Econ Frame 2023

Winners and honourable mentions

A joint initiative
Anoeska Redding
The British School in the Netherlands

Winner, 1st place
Graffiti: trash or treasure?

This is a photo of graffiti by Banksy I saw while in the city of self-expression, Amsterdam, and it struck me that this relates significantly to the economic concept of negative externalities. Graffiti can be seen as a negative externality, most commonly by the government, due to its imposed costs on third parties such as property damage, decreased property values, public safety concerns, social norms etc. However, many could argue the opposite. Graffiti can be seen as a form of expression, it holds cultural significance, as well as being a form of social commentary. Banksy is a clear example of the latter, his work includes a powerful social commentary, highlighting important issues such as inequality, war, and consumerism. It makes people question the status quo. For the government, this may be a negative externality, but, for the people, its benefits can largely outweigh the negatives. Graffiti is art for the people.
Kurt Witmer
Mount Royal University, Canada

Winner, 2nd place
Creative destruction and the AI dilemma

Creative Destruction is defined as a particular market being disrupted by some innovation that forces firms within the market to adapt or be forced out. A historical example would be the automobile disrupting the horse and buggy market. OpenArt, along with other programs like ChatGPT, will have an era defining impact on countless markets - a force of Creative Destruction that vastly eclipses the Industrial Revolution and the advent of the computer chip. In those examples, the destructive element gave way to a creative rebirth that brought in new jobs and markets. AI may end up acting as a tool to assist workers in improving efficiency and output, but could also render those same workers obsolete. The concern with AI is its widespread effect, not only in calculations, but in medical diagnostics, in law, or even in art; the question is - will the net result be creation, or destruction?
Yohann Aaron Arthur Drego
University College London, UK

Winner, 3rd place ex aequo
Combatting pollution with nudge theory

The photo is a clever albeit involuntary representation of nudge theory in action. By framing the choice of disposing a cigarette as either being part of the "solution" or "pollution", incentives are formed inciting people to properly dispose. By leveraging the social recognition and psychological reward of this process, the board efficiently acts to costlessly align the incentives of the Greek government and citizens towards cleaner streets. This is an example of a branch of behavioural economics called nudge theory - popularised by Richard Thaler - wherein subtle changes to everyday items or processes align preferences towards societally welfare improving situations. This example serves as an important case-study for how nudge theory can be applied to promote desirable behaviors at low cost. By understanding the psychology of decision-making and designing interventions that work with - not against - human nature, policymakers can nudge people towards better choices without resorting to heavy-handed regulations or taxes.
Jay Leong
Dubai English Speaking College, UAE

Winner, 3rd place ex aequo
Money grows on trees

In the right-hand side of the picture in the forest, a uniform hole can be seen—evidence of commercial forestry. This is when trees are cut down for commercial use, and then replanted, ensuring its renewability. When done at the socially optimum level, commercial forestry can have widespread positive externalities, such as providing a renewable resource in the form of wood for uses such as fuel or construction, and the cleaner air provided by more trees. This picture is in stark contrast to 100 years ago when 97% of Scotland’s indigenous forests had been deforested due to a lack of ownership and extensive grazing, an example of the tragedy of the commons. With the aid of the government and commercial incentive, forests may soon return in lusciousness to the Highlands of Scotland, reaping with it not just the fruits of economic growth, but widespread welfare gains for all.
Ana Teodorescu
Royal Holloway University of London, UK

Honourable mention
Ceramic café

This is an image from a ceramic café in Bucharest Romania. In order to paint a bowl for two hours I paid £25 while my friends who chose to paint mugs paid £22. When doing a quick cost-benefits analysis, this activity doesn’t bring me any tangible benefits such as rewards or financial gains. On the contrary, if I needed more supply of crockery, I could have purchased cheaper and more beautifully painted pieces from any store. Also, the place had extra charges for consumption – which on their own are higher than other places in town. So, why is it that my friends and I made the financially irresponsible choice of going to this overhyped and overpriced place? Well, it is because of marginal utility. After visiting most cafes and restaurants in our area more than two or three times in the past few years, we felt like trying something. The concept of just sitting down for an hour and not doing anything to entertain ourselves no longer seemed as attractive as two or three years ago when we were coming out of lockdown. Therefore, we looked at our options, and decided to rather prioritize the option that would have given us the greatest amount of utilities/ the greatest satisfaction.
Effi Tiekoura, Miquel Tirach, Alexandre Nau, Nabil Nafouri

