

“Limits to Growth” Dennis Meadows at the RCE BenE Munich

The year 2012 marked the 40th anniversary of the publication “Limits to Growth”, one of the original studies on sustainable development. On this occasion, the Rachel Carson Center invited lead author Prof. Dennis Meadows to Munich. His talk at the Amerika Haus, which was part of the joint series of lectures “Leitbild Nachhaltigkeit”, was the high point of a series of exciting encounters.

During the first week of December 2012 a number of important characters from the field of sustainability visited the city of Munich. Dennis Meadows, Vandana Shiva, Jørgen Randers, Donald Worster, to name but a few. Various organizations, some of which are members of the RCE BenE Munich, sent out invitations for different events.

BenE Munich, however, focused on Dennis Meadows’ visit who is a nestor of the sustainability movement. For several years now, we have been applying his methods in our project “GenE - shaping competences for sustainable development”.

Since its publication in 1972, „The Limits to Growth“ has been translated in over 30 languages. With more than 30 Million copies of it being sold and its influence on the Brundtland commission, it has sparked a global reflection on sustainable development.

„The study caused an enormous stir with extremely shady prospects for the 21st century. After all it was about the thesis that exponential growth in a finite world would inevitably lead to a collapse. Thus a debate was triggered which is continuing until this day.” Christof Mauch, director of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society explains.

The occasion for his visit was the joint series of lectures “Leitbild Nachhaltigkeit”, which was initiated one year ago and ever since been organized by the RCE BenE Munich together with the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society (RCC) and the “Verein für Nachhaltigkeit”. It involves 15 colleges and universities from the Greater Munich area.



One week prior to his visit, the „Systemischer Salon“ dealt with Dennis Meadows’ approach already. People who are interested in a systemic reflection on sustainability meet in the “Zukunftssalon” quarterly since midyear 2012 in order to discuss different approaches. Participants compare and contrast both the strongly mathematically-analytically influenced method by Dennis Meadows and the bio-cybernetic approach which was developed in Munich by Frederic Vester. Although both approaches clearly differ from each other, neither one of them is out of date.

Finally, on December 3rd Dennis Meadows arrived in Munich. After several interviews, he found the time to dine with a group of people involved with BenE Munich. The group consisted of GenE members as well as multipliers who apply methods which were developed by Dennis Meadows. About 15 people engaged in a dialogue with questions on urban planning and different methods. [More.](#)

On the morning of the second day of his stay, Dennis Meadows met with mayor Hep Monatzeder for breakfast. Afterwards, students of the Rachel Carson Center tested a newly developed game by Dennis Meadows which deals with the handling of shocks and raises awareness for the concept of resilience. Subsequently he engaged in a discussion with Donald Worster; a fellow of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society who, as of late, takes up the position of honorary director at the center for environmental history in Renmin (China).

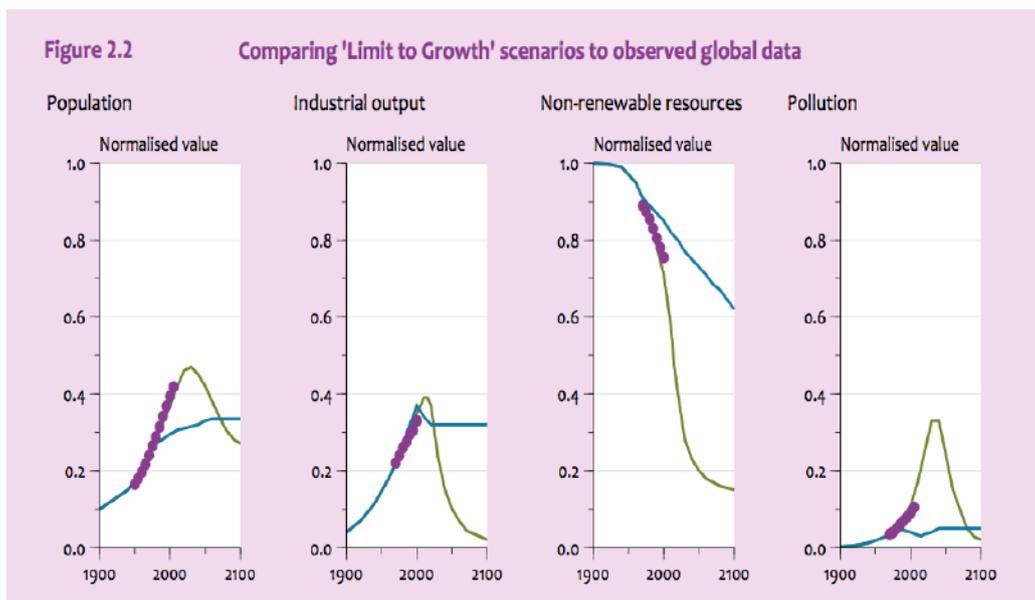
On the evening of his lecture at the Amerika Haus, Dennis Meadows faced big questions together with an audience of 550.



- Has humankind exceeded the earth's carrying capacity?
- Can we avoid resource limits and ecological collapse?
- How do we need to change as a species in the face of climate change?
- What would a sustainable future look like—one that we could realistically hope to achieve?

According to Dennis Meadows, next to increasing our capability to handle shocks (resilience), it is going to be vital for us to focus on universal problems as well as to accelerate cultural and social change and to evolve from talking into acting in order to be able to look into a brighter future.

Until this day Dennis Meadows has not been able to witness a shift away from unsustainable growth trends and thus cannot give the all-clear regarding upcoming shocks. Especially in the next few years, many of the thresholds that had been predicted 40 years ago will be reached. The present economic crisis marks the beginning of a global turnaround.



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Growing Within Limits, Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, Bilthoven, NL, Octobre 2009, Page 23

Dennis Meadows points out five ways to achieve more resilience again:

- Improve Efficiency
- Raise the Barrier
- Increase Redundancy
- Create more Buffering
- Develop better Predictions

His talk was followed by a discussion with the audience which was moderated by Jane Carruthers from the Academy of Science (South Africa), Christof Mauch Director of the Rachel Carson Center (Munich) and Libby Robin from the Australian National University (Canberra). Please find the questions of the evening as well as an opportunity for an online discussion [here](#).



Please visit www.leitbild-nachhaltigkeit.de in order to download the slides of his presentation and find information about upcoming event dates.