

Leisure and Recreation in the Context of Philosophical Approaches

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the concepts of leisure and recreation from historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives, revealing their transformations in terms of individual freedom, self-realization, and social structures. It is emphasized that leisure is not merely a period outside of work, but also a critical area for the individual's intellectual development and search for existential meaning. The evolution of leisure time is examined through the approaches of various thinkers from ancient Greece to the present day, with a focus on the views of philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Marx, and Russell on liberation, happiness, and productivity. With the Industrial Revolution and the capitalist system turning leisure time into a consumption-oriented commodity, the importance of recreation as a quality activity contributing to the individual's mental, social, and physical well-being has been highlighted. In conclusion, it is stated that leisure time and recreation should be structured in a meaningful and liberating way for individual development and social welfare in modern societies.

Keywords: Tourism, Leisure, Recreation, Philosophical Approaches.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leisure time is not merely a passive period outside of compulsory work, but is recognized as a profound philosophical domain that offers individuals the opportunity to understand the universe, think, and express their creativity (Pieper, 1999). This understanding is evident in Aristotle's concept of *scholê* in Ancient Greece; according to Aristotle, the highest human activity, in which intellectual activities and "eudaimonia" (true happiness) are realized, emerges in free time spent in rest (Kalaos, n.d.). Throughout history, in every period even during the intense work pace of the Industrial Revolution the nature and accessibility of leisure time may have changed, but its fundamental function of enabling individuals to transcend themselves, seek meaning, and achieve liberation has consistently retained its importance. In this context, even in periods of intense work schedules such as the Industrial Revolution, individuals continued to use their leisure time for the search for meaning and personal development (for

example, research on the social benefits of recreation increased in the mid-20th century (Brown, 2016). Recreation, one of the fundamental tools contributing to the realization of this potential, is defined as a set of activities chosen by the individual's free will, voluntarily participated in, and providing personal satisfaction, renewal, learning, and the establishment of social bonds; recreation is the conscious structuring of this leisure time; recreation, consisting of voluntarily chosen activities, offers the individual satisfaction, renewal, and learning opportunities, as well as strengthening social bonds (Çay, 2015), thereby serving not merely to pass the time but to utilize it in a meaningful and constructive manner. In summary, leisure time is not merely a period to be consumed, but a space where the individual can realize themselves in a meaningful way – according to J. Dumazedier, even the narrowest definition of leisure time encompasses all activities aimed at self-realization (wikipedia, n.d.). Maslow (1943) also supports this idea; once basic needs are met, a person experiences the desire to "become all that they can be" (self-actualization) (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, recreation plays a key role in this process of self-actualization. Additionally, leisure time offers an opportunity to escape the alienation created by work: Marx (1844) argued that labor becomes alienated from the worker in capitalist society, with the worker negating themselves in their work (Marx, 2007), while Bertrand Russell (1932) also maintained that excessive work is contrary to human nature, and that true progress lies in creative activities carried out through freely used leisure time (Eldin, 2024). In other words, recreation provides individuals with the freedom to think, create, and contribute to society beyond work and obligations. Modern research also highlights this potential of recreation; for example, leisure activities have been shown to have positive contributions to physical, social, emotional, and cognitive health (Caldwell, 2005). Moreover, the experiences gained through these activities not only benefit the individual at a personal level but also enhance social well-being (Brown, 2016). For these reasons, recreation plays a critical role as a multifaceted activity area that serves to help individuals discover their potential for liberation, strengthen their social participation, and increase their overall well-being (Caldwell, 2005; Brown, 2016).

The aim of this study is to examine the concepts of leisure time and recreation from historical, cultural, and especially philosophical perspectives, thereby revealing the transformation of these concepts within individual freedom, self-realization, and social structures. Within the scope of the study, different thinkers' approaches to leisure time were analyzed, and the effects of these approaches on the understanding of modern society were evaluated. Based on philosophical approaches that argue that leisure time is not merely a process outside of work but a critical area in terms of the individual's intellectual development and search for existential meaning, the function of recreation in structuring and enriching this process was examined.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. The Concept of Leisure Time and Recreation

The concept of leisure time, which dates back to ancient Greece, is closely related to the word "scholē." In that period, leisure time was also seen as a time outside of work for learning and engaging with culture. In English, it is defined as "leisure," but it is known to have originated from the Latin word "licere," which means "to be free" and "to allow." Similarly, in French, it has been translated as "Loisir," which corresponds to meanings such as freedom or permission to move (Torkildsen, 2005: 50). This concept is thought to have emerged in primitive times when basic needs such as physiological and security needs were no longer at risk. It is believed to have started during celebrations after harsh weather or hunting. Furthermore, it has been observed that leisure time has been intertwined with class differences for generations, with lower or working-class individuals having no access to leisure time, while the upper class enjoys the privilege of having leisure time (Torkildsen, 2005: 11).

