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## An Illustration of a Social Type: The Idle in Veblen Sociology

### Abstract

The idle, as an example of a social type, provides some significant insights into social reality and gives us the opportunity to draw general conclusions about the evolution of social transformation. With its qualities, characteristic actions and features, the idle type has become an embodied form of social reality, providing information about the world of meaning and mental structure of a society. In this respect, it is an indispensable field of sociology. Thorstein Veblen is one of the most important names in this field. As a concept reflecting social status and class distinction within social structure, the idle type occupies a central place in Veblen's social typology studies. Its strong relationship with conspicuous consumption reveals how this type functions as an indicator of social privilege in society and how individuals differentiate themselves in search of status. This study analyses this relationship between idleness and conspicuous consumption and discusses the characteristics of the idle type within the social structure. In line with Veblen's theoretical framework, it analyses the characteristics of the idle type within social structure and discusses how it has evolved in modern society. Through discussions, it aims to show that this type still exists today, albeit in different forms.

**Keywords:** Thorstein Veblen, Social type, Idler, Consumption, Conspicuous Consumption.

## Bir Toplumsal Tip Örneği: Veblen Sosyolojisinde Aylak

### Öz

Aylak tipi, başlı başına bir toplumsal tip örneği olarak sosyal gerçekliğe dair önemli ipuçları sunmakta ve toplumsal dönüşümün evrimine ilişkin genel çıkarımlar yapma fırsatı vermektedir. Sahip olduğu nitelikler, karakteristik eylemleri ve ayrıştırıcı özellikleriyle aylak tipi, bir toplumun anlam dünyası ve zihniyet yapısına dair bilgiler sunarak toplumsal gerçekliğin somutlaşmış bir biçimi haline gelmiştir. Bu açıdan sosyolojinin vazgeçilemez bir alanıdır. Thorstein Veblen, söz konusu alanın en önemli isimlerinden birisidir. Aylak tipi, toplumsal yapı içinde, sosyal statü ve sınıf ayrımını yansıtan bir kavram olarak, Veblen'in toplumsal tipoloji çalışmalarında merkezi bir yer tutmaktadır. Gösterişçi tüketimle olan güçlü ilişkisi, bu tipin toplumda nasıl bir sosyal ayrıcalık göstergesi olarak işlediğini ve bireylerin statü arayışında nasıl farklılaştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, aylaklık ve gösterişçi tüketim arasındaki bu bağlamı analiz etmekte, ayrıca aylak tipinin toplumsal yapı içerisindeki karakteristik özelliklerini tartışmaktadır. Veblen'in teorik çerçevesi doğrultusunda aylak tipinin toplumsal yapı içindeki karakteristik özelliklerini analiz etmekte ve modern toplumda nasıl evrildiğini tartışmaktadır. Bu tipin farklı biçimlerde de olsa, günümüzde varlığını sürdürdüğünün i teorik ve kavramsal tartışmalar eşliğinde gösterilmesi amaçlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Thorstein Veblen, Toplumsal Tip, Aylak, Tüketim, Gösterişçi Tüketim.

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## 1. Introduction

The discipline of sociology has been under the influence of the positivist paradigm since its inception and has developed a perspective on social issues within the framework of the natural sciences. In line with the naturalistic paradigm, the impact of culture on human beings and society was discussed, and these two phenomena were approached independently of structure and system. Macro approaches focusing on structure and system led to micro issues such as social type being ignored or underemphasized. After the Second World War, approaches to understanding culture and human action became dominant in sociology. As a result, micro-studies came to the fore.

During the period when micro approaches gained popularity, interest in the concept of social type, one of the long-neglected topics in sociological literature, increased. A social type is a concept represented by an individual and characterized by similar behaviors and actions of a large number of individuals in society (Aydemir, 2016). In this context, in the society in which it exists, it contains many of the general characteristics of the society, expresses the average of the society and contributes to the idea of the society in this regard. It is therefore the place where social relations are reflected. Social types, which play an important role in the visualization of the network of social relations and the maintenance of social relations, are at the center of differences, conflicts and routines.

Social types have been the subject of various studies in different subfields of sociology. In particular, the founders of classical sociology attached importance to social types and tried to analyse time and social life through these types. This typification was even presented as a method of sociological analysis by Max Weber (see Weber, 1978; 2001). In addition, George Simmel's analysis was directly through social types. The stranger, the poor, the miser, the avaricious, the prodigal, the adventurer, and the noble, which he analyzed through forms of social interaction, constitute the prominent social types of the field in early studies (see Simmel, 1972). Also in early sociological literature, Karl Marx positioned his theory through types such as the bourgeois, the lumpen and the proletariat, and Durkheim explained his basic theory through suicidal types (see Durkheim, 2005). This interest has continued in contemporary sociology. It should be noted that there is a serious field of study on the subject in English literature. In Turkish literature, on the other hand, type sociology does not seem to have been accepted as an independent field of study. At this point, Ulus Baker's (2010) *Kanaatlerden İmajlara: Duygular Sosyolojisine Doğru* (From Opinions to Images: Towards a Sociology of Emotions), Nilüfer Öztürk Aykaç's (2018) *Toplumsal Bir Tip Olarak Ankaralı* (Ankaralı as a Social Type) and Musa Arı's (2019) *İnformel Bir İktidar Tipolojisi: Türk Kamu Bürokrasisinde Üstatlık* (An Informal Typology of Power: Mastery in the Turkish Public Bureaucracy) can be referred. In this context, the Social Types dossier in the third issue of *Journal Sosyoloji Divanı* and Mehmet Ali Aydemir's (2016) edition of *Toplumsal Tipler* (Social Types) and other various articles written on different social types are among the early works of Turkish literature in this field.

