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ARTICLE**The Sociology of Organisation and Institution between Statics and Dynamics: A Sociological Reading of Auguste Comte's Concepts****Abderrahmane
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Abstract

This paper explores the duality of statics and dynamics in the sociology of organisations and institutions, drawing on Auguste Comte's theoretical framework. Through an analytical reading of Comte's concepts, the study examines how social institutions, political, economic, religious, and public, navigate the tension between stability and change. Special attention is given to the application of this framework in the Algerian context, highlighting both its explanatory value and limitations in addressing contemporary institutional transformations. The findings underscore the need to supplement Comte's positivist approach with more flexible and critical perspectives to account for the complexity of modern societies.

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Introduction

Social institutions are the backbone upon which any social organisation is founded; they function as codified systems of rules, standards, and roles that regulate interactions among individuals and guide their behaviours towards achieving collective goals. Understanding these entities cannot occur in isolation from comprehending the fundamental dialectic that governs their existence and function, the dialectic of stability and change. This dual framework, formulated by Auguste Comte in his foundational project for the science of sociology under the terms "social statics and dynamics," enables the analysis of institutions as entities with a composite function. On the one hand, they reinforce stability and the reproduction of order; on the other hand, they are subject to the forces of social and historical transformation, which necessitate adaptation and development.

Auguste Comte is regarded as one of the founders of sociology, dedicating his efforts to establishing the scientific basis for the study of society, believing that it should be treated as a living organism governed by specific natural laws. His

conception was grounded in the positivist model, influenced by natural sciences such as chemistry and physics, which led him to apply the scientific inductive method to social phenomena. This orientation manifested in his methodological division of sociology into two complementary branches: social statics, which focuses on the study of structures that ensure social integration and cohesion (such as the family, religion, and authority), and social dynamics, which is concerned with the study of the laws of progress and the gradual development of societies through the law of the three stages.

Understanding this problem, namely, how Comte's concepts provide an analytical framework for grasping the dialectic of stability and change in contemporary institutions, is particularly important in a societal context such as Algeria. This issue transcends a mere classical reinterpretation to penetrate the core of current institutional transformations. Modern societies, and Algerian society in particular, experience a continuous tension between their traditional institutional structures, which resist change, and the social and economic pressures that necessitate modernisation, rendering this study essential for understanding this tension.

To address this problem, this study poses a set of subsidiary questions that constitute a roadmap for the research. The most prominent of these questions include the following:

What are the philosophical and conceptual roots upon which Comte based his concepts?

How does his approach to stability and change differ from those presented by Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx?

How is this dialectic manifested in Algerian religious, political, economic, and public institutions?

I. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from two principal aspects:

A. Theoretical significance: This lies in the revival and contextualisation of classical sociological concepts in a contemporary setting, thereby enriching the academic discourse on the history of social ideas and their interaction with reality.

B. Applied significance: This is evident in the use of this theoretical framework to understand the dynamics of Algerian institutions, providing local sociological research with an analytical tool to comprehend the challenges these institutions face in their quest for adaptation and development.

II. Methodology of the Study

This study adopts a descriptive method, addressing Auguste Comte's theory concerning stability ("social statics") and change ("social dynamics"). It also employs a critical approach to transcend the positivist Comtean perspective and to demonstrate its limitations in explaining complex social phenomena. Furthermore, the theoretical analysis will be supported by practical examples drawn from the Algerian institutional context to bridge theory and practice.

The study is divided into three main sections. The first section addresses the conceptual and theoretical framework of statics and dynamics in Comte's thought and their intellectual roots. The second section presents a critical comparison between Comte's perspective and other classical viewpoints, such as Durkheim's view of solidarity and Marx's view of conflict. The third section addresses the concepts of institutions and work culture, applying this theoretical framework to the Algerian context, with a focus on religious, political, economic, and public institutions, before the study concludes with a summary of the subject.

III. The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Statics and Dynamics in Comte's Thought and Their Intellectual Roots

1. The Philosophical Roots of Comte's Concepts of Statics and Dynamics

Comte's conception of these two concepts is rooted in philosophical perspectives that were structurally influenced by nineteenth-century biological and physical thought, particularly by his mentor, Saint-Simon, and the theory of organic evolution. He sought to translate the scientific model into the social sphere, thus linking the laws of nature with those of society.

From this standpoint, Comte endeavoured to apply the natural scientific model to social structure through what he termed "social physics", thereby attempting to move from the observation of social phenomena to their explanation on the basis of general and constant laws, as is the case in the natural sciences. This orientation was reflected in his division of the sociology of organisation into two complementary branches:

1. Social statics, which focuses on the study of order, stability, and fixed structures that preserve the cohesion of society (such as religion, family, and authority);

2. Social dynamics is concerned with the study of transformation, progress, and the laws governing the development of society over time.