The concept of recreation, which is closely related to leisure time, similarly comes from the Latin word "recreatio" and means "recreation" (Kaba, 2009). Recreation, as the word implies, supports individuals in regaining their mental, social, and physical health or maintaining their well-being by providing them with renewal. Additionally, recreation emerges as an element that enables individuals to actively or passively participate in and productively spend their free time. In this context, individuals who participate in recreational activities experience development in mental, physical, and social areas, and also benefit from a reduction in obesity, depression, and stress levels, thereby achieving multifaceted benefits (Mistry et al., 2017).

2.2. The Historical Development of the Concept of Leisure Time: From Antiquity to the Post-Modern Era

The concept of leisure time, which dates back to the origins of human history, is a phenomenon that attracts considerable attention. Although there is a common belief that hunter-gatherer societies spent their entire days hunting or trying to survive, the reality is quite different. Veal (2005: 17) highlights an important distinction in this regard, arguing that these individuals' necessity to hunt should be defined as "work," and that the time remaining outside of this work should be considered their leisure time. Similarly, Shivers & DeLisle (1997: 5) support this view, stating that the human brain's ability to distinguish between leisure activities and necessary survival efforts has led to the concept of leisure time becoming a more cultural object as we know it today.

In ancient Greek civilization, it is seen that the concept of leisure time was first established on a philosophical basis. In particular, during this period, leisure time, referred to as "scholê," appeared as the exact opposite of work, or non-leisure time (ascholia) (Torkildsen, 2005: 50). At the same time, in Athens, physical labor was considered the domain of slaves, while leisure time was regarded as the highest value, and the lack of leisure time was seen as a cursed situation (Sylvester, 1999: 3). Russell (1990: 12) summarizes this situation with the words, "Leisure time is essential for civilization and society," and argues that free (wealthy or upper-class) citizens in Athens used this leisure time for their intellectual and cultural development.

Plato is one of the important thinkers who placed the concept of leisure time at the center of his philosophy, and he viewed working on a job as a hardship that should never exist in the lives of the upper class with a high standard of living (Parker, 2005). In line with this view, he established an academy that later came to be known as scholê (school), and this view formed the basis of the academy. Again, in this academy, Plato argued that people needed to discover their true selves and that free time should be used for this purpose (Kalimtzis, 2017: 20). After Plato, the famous philosopher Aristotle expanded this concept and equated scholê with happiness, viewing this situation as a balance between happiness, theoretical life, and practical life (Shivers & DeLisle, 1997: 41).

After the ancient Greek state, a major transformation took place in the understanding and acceptance of leisure time during the Roman Empire. The concept of scholê, which was accepted in ancient Greece, was replaced by the concept of "otium," which means time for renewal and rest that supports work (Juniu, 2000: 69; Bahadır, 2016: 107). According to another source, this concept indicates that the wealthy class used their leisure time for intellectual development, while the poor class spent their leisure time in entertainment venues such as circuses and fairs. This situation reveals that although the right to leisure time was granted to all classes in the Roman Empire, class distinctions became more pronounced (Kalimtzis, 2017: 164).

By the Middle Ages, churches in Europe had increased their influence and begun to shape the concept of leisure time. During this period, churches began to prohibit almost all leisure activities that were not used for worship and had no religious content (Torkildsen, 2005: 16).

On the other hand, despite the dominant attitude of the churches, some thinkers began to look at the concept of leisure time from a different perspective. Aquinas, in particular, referred to leisure time in his philosophy and stated that the highest form of life is that which is spent in deep thought (Pieper, 1998: 40). He expresses this situation by stating that individuals deprived of deep thought have mediocre, mundane, and poor lives, and uses the following words: he conveys that the life of an individual engaged in contemplation is a prerequisite for his perfection (Han, 2019: 119). As can be seen, this view offers an opportunity for spiritual and intellectual development despite the restrictions on leisure time imposed by the oppressive church.