One of the pioneering works and names in the literature on Social Types is Thorstein Veblen and his distinguished work *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (see 1994; 2014). This work is fundamental to the understanding of the *theory of the idle class* and *social type* analysis. However, this work of Veblen, which is supported by

his important views on type, has not been adequately addressed in Turkish literature in terms of sociology of type. The type of idler he presents aims to reach general definitions of the structure and system by starting from a micro element within the social structure. It is therefore oriented towards understanding the social life and conditions of the time. The idler is a type whose dress, posture, behavior and discourse are unique to him. This particular type's distinctive presence leaves a lasting impression on the minds of others. For this reason, Veblen's idler type is placed at the center of the study. This type will be discussed in the context of conspicuous consumption. Within this framework, the first part of the study will focus on what the concept of social type is and what the characteristics of the social type embodied in society are. Then, based on the concept of social type, Veblen's idle type will be discussed, and it will be explained what the idle type is as an example of a social type and what its characteristics are. Finally, it discusses the significance of this type in terms of conspicuous consumption, which reflects today's consumer culture. The article, which is accompanied by a theoretical discussion, is written as a literature review and discussion.

## **2. Development of the Concept of Type from Macro to Micro Sociology**

Existing approaches to the reality of social life have long existed as macro-level approaches, treating the realities associated with society from a more generalizing perspective. The main starting point of social structure and system-oriented theories had explained society rather than to understand it, and perspectives on the individual within the structure have been considered unnecessary. In explaining social problems, they have attempted to establish laws similar to the laws of natural sciences and to draw general conclusions about social reality. In explaining social reality, the theorists who emphasized social reality ignored the existence of the individual in society and defined the individual as a passive element of society. Under the dominance of the positivist paradigm, the determining influence of the individual on social reality was ignored and a form of explanation of society within the comprehensive system was developed. For a long time, this general approach to explaining social reality was accepted as the dominant and most influential theory in the sociological literature (see Layder, 1994). This conception of sociology prevailed because it spoke directly to the intellectual and social demands of its era.

The explanation of social reality in terms of structures and institutions has devalued any social phenomenon in which the individual has a direct influence, and the individual's participation in society has been defined as a passive quality. However, every social institution and every element of the social structure is given meaning by the direct existence of the individual, and a social reality emerges from the interaction of the individual with society. The individual assumes the role of the dominant actor by constructing society and contributes to the process of understanding social reality as a direct performer of important roles within the system and structure. This reconciliation between structure and agent, as Talcot Parsons (1968) argues in *The Structure of Social Action*, has made the concept of social roles a central interest of sociology. This interest has also made possible the types of agents, that is, the types that fill, play and function within social roles.

Thinkers such as Weber, Simmel and Veblen criticized the existing approaches to the passive status of the individual by focusing on and reminding the dominant role of the individual in the social structure. Their analysis of social reality, which they presented with a new perspective to understand the action of the individual, gave rise to a new style in which micro-level

approaches replaced the dominant understanding in sociology. Thus, theories began to emerge that placed interaction and individual agency at the center of understanding social life and thus sought to understand the individual's world of meaning. "Sociological theories, mixed with a social-psychological touch, have tried to touch the micro-relations of society. By tracing the marks of life left in the corners, an attempt was made to store data for the new paradigm of social sciences" (Gökçen and Ulutaş, 2019). Beyond a generalizing approach, the way was paved for the inclusion of both macro and micro approaches in sociology by considering the individual interactions that exist in the social structure.

The concept of social type is one of the important sociological phenomena that has long been overlooked in macro-theories and not included within the boundaries of the positivist paradigm, where the individual exists as the main actor. In the periods when sociology was trying to prove itself as a science, studies conducted in the shadow of the natural sciences led to the emergence of perspectives that prioritized the importance of human action and the necessity of the interaction of the individual within the social structure. The replacement of generalizing perspectives and universally valid conclusions by studies aimed at understanding society led to the concept of the human being placed at the basis of studies. The concept of social type, on the other hand, was not a concept in which the early thinkers were directly interested, but a phenomenon that they used in their studies to understand human action and to examine individual interaction within the social structure. Therefore, rather than a concept of social type that is the focus of early studies and whose boundaries are known, we see the existence of a phenomenon of social type that is used, when necessary, in studies aimed at positioning human beings in society.

Especially after the Second World War, with the popularity of micro-sociological topics, the number of studies on subjects included in the study of everyday life has increased. Based on this popularity, the concept of social type has been traced in the theories existing in the sociological literature from the past to the present, and studies on this concept have formed the background of the concept of social type. From Simmel to Veblen, from Sombart to Debord, from Baudrillard to the works of Ritzer, the trace of the social type has been sought.

Type, in its most general sense, means that an individual's prominent behaviors come to the fore within the social structure and become prominent and stereotyped within a group. For the behavior displayed by an individual to be defined as a social type, it must be *prominent*, *common* and *stereotyped* (Aydemir, 2016). Being stereotyped is the existence of similar forms of behavior in the phenomenon we call social type. This does not mean that the social type has an average quality. What makes a social type a "type" is the presence in it of the highest level of development of all the basic determinants of human and social aspects, the representation of the lines that embody the peaks and limits of people and epochs to the end (Sümen, 2019: 13-14). In the social structure, action is so distinctive that it is directly understood by the other segments of society that the action exhibited is unique to that type. In this respect, it is possible to speak of the existence of a characteristic action specific to this type. For example, a bully is a social type. The bully's shouting is a characteristic that distinguishes this social type from other individuals. The differentiation of a bully as a social type by shouting has led to the shouting becoming widespread among other bullies and this action being defined as a specific action of the bully within the social structure.

Referring to the differences between the concept of role and the concept of type, Almog Oz (2018) highlights the elements that should be considered within the boundaries of the concept of type. According to him, it is not possible to predict the behaviors that are defined as specific to the social type. There are no physical factors that distinguish social types from other types. A clothing style determined by the normative structure is out of the question for social types. Individual preferences and tastes are important for social types. Social types have the characteristic of being continuous. They are not limited to one place or institution. Social types are not as numerous and varied as roles. In addition, a person has a limited number of social type behaviors. Whereas role is determined by institutional structures, social type is determined by personal characteristics and traits of individuals. Social type is given content by primary or secondary groups (Sümen, 2019: 12).

