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“CLEANER PRODUCTION FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS”

Do the Limits to Growth Apply to Smart Cities that Have Achieved the Sustainable Development Goals?

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The year 2022 will mark the 50 year anniversary of the much maligned and controversial ‘Limits to Growth’ study which asserted that economic growth and population growth cannot continue indefinitely. Since then the world has seen major declarations and aspirations relevant to the limits to growth including: 1) The 1987 WCED (Brundtland Report coining the phrase ‘sustainable development’), 2) The 1992 UNCED (the Rio Declaration establishing Agenda 21, the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD, 3) The 2005 Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, and 4) the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. A nascent ‘Smart City’ movement is purporting that information technology and webs of sensors will enable the perhaps contradictory goal of ‘Smart Growth’. This presentation explores the challenge of achieving ‘sustainable cities and communities’ with ‘no poverty’, ‘clean water’, ‘clean energy’ and the many other sustainable development goals through the lens of ‘Limits to Growth’. The city of Shanghai in China has determined that it hopes to cap it’s total population at 25 million people. Here, we will contemplate the questions: Can a city become too big? Will smart cities know when they have become too big? Is the smart city movement avoiding the unpleasant limits to growth question and merely enabling the building of larger and larger cities that are even more vulnerable to exogenous shocks to their systems?