Petrarca (1304-1374), approximately a century after Aquinas, adopted philosophical approaches to leisure time and addressed this issue from a different perspective. According to Petrarch, leisure time is defined in two types: the first type is a devilish thing that includes the purposes of distraction, entertainment, and idleness and corrupts individuals' minds; the second type emphasizes that it is a quality leisure time that strengthens the individual's inner self, develops the mind, and brings about a positive transformation in individuals (Holba, 2007: 64). Similarly, Vickers (1990a: 15) supports the idea that idleness is the opposite of morality. Again, during this period, it is observed that the concept of leisure time began to be distinguished and evaluated in terms of its correct or incorrect use, unlike in ancient Greek history. This distinction began to draw clear lines between leisure activities that added virtue to individuals and those that enabled them to be idle (Vickers, 1990b: 115). This situation shows that churches increased their control over individuals' use of leisure time and began to determine the areas in which this time could be used (Torkildsen, 2005: 16). As can be seen, during the Middle Ages, leisure time was shaped by religious authorities and accepted as a norm within society (Holba, 2007: 64).

By the Renaissance and Reformation periods, the concept of leisure time had undergone a fundamental transformation. While in the Middle Ages, leisure time was supposed to be used for religious worship and activities that would contribute to personal development, during the Renaissance and Reformation periods, work was considered sacred, and leisure time began to be seen as laziness and sin (Sennett, 2013:160).

The proverbs used during this period are quite striking. In particular, sayings such as "Work is a virtue," "God does not love lazy servants," and "A rolling stone gathers no moss" clearly show how this situation permeated society (Önder, 1997: 73). Russell (1990: 11) interprets the situation of the period as follows: a period of instilling the idea that work is an individual responsibility among the peasantry. In another source, Burke (1995: 145) provides concrete examples of this situation by documenting that various activities and games were banned during this period on the grounds that they were a waste of time. In conclusion, while it was thought that leisure time needed to be controlled during this period, the glorification of work was seen as very important, paving the way for the capitalist transformation that would take place in the following period (Torkildsen, 2005: 17).

By the time of the Industrial Revolution, the concept of leisure time had undergone another significant transformation. During this period, particularly in 19th-century England, it was observed that men and even children worked up to 15 hours a day. This was believed to be because it was thought to keep men away from alcohol and children away from mischief (Russell, 1990: 14). On the other hand, Torkildsen (2005: 20) emphasizes that in the following century, social reformers and trade unions played a critical role in the struggle to reduce working hours and regain leisure time. Applebaum (1997: 48) also supports this view, documenting that these movements and technological developments led to a relative reduction in weekly working hours. Aytaç (2002: 233-234) summarizes this change as follows: the

capitalist system initially did not welcome leisure time, but later accepted it as a process necessary for production and consumption and for increasing productivity.

As a result of this transformation, leisure time is now defined as the designated periods after work hours and on weekends for individuals who have completed their production or work (Lefebvre, 2012: 35). However, Bahadır (2016: 109) cautions that this new concept of leisure time is being utilized as a materialistic attitude and a tool for social control.

In the present day, the concept of leisure time has undergone another transformation, blending with the complex dynamics of postmodern society. Sennett (2009: 49-50) views this situation as a result of flexible working hours, noting that the boundaries of leisure time have become blurred and the distinction between work and rest has disappeared. At the same time, he defines the disappearance of the distinction between work and rest time as flexible specialization and concludes that individuals are beginning to struggle with managing their autonomous time (Sennett, 2008: 53). On the other hand, Hemingway (1996: 30-31), who views this situation critically, argues that the liberating aspect of leisure time has disappeared and that it has begun to be commodified. He attributes this situation to the capitalist system weakening the political, cultural, and social dimensions of leisure time and turning it into a consumable commodity. Similarly, Lefebvre (2012: 156) emphasizes that the market logic regulates every aspect of daily life.

Throughout history, the meaning and function of leisure time have undergone a significant evolution alongside changes in social structures. What was referred to as "scholê" in ancient Greece and set aside for intellectual development (Kalimtzis, 2017: 2) has, in today's capitalist order, been transformed into a set of activities focused on consumption. Particularly since the mid-20th century, the definition of leisure time as "free time outside of work" (Roberts, 2006: 2) is one of the most prominent examples of this change.

