**Varianta 1**

**Question I (50 points)**

Read the text below and then write **an essay in which you suggest solutions to the problems** illustrated by the article**. (350 words)**

A new study sponsored by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center has highlighted the prospect that global industrial civilisation could collapse in coming decades due to unsustainable resource exploitation and increasingly unequal wealth distribution. The research project is based on a new cross-disciplinary 'Human And Nature DYnamical' (HANDY) model, led by applied mathematician Safa Motesharri of the US National Science Foundation-supported [National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center](http://www.sesync.org/), in association with a team of natural and social scientists. The study based on the HANDY model has been accepted for publication in the peer-reviewed Elsevier journal, *Ecological Economics*.

It finds that according to the historical record even advanced, complex civilisations are susceptible to collapse, raising questions about the sustainability of modern civilisation: "The fall of the Roman Empire, and the equally (if not more) advanced Han, Mauryan, and Gupta Empires, as well as so many advanced Mesopotamian Empires, are all testimony to the fact that advanced, sophisticated, complex, and creative civilizations can be both fragile and impermanent." By investigating the human-nature dynamics of these past cases of collapse, the project identifies the most salient interrelated factors which explain civilisational decline, and which may help determine the risk of collapse today, namely: Population, Climate, Water, Agriculture, and [Energy](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/energy).

These factors can lead to collapse when they converge to generate two crucial social features: "the stretching of resources due to the strain placed on the ecological carrying capacity"; and "the economic stratification of society into Elites [rich] and Masses (or "Commoners") [poor]" These social phenomena have played "a central role in the character or in the process of the collapse," in all such cases over "the last five thousand years." However, the scientists point out that the worst-case scenarios are by no means inevitable, and suggest that appropriate policy and structural changes could avoid collapse, if not pave the way toward a more stable civilisation.

**(NASA-funded study: industrial civilisation headed for 'irreversible collapse'?** in [www.eurotopics.com](http://www.eurotopics.com), accessed March 16, 2014)

**Question II (50 points)**

Write **an article for a newspaper** addressing the issue of online courses starting from the views presented in the text below. **(250 words)**

Online courses provided by some of the world's top universities are going to be used by students at local community colleges, in a project funded by the Gates Foundation. If you fancy a top-class education but can’t afford the fee or the time, there is now an alternative. This November, the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation [invested a million dollars](https://www.edx.org/press/gates-foundation-announcement) in [edX](https://www.edx.org/), the world’s largest online learning initiative. Founded by Harvard and MIT, edX boasts a growing number of “massively open online courses” (MOOCs) aimed at bringing virtual versions of world-class higher education to hundreds of thousands of participants. By 2013, it will offer a selection of entirely free online classes from Harvard, MIT, Berkeley and the University of Texas. A not-for-profit platform, edX is billed as “the future of online education: for anyone, anywhere, anytime”.

The possibility MOOCs hold out isn’t replacement. Rather, it’s that education can be unbundled. Much like many other fields – from broadcasting and newspapers to games and shopping – technology promises not so much to replace older institutions as to break up the packages they once offered, providing particular parts of them at a scale and cost unmatchable by the old order. All of which is certainly a recipe for reform. When it comes to what is actually being unbundled, though, there’s something paradoxically conservative about most MOOCs: recorded lectures, online tests, digital documents, and blue chip institutional endorsements. As the author and technology theorist [Ian Bogost argued](http://www.bogost.com/blog/mooc_rhetoric.shtml) earlier this year, “if the lecture was such a bad format in the industrial age, why does it suddenly get celebrated once digitized and streamed into a web browser in the information age?”

It’s a fair question. A digital lecture is still a lecture; an online test is still a test. Those looking for genuinely new kinds of skill and instruction are unlikely to find them in even the most articulate digital incarnations of a conventional apparatus.

**(Can schools survive in the age of the web?** in *BBCNews*,14 December 2011)

**Toate subiectele sunt obligatorii. Timp de lucru 3 ore.**