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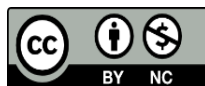
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Individual Conceptions of the Two Different Economic Systems: Homo-Economicus and Homo-Sovieticus*

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Abstract

This study examines the concepts of homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus, which represent the individual archetypes of capitalist and socialist economic systems, respectively. Homo-economicus embodies the rational individual model of the capitalist system, grounded in individual benefit and competition, while homo-Sovieticus reflects the collectivist, state-centered individual model of the socialist system. Homo-economicus is characterized as a self-interested individual who aligns with the dynamics of the free market, whereas homo-Sovieticus is depicted as one who adheres to central planning and state authority, prioritizing collective interests. The aim of this study is to highlight that representative individual typologies were created to understand and explain capitalist and socialist systems. In this framework, the concepts of homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus will be examined conceptually, followed by a comparative evaluation.

Keywords

Capitalism, Socialism, Homo-Economicus, Homo-Sovieticus

JEL Classification

B13, B24, B31, B41

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İki Farklı Ekonomik Sistemin Birey Anlayışları: Homo-Economicus ve Homo-Sovieticus

Öz

Bu çalışma kapitalist ve sosyalist ekonomik sistemlerin temsili birey anlayışları olan homo-economicus ve homo-Sovieticus kavramlarını incelemektedir. Homo-economicus kapitalist sistemin bireysel fayda ve rekabet temelli rasyonel birey modelini temsil ederken, homo-Sovieticus sosyalist sistemin kolektivist ve devlet odaklı birey anlayışını yansıtmaktadır. Homo-economicus kendi çıkarlarını maksimize eden, serbest piyasa dinamiklerine uyumlu bir bireyken, homo-Sovieticus merkezi planlama ve devlet otoritesine bağlı, kolektif çıkarları önceliklendiren bir karakter sergilemektedir. Çalışmanın amacı kapitalist ve sosyalist sistemlerin anlaşılması ve açıklanması amacıyla temsili birey tipolojilerinin yaratıldığına dikkat çekmektir. Bu çerçevede homo-economicus ve homo-Sovieticus birey anlayışları kavramsal olarak incelenecek ve daha sonra kıyaslamalı bir değerlendirme yapılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler
Kapitalizm,
Sosyalizm, Homo-
Economicus, Homo-
Sovieticus

JEL Kodu
B13, B24, B31, B41

1. Introduction

The relationship between human behavior, individual choices, and economic systems is one of the key topics addressed by the discipline of economics. Throughout the history of economic thought, various models and approaches have been developed to analyze individuals' decision-making processes. These models often introduce a representative individual to better understand and explain different economic systems. Two such representative individuals are Homo-Economicus and Homo-Sovieticus. While homo-economicus represents the rational individual who seeks to maximize personal interests which forms the basis of neoclassical economic theory, homo-Sovieticus characterizes the collectivist individual shaped under state control during the central planning era of the Soviet Union.

The concept of homo-economicus is grounded in individualism and competition, which are fundamental to market economies. It assumes that individuals act with the intent to maximize their economic interests, supporting the idea that market dynamics can self-regulate. On the other hand, the homo-Sovieticus concept was developed to understand the effects of the Soviet Union's political and economic structure on individuals. In the Soviet economic system, individuals were highly dependent on the state, and economic decisions were shaped by central planning. Homo-Sovieticus, therefore, tends to prioritize collective goals over individual initiative and competition (Leão & Rovny, 2024).

This study will compare the concepts of homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus within their theoretical backgrounds. The aim of this study is to highlight that homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus are representative individuals created to explain capitalist and socialist systems rather than defining the real-world human behavior. In this framework, both concepts will be examined conceptually, followed by a comparative analysis.

2. The Representative Individual of the Capitalist System: *Homo-Economicus*

The economic reflection of the capitalist system, which prioritizes free competition and individual enterprise, is neoclassical economics. Restricting its field of study solely to the market and, by extension, to the capitalist system, neoclassical economics examines human behavior, choices, and decisions within the framework of market exchange.

As Guerrien (1999: 7-8) points out, the essence of neoclassical economics lies in the conceptualization of society as a whole composed of independent, free, and equal individuals¹, with the market serving as a mechanism that harmonizes their activities. Within this framework, neoclassical economists assume that resources are scarce, while human wants (or needs) are unlimited and define economics as a science of choice. This conceptualization is most clearly articulated in Robbins' (1932: 15) definition of economics: "Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses."

The analytical starting point of this approach is the "individual," who is assumed to act rationally² and in pursuit of self-interest, isolated from social, cultural, class-based, and historical contexts. At the core of this analysis, the primary motive (or objective) of the individual is utility maximization. Each individual rationally pursues personal interest and seeks to maximize expected utility.