It is not possible to speak of the existence of a single social type within the social structure. Social types created by many positions and social institutions coexist within the structure. Existing social types have distinctive features and characteristic actions. The fact that characteristic actions are specific to the social type makes it possible to analyze the social structure and social institutions through the type. Thus, general conclusions about society can be drawn from a micro element such as social type. "In this sense, the categories of social types allow the differentiation of the social field or the production of a descriptive framework for the whole of the features with common characteristics" (Aydemir, 2016: 11). This produced framework creates important contents for understanding the social structure, and social analysis becomes possible based on these contents. For example, based on the tribal chieftain social type, it is possible to understand the conditions necessary for the continuity of the social structure in which the tribal chieftain type exists, general information about the functioning of the structure and the basic characteristics of the social structure. The main point to be emphasized here is the sensitivity of documenting the character known by everyone as a social type. It is only through this distinctive aspect that it is possible to draw general conclusions about society.

The fact that significant differences become widespread by gaining specificity within the social structure reveals the existence of the concept of social type. The existence of a particular segment within the majority with distinct differences means that many features of the social structure can be understood in terms of a type. This is because the social type in itself allows conclusions to be drawn about belief, culture, tradition, relationship, conflict, unity and solidarity. There is a social type produced by every reality that exists within the social structure. Each social type is also the embodiment of a social reality. The type contains data about the culture, language, religion and ethnic identity of the individual in the society. It thus provides the researcher with a wide range of data about the individual in sociological research. "The effort to define, classify or categorize is also an effort to understand that type. When classifying types, issues such as their environment, lifestyle or occupation are important to show the general characteristic structure of that type. Types such as marketers, students, politicians, parents, neighbors, snobs, urbanites and criminals are all active in society and all have their own characteristics" (Keskin & Çelikel, 2023: 453). Their characteristics cause social types to be differentiated from others within the structure and to be seen as a source of data about society.

There can be no assumption that the characteristics of social types are specific to a single individual. It is not the behavior itself that is the subject of sociology, but the world of meaning, mentality and social codes behind it. An exhibited form of behavior becomes stereotyped and widespread, reveals the world of mentality behind it, and thus becomes the subject of the social. By providing information about the structure in which it exists, the type gives a clue to the social by its very existence. "The social type is the state of being able to collect the structure and the universe to which it belongs. Each structure creates its own type and its own people or is created and reformulated by its own people. Social types are whole societies. The structures that make up society exist and are meaningful with institutions, departments, spaces, situations/states and their own actors" (Aydemir, 2016: 16). The actors of each institution, department, space and situation, as social agents, ensure the continuity of the structure within the structure and thus have the characteristic of being the main actor in the functioning of the structure.

The reality represented by the social type contains a world of meaning and mentality behind it. It is at this point that the existence of social types within the structure allows generalized judgments about the structure to be made from micro scales - that is, from social types. Every social structure produces unique social types. And the social types it produces contribute to the process in interaction with the structure, thus the social type acquires the property of being a social phenomenon. Aydemir compares the role of social types in the structure to a projection system. "In any case, types are a projection system that the researcher must identify to clarify his point of view and understand what he is using. In a way, it contains the possibility of revealing the essence of the social world he is dealing with. Through typological conceptualizations, it creates the possibility of representing the social world with one piece in infinite sections" (Aydemir, 2016: 23). The social type has a characteristic that distinguishes it from other individuals in its attitudes, behavior, clothing and communication styles. Each element that differentiates the social type is partly characteristic and partly social. "In this sense, while type focuses on the individual characteristics of agents in social space, it also emphasizes that their individual characteristics are given a distinctive character by a particular social structure at a particular moment in history" (Sümen, 2019: 6). While the social position and institutions in which the individual exists have the potential to create a social type, the characteristics of the individual are also very important in creating a social type.

### **3. The Theory of the Idle Class and the Idle Type**

Thorstein Veblen wrote *The Theory of the Idle Class* in 1899. Although Veblen's area of expertise was economics and business, in *The Theory of the Idle Class* he focused on human behavior and tried to uncover the economic and social reasons behind that behavior. Veblen explained society by looking at the consumption habits of the emerging new middle class in America. He emphasized the relationship between changes in the daily lives of the rich in America and the economic activities and tried to understand the impact of economic understanding on social classes. The effect of micro changes in American society on social perception was another theme that Veblen tried to convey. Starting from primitive societies to feudal societies, Veblen discussed how those who had wealth used their position in society and appropriated the products of the lower classes who played an effective role in production relations, how they gained more income from the lower classes by idling, and how they

regarded industrial workers as inferior to themselves. He made a social analysis by reflecting on the changing form of capitalism in American society.

Throughout his work, Veblen explained society from an evolutionary perspective. From primitive societies to contemporary societies, he emphasized the changing social status and roles due to technological progression. In other words he tried to understand the process from savage societies to barbaric societies, from barbaric societies to peaceful industrial societies from an evolutionary perspective by linking it to technology. In his approach to technological progress, he also focused on changes in the consumption habits of individuals. With this evolutionary perspective, he categorized the stages of development of societies into three main categories. He emphasizes that society, which he categorized into three stages as peaceful societies, barbarian/predatory societies and monetary societies, has reached its current stage by passing through these stages (see Veblen, 2014). The characteristics of today's societies are in fact the transformation of the characteristics that existed from barbarian societies to the present day in accordance with the spirit of the times. This feature of the social structure allows us to trace the history of a social type or a social phenomenon, such as idleness, back to barbarian societies.

The theory of the idle class is essentially a sociological study centered on an economic perspective. In his work, Veblen analyzed in detail the consumption habits of societies from the past to the present and tried to understand the basic dynamics of past and present societies. The relations of production and consumption in which people engage to sustain their lives have, over time, come to have meanings beyond the satisfaction of primary needs. Veblen emphasizes that the meaning of consumption has evolved in the sense that individuals have evolved to gain or maintain a position within the social structure (see Veblen, 2014). What Veblen emphasizes in the social structure is *conspicuous consumption* out of necessity. For conspicuous consumption to continue, certain factors must be present in society. These factors are the existence of the *idle class*, *consumption* and *material imitation*.