This development reflects the struggle between production and rest. As Russell (1990: 20) emphasizes, the commodification of leisure time narrows individuals' opportunities for free self-expression and directs them toward conforming to standard behavioral patterns. However, as Maslow (1943: 375) noted in his hierarchy of needs, the search for meaning beyond basic human needs offers an opportunity to rediscover the liberating aspect of leisure time.

In conclusion, the transformation of the concept of leisure time clearly reveals the impact of economic and social systems on individuals' lives. In the near future, it is predicted that the concept of leisure time will take on a new definition with the increase in digital transformation and automation. At this point, ensuring that leisure time is not limited to consumption but contributes to the liberation of the individual will become one of the most important goals of modern societies.

2.3. The Philosophy of Leisure Time and Leisure Time According to Thinkers

The philosophy of leisure time is a discipline that discusses the use, meaning, and value of leisure time outside of work. The concept of leisure time, which appears as "otium" in Latin and "scholê" in Ancient Greece, is not merely the absence of work but also the time individuals devote to activities that allow them to realize themselves, think, and build a good life. The ancient philosopher Aristotle summarized this situation as follows: happiness depends on leisure time, and we work so that we can have leisure time (Maund, 2004). Therefore, the concept of leisure time has been seen as the foundation of both culture and individual happiness.

For Aristotle, leisure time (*otium*) is the environment necessary for the intellectual activities required to achieve true happiness. He emphasizes that work alone is not sufficient for the peace and economic freedom of society, and that true happiness depends on the existence of time for reflection (Maund, 2004). In this context, Aristotle views leisure time as a period during which

humans can realize their full potential and completely rejects the notion that it is merely a time for pursuing pleasure (Bahadır, 2016).

For Plato, leisure time was seen as the highest means of enabling philosophical thinking. Again, in his ideal state, he assigned philosophers to a special class dedicated to thinking. According to him, the prerequisite for reaching the pinnacle of humanity was to engage in philosophy and make the best use of leisure time. In this context, Plato accepted the highest human endeavor as intellectual activities performed in free time. Like most other philosophers in Ancient Greece, Plato saw free time as the only way to pursue ideals and escape material difficulties (Hunnicut, 2006).

Seneca (n.d.), one of the philosophers who argued that virtue is the only good, pointed out that free time should be evaluated under this virtue. Because of this situation and his belief that life is wasted, he wrote a work titled "The Shortness of Life." According to Seneca, it is not right for an individual to only work; he believes that in order to find peace, one must also devote time to thought and philosophy. In his view, those who devote time to thought and philosophy are truly alive, even though they have leisure time. He sees leisure time not merely as a time for rest, passing time, and entertainment, but as an opportunity for individuals to realize themselves, learn, and experience inner growth. He also states that postponing leisure time is equivalent to postponing life.

According to Marxist theory, free time gains meaning through the structural transformation of society; first, the organization of labor processes is necessary. Marx argues that by reducing the necessary labor for society to the minimum possible level, everyone can have free time. Therefore, he believes that individuals who have leisure time and sufficient time for fields such as science and art can use these pursuits for their own development. He states that individuals who are not granted this opportunity are no different from machines that work continuously within the capitalist system (Marx, 2007). Although Marx's idea of facilitating work remains unfulfilled, the fact that individuals have such a right and that individuals reflect on their existence is of great importance from the philosophical perspective of free time.

According to Lafargue, leisure time, as he states in his work *The Right to Be Lazy* (1883), opposes the sanctification of work and believes that an individual should work no more than three hours a day. He believes that individuals should spend the rest of the day engaging in developmental and creative activities (Lafargue, 1999). He believes that this is because long working hours destroy individuals' morale and creativity, as well as enabling the bourgeoisie to develop their control mechanisms. He believes that the proper use of machines will provide individuals with sufficient leisure time and, together with radical social transformation, will bring about liberation (Lafargue, 1999: 112). At the same time, Lafargue argues that leisure time is a realm open to individuals' inner desires and that it develops a strong stance against the imposed capitalist order. We can see this attitude in Goncharov's novel *Oblomov*. In his novel, he emphasizes that work is a repulsive element and that leisure time and idleness should take precedence (Goncharov, 1983).

