

CONFRONTING SCARCITY

2-3 MAY 2024

Global Essay Competition 2024

Essay Review

Tackling pressing scarcities – Thriving for more or thriving with less

Prof. Dr. Georg Guttmann & Dr. des. Kata Isenring

Introducing the Top 25 Essays of the St. Gallen Symposium Global Essay Competition

The Global Essay Competition attracts numerous entries each year, with a distinguished panel selecting twenty-five exceptional essays. These works are penned by an emerging cohort of global leaders poised to shape the future. Each submission addresses a specific theme central to the St. Gallen Symposium, inviting young minds to explore various interrelated topics that drive our challenges in the world today. The essays offer fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to pressing contemporary issues, challenging conventional thinking, and proposing novel approaches. These contributions ignite crucial discussions about our collective future, both within and outside the confines of the symposium. A key goal of the St. Gallen Symposium is to foster these important

exchanges annually, bridging the gap between these young innovative thinkers and today's decision-makers.

This year's Global Essay Competition focused on the critical issue of scarcity, where human needs outstrip available resources. Young thinkers worldwide were invited to identify specific challenges related to scarcity, both current and future, and suggest innovative solutions. The competition encouraged practical thinking, questioning whether solutions should aim to increase the supply of scarce resources or encourage adapting to less by rethinking our demands and needs. The competition encouraged authors to cover a wide range of scarcities, not limited to physical resources like labour, capital, and natural resources, but also extending to intangibles like time, creativity, and care. Participants were urged to clearly define a scarcity

challenge, specify the resource in question, and propose a direct, practical approach to tackle it.

Understanding the impact of scarcities

The Top 25 essays demonstrate well that scarcity impacts nearly every facet of human life, from the consumption of goods and services to global challenges such as energy use and environmental sustainability. The concept underscores the reality that Earth's resources are finite, which necessitates a balance between increasing the availability of these scarce resources and adapting to live with less. This balance requires innovative thinking and actions, whether it's through technology, policy changes, or shifts in societal values and behaviours.

Scarcities impact communities and countries differently, exacerbating inequalities and exposing systemic vulnerabilities. For instance, the essays highlight how developing nations face exacerbated challenges due to resource scarcity, notably in energy demand and natural resource management. The surging energy demand in these regions, driven by population growth and the quest for improved living standards, places immense pressure on already limited resources. Developing countries, accounting for a significant portion of the global population, are projected to see their energy demand double by 2050. This situation is further complicated by inadequate institutional frameworks and corruption, making effective resource management and equitable growth challenging.

Conversely, developed nations grapple with the paradox of resource scarcity amidst opulence. Their advanced

industrialization leads to substantial carbon emissions and environmental degradation, revealing a stark contrast between the image of abundance and the reality of unsustainable resource depletion. The reliance on fossil fuels remains high in these countries, emphasizing the need for a shift towards sustainable practices and a re-evaluation of consumption patterns to address the environmental legacy of resource exploitation.

These disparities underscore a critical need for a collaborative and holistic approach to sustainable resource management, bridging the gap between developed and developing nations. Solutions such as the adoption of circular economy principles and the transfer of sustainable technologies from developed to developing nations are proposed to alleviate the strain on resources and foster a more sustainable and resilient future for all.

Leaders of Tomorrow Identify Three Main Types of Scarcities and Call for Action

In the diverse array of essays, three overarching types of scarcities emerge, each encapsulating a range of challenges that societies across the globe grapple with. First, **Resource Scarcities** delve into the pressing environmental and sustainability issues, such as clean energy deficits and water shortages, signalling a critical need for sustainable resource management and conservation efforts to mitigate the impact on natural ecosystems and ensure future availability. Second, **Human and Social Capital Scarcities** highlight the acute shortages in skilled labour and healthcare resources, alongside the diminishing pool of innovative ideas. These scarcities

underscore the importance of nurturing human potential through education, healthcare infrastructure, and fostering a culture of creativity to drive progress and address labor market demands. Lastly, **Information Scarcities** focus on the challenge of navigating the digital landscape amid rampant misinformation, emphasizing the need for reliable information verification mechanisms, digital literacy, and policies to enhance online information credibility. Together, these essays underscore the multifaceted nature of scarcity, urging a comprehensive approach to tackling these pervasive challenges.

