, this alters the flow of goods because of the underlying change in needs. Moving to this new requisite cultural form will require a shift, an evolution of human culture.

The technology's profile as well as the economical methodology that corresponds to such a social model should also adopt some of those principles. A possible proposition could be the use of appropriate technology because of the fact that it is designed with special consideration to the environmental, ethical, cultural, social and economical aspects of the society it is intended for. It requires fewer resources, it is easier to maintain, it has a lower overall cost and less impact on the environment compared to industrialized practices.

Furthermore, the principles of the new economics should be based on a systematic conservation of resources and the environment, as the basis for environmentally sustainable development. Another important fact should as well be the evolution from a "wealth of nations" model of economic life to a one-world model and from today's international economy to an ecologically sustainable, decentralising, multi-level one-world economic system. Finally, we have to learn how to cultivate a sense of respect not only for quantitative values, but also for qualitative ones.

Well-being is most usefully thought of as the dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are evolving through the interaction between their circumstances, activities and psychological resources or 'mental capital'. While a combination of objective and subjective factors are important for assessing well-being, it is the subjective dimensions which have, to date, been lacking in any assessment by national governments. Despite the possible solutions that exist and in some cases are already applied, what is acquired, as long as the situation remains critical, is a widespread shift of emphasis on the common way of thinking. As long as people go on living following their old habits that –among other- resulted to the current problematic reality, no initiative will be enough for responding to the needs. Only the convenient awareness, in combination with remaining initiatives, methods and solutions, will appear enough for the confrontation of such problems as food and energy crisis.