In his work *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen evaluates leisure time as an area where the wealthy class displays itself as a consumer object. In his work, he argues that leisure activities are objects that can be purchased within the scope of "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen, 1995: 68-87). Veblen does not approve of capitalism's view of individuals as objects of pleasure and means of consumption, and believes that capitalism is hedonistic and irrational. According to him, the human urge to work is essential for science, technology, and culture to understand nature (Veblen, 1995: 40-47; Eby, 1998).

In his work *In Praise of Idleness*, Russell opposes the capitalist work system from a moral and ethical standpoint. Russell is dissatisfied with the pressure of work on individuals and believes

that idleness is not a bad thing, but rather extremely important for humans. According to him, the amount of free time that individuals can enjoy should be increased and seen as a right, and working hours should be reduced accordingly. He argues that if work is necessary, it should not exhaust the individual or affect their free time. At the same time, Russell believes that idleness is necessary for the existence and nature of individuals and that it is directly related to virtue (Russell, 1990: 111).

Baudrillard, on the other hand, believes that every aspect of society has become commodified, turning it into a consumer society. He emphasizes that leisure time is part of this market and has commodity value for capitalism (Baudrillard, 1997: 193). At the same time, Baudrillard views leisure time as a process that is a product of individuals' identity and status, and accepts that the consumption of this time is a sign and meaning exchange, or "potlach." Furthermore, he describes leisure time not as an area that provides opportunities for individuality, but as a ritual where the pressure of pleasure, the use of images, and the tendency toward consumption are employed (Baudrillard, 1997: 193-194).

3. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The concepts of leisure time and recreation have undergone various transformations in meaning over time, in line with the social, cultural, and economic structures of different periods. In ancient Greece, the concept of leisure time, which took shape around the concept of "scholê," was evaluated as an area that laid the foundation for the individual's intellectual activities, efforts to realize oneself, and understanding of the good life (Torkildsen, 2005; Kalimtzi, 2017). This understanding, particularly in the eyes of thinkers such as Aristotle and Plato, indicates that leisure time is not merely a process of being free from work but also an indispensable element in the construction of a virtuous life (Maund, 2004; Hunnicutt, 2006).

When examining the historical trajectory of leisure time, it is seen that it acquired a more secular meaning with the concept of "otium" in the Roman period, and was shaped by religious authorities in the Middle Ages (Pieper, 1998; Torkildsen, 2005). Following the Renaissance and Reformation movements, work gained moral value, while leisure time was negatively associated with idleness (Sennett, 2013). This approach became even more institutionalized with the Industrial Revolution, evolving into a process in which control mechanisms over individuals' leisure time intensified (Russell, 1990; Applebaum, 1997).

In modern capitalist society, leisure time has been directly linked to production processes and transformed into a consumption-based structure. In this context, Veblen (1995) considers leisure time as a means of "conspicuous consumption," while Baudrillard (1997) evaluates this process as the commodification of leisure time, which is instrumentalized in the construction of the individual's identity and the display of status. Thus, leisure time today has moved away from its potential for liberation and become an element that facilitates the reproduction of the system (Hemingway, 1996; Lefebvre, 2012).

In this context, the concept of recreation comes to the fore as a process that enables the qualitative and purposeful use of free time, contributing to the physical, mental, and social well-being of the individual (Kaba, 2009; Mistry et al., 2017). Recreation facilitates the individual's use of free time not only for pleasure-based activities but also for therapeutic, productive, and developmental activities. Thus, both the individual's self-awareness and social functionality are strengthened, and free time ceases to be merely a relaxation process and becomes a meaningful life practice.

However, despite all these transformations, the potential of leisure time in terms of individual development, intellectual activities, and self-actualization has not completely disappeared. As Maslow (1943) expressed in his hierarchy of needs, the individual's search for meaning and

need for self-actualization necessitates a return to the liberating function of leisure time. In this context, thinkers such as Marx (1997) and Lafargue (1999) offer an important perspective by arguing that leisure time can be regained through the social transformation of labor and that individuals can turn to fields such as science, art, and thought.

In conclusion, the concepts of leisure time and recreation should be considered not only as an important component of individual life but also of social structure. Considering the historical and philosophical background of these concepts, one of the fundamental problems facing modern societies is the transformation of leisure time into a liberating, productive, and self-actualizing space for the individual. In this context, critical approaches shaped by philosophical orientations provide an important foundation for developing alternative understandings of leisure time in today's societies.

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