This link between the laws of nature and those of society was not merely metaphorical. However, it constituted a philosophical project aimed at establishing a positivist social science capable of interpreting society with rationality and predictability, as is the case in physics or biology. Nevertheless, this approach is not without its problems, most notably a reductionist tendency that may overlook the cultural and historical particularities of societies in favour of imposing general, "universal" laws. (Comte, 1830, pp. 10–11)

2. Social Statics in the Thought of Auguste Comte: Towards Understanding the Mechanisms of Societal Stability and Cohesion

This concerns the study of human societies in terms of their systems and the mechanisms of their cohesion and transformation during periods of stability at a given time, as well as the detailed aspects and particulars of human sociality, its systems and political, judicial, economic, ethical, and religious rules, among others, and their elements and functions to uncover the laws governing solidarity among social systems (Abdelaziz Ben Ali, 2012, p. 83).

According to Comte, social statics encompasses the study of those elements that guarantee stability and cohesion within society, such as the family, religion, the political system, and collective morality. Comte draws an analogy between society and a living organism, wherein functional balance among the parts is necessary (Comte, 1830, p. 67). He asserts that a strong social order is founded on shared moral and religious principles, stating:

"La suppose une harmonie des institutions, fondée sur une morale Partagée." (Comte, 1830, p. 73)

The researcher Mary Pickering noted that statistics, in Comte's view, reflect his concern with establishing the notion of order and social discipline. This, in turn, was a direct response to the instability and chaos following the French Revolution of 1789, making social cohesion a central priority in his sociological project. However, this conception, while valid in the Western context, faces a paradox in underdeveloped or developing societies (Pickering, 1993, p. 241).

The elements presumed to produce cohesion, such as the tribe, religion, and patriarchal system, do not necessarily play a functional role in fostering cohesion; instead, they often become obstacles to change instead of serving as essential pillars of stability (Al-Aroui, 1983, p. 101).

3. Social Dynamics: Mechanisms of Transformation and Change within Society

Social dynamics, by contrast, is the part concerned with analysing the evolution of societies over time and is based on the law of the three stages articulated by Comte: the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the positivist stage (Comte, 1830, pp. 21–25). Comte believed that humanity progresses from mythical thinking to scientific thinking. However, Raymond Aron noted the idealistic and utopian nature of this law, asserting that the transition between these stages does not always proceed smoothly, particularly in non-European societies (Aron, 1965, p. 110).

In underdeveloped societies, there is an overlap of the three stages rather than their succession, a phenomenon that Adonis Al-Akra refers to as "distorted modernisation," that is, the adoption of tools of modernity without their rationalisation (Al-Akra, 2001, p. 56).

IV. A Comparative Approach: Comte, Durkheim, and Marx in Understanding Stability and Change

The concepts of statics and dynamics constitute core themes discussed by prominent sociologists, including Auguste Comte, Émile Durkheim, and Karl Marx, each of whom offered differing perspectives on the nature of society and the understanding of stability and change within it.

A) Auguste Comte: The Positivist Foundation of Sociology and the Dialectic of Stability and Change

Comte, as one of the founders of sociology, conceived of it as a comprehensive science aiming to understand society as an integrated whole with functional and structural interconnections. Social statics, in his view, plays a role in examining the social structure that ensures stability and cohesion, such as customs and religious and political institutions that maintain social order (Comte, 1830). Social dynamics, for Comte, relate to the forces that propel society towards change and development through specific stages, as in the law of the three stages (theological, metaphysical, positivist).

Stability is the essential condition for organised and sustainable change, as change can only occur through the organisation of society and the achievement of equilibrium among its elements (Pickering, 1993, p. 241).

B) Émile Durkheim: Social Solidarity as Statics and the Evolution of Its Forms as Dynamics

Émile Durkheim, one of the most prominent pioneers of sociology, focused on analysing how social solidarity is achieved, considering it the fundamental pillar upon which societal stability is founded (Durkheim, 1893).

He distinguished between two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity in traditional societies and organic solidarity in modern societies. For Durkheim, social change is manifested in the evolution of the forms of solidarity, which indicates transformations in the structure of social ties among individuals. This situates social dynamics within the framework of changes such as social cohesion rather than merely as institutional change. Thus, Durkheim contended that social change cannot be understood apart from the structure of social relationships and their transformations (Durkheim, 1893, pp. 90–95).

C) Karl Marx: Class Struggle as the Primary Driver of History

In contrast, Marx focused on social dynamics as the engine of class struggle and radical historical change. He argued that society is divided into conflicting classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and that this struggle is the fundamental force leading to changes in the economic and social structure (Marx, 1867).