¹ In neoclassical economic theory, the decision-making unit is generally assumed to be the household rather than the individual. Individuals are considered representatives of the household, based on the assumption that decision-making is conducted by "the head of the household" (Wärneryd, 1988: 207). In other words, neoclassical economics assumes that the household behaves like an individual with specific tastes and preferences. Despite this, decision-making units in neoclassical economics are still individuals, and these units are classified into two major groups (Guerrien, 1999: 17): households, which consume goods and services and provide labor, and firms, which utilize various goods and services to produce new goods and services. For the differences between family and household, see. Kirchler, 1988.

² In neoclassical economics, individuals are considered rational to the extent that they use their means efficiently to achieve their goals; this refers to instrumental rationality (Varoufakis & Arnsperger, 2009).

In this context, homo-economicus -who is assumed to be rational, pursue self-interest, and strive to maximize utility or profit- represents the individual model of the capitalist system, as an ideal type (Kırmızıaltın & Çeri, 2025), which prioritizes free competition and individual enterprise. Homo-economicus makes economic choices within a framework of given, externally determined preferences. These choices apply to the production, consumption, and exchange of goods and services. In this decision-making process, knowing what is best for himself and making decisions based on his individual preferences (Özalp, 2011), homo-economicus pursues self-interest and focuses solely on individual (or, in a broader sense, household-related) goods, labor, and leisure, making him outcome-oriented. He/she considers social interactions only to the extent that they influence his/her final consumption and overall welfare. Additionally, he/she possesses a time preference that allows him/her to allocate consumption across different periods to balance his/her personal welfare with that of future generations (Gintis, 2000).

However, it is important to emphasize that in the world of homo-economicus, where decisions are made based on fixed preferences, time and space exist only as conceptual categories. As a result, there is no change, uncertainty, or risk, allowing choices to be made instantly and without cost based on new information. In other words, the model assumes perfect and complete information, eliminating uncertainty altogether. Ultimately, homo-economicus is an atomistic, self-interested, rational individual who makes independent decisions and continuously evaluates benefits and costs at the margin to maximize utility (Bilir, 2017: 33).

3. The Representative Individual of the Socialist System: *Homo-Sovieticus*

Homo-Sovieticus is a term used in the literature to describe the "new Soviet man." In this regard, the creation of homo-Sovieticus is considered a part of communist ideology's broader effort to transform human nature. This concept was particularly reinforced during the Stalin era, when Soviet propaganda emphasized the importance of collective harmony over individualism, and encouraged individuals to act in accordance with state planning.

This discursive framework was constructed to define a distinct type of human being shaped by the Soviet system. According to this idea, living under a communist system for an extended period led to the development of a mindset fundamentally different from that of individuals in capitalist countries, and changing this mindset was not an easy process. The concept of homo-Sovieticus can be seen as the result of ideas put forth by socialist thinkers who highlighted the

impact of the communist system on individuals' consciousness, character, and social practices (Soboleva, 2017; Mudrakov et al., 2020). For instance, dissident thinkers Markov and Ignatow examined the effects of communism on society and individuals, while Miłosz (1953) analyzed how Stalinism influenced individual behavior. Havel (1978), on the other hand, emphasized the role of personal moral choices among individuals living under the communist system.

However, it was the research conducted by sociologist Iurii (Yuri) Levada in the 1980s that solidified the concept of homo-Sovieticus in socialist literature. In November 1989, under Levada's leadership, the All-Union Center for Public Opinion Research (VTsIOM) launched an extensive study under the title homo-Sovieticus, the findings of which laid the foundation for a collective monograph. The study included 2,700 participants from various Soviet republics, with 1,325 from Russia alone.

Levada and his colleagues aimed to identify the common thought patterns, tendencies, attitudes, and values of Soviet individuals. To achieve this, they designed a comprehensive survey that included questions on people's attitudes toward the state and their expectations from it, their perceptions of society, their sense of obligation, moral inclinations, choices between risk and stability, and their levels of social and political engagement.

Based on this extensive research, Levada (1996) identified the key characteristics of the Soviet individual as statist in nature, willing to serve the bureaucratic structure, and strongly identifying with its symbols. According to Levada (2001), the underlying causes of these characteristics were strict control over information, vertical mechanisms of social mobility, and the pressure of forced socialization, accompanied by relentless propaganda. In Levada's view, while Western individuals tended to be more liberal, open, and independent, the Soviet individual was more hierarchical, devoted to the state, and obedient to its authority.

Following these studies, the concept of homo-Sovieticus began to be widely used in sociology and other disciplines. The thinker who introduced the term into Western literature was Alexander Zinoviev. Comparing Western individuals with Soviet individuals, Zinoviev argued that while there were no fundamental differences between them, the Soviet system -providing citizens with basic needs such as housing, education, and healthcare- ultimately distanced individuals from rationality. In this sense, as Neumeier (2021) points out, Zinoviev used the concept of homo-

Sovieticus in a meaning almost opposite to its original intention, critiquing its supposed role in reshaping individuals in a universalized manner³.