University of Bordeaux, France

Honourable mention
Spring of discontent

The photograph depicts a huge opposition between demonstrators and riot police. The scene describes a heated cry from the heart of the people worried about the legitimacy of the democracy in the country and their retirement age. In fact, the main reason why this opposition started was the forced enactment of the pensions reform by the government. The demonstration can be linked with the concept of the Labour Market. Owing to the new reform, we can relate to the fact that employees felt like their employment rent decreased. Indeed, their disutility of effort increased due to the reason that they will do more effort at an older age than they would’ve before. As a consequence, the labor force disagrees with this reform and acts for change by taking it to the streets. In a nutshell, this picture exhibits the disruption between the labor market and the new policy.
Joshua James MacKinnon
Mount Royal University, Canada

Honourable mention
Wild, not free

On visiting the wolfdog sanctuary near my home, I learned that wolfdogs are a crossbreed of wild wolves and domestic dogs. They are deliberately bred for the exotic pet trade; wolfdogs are not the result of incidental mating between wild wolves and domestic dogs. The exotic nature of these expensive pets makes them seem like an ideal pet, thus initially giving them a high marginal utility for consumers. As they grow, they become larger than domestic canines and exhibit more wolf than dog traits. Most wolfdogs are surrendered and euthanized by the age of two as their owners realize the full opportunity cost of wolfdog ownership exceeds their willingness to pay. The social cost of the wolfdog trade is the burden of care and disposal of these unwanted pets away from producers and consumers to the broader economy, with negative opportunity cost for their supporters due to reduced disposable income.
Caspar Støren
Royal Holloway University of London, UK

Honourable mention
A tale of inequality beneath the Acropolis’ glow

This captivating photograph captures the stark contrasts of Athens, offering a powerful perspective on the economic concept of inequality. The illuminated Acropolis, a symbol to Greece's achievements, highlights the city's contemporary struggles against the backdrop of urban decay. The image shows a young couple, hand-in-hand, gazing upon the citadel, perhaps momentarily forgetting the harsh realities surrounding them. This scene emphasizes the personal effect of economic inequality as the graffiti-adorned buildings, representing the weight of modern challenges, contrasting the ancient citadel. The photograph prompts viewers to explore the underlying mechanisms of economic inequality. It ignites a quest for understanding and change, to use economic means to confront inequality and create eternal testaments once again to mankind’s abilities. It showcases the power of photography, fostering meaningful dialogue on economic disparities in modern society. By encapsulating Athens' economic dichotomy, the photo serves as an enduring reminder of the pressing need to address inequality in the modern world.
Kenny Lithwick
Bishop’s University, Canada

Honourable mention
Mechanical symphony

Power is created by the rotor spinning as a result of movement. The mainspring is then wound, storing power. As it slowly unwinds power is transferred from gear to gear, terminating in the escapement wheel. There, the steady beat of the second hand is regulated so as to maintain a degree of accuracy. The integrated rational choice framework of crime mirrors the harmony of components in a watch, synthesizing economic, and non-economic theories of crime. A simple table of data is analyzed first with a theory of capital. Based on what kind of capital an individual has acquired, a congruent, non-economic theory of crime, such as strain theory is attached. Then, a net benefit is calculated by comparing the marginal cost to the marginal benefit of committing crime. Finally, a descriptive framework is established that explains why an individual chose to commit crime.
Lucy Hunt
Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Honourable mention
Lifestyle inequality in Cape Town

This photograph depicts the inequality evident in Cape Town city centre. Amongst skyscrapers occupied by Tertiary sector businesses there are homeless people living in shelters made from discarded cardboard and pieces of plastic. I chose this photo because income inequality is an economic concept measured via methods such as the rich/poor ratio, this photograph illustrates an everyday scenario in South Africa that typifies the effects income inequality has in people’s lives.
Jeanne Dombret
PSL Research University, France

Honourable mention
Ghost town and ghost money

This picture was taken in downtown Beirut, which was shut down following the 2020 harbour explosion. I was surprised to see that, more than two years later, the district was still completely empty and partially destroyed. Once a commercially dynamic area, it was now an abandoned part of the city. This struck me as an illustration of the economic state of the country, which was heavily worsened by Covid and the explosion. Indeed, the Lebanese Central Bank had set very advantageous interest rates to attract investments, and the financial system could be considered a very large scale Ponzi scheme: new money was borrowed to pay existing creditors. But in times of instability, Lebanese people living abroad lost trust and stopped sending money. Thus, banks ran out of dollars and it resulted in a spectacular devaluation of the Lebanese pound.
Ruslan Kim
Royal Holloway University of London, UK
Honourable mention
In the skies above

