



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LEISURE ECONOMY

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Abstract:

This article explores the theoretical foundations of the leisure time economy, examining its emergence, stages of development, and its role within modern economic relations. It analyzes the social and economic significance of leisure, particularly its influence on human capital, tourism, culture, sports, and service sectors. The study highlights the correlation between the growth of the leisure economy and factors such as income levels, social infrastructure, and labor productivity. Furthermore, the article reviews international experiences and scholarly sources to assess the prospects of developing a leisure economy within the context of Uzbekistan. The research findings offer practical insights for formulating strategic approaches in this emerging field.

Keywords: Leisure economy, working time, graduate school class, economic development, psychological need, social stratification, Plenitude model, population awareness.

Introduction

In recent years, Uzbekistan has emerged among developing countries with its focus on achieving economic stability, improving the well-being of its population, strengthening national peace, and implementing an active social policy — all of which represent key strategic objectives of the national development agenda. To support these goals, there is a growing need to organize the productive use of economically



active citizens' leisure time, create new jobs in alignment with these efforts, and accelerate the development of sectors related to the leisure economy, including human resource management.

In the context of modern economic progress, the human factor — especially the effective and efficient use of human potential — plays a critical role. Today, managing human resources goes beyond supervising work performance; it also involves organizing employees' leisure time in a meaningful way. In this regard, the concept of the leisure economy demands special attention. This article focuses on the theoretical aspects of the leisure economy and its significance in the effective management of human resources.

The term "leisure time economy" began to gain academic attention in the second half of the 20th century. One of the early thinkers who contributed to its conceptual foundation was American economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen. In his influential 1899 work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Veblen explores the emergence of a distinct social class characterized by its access to leisure time, analyzing its broader social and economic impacts. According to Veblen, engagement with the leisure economy is predominantly associated with the wealthier segments of society who utilize leisure to signify social status and economic power.

British philosopher and economist Bertrand Russell, in his essay *In Praise of Idleness*, also highlights the value of leisure, portraying it as a means for individuals to realize their full potential and engage in cultural and creative development. Russell's approach frames leisure not merely as free time, but as a manifestation of human freedom and personal fulfillment.

Another prominent contributor to the theoretical understanding of leisure in relation to economic progress is John Maynard Keynes, a leading British economist and founder of modern macroeconomic thought. In his essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, Keynes reflects on the future of humanity in light of technological and economic advancements. He predicted that increased productivity and technological innovation would eventually lead to shorter working hours and more available leisure time. Keynes even forecasted that within a century, people might work as little as 15 hours per week due to rising living standards and more efficient economic structures.

By the final decades of the 20th century, rapid industrialization began to reshape societal perspectives on the leisure time economy. One significant contribution to this



discourse came from Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, who, in his 1988 book *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*, critically analyzes why the working hours in the United States did not continue to decline as expected. He highlights that although, at the beginning of the 20th century, many anticipated a gradual reduction in working hours and an increase in leisure time, this vision was never fully realized. According to Hunnicutt, capitalist societies prioritized production and employment over personal free time, which ultimately led to a restriction of leisure opportunities for individuals.

In a different context, German psychologist Professor Fred van Raaij addresses the leisure economy from a psychological and behavioral standpoint. In his study *Vacation Decisions, Activities, and Satisfaction*, he explores how individuals choose their vacation activities and how satisfied they feel with those choices. His research reveals that vacation decisions are influenced by a range of economic and psychological factors, such as income level, educational background, and personal preferences. Importantly, van Raaij's findings emphasize that leisure is not merely an economic phenomenon but also a vital response to psychological needs.

By the 21st century, Juliet Schor, an economist at Boston College, emerged as one of the leading global scholars in the fields of leisure, consumption culture, and work time. In her influential 2010 book *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*, she proposed a radically new economic vision. Critiquing the traditional mission of classical economists, Schor introduced an alternative economic model centered on personal well-being, time affluence, and ecological balance—what she terms the "Plenitude" model.

Schor argues that modern society's overreliance on excessive consumption and production has led to the depletion of natural resources, overwork, and a significant decline in the quality of personal life, including a severe lack of leisure time. Her model suggests that if individuals work less, they will have more time available for self-sufficiency, creativity, and meaningful human interactions. She envisions a shift toward producing more goods locally, sharing resources through community-based cooperation, and focusing on sustainable lifestyles.

At the core of Schor's argument is a redefinition of wealth—not as the accumulation of money, but as access to time, health, social connection, and spiritual fulfillment. In her view, leisure is not merely a passive break from work, but a potential foundation for new forms of economic activity. Ultimately, she emphasizes that true economic



stability and environmental sustainability are not opposing forces, but rather complementary aspects of a more humane and resilient economic future.

In recent academic literature, Elizabeth Currid-Halkett's 2017 book *The Sum of Small Things: A Theory of the Aspirational Class* offers a compelling analysis of modern consumption habits and social stratification. Through her exploration of subtle, non-material consumption patterns, she introduces the idea of leisure time as a form of capital, arguing that how individuals spend their free time reflects and reinforces social class divisions in contemporary society.

Currid-Halkett focuses on what she calls the "aspirational class", a group that may not always be the wealthiest in monetary terms but distinguishes itself through cultural capital accumulation. Members of this class tend to invest their leisure time in self-improvement activities—such as education, wellness practices (like yoga and meditation), participation in local eco-festivals, and cultural engagement. These forms of consumption are often invisible yet serve as powerful indicators of social positioning and long-term advantage.