According to Veblen, when consumption is related to the status of the individual, when there is material emulation between individuals, and when there is luxury and conspicuous consumption within the social structure, it is possible to speak of the existence of the idle type. The idle type, identified with consumption, ostentation and luxury, can be the subject of type sociology because of the social position it represents.

### **3.1. The Idler as a social type**

The types within the social structure contain meanings related to the meaning and mentality of society. It is possible to understand the changing structure and the basic dynamics that hold the structure together through the position of the types within the structure and their main patterns of behavior. Veblen's idler type is an example of a social type because it is the equivalent of a world of mentality related to the society in which it lives. The idler type has a feature that contains data about the social dynamics of the period and contains clues about the criteria by which social layers differ within the structure. In this context, Veblen's idler type can be used to understand the economic inequality caused by industrialization in a society that has taken important steps towards industrialization, how this inequality is reflected in society, and the social stratification between those who are obliged to work in industry and those who are not. These are also the central questions of sociology and the central themes

of social change. In addition, it can be said that the type of idler, who, with the spread of industry, has chosen the cities as his living space, exists as an example of a social type belonging to the city in modern times. The place where the idle type, whose modernity is associated with travelling, having fun, spending and not working, can maintain all these elements is the city itself. It is not possible for the idle type to continue idleness within the opportunities of rural life (Aydemir, 2016: 124). Therefore, modernity's relationship with consumption and the city, and the reflection of this relationship in social life, shaped Veblen's central interest.

According to Veblen, the idle class has more than one visibility. The idle class has the characteristics of being in the upper echelon of society and frequently consuming within the relations of production and consumption, being the first consumers of quality and expensive goods, thus increasing the value of quality and expensive goods by making them unique, consuming out of necessity, and leading society based on consumption and ostentation. There is also a group that performs the act of consumption to maintain its status in the social structure, emulating the idle class and aiming to achieve the lifestyle of the idle class. It is a group that has the lifestyle they have, has fun like them, walks and behaves like them. This group, which appears in places where the idle class is present and tries to join it, is the same as the idle class in terms of consumption habits and lifestyle. It is possible to consider this group, which does not have a noble lineage or family wealth, but is newly enriched by trade, as the idle class. Apart from these two representations, Veblen also mentions the existence of a type of idler who is noble in lineage, but who comes under the protection of rich families because he loses his wealth over time. "These men who accept the patronage of the rich in order to earn a living and protect their interests, also benefit from his fame and title, but everyone knows their situation, and some think that they are people without pride" (Veblen, 2014: 65). This type, who travels, wanders, and spends time just having fun and consuming in everyday life, must think about the prestige of the families that patronize them. This type of idler performs this action as an indicator of the nobility and gentility of the noble and aristocratic families that patronize them. Apart from all these, Veblen mentions that noble families who have wealth often keep surplus servants and domestics just for show, and the servants and domestics who are many in number do not have a defined job for themselves, so they loaf (Veblen, 2014: 50). Servants who benefit from their masters' wealth, fortune, and reputation, and who have leisure time and the opportunity to consume, even if only a little, may have some of the characteristics of the idle type.

In an effort to delineate the characteristics of the idle type, Veblen sought to distinguish this class from those situated within the social structure. To this end, he endeavored to define the idle type by delineating its boundaries. The idle constitute the social stratum at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, endowed with the capacity to consume luxury goods and the economic means to maintain their lives without engaging in productive work. Veblen posits that individuals who are not compelled to engage in labor and possess substantial financial resources and leisure time are either members of the nobility, clergy, or aristocracy. The upper classes are predominantly employed in sectors that are not industrial in nature, including government, military service, religious work, and sports. Manual labor and industrial work, which provide a means of livelihood for the majority of the population, represent the sole domains of employment for the lower classes. These four areas of employment are analogous to the traditional occupations of kings, tribal chieftains, and nobles. They are undertaken for reasons



of tradition or to enhance one's standing in society (Veblen, 2014: 8-9). Those in the upper class who possess knowledge in fields such as politics, religion, and economics, which are of little interest to most of the society, can be included in the idle class due to their abundance of free time and their pioneering attitude in consumption.

In his *Theory of the Idle Class*, Veblen, while discussing the appearance of the idle type in the social structure, states with a progressive perspective on the existence of the idle type that "the most advanced form of idleness, that is, having leisure time, is found in feudal societies, which he calls the higher stages of barbarian culture" (Göktürk, 2020: 219). Veblen posits that the distinction between social classes in feudal societies is pronounced, with those engaged in military and religious roles held in high esteem, while industrial occupations are perceived as insignificant. The perception that activities requiring labor and effort are superfluous is not exclusive to feudal societies. In subsequent historical periods, activities necessitating work and labor for those in possession of wealth have been regarded as the domain of the lower classes.

The upper strata of society, which is included in the idle class, tends to perceive the industrial jobs as inferior and defines the ability to live without working as a prestigious position. For members of the idle class, the ability to live without working represents the pinnacle of achievement in the context of daily social life. The ability to consume without the necessity of gainful employment is the most esteemed aspect. The freedom to traverse the urban landscape without the necessity of labor and the capacity to consume beyond mere necessities represents a privileged position for those belonging to the idle class. Veblen underscored that throughout history, there has existed a privileged class within society. He further observed that there are segments of society that eschew pursuing a vocation and instead contribute to social life through consumption.

"The man of plenty of money and time who lived during the so-called peaceful period not only consumed what was necessary for his life, but always sought and found and consumed more and better. Food, drink, sedatives and habit-forming substances, houses, services, ornaments and jewelry, weapons, various equipment, entertainment, household items, idols or sacred objects, he always wanted and obtained the best. He did whatever was necessary to make his life easier and more comfortable. His standard of living and fame were also at stake. Luxury and expensive consumer goods were a sign of wealth. It increased the respect for him, and using poor quality products did the opposite, and dishonored his name" (Veblen, 2014: 62).