Statics, in Marx's view, is nothing more than mechanisms and policies employed by the ruling classes to maintain their dominance; any social stability is, in his estimation, an unnatural stability grounded in repression and hegemony (Marx, 1867, pp. 300–310).

V. Sociological Concept of the Institution

In an article, the researcher Ben Tahar Hamza noted that in the field of the sociology of organisation and institution, the institution represents a social dimension rather than an economic one, wherein the conceptual approach, with its sociological aspect related to diagnosing the structure of social entities and the behaviours and social relations among individuals, predominates. This reveals a transparent interconnection between the economy and society, whereby the effects of economic changes are reflected in the sociality of individuals and their behaviours (Ben Tahar, 2019, p. 524).

Anthony Giddens considers the institution to be an organised framework of actions and behaviours supported by a set of agreed-upon social values and standards, which confer legitimacy and continuity within society and ensure the reproduction of the social order over time (Giddens, 2006, p. 527).

Accordingly, institutions are characterised by two main features:

- Their structural aspects are linked to the stability of systems and standards.
- Their dynamic aspects are related to their capacity for adaptation and development over time.

From this perspective, it is evident that institutions, according to Comte, cannot be understood apart from this duality, as they are simultaneously a force for cohesion and continuity (statics) and a site for transformation and renewal (dynamics).

VI. Transformations in Work Culture: Between Organisational Statics and Professional Dynamics

Work culture is a fundamental axis for understanding the sociology of organisations, as it encompasses informal value-laden and normative contents that guide individual behavior within the institution. It is not limited to administrative instructions or legal frameworks but also includes symbols, traditions, and patterns of interaction that gradually develop in professional reality, profoundly affecting the dynamics of work and organisational relations. It even extends to patterns of leadership, forms of daily interaction, methods of motivation, and workers' perceptions of self and role within the institution.

From Auguste Comte's perspective, work culture can be framed within the duality of statics and dynamics:

- On the one hand, work culture reflects a static dimension, as it fulfils the function of regulation and harmony, establishing a value system that reproduces itself through mechanisms such as professional socialisation, administrative hierarchy, and inherited practices within the institution (Schein, 2010, p. 23).
- On the other hand, this culture is subject to dynamic factors that lead to its gradual or radical change, influenced by new technologies, changing employment patterns, generational shifts in the workforce, or flows of globalisation (Alvesson, 2013, p. 91).

In modern contexts, institutions have become compelled to reshape their work cultures to be more flexible and responsive, particularly in light of digital transformations, remote work, and the changing conceptions of "place" and "professional time." Traditional values such as obedience, discipline, and a strict hierarchy are no longer sufficient on their own; they have been supplanted by new values such as creativity, adaptability, initiative, and collaborative work (Hamdanī, 2022, p. 59).

In Algeria, many public and private institutions have faltering attempts to enact internal cultural transformation, as expressed in slogans such as "performance improvement," "participative management," or "human resources instead of employee." However, these dynamics frequently clash with a rigid organisational culture rooted in traditional bureaucratic models (Bouafia, 2020, p. 78).

A complete reading of these transformations enables the analysis of the institution in terms of its ability to maintain its value system and internal stability while simultaneously opening up to the laws of change imposed by the work infrastructure. Although Comte's evolutionary logic is linear, it aids in tracing the stages of transformation in work culture, from the rigid traditional model to the interactive functional model of modern industrial societies.

VII. Stability and Change in Institutional Structure: An Organisational Sociological Perspective

Organisational sociology demonstrates that institutions not only impose order but also interact with change factors such as technology, ideology, economic changes, and political pressures.

Talcott Parsons noted that the social system requires a "functional equilibrium" between maintaining the existing structure and adapting to environmental changes (Parsons, 1951, p. 36).

In this manner, the institution operates according to a dual logic:

- Static logic: maintaining order through bureaucratic rules, functional distribution, and socialisation.
- Dynamic logic: responding to changes through reform, reorganisation, or radical transformation.

This is evident in modern institutions such as universities, political parties, and trade unions, where the need for organisational traditions intersects with demands for renewal and accountability.

VIII. Comtean Thought in the Context of Contemporary Institutions

Amid current social transformations, Comte's framework continues to offer an applicable interpretive approach.

A. In the Domain of the Religious Institution:

The religious institution is one of the oldest and most established social institutions, to which Auguste Comte devoted particular attention. He regarded religion as the symbolic force that shaped the moral structure of human societies in their earliest stages. Through his well-known duality (statics and dynamics), the religious institution can be understood as a sphere that embodies both the logic of doctrinal and organisational stability and the logic of historical change in religious conceptions and institutional roles.