Crucially, Currid-Halkett contrasts this with the leisure behaviors of lower-income groups, who are more likely to engage in passive forms of entertainment such as watching television or scrolling through social media. She argues that this divergence in time use deepens inequalities of opportunity, as the aspirational class leverages their leisure as a strategic investment in personal development, while others may inadvertently lose out on such growth. As she poignantly states, "some people use leisure to gain knowledge and experience, while others simply lose time." This dichotomy illustrates how leisure is no longer just about rest—it has become a silent mechanism for sustaining social inequality.

Although research on leisure economy in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) remains relatively limited, this field is recognized as a new and evolving area of study. Consequently, existing academic work primarily focuses on topics such as the socio-economic impacts of leisure, cultural consumption, tourism, and quality of life.

In a collaborative paper titled *Economic Potential of the Sphere of Culture and Leisure in Russia and the OECD Countries*, Russian scholars Tatyana Abankina, Viktoriya Romanova, and Elena Nikolayenko analyze the economic potential of the culture and leisure sectors in Russia and OECD countries. The authors explore the demand for cultural and leisure activities within households, government support for



the cultural sector, and the development of creative industries. Their research highlights a significant imbalance between the high demand for cultural and leisure services in Russia and the limited government support, which they argue restricts the growth of creative industries. This imbalance, the authors suggest, contributes to the outflow of talented young professionals abroad.

In the article titled "The Influence of the Sanatorium and Resort Services Market on the Development of Kazakhstan's Economy" (2024), Kazakhstani scholars A. Kizimbayeva, A. Urazbekov, and Zh. Bulakbay analyze the impact of the sanatorium services market on Kazakhstan's economy. The article discusses how sanatorium services contribute to meaningful leisure time by focusing on health recovery, the role of leisure infrastructure, and the development of the service market driven by leisure demand. The central theme of this paper is the analysis of the "health recovery and recreation-oriented services segment" within the leisure economy and its influence on economic growth.

In our country, several scholars have explored the role of leisure economy and its connection to human resource management. For example, S.B. G'oyipnazarov has studied the interrelationship between leisure time management and human resources management. His research analyzes the impact of leisure time management on labor activities and examines strategies aimed at increasing employee motivation. N.U. Arapov, in his research, examines the close relationship between leisure economy and tourism, emphasizing that the development of the leisure economy is beneficial for the entire economic activity.

The economic significance of leisure time is not only related to its impact on individuals' personal lives but also on overall economic development, social well-being, and labor productivity. Effective organization of leisure time can influence various aspects of the economy. Properly managed leisure time helps employees rest and rejuvenate, which in turn increases their productivity, as they return to work refreshed and motivated. Additionally, spending leisure time effectively contributes to both physical and mental health improvements. People use their free time to reduce stress, engage in sports, and improve their overall well-being, which is essential for continuous and stable work performance. For employers, this leads to healthier employees with long-term work capabilities.

Another crucial aspect of the leisure economy is its role in improving social well-being and quality of life. The social dimension of leisure is also important, as



individuals enhance their quality of life by spending time with family and friends, engaging in cultural and artistic activities, and traveling. This positively impacts social well-being and contributes to the development of various sectors of the economy, such as regional tourism and other service industries. The leisure economy drives the growth of tourism, sports, culture, and entertainment industries. As more people spend their time in tourism, entertainment, and other service sectors, these industries expand, creating new job opportunities.

Conclusions

On April 9th, 2023, during a video conference with relevant authorities, the President of Uzbekistan highlighted that many families have not yet visited cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shahrissabz. In response, the idea of declaring one Saturday and Sunday each month as "family and workgroup travel days" was proposed. This initiative reflects the growing attention given to leisure economy in Uzbekistan. The development of this sector is not just an economic issue but also plays a crucial role in improving social, political, and economic dynamics, enhancing work productivity and contributing to national economic growth.

Expanding financial opportunities, such as supporting local entrepreneurs in tourism and leisure services, has become a key topic in the country. This is evidenced by Presidential Decree PQ-238 of July 27, 2023. Leisure economy and tourism are closely interconnected, with the growth of one positively affecting the other. The expansion of local tourism increases opportunities for people to spend their leisure time meaningfully and contributes to economic activity by creating new jobs.

As people gain more leisure time, the management of this time becomes increasingly important. Strategies need to be developed to help individuals effectively utilize their free time. This could lead to the development of tourism and leisure-related sectors, which can further fuel economic and social development.

Moreover, managing leisure time plays a significant role in ensuring social equality. Everyone should have equal access to leisure opportunities, such as sports facilities, cultural events, and other recreational activities.

In the context of modern economic development and technological advancement, how leisure time is managed affects not only individuals but also society and the economy as a whole. The economic and social importance of effective leisure time management



is steadily increasing. Uzbek scholars are conducting numerous studies in this area, which contribute to the development of a healthy, happy, and productive lifestyle. In the field of Human Resource Management (HRM), the importance of leisure economy is growing. This can be explained by several factors:

Employee Health and Well-being: Properly organized leisure time helps reduce stress levels and improve the physical and mental well-being of employees, positively influencing productivity.

Motivation and Work Productivity: Initiatives supporting leisure activities (e.g., gyms, travel opportunities, weekends off) increase employees' loyalty and improve the corporate culture. This reduces turnover and helps retain talent.

Work-Life Balance: Managing the balance between work and leisure time is becoming a crucial issue. Companies that respect employees' leisure time are seen as modern and sustainable, and this becomes part of the company's mission.

Creativity and Innovation: Properly organized leisure time has a positive effect on cognitive function and fosters creative thinking. Well-rested employees bring new ideas and innovations to their work.

Leisure economy not only contributes to the socio-economic development of society but also helps in effective human resource management at the company level.

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