

Foreword

After more than forty years from the publication of the ‘Limits to Growth’ we see that mankind has inertially gone on along the track it followed in the 70’s of the 20th century, with only little corrections. The situation in the present day is worse than at that time, so we may safely say that it will be harder to recover now, because the exploitation of natural renewable resources has gone beyond the threshold of sustainability and the inequalities among humans have kept growing, making any change more difficult and painful even though changes are inescapable.

This is the background that motivated the Science and the Future conference held in Turin in the premises of the Politecnico University, on October 28-31 2013. A task which is naturally in the reach of the academy is of course to discuss, to analyze and compare data, to try and predict future trends and this is what we have tried to do during the four days spent working in general and specialized sessions. The purpose, however, was not confined to raising the interest of researchers in universities; we hope to stir also that part of the society that bears responsibilities.

There are two gaps to fill. One is between natural and hard sciences, recognizing insurmountable material conservation constraints, on one side, and that part of economics and other soft sciences which still offer an ideological coverage to the ongoing practices based on long term irrationality.

The second gap, even wider, is between the world of scholars, analyzing, discussing, theorizing, and decision and policy makers in the institutions and in the world of enterprises.

Of course a conference cannot make miracles. It simply is a step in, I hope, the right direction. It may help in raising the attention of the general public and (who knows?) of public authorities.

The interest has been high with an attendance oscillating around three hundred, up to four hundred, persons. We have had 32 speaker, covering a wide range of subjects from economy to biosphere, from natural resources to climatology and so on. Interested persons may find the live records of most talks at the address <http://scienceandthefuture.polito.it>.

The present book includes a number of contributions from the speakers of Science and the Future and is intended to be a tool for those who wish to understand what is really going on around us.

The conference is in a sense still open and the hope is that, together with a number of similar initiatives organized during recent year and which will presumably be organized in the future, it will induce not just analyses but also positive actions.

Humans, in spite of themselves, are ultimately rational beings, so let us be confident.

Angelo Tartaglia