

SCIBE

WORKING PAPER NR.

SCARCITY + CREATIVITY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

20

SCARCITY IS...

Deljana Iossifova

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A Working Paper for SCIBE
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20

...when demand outstrips supply

That is, when there is not enough of a resource to meet demand. We could differentiate between slightly different modes of this condition. For instance, to take the most straight forward one: if there is more demand for a resource than is available, this could be because of genuine need. A resource is needed for survival. But who is to decide on the genuineness of needs? Probably arising from this problem, today, in regulated societies, we have standards that define the minimum amount of a resource that we need in order to survive; the minimum of a resource to which, under ideal circumstances, everyone should have access and to which everyone should be entitled.

...real

Scarcity is always real. Regardless of the factors that trigger or cause scarcity, it is perceived, experienced and problematized as a condition or phenomenon, and thus, as an experience, it is always real. When used on the grounds of political or economic motivation, scarcity as a menace or threat, an empty construct, may result in real feelings and actions with real consequences.

...natural

Natural scarcity could be defined as the scarcity of resources which are naturally scarce, or rare – rare earth, for instance, or precious metals. Natural scarcity may also refer to scarcities caused by natural phenomena, such as draughts. There are, however, several problems with the notion of

'natural' scarcity. Namely, it is only through experience that the notion of scarcity becomes real, i.e., naturally relatively rare resources may not necessarily be scarce because demand for them is not large enough; or, on the other hand, naturally relatively abundant resources, such as air, may be experienced as scarce in particular contexts (for instance, when one is trapped in an elevator or cave). Furthermore, all 'natural' phenomena experienced by human beings are directed or influenced by human activity, or a result thereof. A distinction between natural and human-induced scarcity seems futile.

...sociomaterial

As a result of human relations with non-human resources, i.e. of human and non-human agency, the notion of scarcity is one that describes a sociomaterial condition.

...relative

A resource may be experienced as scarce at some times and as abundant at others; it may be experienced as scarce in one place and as abundant in another; it can be experienced as scarce by one person, and as abundant by another. Thus, in order to grasp (and transform) the meaning and reality of scarcity, it must always be framed within its spatial, temporal and sociocultural context.

...relational

As a social phenomenon, scarcity is always relational. Scarcity can be traced as a result of social relations in that it reveals how resources within society are handled. Power relations and sociomaterial inequalities can be revealed through the lens of scarcity, and it can be framed through the notions of distribution and redistribution.

...artificial

Scarcity is artificial when it is the result of misdistribution: when the supply of a resource could be large enough to respond to demand (or equally, when the demand for a resource could be small enough to respond to supply) – but when demand and supply are tweaked by decisions based on vested interest (in the interest of those in power rather than in the interest of all/the majority).

...constructed

Scarcity is socially constructed in that the notion is, as explained above, both relative and relational, and always sociomaterial. The process of becoming aware of scarcity, the framing and problematizing of a certain condition as scarcity – the naming of scarcity – is the process of social construction. Socially constructed scarcity is not necessarily artificial.

...engineered

Scarcity is engineered when it serves an interest. It may not necessarily be the interest of ‘those in power’, the capitalists or the wealthy, but the process of engineering scarcity explicitly involves intend: increased demand for a resource in limited supply will lead to a higher prize and thus more profit; the hoarding of a resource for the in-group will lead to scarcity for the out-group; etc...

...systemic: translocal, transtemporal, transcalar

Of course, because it is relational, scarcity is a systemic condition. Scarcity in one place, time or scale – because of its systemic nature – can trigger scarcity in another place, time or scale through human – non-human relations and feedback mechanisms.

Creativity is...

...a social skill or process common to all human beings. Design is specialised, commodified creativity which serves the generation of income and profit – in contrast to creativity, which can be applied in all situations, by everyone, and does not require an identifiable outcome or product.

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