As evidenced by Veblen's quote, the consumption of goods and services based on status, prestige, and ostentation, rather than necessity, has persisted from primitive societies to the present day. This phenomenon has undergone significant transformations in terms of content and form. Veblen underscores that with the advent of industrialization, the spectrum of demands among the idle class has expanded, and metropolises have emerged as hubs for consumption-based interactions. The proliferation of mass production led to an expansion in the range of available consumer goods, with luxury items displayed in shop windows and on streets. In the context of the capitalist system, the idle class has begun to be defined in terms of its leisure activities and pursuit of pleasure. The idle class consumes time, space, and commodities without engaging in productive labor. At this juncture, the remainder of society must sustain their livelihoods by engaging in productive activities or contributing to the overall

production of the system. The idle class regards this obligation as superfluous and characterizes production and industrial labor as menial and unsavory pursuits.

Veblen posited that the primary agent of consumption within social life is the idle type. This characteristic is among the most salient features of the idle class, ranking alongside the act of not working in terms of prominence. Veblen posits that the phenomenon of consumption has acquired new meanings in the hands of the idle type, diverging from its original connotations. For Veblen, consumption is as natural as production and is an obligatory action for individuals to survive. In addition to the fundamental objective of consumption, the notion that consumption is a requisite action for individuals to attain or retain a particular position or status, and the assumption that consumption is driven by ostentation, represents a form of consumption that Veblen critiques. Veblen posits that the idle type feels compelled to consume the best. “The consumption of these superior goods bestows honor upon the owner, demonstrating their affluence. Conversely, eschewing such consumption is perceived as a deficiency, indicative of a lower socioeconomic status” (Soncu and Çelik, 2022: 20). In consequence, the privileges of the idle concerning luxury consumption represent an area of emulation for other segments of society. The freedom to consume without restraint is a source of prestige and reputation for those who are idle. Veblen posits that a lack of consumption aligns with the social construct of stinginess within the context of the idle type (Veblen, 2014: 78). Those who are idle and do not consume the wealth they possess in a manner that aligns with societal expectations are perceived as behaving in a manner similar to that of a person with limited financial resources. This is not a socially acceptable position within the social environment.

While the idle type consumes in excess of their needs, this is not solely manifested through the consumption of commodities. It is also evident in the consumption of time and space. Those who have the luxury of leisure time are predominantly members of the upper socioeconomic stratum, and also tend to possess significant material wealth. The upper-class idle type is the sole entity capable of initiating the management of their free time. The idle individual exercises autonomy over their time by traversing the urban landscape and engaging in acts of consumption. The state of idleness, whereby all forms of labor are deemed superfluous, is perceived by other social groups as a profitable condition (Güleç, 2015: 15). This profitable position within the social hierarchy serves to reinforce the status of the idle type. The idle type views consumption as a means of maintaining and sustaining a profitable status within society, attaching particular significance to the act of consuming. The possession of commodities serves as the primary indicator of wealth for the idle type. “The consumption of commodities outside of the production process offers two distinct benefits. Firstly, it confers prestige and a sense of valor and value upon the individual. Secondly, consuming items that are envied by the wider society is a form of respect” (Soncu and Çelik, 2022: 20). Consequently, the idle class ascribes the ability to sustain life through production to the lower-class poor, whereas the upper class identifies leisure time and unlimited consumption as the pinnacle of societal achievement. This has consistently been the case for those situated at the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Those in the upper echelons of society have consistently retained their dominant position in terms of living standards throughout most historical periods.

Veblen identifies the pursuit of the latest fashions, and the most expensive items produced as a defining characteristic of the idle type in terms of consumption. This demand of the idle type gives rise to competition among the idle class and emulation of the idle type by other classes. In essence, the consumption of luxury goods is a direct reflection of the consumer's preferences and comfort, showcasing their discernment. "Those luxurious, delicious articles of consumption can be consumed by others other than the master only with his indulgence" (Veblen, 2014: 61). The concentration of the best products on the market in the hands of the idle type results in the use of certain products becoming exclusive to the idle class. Such products include tobacco, narcotics, assorted fruits and vegetables, headwear adorned with exotic feathers, assorted accessories, and beverages produced through specialized processes. This distinction is especially evident in the case of drugs and other intoxicating substances and beverages. Given their elevated cost, these substances and beverages are perceived as luxuries reserved for the affluent and aristocratic classes. The disparate consumption patterns of different social classes have contributed to the emergence of distinct social stratification. The commodities consumed by the nobility, for instance, differ significantly from those consumed by other social classes. While the lower strata of the social structure are preoccupied with meeting their daily basic needs, the upper classes engage in conspicuous consumption. Veblen posits that this surplus consumption is wasteful, and that wasteful consumption represents a significant social issue. He posits that the optimal use of available resources for the benefit of society, as opposed to the current practice of wasteful consumption, would effectively address many of the existing societal issues.

One of the most salient characteristics of the idler is that the idler also delineates time, space, family, spouse, wife, servant, butler, and children in terms of consumption. The idler views his wives and children as a means of displaying his material wealth and demonstrating it to others. He also assigns the role of representing his wealth to his wives and children. "Women and children typically did not select their preferred food items or purchase the jewelry and ornaments they desired" (Veblen, 2014: 59). Women and children, who typically align their consumption with their husband's and father's preferences, tend to consume in accordance with the wealth and consumption patterns of the idle type. The woman's role is to display the wealth of the noble idle type in accordance with her status. "The more financial resources and leisure time the housewife allocated, the more the name of the man, the head of the household, was heard and respected. In that historical period, women were expected to engage in leisure activities and to expend considerable sums of money, rather than to engage in productive work" (Veblen, 2015: 139). The concept of leisure time and the act of consumption are two significant elements that women embody and exhibit in the name of upholding their husbands' reputation. "The respectable woman was expected to spend her time at home in a manner that reflected her role as a wife and mother. This often entailed dressing in a manner that was considered attractive and maintaining a certain standard of beauty for her husband. In accordance with the contemporary, civilized way of life, the comfort and tranquility of life at home, which is a domain that encompasses women as well, hinges on the woman's actions. To guarantee this, it is imperative that the woman of the house exercises prudence in her spending and recognizes this as her responsibility. As evidenced by the lives of wealthy families, the sole economic function of the woman in the ideal way of life applicable to this class of people is to make that would be considered wasteful in a way that would attract attention" (Veblen 2014: 139). A woman who honors her

