Thank You, Walter: A tribute to Prof. Dr. Walter Klöpffer

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In the late 1980s, while employed by Battelle, I spent a few days at the Frankfurt, Germany, office and laboratory. I met this gentleman who was soft spoken, yet clearly extremely knowledgeable. When he spoke, he had such significant substance in his messages that folks listened. He talked about his experience with fate and effects of chemicals on the environment, with an evolving focus on exposure and environmental assessment. He wondered how that experience might be applied to products. He also spoke about some work their office had been doing in life cycle product analysis. Our Battelle laboratory in Columbus, Ohio, had also been experimenting with and exploring a similar concept in mass balance. This experience ultimately led me to chair a SETAC (Society of Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry) Workshop which resulted in the report “Technical Framework for Life Cycle Assessment” (Fava et al., 1990). It turned out that Walter and his team were already exploring that space (Oberbacher et al., 1996). Our long standing collaboration and friendship was born.

As the field of LCA advanced and more researchers investigated LCA methodology, impact assessment and database development to name two, there were few places where LCA publications could be published. Without a source for research to be published, the ability for LCA researchers to

share and learn from each other was limited. Walter identified this gap.

Walter’s visionary position of striking new ground for an International Journal of LCA was viewed initially with skepticism. In the early 1990s, LCA was a fledgling concept that was just beginning to be realized as a potentially powerful tool to support the understanding of the full range of impacts over the entire life cycle of a product system. Walter was right. There was a gap in publishing LCA-related work. Walter had the commitment and ability to inform and influence the founding of the Journal. More importantly, he was persistent and resilient in his unwavering ability to respond positively to the “doubting Thomas’s” with a “Yes we can!”—and he did.

Throughout the 1990s, the LCA community grew rapidly and expanded from a tool used mainly by consultants and industry toward studies in universities. For PhD students and young professors, it was important to have a recognized journal accepting LCA papers. Together with assistance from Mrs. Almut Heinrich, whom Walter considered the “heart and soul” of the Journal (Klöpffer, 2012a, b), the International Journal of Life Cycle Assessment was born in 1996. It has grown steadily over the years. Since 2008, the Journal has been published by Springer. It now produces 12 issues per year. The 3-year Impact Factor for 2015 is a respectable 3.324.

During those early days of LCA, the community was always addressing the criticism about the quality of the LCA studies and publications. Walter broke ground with advancing the LCA study peer review process, which was ultimately called the critical review process (Klöpffer 1997, 2005, 2009, 2012a, b, 2013). As a result, the quality of LCA studies were improved. He also transferred that scientific rigor and commitment to quality to the review of LCA papers to be published in the International Journal of LCA. He did not forget the importance of his own scientific advancement and continued to publish. His later interests expanded beyond

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LCA methodology to include life cycle costing, social LCA, and life cycle sustainability assessment (Klöpffer 2008a; Klöpffer 2008b; Klöpffer and Renner, 2008b).

In 2014, Walter worked with Prof. Dr. Birgit Grahl to create a guidance book entitled “Life Cycle Assessment: A Guide to Best practice” (Klöpffer and Grahl 2014). But knowing Walter as long as I have, everyone should understand that this would not be his final work. Walter saw the need for an even more comprehensive and authoritative publication on LCA methodology and application. As first editor of the *LCA Compendium: The Complete World of Life Cycle Assessment*, he continues to oversee the development of this ten-volume plus work. The aim of the series is to provide a well-structured treatise of the field of LCA to give orientation and guidance through detailed descriptions on all steps necessary to conduct an LCA study according to the state of the art.

LCA Compendium – The Complete World of Life Cycle Assessment (book series)

Editors: Walter Klöpffer and Mary Ann Curran

Published titles:

“Background and Future Prospects in Life Cycle Assessment”

Editor: Walter Klöpffer

Goal and Scope Definition in Life Cycle Assessment

Editor: Mary Ann Curran

Life Cycle Impact Assessment

Editors: Michael Z. Hauschild and Mark A.J. Huijbregts

Special Types of Life Cycle Assessment

Editor: Matthias Finkbeiner

Life Cycle Management

Editors: Guido Sonnemann and Manuele Margni

Titles in Preparation:

Life Cycle Inventory Analysis (LCI)

Editors: Rolf Frischknecht and Andreas Ciroth

Interpretation, Critical Review and Reporting in Life Cycle Assessment

Editors: Birgit Grahl and Carl-Otto Gensch

Life Cycle Sustainability Assessment (LCSA)

Editors: Alessandra Zamagni and Jeroen Guinée

<http://www.springer.com/series/11776>

I recall conversations with an editor-in-chief of another international journal who claimed that LCA lacked sufficient science to publish in a peer review journal. Today, as we have seen, the Journal of LCA is a recognized and accepted scientific publication. The field of LCA has a solid foundation. We appreciate all of your leadership as founder and leader to advance the Journal to its current state. Walter we could not have done it without you—thank you. The Journal is in excellent hands with Mary Ann Curran assuming the sole Editor-in-Chief role in 2017. As we all know, she has been active already in leading editor meetings and calls for ideas on how to improve the Journal and make it more responsive to the needs of the life cycle community. She and Walter will continue to interact to ensure that the lesson learned, experiences, and insights that Walter has will be used and incorporated into the Journal going forward.

In conclusion, Walter, congratulations for all your efforts to advance not only the Journal but the field of LCA. Many thanks for all of your contributions. I look forward to continue to collaborate with you to advance the development and application life cycle information to inform decision-makers so that the next generation of product systems is more sustainable than the previous generations. I view you as a friend and I am excited that our journey together will continue.—Jim

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