Zinoviev (1984: 202) described homo-Sovieticus (or homosos, as he termed it) not merely as a citizen of the USSR but as "a living species of being.": "Not every citizen of the USSR is a homosos... (Homosos) is a being created by the conditions of a communist (socialist) society and serves as a bearer of the principles of this society... It is a result of adaptation to specific social conditions, and for this reason, it cannot be understood outside of its normal environment."

Zinoviev argues that the Soviet man finds the purpose and meaning of life within the collective. Every activity he engages in is not driven by his intellectual choices or emotional needs but rather by a desire to conform to and integrate with the majority. Since he reflects the characteristics of the society to which he belongs -that is, the social collectivity- he is merely a small part of this whole and experiences his individuality as a member of this collective. Zinoviev notes that this type of person also exists in Western societies; however, he states that "the Soviet man, as a mass phenomenon, was born in the Soviet Union and was assigned a dominant role in the process of forming social consciousness" (Zinoviev, 1984: 8).

It has been argued that the dominance of collective consciousness in a socialist society is a factor that limits individuals' sensitivity to market dynamics and their entrepreneurial potential (Karavournioti, 2017). In this regard, Homo-Sovieticus is often defined by its shortcomings. For example, Shiller, Boycko, and Korobov (1992) describe homo-Sovieticus based on attitudes such as a lack of entrepreneurial spirit, initiative, leadership, motivation, risk-taking, and responsibility. According to Levada (1996) and Gudkov (2008), the relationship between the Soviet man and the state resembles that of a father and son: while the Soviet man is an obedient and respectful child, the state is a strict, sometimes even cruel, yet also caring father. As a father, the state controls the Soviet man and does not allow him individuality or free will.

Tyszka (2009) argues that homo-Sovieticus is a spiritual slave, and this state of servitude so deeply affects his behaviors and values that he does not even recognize his own bondage. He perceives anything that could free him from these chains as a threat. He cannot make individual

³ As Güneş (2004: 60) points out, this concept was used in two different senses in Soviet literature: first, as the "average Soviet citizen", and second, as the idealized Soviet individual that the system sought to create. However, in Western literature, the term encompassed both meanings while also acquiring a pejorative connotation.

decisions about his life. As a result, the Soviet man is unable to distinguish between personal and public interests.

Soboleva (2017) lists the fundamental characteristics of homo-Sovieticus as dependence on authority, social and political passivity, avoidance of individual responsibility and initiative, indifference to public goods, conformity driven by fear of the existing regime, and insecurity regarding his own actions. According to Sharafutdinova (2019), the idealized Soviet man is expected to love his job and homeland, have a strong sense of public duty, sacrifice his individual desires for the collective good, be fearless, remain loyal to his state, and dedicate himself to building communism.

4. Different Individual Types Shaped by Different Economic Systems

These two concepts of individuals are products of different historical, cultural, and ideological foundations: while homo-economicus represents the rational individual of capitalism, homo-Sovieticus embodies the collectivist individual of the socialist system.

Capitalism is a social and economic system in which private ownership dominates, with the majority of production assets being owned and operated privately. Investment, income distribution, production, and the prices of goods and services are determined by the market economy, where supply and demand meet. The fundamental principles of this system include private property, entrepreneurial and choice freedom, the free market mechanism, profit/utility maximization, and a limited government role. The core principle of capitalism is profit, and within this framework, there is boundless competition among individuals and nations. The purpose of this competition is the accumulation of capital (Wallerstein, 2006: 12).

While private ownership of the means of production is the fundamental element in capitalism, socialism is characterized by the collective ownership and control of production, resource allocation, and distribution by the state or society as a whole (Çulhaoğlu, 2020: 55). In this system, the government, which owns or controls most of the economy's resources, determines what is produced, how it is produced, and how it is distributed. In a socialist society, economic decisions are guided not by individual interests but by the interests of society as a whole.

Therefore, capitalism prioritizes individual benefit, and individuals in capitalist economies aim to maximize their personal interests to generate higher profits. In socialism, however, public welfare takes precedence, and economic decision-making is shaped by collective interests rather

than individual ones. In this regard, these representative individuals (homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus) are not only useful methodological tools for understanding these systems but also highlight how different economic systems shape individuals' economic behavior patterns. The formation of human character is a function of the social system. Through the process of socialization, individuals internalize the values, symbols, and networks of relationships that define the system, ensuring its continuity. Consequently, a specific character type emerges in accordance with the requirements of the system, reinforcing its sustainability.