husband through the performance of respectable expenditures is compelled to consume to maintain her husband's reputation and position within the social structure. At this juncture, Veblen traces the genesis of economic and social disparities within the social structure back to the acquisition of property. He posits that the foundation of inequality is the advent of property. The initial manifestations of property ownership can be traced back to the acquisition of women and servants by men, progressing to the ownership of a vast array of commodities in the present era. At this juncture, Veblen underscores that the appropriation of women by men in barbarian societies bestows upon the latter a position and role within the community. He further asserts that women are regarded as property in such societies. When this perception of property is associated with conspicuous consumption, it can be argued that women serve as a form of status and self-expression for men.

The advent of the idle class is an inevitable outcome of industrialization. The concept of the idler as a distinct social category existed prior to the advent of industrialization. However, it was only with the advent of the Industrial Revolution that this category became a recognizable social type. Indeed, the advent of the working class rendered the existence of the idle class a tangible reality. As the working class (see Marx, Engels, 2014), which does not work on its own capital and property and cannot own what it produces, fills the labor space in production, a new class that can make a living without spending labor has emerged. As a result, a new class that can make a living without spending labor has emerged. It is therefore possible to posit the existence of a class that derives its income from the production process and whose members are able to survive without engaging in any form of productive work.

Veblen emphasizes that with the advent of property, a class distinction based on ownership became apparent in the social structure. The proliferation of industry across all societies has resulted in a notable expansion of the industrial labor force. Concurrently, the distinction between those who are compelled to engage in industrial work and those who are disinclined to assume the role of a worker has become increasingly discernible within the social structure. The advent of an industrial labor force and the concomitant anxiety surrounding the necessity of maintaining one's livelihood through work contributed to the popularization of the idle class, which possesses the economic potential to sustain itself without engaging in labor. The idle class, which was not compelled to engage in productive labor to sustain their livelihood, was able to flourish while enjoying the benefits of not working and securing a position in social life without producing. The fundamental characteristic of the idle class is their avoidance of work and consolidation of their social position through the consumption of luxury items.

One of the most significant attributes of the idle class, as conceptualized by Veblen, is their proclivity to maintain their conventional cognitive structures and resist the abandonment of their deeply held beliefs and worldviews. In other words, this is indicative of a conservative attitude. These individuals refrain from expressing discontent regarding the existing inequalities and the perceived unfair distribution of economic resources. Such expressions could potentially incite a social awakening, and they seek to maintain the status quo in their favor. They believe that they will lose their privileges and social standing if the established order is disrupted, and they are vehemently opposed to change. This class prefers the perpetuation of traditional beliefs and values to maintain control over the individuals they employ. They are not proponents of social mobility. Such individuals are averse to change

and resist the implementation of industrial reforms. In this sense, the idle class may be considered to exhibit conservative tendencies. They advocate for the preservation of traditional values to safeguard their social standing (Veblen, 2014: 150). This is, in fact, an ongoing process. Given that the idlers' relations with the economy in the flow of daily life are focused on gain, they feel obliged to take part in an organization that is beneficial for society. Veblen posits that an individual with considerable leisure time and financial resources who chooses not to engage in gainful employment must demonstrate that they are utilizing their free time in a productive manner, in a way that is not overtly visible to others.

#### **4. Conspicuous Consumption and the Idler Type**

The idler is driven to demonstrate and exhibit his affluence. This is the way he makes known both the existence of his possessions and their rarity. The idler's aspiration to flaunt their capital manifests as a culture of consumption. "In addition to their inclination to consume the finest products, these individuals also possess a desire to understand the optimal methods for displaying them. It is of the utmost importance that their lives, which are replete with leisure time, are lived in an appropriate manner. Leisure is the ultimate symbol of success. Their refined demeanor and lifestyle must align with their ostentatious unemployment and conspicuous consumption standards" (Zorlu, 2016: 145). It is incumbent upon the idler type to propose innovations that will demonstrate their use of leisure time and conspicuous consumption. The organization of invitations, entertainment, and meals represents a significant preoccupation for the idle type, with the objective of ensuring that the organization aligns with their wealth and consumption. This is a manifestation of the everyday activities of the idle. This allows for the emergence of conspicuous consumption.

Veblen maintains that the idle type is distinguished from the rest of society by their proclivity for conspicuous consumption. As the diversity and demand for acquiring property increased, the equivalent of consumption became conspicuous consumption. For the idle type, consumption is not merely a means of meeting basic needs; it is also a way of maintaining their position and prestige within the social hierarchy and displaying their wealth to others. Veblen emphasizes that for the idle type, consumption is not merely for its primary purpose, but also for display. This imbues the concept of consumption with a new dimension. Concurrently, "the dominant element that distinguishes the idle class from other societal groups is consumption based on ostentation and luxury. The idle class is the primary demographic that has the capacity to consume innovations as they emerge. There is a state of competition within the group. As consumption is less prevalent among other social classes, they engage in a form of competition with themselves" (Zorlu, 2016: 145). These consumption elements are identified exclusively as consumption characteristics of individuals belonging to the upper class. The continued existence of the idle type at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy is contingent upon their ability to engage in conspicuous consumption.

The concept of the idler is contingent upon the existence of a hierarchy of consumption, wherein certain forms of consumption are regarded as more noble than others. High and noble consumption represents a form of consumption that encompasses the elements of pleasure and taste in addition to the fulfillment of basic needs. Those who are idle, who seek to engage in leisure activities and consume their wealth in a conspicuous manner, have defined the actions of working and being busy as situations they would prefer to avoid. He

posits that the primary criterion for social prestige is the consumption of goods and services and the subsequent enjoyment of leisure time.

