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Preface to the Special Issue Bioeconomy[§]

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Mankind is currently confronted with several Grand Challenges, among them food security, security of energy supply, resource efficiency of global production chains and climate change. They are to be tackled in a context of strong society pressure to create and maintain sustainable economic value and jobs while simultaneously preserving, the sustainability of natural resources. All of them are interlinked and based on a scientific interpretation of available data and demand a long-term strategic vision in timeframes that go well beyond the usual terms of office of most politicians. Paraphrasing Paul Valery, we can say that the future is no longer quite what it used to be and we cannot rely much on past events to prepare the future. New paradigms are needed for our societies, and the bioeconomy is one of them.

Economic and social developments in many parts of the world during the last decades of the 20th century have contributed to creating a mirage of continuous and increasing growth and prosperity. Our societies have functioned on the assumption that the increasing demands of the population for energy, food, raw materials, etc., would always be answered with the aid of new technological and scientific advances. However, successive oil crises, the slowdown of productivity increase in agriculture, recent findings on climate change, the continuing expansion of urbanisation and the increase in human population have evolved in parallel with higher living standards in many parts of the world. This is particularly due to the emerging and growing demands of the middle classes worldwide, with a concomitant increase in food, feed, fibre and fuel consumption. On the other hand, the gap between rich and poor keeps widening as pointed out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) [1]. These facts aggravate the challenges of food, feed and energy security and have triggered an increased awareness of the fragility of the biosphere and the need for our societies to adopt a more sustainable production and consumption model based on the bioeconomy.

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