

'Limits to Growth' in Socialist Perspective: Critical Discourses on Modernity in the USSR and the Soviet Bloc During the 1960s and 70s / Abstract

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In 1968 Andrei Sakharov wrote his essay "Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom". In his memorandum – which quickly circulated in the *samizdat* – Sakharov not only pointed at the growing threat of a nuclear world war, but launched a debate on the intensifying industrial and technical exploitation of nature and its resources. Sakharov and other authors took part in a critical discourses that in the 1960s and 70 started to reconsider basic notion of progress, growth and modernity even the USSR. In my paper I want to highlight some aspects of this critical assessment of modern times. I will show how some of the assumptions of a “reflective modernity” were shared in the Soviet Union. The presentation follows traces of critical re-evaluation of modernity in different layers of Soviet society and describes how even the party-state under Brezhnev was partially promoting such forms of “reflections on the future”. Finally, the paper argues that these changes where not simply induced by a transfer of contemporary Western debates on the “limits to growth” (fostered by institutions like the “Club of Rome”). On the contrary, critical Soviet voices on modernity in its traditional form were participating in a global circulation of ideas and –partially– were quite influential in international institutions and networks. Reconsidering modernity in the 1960s and 70s was an endeavor in which the Soviet Union played an active and visible role.