The rationale behind the idle class's consumption of luxury goods is twofold: firstly, the products in question are expensive, and secondly, they are perceived as attractive by the public. The primary motivation for conspicuous consumption is the desire to emulate luxury and material wealth. In this manner, the prerequisites for conspicuous consumption by the idle type are established. The idler type engages in conspicuous consumption by possessing a commodity that is inaccessible to the public due to its exorbitant price point yet holds a universal appeal. Subsequently, the product and wealth must be revealed as an indication of ownership. At this juncture, an element that is as crucial for conspicuous consumption as the act of consuming and exercising purchasing power becomes a pivotal factor. This is a form of disclosure and exposure. Veblen posits that the individual in question "advertises his superiority with excessive expenditures that he makes openly or attempts to conceal through a vague effort, and that he takes great pleasure in the public seeing his idleness, which is his main characteristic" (Güleç, 2015: 69). Veblen posits that the nobility and wealth inherent to those born into nobility is insufficient for attaining a position in social life. He further asserts that such nobility and wealth must be augmented by disclosure. The fundamental prerequisite for attaining social prestige and status is to make others cognizant of one's conspicuously excessive consumption. In his view:

"An individual with considerable financial resources seeks to uphold their dignity through the conspicuous consumption of costly consumer goods. However, this is insufficient to demonstrate and substantiate his wealth to the external world. For this reason, he extends invitations to his friends, associates, and rivals to his home, provides them with banquets and gifts, and hosts parties with music and dancing for entertainment. Apart from his friends, especially his competitors, he will undoubtedly be impressed by his lavish offerings, gifts, and, of course, his benevolent behavior and hospitality" (Veblen, 2014: 63).

As postulated by Veblen, the disclosure of commodities extends beyond the mere act of consuming them. Leisure time is revealed as a form of conspicuous consumption. One of the most significant privileges associated with the idler type is the ability to spend their leisure time and demonstrate that they are not reliant on work. The term conspicuous consumption is used to describe the waste of resources, including both commodities and time. Veblen posits that both are regarded as equal within the context of societal norms. One constitutes a futile expenditure of time, while the other represents an idle squandering of financial resources. In the absence of sufficient temporal and financial resources, the concept of conspicuous consumption is rendered moot. Consequently, other social classes attempt to amass wealth by emulating those who have already achieved it. Emulation represents one of the most fundamental motivational emotions, serving to ensure economic continuity (Güleç, 2015: 72). Veblen emphasizes that the bourgeois class, which emulates the American elite, strives to consume in a manner that is analogous to that of the elite. The upper class displays its wealth to such an extent that it incites emulation and resentment among other social groups. Veblen identifies the phenomenon of emulation as a significant driver of increased consumption and waste. He asserts that the majority of wasteful commodities are not merely a matter of conspicuous consumption by the consumer; rather, they are a matter of existence. To illustrate, items such as carpets, rugs, silver service sets, waiters' sets, silk hats, starched

clothes and bedspreads, various clothes and jewelry, and similar objects fall into this category. If an individual develops a routine of utilizing these items, it becomes challenging to categorize their expenditure as wasteful in a technical sense. It is similarly challenging to assert that these goods and products facilitate an individual's daily life or provide them with a sense of inner tranquility (Veblen, 2014: 79). The utilization of these commodities, which serve as symbols of status and prestige beyond the necessities of life and inner peace, enslaves the idle to such an extent that without these commodities and the lifestyle they are accustomed to, the idle cannot attribute any meaning to their existence. In consequence, conspicuous consumption has become a way of life for the idle. This lifestyle is constituted by a series of habits (Açıkalın & Erdoğan, 2014: 7). It is evident that individuals with idle dispositions, who experience a decline in their financial standing over time, are unable to abstain from these commodities, displays of conspicuous consumption, and forms of entertainment, even when they are burdened by significant debt. The act of consuming persists even when individuals are confronted with challenging circumstances. They often attempt to conceal their difficulties from their social environment.

In his analysis, Veblen identifies women and children as a demographic element that exhibits conspicuous consumption patterns, a tendency commonly observed among the idle class. In his view, the idle type views the institution of marriage as a means of enhancing and safeguarding their status. The potential for advancement through marriage within one's social milieu renders matrimony a form of conspicuous consumption. The idle type seeks a marriage partner who will confer upon them and their family a commensurate degree of power and status. A woman who exhibits this characteristic is often preferred in marriage because she will gain economic strength as a result of her powerful relatives. "She will remain the property of her husband, as she was the property of her father prior to her purchase" (Veblen, 2005: 49). Consequently, in the context of conspicuous consumption, the woman and even the child are perceived as a commodity. The presence of a noble and affluent female is regarded as an integral aspect of conspicuous consumption. As part of this conspicuous consumption, it is expected that the woman will carry and reflect some luxury consumption tools. It is essential that the housewife engage in conspicuous consumption, purchasing items that enhance the prestige of the household and its head. In both practical and theoretical terms, "the advent of women's enslavement and subsequent designation as men's personal property saw the emergence of a new consumer archetype. This figure became the ceremonial consumer of the very products that men had produced" (Veblen, 2005: 66).

