9
Hoping for the Future. A Russian Report to the Club of Rome*

A Review of 'Reconsidering the Limits to Growth. A Report to the Russian Association of the Club of Rome'. Edited by Victor A. Sadovnichy, Askar A. Akaev, Ilya V. Ilyin, Sergey Yu. Malkov, Leonid E. Grinin, and Andrey V. Korotayev. Cham: Springer, 2023.

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We live in a rapidly changing world. It is changing politically, socially, technologically, economically as well as environmentally and the changes taking place are fundamental and long-term. This is a significant challenge for humanity to deal with.

In this situation, the forecasts are needed to inform us about possibilities and probabilities. However, the main point of forecasting is not whether we

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anticipate how the future will look exactly. The main point is to project trends in play now forward so that we do not simply wait to see what 'fate' has in store for us. What are the alternative paths to the future? How can we tell which trajectory is most likely? How can we facilitate the preferred paths and limit the non-preferred tracks?

We are excited to announce the release of our new book called *Reconsidering the Limits to Growth. A Report to the Russian Association of the Club of Rome*. This report is the result of more than ten years of work on modeling and forecasting world dynamics and it reflects the views of Russian scientists on the future of global development. In some respect our report can be regarded as preliminary research attempting to understand how we can expand the limits in the future. In doing so, these limits should be viewed in a broad historical context (and not just as a continuation of 20th-century trends).

The title of our report, 'Reconsidering the Limits', certainly echoes the famous 'The Limits to Growth' (by Donella and Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William Behrens III). This is no coincidence, as 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of this report, which is one of the landmark scientific works that gave impetus to understanding the changed trends and played a prominent role in understanding the path of humanity towards the future. However, in our report, the concept of limits is understood more broadly and covers not only the process of overcoming the limits that hinder development, but also implies situations when such limits become irrelevant. Thus, in our response to the Club of Rome we choose to look at the interactions among aging, capitalism, inequality, climate change, resources, technology, and world order. This list does not exhaust all of the future topics that might be examined but it certainly represents an ambitious undertaking of a group of Russian analysts working in Moscow.

The main goals of our book are:

– to give an analysis of the changes with which the World System has come to the present, based on an integrated approach that includes the world-systems, historical and evolutionary approaches, a systematic view of society, in which changes in one subsystem cause transformations in others, mathematical modelling;

– to define the main vectors of transformations of the World System;

– to make a detailed forecast of the development of all the main subsystems of society and the World System, while presenting three or four horizons of changes (from short-term to ultra-long-term up to 100 years);

– to present different development scenarios and make recommendations on how to switch to the most favorable development scenario.

Another important point of our title is that it implies that limits are not insurmountable. The Moscow Report is surprisingly optimistic as we believe that

the serious challenges facing humanity, or most of them, can and should be resolved.

During the past 50 years both the concept and understanding of these limits have significantly changed. We believe that at present the evolution of the World System has approached a new critical milestone. The World System and humanity as a whole are currently moving into a fundamentally new phase of historical development, when the old economic and social technologies no longer work as efficiently as before or even begin to function counterproductively, which leads the World System into a systemic crisis. We believe that there is a transition of human society to a new phase state, the shape of which has not yet been determined. Therefore, we believe that new approaches are needed both to the analysis of the global situation and to forecasts.

'Depopulation' will be the new demographic focus as societies fail to produce enough children to replace their current populations – even, eventually in places where fertility rates are still very high. At the same time, these societies will be becoming grayer as older segments of the population expand. Technological change will work to counteract these problems even as it extends life expectancy considerably. An artificial intelligence-based Cybernetic Revolution by mid-21st century will bring radical change to economic structures and incentives. Capitalism will gradually become less consumer- and profit-oriented. Sustainable, long-term development will be prioritized instead. Resource acquisition will be less characterized by intense competition. Global warming will be coped with through a reliance on nuclear, hydrogen, and thermonuclear energy sources. Hegemonic-centric world order (whether presided over by the United States or a successor) will give way to a more integrated, supranational coordination of problem solving. The transition will be uneven and it will be resisted but they believe that telling demographic imperatives and technological change will win out eventually – even if a new global system is not seen as fully emerging until as late as 2130. The limits to growth will be supplanted, or at least coordinated, by management and supranational governance.

There is one thing that we want to emphasize. Demographic dynamics and technological change, however powerful shapers they are likely to be, will not suffice to transform the world. Human agency will need to help the movement toward more utopian and less dystopian choices.

The structure of our report is as follows. It consists of an Introduction, three parts, Conclusion, and Mathematical Appendices. The names of these parts speak for themselves. Part I ('Looking into the Past and the Future') contains two chapters, which outline the general approach of our team. Chapter 'Macrohistorical Approach' provides the macrohistorical background, whereas the other chapter of that part presents some assessments of modern processes arising against that background, as well as some forecasts. The main content

of the report is presented in Parts II and III, which together consist of ten chapters. These chapters cover all the main subsystems of modern and future society. There are also eight methodological/mathematical appendices to the report united under common title 'Modeling Social Self-Organization and Historical Dynamics – from Agrarian to Cybernetic W-Society' and an introductory chapter to them. They cover certain issues in more detail and show the mathematical tools that we use. They demonstrate how we see combining of the world-systems, historical and evolutionary approaches, a systematic view of society, and mathematical modeling within a single research program.

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