In their essays, Leaders of Tomorrow encourage us to “thrive with less” resources, or “strive for more” resources. The differentiating factor between thriving with less and striving for more often hinges on the nature of the scarcity being addressed. When scarcity pertains to finite natural resources or environmental sustainability, the narrative leans towards thriving with less, focusing on efficiency and sustainable practices. Conversely, when dealing with human-centric scarcities such as healthcare access and labour shortages, the solution frequently involves striving for more—more investment, more development, and more resources to adequately meet human needs and foster societal progress.

Top 10 scarcities identified in the essays
1. Verifiable information
2. Clean water
3. Affordable healthcare
4. Equitable education
5. Healthy food
6. Clean energy
7. Transferable technology
8. Diversity in nature
9. Access to economic resources
10. Equal opportunities

Adapting to Thriving with Less

In their essays, the Leaders of Tomorrow highlight the importance of intelligent resource management and the innovative use of technologies to optimize existing assets.

Discussions around circular economy initiatives focus on reusing, recycling, and repurposing resources to minimize waste and enhance efficiency, embodying a paradigm of thriving with less. One essay introduces the use of Geospatial Artificial Intelligence (GeoAI) to optimize resource allocation in healthcare systems, particularly in response to climate-induced scarcities.

Another essay advocates for innovative solutions to clean energy scarcity that do not necessarily involve acquiring more physical resources but rather optimizing what we have through renewable energy sources and technology. This approach underscores the importance of efficiency and sustainability over mere abundance.

Lastly, another essay promotes the use of advanced AI and blockchain technologies to improve information verification processes. The author emphasizes the need to create a more discerning public through educational reforms in digital literacy, aligning with the principle of using less by refining the quality of information rather than merely increasing the quantity of content produced.

Striving for More: When More Is Necessary to Overcome Scarcity

In contrast, often the very same essays advocating for ‘thriving with less’ also explore scenarios where increasing resources is imperative to tackle deep-rooted scarcities. For instance, while the

above-mentioned essay extols the virtues of using GeoAI to optimize existing healthcare resources, it simultaneously acknowledges the pressing need for more healthcare facilities and personnel to address the escalating challenges posed by climate change, particularly in vulnerable and under-resourced communities.

Striving for more is sometimes the only viable option. For example, an essay on food security highlights the necessity for more targeted agricultural supports that enhance productivity while also promoting sustainable practices. It recommends redirecting subsidies towards the research and development of climate-smart agricultural technologies and conservation efforts, demonstrating a clear need for additional resources to ensure food security and environmental sustainability.

Lastly, essays addressing human labor scarcity advocate for the path of 'striving for more' through skilled workforce development. These essays champion enhanced education and training programs to bridge the skills gap, underscoring a scenario where increasing the availability of skilled labor is essential for economic development and innovation.

Conclusion and Outlook

The exploration of scarcities through the lens of this year's top 25 essays reveals a complex tapestry of challenges and solutions, where technology emerges as a beacon of hope for both mitigating resource constraints and fostering sustainable growth. As we stand at the crossroads of 'thriving with less' and 'striving for more', these narratives underscore the critical need for

innovative thinking, cross-sector collaboration, and a global commitment to sustainability. Interestingly, the Leaders of Tomorrow have pointed out that many scarcities stem not from an absolute lack of resources, but from their uneven distribution; indeed, our planet often holds these resources in abundance. Addressing this mismatch is crucial as we look forward to harnessing technological advancements, embracing adaptive strategies, and cultivating a culture of resourcefulness and resilience to navigate the future's uncertainties and unlock the full potential of our global community. We invite the participants of the 53rd St. Gallen Symposium to engage in discussions on how to effectively mitigate these distribution challenges to achieve a better future.