The conspicuous consumption of the idle is not exclusive to women through marriage; it is also evident in their sartorial choices. It is widely acknowledged that individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds prioritize aesthetic appeal over practicality when purchasing attire. In the absence of appropriate attire, an individual may experience a sense of unease and perceive a discrepancy between their appearance and the prevailing social norms (Veblen, 2014: 130). Consequently, clothing can be considered a spiritual necessity for the individual in question. The idle class permitted their wives to engage in uninhibited consumption with regard to clothing and household items, and held the view that women could convey their status through their attire. "The prevalence of shiny, high-heeled footwear among women is a clear indication of their affluence and leisure time. The production of high-heeled women's shoes is a labor-intensive process, necessitating skilled craftsmanship and

intricate techniques. The fabrics utilized in the construction of women's dresses and petticoats are also costly. Women's petticoats are costly and must be meticulously crafted to ensure they do not impede women's mobility" (Veblen, 2014: 133). The attire of the idle is not only a reflection of their status and affluence, but also serves as a symbol of their identity. The basic elements that the idle type has traditionally paid attention to for an extended period of time include powdered wigs, watches with gold bands, and the shaving of beards. Veblen delineates the conspicuous consumption of the idle type through clothing as follows:

"An individual who expends a considerable amount of resources on their attire can simultaneously convey that they are not reliant on gainful employment and have attained a certain degree of social prestige. An individual who is attired in exquisite and costly garments can be swiftly identified as belonging to a financially affluent family unit that can maintain a comfortable standard of living without the necessity of gainful employment. A gentleman who wears elegant shoes with leather soles, an ironed white shirt, a beautiful expensive suit, a fedora hat, and carries a cane in his hand is not engaged in industrial labor. An aesthetically pleasing ensemble not only indicates the expenditure involved in its creation but also suggests the financial resources and leisure time available to the wearer. An individual who adheres to such a style of dress is capable of consuming without producing" (Veblen 2014: 132).

For the idle type, the utilization of garments for the explicit purpose of attracting attention has given rise to a proclivity towards the organization of events wherein these garments may be exhibited or to the participation in existing events. This has, in turn, resulted in the formation of a distinct ritual.

Another aspect of the idle type's conspicuous consumption is their inclination towards pet ownership and their efforts to display this as a matter of status within their social circles. The idle type categorizes animals such as cats, dogs, horses, and parrots as luxury consumption items, which they define as "beautiful" due to various characteristics they possess (Veblen, 2014: 112). The animals in question do not serve a utilitarian purpose for the idle type; rather, they are selected based on their aesthetic appeal and perceived rarity. In addition, the use of pets serves as a means of self-expression for the idle type, along with women and children.

Conspicuous consumption can be defined as the act of consuming objects and materials in a way that displays them to others, thereby seeking to gain social recognition. In other words, it is focused on demonstrating and alluring. This is identified as a central trait of the idle type. The act of displaying and, in some cases, organizing a series of events for the purpose of showcasing them can be considered a form of idleness. In light of these observations, it becomes evident that there is a strong and organic connection between the idle class and conspicuous consumption.

## **5. Conclusion**

The fundamental human drive of ostentation has persisted throughout history in various forms. In particular, following the Industrial Revolution, new forms of ostentation emerged, which have persisted to the present day. Furthermore, alterations in the form and type of capital have also exerted an influence on and transformed the objects and styles of display. To fully comprehend this transformation, it is essential to examine the agents involved. In this context, an examination of the social types that engage in ostentation is of significant importance. The idle type, with its numerous defining characteristics, emerges as a social



type that espouses conspicuous consumption and exhibits a distinctive style associated with consumer culture. In this regard, it offers a means of understanding consumption, which is an integral aspect of contemporary social life.

In the context of a rapidly evolving socio-economic landscape, the concept of the “idle type” as posited by Veblen, has assumed greater salience within the broader social landscape. It has become increasingly evident in the wake of industrialization that this social type has the capacity to further delineate and clarify the boundaries of the various social strata, particularly with respect to the opportunities they possess on a daily basis. The role of the idle type in social life has continued to evolve in response to changing conditions, from those of barbaric cultures to those of modern culture. In this context, Veblen analyzed the characteristics of the idle type, its relation to consumer culture, and its association with ostentation, emphasizing its importance in understanding the social structure of his era. He conducted this study in the late nineteenth century, when the initial effects of the Industrial Revolution were becoming apparent. His decision to focus on the idle type as a means of understanding and analyzing the social structure of his period—depicting social conditions through the lifestyle of this type—led to the creation of a foundational work. Although this type persists, the various stages of the Industrial Revolution, the transformation of the current economic system, and the evolution of objects and the logic of ostentation have necessitated a renewed examination of idleness.

The wealthy class Veblen observed and pointed out as emerging in the United States has proven to be accurate, and this socioeconomic group continues to exert a profound influence on global trends and practices, manifesting in a multitude of visible new forms. The utilization of leisure time, the display of capital, luxury consumption, social events, the wearing of branded clothing, and the consumption of rare foods continue to serve as significant status symbols. It is important to acknowledge, however, that new elements have been incorporated into our conceptualization of conspicuous consumption in contemporary society. New parameters of social stratification have emerged, and new characteristics have been integrated into the idle type. Each of these features is not entirely independent of what Veblen described; rather, they are transformed versions of his original concepts. The rationale behind luxury travel, branded clothing, fashion, leisure time pursuits, the market, expensive cars, and houses has undergone a transformation. New capital elements, including the stock market, artificial intelligence, and cryptocurrencies, have emerged. In addition, the settings for displays of wealth have also undergone a transformation, shifting from the opulent settings initially described by Veblen to encompass digital spaces. In the contemporary era, the principal venues for display are digital platforms and social media accounts. Indeed, even those who lack the requisite capital to engage in genuine idleness can nonetheless exhibit the essential elements of conspicuous consumption on these platforms, thereby emulating an idle type. In this sense, the most crucial parameter for adapting Veblen’s theory to contemporary societies is to include digital platforms in the analysis.

Notwithstanding the transition to digital platforms and the evolving character of objects of display, the fundamental tenets of Veblen’s consumption-oriented idle type remain unchanged. This fundamental trait is the aspiration to exhibit one’s possessions. In the present era, the idle type does not refrain from displaying or even flaunting a range of material possessions, including clothing, food, beverages, a spouse, a child, a home, or a

vehicle. The advent of digital platforms has introduced a novel phenomenon: the emergence of platforms that enable individuals who are not truly idle—who must engage in work and thus have limited free time—to present themselves as if they are idle. These platforms have facilitated the dissemination of humanity’s ancient drives for status and the desire for ostentation across all segments of society.

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