For example, in the capitalist system, rational individuals with fixed preferences - represented by homo-economicus- are assumed to make accurate calculations to maximize their utility and act accordingly, placing reason at the center of their decisions and behaviors. In contrast, the concept of homo-Sovieticus, used to describe the type of individual that emerged within the ideological and economic structure of the Soviet Union, characterizes individuals as deeply loyal to the state and the collective order, shaped under the influence of central planning. In other words, while the homo-economicus model depicts a world where individual well-being and competition are prioritized, homo-Sovieticus reflects a structure in which social responsibility and collective goals take precedence over individual interests (Appel, 2023).

These differences highlight the decisive impact of market economies and centrally planned systems on social structures and, consequently, on individuals. In this context, there is a close relationship between these two human models and the economic systems in which they emerged. Institutions, which regulate both individual actions and collective social actions, play a crucial role in shaping behavioral norms. They represent standardized social habits, collective practices, and ingrained patterns of thought and behavior within a group or individual tradition (Neale, 1994: 405). In short, all elements of social life interact with one another, and these components influence both each other and the system as a whole. As a result, the whole cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts within such a structure.

As Fine and Milonakis (2014: 282) point out, society is more than the mere aggregation of its individual members, and secondly, the social whole significantly influences and conditions the functioning and behavior of its parts, though it does not completely determine them. At the same time, agency (both individual and collective) does not passively respond to structural constraints

but actively participates in shaping these structures. Thus, while individuals shape the society in which they live, they are also directed and conditioned by it.

In this regard, a major socio-economic transformation has the potential to create significant changes in individuals' economic behavior patterns (Rust, 2017). For instance, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the adaptation of homo-Sovieticus to a market economy represented one of the most profound socio-economic transformations of the post-Soviet period. In this transition, where market mechanisms and private enterprise became dominant, significant changes occurred in individuals' economic decision-making processes. This shift manifested in the diminishing role of the state in economic decision-making and a growing tendency for individuals to prioritize their self-interest (Porter-Szűcs, 2020).

This transition process necessitated the reconfiguration of individuals' economic expectations, social relationships, and interactions with the state. According to Leão and Rovny (2024), economic liberalization and the expansion of private ownership led to the gradual erosion of homo-Sovieticus' collectivist values and the increasing prominence of individual interests. To understand and explain why individuals in former communist and capitalist countries behave differently, Shiller, Boycko, and Korobov (1992) conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews with 2,670 participants from Russia, Ukraine, and East Germany, as well as the United States, Japan, and West Germany. Their findings suggested that attitudinal factors were less significant than situational factors, and they argued that generalizing across countries based on attitudinal differences was complex. Moreover, they cautioned that defining Homo-Sovieticus as an entirely distinct human type could be misleading. Therefore, while different economic systems have the power to influence individuals' economic decision-making mechanisms, it would be inaccurate to assume that entirely distinct human typologies inevitably emerge within different economic systems.

5. Conclusion

Both capitalism and socialism are not only economic modes of production but also forms of social organization. In societies dominated by these different systems, variations may emerge in individuals' economic decision-making processes and behaviors. Homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus are methodological abstractions used to emphasize the formative impact of different economic systems on individuals' economic behavior. While homo-economicus symbolizes a

worldview shaped by free markets and individual competition, homo-Sovieticus represents a collectivist society model under central planning and state control.

Homo-economicus has become a significant figure in the expansion of global capitalism. This concept represents individuals who quickly adapt to market dynamics and make rational decisions as consumers and producers. In this context, homo economicus can be regarded as the ideological subject of the market society construct (Gürkan & Öziş, 2012). Particularly since the 1980s, with the liberalization of global markets and the growth of financial sectors, the influence of homo-economicus has increased (Porter-Szűcs, 2020). During this period, the importance of risk-taking and rapid adaptation in individuals' economic decisions was emphasized.

On the other hand, the centrally planned economic system of the Soviet Union deeply affected the decision-making processes of homo-Sovieticus individuals. During this period, individuals' ability to take initiative was significantly restricted, and compliance with state-determined production and consumption goals became paramount (Mudrakov et al., 2020). In this system, where the state controlled nearly all aspects of economic activity, individuals' economic motivations were shaped around serving societal needs (Karavournioti, 2017).

In conclusion, homo-economicus and homo-Sovieticus have played different theoretical roles in the history of economic thought and have left significant marks on the economic structures of societies. This is because both individual models are the result of adaptation to specific social conditions, and understanding or explaining them outside the socio-economic framework in which they emerged would be highly challenging.

Declaration of Research and Publication Ethics

This study which does not require ethics committee approval and/or legal/specific permission complies with the research and publication ethics.

Researcher's Contribution Rate Statement

Since the author is the sole author of the article, his contribution rate is 100%.

Declaration of Researcher's Conflict of Interest

There are no potential conflicts of interest in this study.

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