Earlier today, I took this photo of cloudy London skies. While it is a very nice view and a good photo (in my opinion), you may notice a very subtle detail. That detail is the fact that the view of the skies is obstructed by the wing of the plane. This is linked to a simple economic concept. You may be wondering how the presence of a wing in a photo can be linked to economics in any way. What this photo shows is price discrimination. I paid for the cheapest possible ticket which meant that my seat was towards the back of the plane, if I chose to pay for a business class ticket for a significantly higher price, this photo would have been taken at the front of the plane without the view of the wing. For a short haul flight like this there isn’t much extra business class can offer, other than faster boarding, yet this way the airline can set different prices for different customers. A less price sensitive passenger may decide that paying a lot more for a ticket is worth it, so the company can maximise its revenue while still catching customers like me who would be happy to save some money by sitting in the back. I could argue that a business class customer and I are paying different prices for the same service. The airline’s primary service is to get people from point A to point B, and since we’re on the same plane we both get to point B at the same time.
Xinghan Shao
St. Paul’s School, London, UK

Honourable mention
High and low: a skyline of economic disparity

Titled "High and Low: A Skyline of Economic Disparity", the photo captures the concept of Economic Inequality as discussed in Unit 19 of CORE Econ. In the foreground of the photo is an informal housing structure made of makeshift materials, which serves as a stark contrast to the towering skyscraper in the background. This housing structure represents the struggles of the underprivileged and marginalised communities in Hong Kong, who face significant barriers to accessing economic opportunities. The photo thus highlights the uneven distribution of resources and the impact of economic policies on social and economic outcomes. By portraying the coexistence of wealth and poverty in a single frame, the photo demonstrates the complexity of economic inequality and its multiple dimensions. Overall, the image serves as a poignant reminder of the urgency of addressing economic inequality in contemporary societies.
Keonyi Kim
North London Collegiate School, Jeju, South Korea
Honourable mention
Growing together

During the last Christmas season, my community service team and I visited an orphanage to share gifts with the children. Our motivation for engaging in this charitable act stemmed purely from our sense of empathy and a desire to contribute towards improving the well-being of others in our community. In doing so, we exemplified two fundamental principles of economics: altruism and social capital. By donating our resources, time, and money to charitable causes, we were able to foster trust, reciprocity, and social networks that are invaluable for building a prosperous society. Our efforts not only created meaningful experiences for the orphans, but also helped to establish social connections and goodwill that benefit the community in the long term. The photograph serves as a powerful reminder that altruism and social capital are essential for creating a brighter future for everyone, conveying a hopeful message for individuals to extend compassion toward others.
Seoyoon Hannah Hong
The British School in the Netherlands

Honourable mention
All you can eat: who’s the winner?

This is a photo I took at an All-You-Can-Eat Hotpot restaurant before I began eating. By the end of my meal, I was uncomfortably full and in agony because of the spices. Customers of AYCE including I, have a common perception which restaurant owners employ: by consuming as many units of food, I would maximise my consumer surplus by reducing the unit price of meat slices. This illusion incentivises customers to make the 'best' use of their money by overwhelming themselves to the point that the marginal utility becomes zero or even negative. For the owners, they can rest assured that people generally do not tend to eat beyond zero or negative marginal utility and hence cause damage to their business.
Molly Smith
Putney High School, UK
Honourable mention
Personal gain vs the greater good

This photo shows our new school building that was built throughout the pandemic and opened in January 2022. This new development is significantly larger than the building in this setting previously but was designed to be more environmentally conscious and energy efficient by utilising natural light. However, to build this new block existing trees needed to be removed; it also created a lot of traffic in the surrounding area during the building project. These are both examples of externalities, as our building created marginal social costs that were not equal to the private costs. Additionally, our headteacher recently informed us that environmental action our school has undertaken under its initiative “Breathe Week” was actually conducted in order to get permission to undertake this project. This blurs the line between private and social benefits that are considered when assessing the impact of externalities, as private benefits were disguised as social ones.
Cheuk Yan Kong
Putney High School, UK

Honourable mention
The cupcake problem

Although this photo started as a whimsical picture opportunity, having just baked cupcakes, in fact, this image successfully illustrates the basic economic problem of unlimited wants but limited resources. As an allusion to our society, we are represented by the stuffed animals, and the cupcakes represent scarce and desirable resources. Despite there being five cupcakes, there are only four animals present. This raises the question: how should the cupcakes be allocated? As there are an excess number of cupcakes, everyone can receive one, but who should receive the last one? Should the cupcakes be divided evenly in the first place? The stuffed animals may need to consider factors such as their individual preferences for cupcakes, the cost of obtaining additional cupcakes, and the potential benefits and costs of sharing them, like we do in the real world.