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What Can World Models Tell Us About Our Future?

Peak Oil and Global Warming looked at from the perspective of a modeler

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More than 35 years have passed since Forrester and Meadows published their respective world models that they had created for the Club of Rome. Initially, their reports received a lot of publicity, but their message wasn't palatable, and consequently, their work was soon heavily criticized by politicians, economists, and fellow scientists alike. Forrester and Meadows were laughed at if not outright vilified.

Recently in the context of the ongoing discussions about Peak Oil and Global Warming, the world models of the past are suddenly looked at once more with increasing interest. Unfortunately, the message has not become more palatable in the meantime, and consequently, there are strong forces that once again try to silence those who warn about a future that looks to be troublesome at best. Cassandra's curse is still alive and well.

The time is ripe for looking at Forrester's and Meadows' world models once more with the detached eyes of a scientist while asking ourselves: Were these researchers maybe right after all? What can world models tell us about our future? How can they help us prepare for the times to come?