

THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL OF THE CLUB OF ROME

This proposal, (for a review of the proposal visit www.cwaltd.com/pdf/clubrome.pdf), was put together under the towering leadership of Hasan Ozbekhan, probably one of the best systems thinkers of the 20th century. It described very eloquently the predicament of mankind. It identified approximately 50 Continuous Critical Problems (CCPs), which on account of their strong interactions should not be addressed in a piecemeal fashion. Such problems as the "pollution problem," the "inner city problem," the "poverty problem" the "starvation problem" the "nuclear proliferation problem," the "population growth problem," and so on, are strongly interconnected contributing to the emergence of a new entity called in the proposal the global *Problematique* (Christakis, 2005). The concept and the name *Problematique* appeared for the first time in the Club of Rome (CoR) proposal. The proposal recognized and described the futility of addressing these problems in a piecemeal fashion, instead of addressing them as a system of problems. It proceeded to conceptualize and articulate very elegantly a philosophical, methodological, and institutional framework for penetrating and resolving the global *Problematique*.

Because no appropriate methodology was available in the early 70s for addressing the complexity and multidimensionality of the *Problematique*, the framework presented in the proposal was more like an architectural design than an engineering blueprint. Some readers of the proposal considered it an outstanding conceptual breakthrough, but others, especially the systems engineers of the 60s, found it lacking in methodological specificity and rigor.

The perceived lack of methodological rigor of the proposal contributed significantly in the decision of the Executive Committee of CoR to award, in the summer of 1971, a major grant to the systems dynamics group of MIT. This group, under the leadership of Jay Forrester who was an electrical engineer by training and was a professor at the Sloan School of Management at MIT, had been working on developing the systems dynamics approach to the observation, explanation, and prediction of the dynamics of social systems. Forrester had already applied the method to industrial and urban dynamics in the 60s, so it was easy for him to persuade the Executive Committee that it was appropriate to apply the method to world dynamics. The

Executive Committee decided to sponsor the project on the development of the world dynamics model. The major outcome of this project was the production of the “world model” using the methodology of systems dynamics. The work and findings of this project culminated with the publication of the very popular book *Limits to Growth* in 1972 (Meadows, et al., 1972). The controversial nature of the findings reported in this book gave a lot of publicity and notoriety to the CoR.

When the Executive Committee made this grant award to MIT to develop the world model, Hasan and I resigned from the Club. We both felt that the systems dynamics methodology, which was used for deriving an extrapolated future for the world system to the year 2150, compromised the original intent of the CoR proposal which was to discover and use a methodology capable of engaging the stakeholders in a dialogical process with sensitivity to their cultural situation and the praxis of their lives. We felt that the system dynamics approach was perpetuating a paradigm of scientific elitism and social engineering in designing social systems, instead of legitimizing the wisdom of the people by engaging stakeholder in a dialogue for designing their futures. Hasan joined the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, and I got involved with the establishment of the Academy for Contemporary Problems with the financial support of the Battelle Memorial Institute. Battelle was one of the founding sponsors of the CoR.

Working with many other colleagues, initially at the Academy for Contemporary Problems in Columbus, Ohio, and later in other academic institutions, it took approximately 20 years of research, development, and testing in the arena to invent and apply the model and methodology that rendered the original architecture of the Club of Rome proposal usable and applicable in the field of practice, as I will describe in the following chapters.