At the level of religious statistics, the religious institution acts as a force for maintaining social order by providing value and moral systems and consolidating collective identity. In this context, it performs the function of symbolic social regulation, which contributes to the stability of social relations (Comte, 2005, p. 102). In his analysis of the three stages of the development of human thought, Comte emphasised that the theological stage, during which the religious institution occupies a position of prominence, was essential for the cohesion of primitive societies and the establishment of their symbolic authority.

With respect to the dynamic aspect, Comte indicated that historical transformations, particularly in thought and science, gradually led to a decline in the symbolic authority of religion in favour of positivist and scientific knowledge. He explained this by the development of individual consciousness and the multiplicity of sources of legitimacy in the modern era, which diminishes the traditional functions of the religious institution and compels it to adapt to new contexts (Comte, 2005, p. 147).

In the Arab context, especially in Algeria, religious institutions (such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, mosques, zawiyas, and Qur'anic schools) continue to possess strong static functions, contributing to the preservation of moral and symbolic stability in society. Nevertheless, these institutions have faced clear transformations in recent decades, manifested in the following:

- Attempts to modernise religious discourse;
- The reorganisation of the relationship between religion and the state.
- The emergence of new currents (Salafism, activist movements, etc.) has introduced dynamism within the traditional religious sphere (Bouzeid, 2018, p. 91).

This renders the religious institution an exemplary field for understanding the dialectic of stability and transformation as envisioned by Comte, as it retains its traditional symbolic roles while simultaneously subjecting itself to contemporary challenges such as digitalisation, jurisprudential pluralism, and new political contexts (Abdelmajid, 2021, p. 63).

B. In the Domain of Political Institutions:

The political institution is among the most important structural pillars of modern society, as it undertakes central functions that range from the production and distribution of power to the oversight of its exercise. Through the lens of Auguste Comte, this institution can be understood as operating through a continual interaction between the elements of stability (statics) and change (dynamics), whereby the political institution maintains its symbolic and organisational structure while simultaneously being subject to pressures arising from social and political development.

At the level of political statistics, the political institution plays a role in maintaining public order through adherence to the constitution, rules of peaceful transfer of power, and the stability of legislative and executive structures. Auguste Comte affirms that the political system is one of the pillars of social cohesion, as it provides fixed frameworks that enable the regularity of relations between individuals and authority (Comte, 2005, p. 114).

At the level of political dynamics, social transformations (such as popular movements, the rise of political consciousness, demographic changes, or economic challenges) compel the political institution to redefine its functions or alter its structure. Comte holds that each historical stage has its laws and that the political institution must necessarily change with the evolving spirit of society (Comte, 2005, p. 137).

For example, in the Algerian case, the successive constitutional amendments (1989, 1996, 2016, 2020) represented clear indicators of the dynamism of the political institution. Each amendment arose in the context of pressing social or political transformations (security crises, popular demands, civil movements, etc.), which implicitly reflects a Comtean understanding that the political system cannot persist without adapting to the “historical stage” it is experiencing (Bouafia, 2020, p. 74). However, these changes have often occurred within a conservative bureaucratic static framework that preserves the state’s political and institutional constants, thus highlighting the dialectic of stability and change simultaneously.

In this context, some researchers contend that political reforms in Arab countries, including Algeria, “may outwardly display a dynamic character, yet are frequently managed through a static logic that reproduces the same authoritarian structure” (Charafi, 2019, p. 61).

C. In the Domain of the Economic Institution:

The economic institution, as one of the fundamental pillars of social structure, displays a clear interaction between the logic of stability and organisation (statics) and the logic of change and adaptation (dynamics). From Auguste Comte's perspective, this institution can be understood as an instrument for ensuring economic and social equilibrium while at the same time remaining subject to ongoing developments imposed by changes in the market, technology, and class relations.

At the level of statistics, economic institutions seek to maintain the productive system through the division of labour, administrative hierarchy, and enforcement of accounting and legal standards. These structures form what Comte called “the conservative structure of society,” wherein economic institutions play a role in guaranteeing general stability and social regulation (Comte, 1975, p. 15).

At the level of dynamics, technological changes, globalisation, and shifts in consumption patterns compel institutions to reshape their structures and management methods. For example, the transition from industry to the digital economy has led to the emergence of new institutional models (such as start-ups and collaborative platforms), reflecting the logic of continuous change indicated by Comte in his laws of evolution (Comte, 1975, p. 29).

Moreover, economic crises such as the 2008 crisis or the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed the fragility of some institutional structures, prompting the consideration of new adaptation mechanisms such as remote work, e-marketing, and the restructuring of supply chain developments that can be framed within “institutional dynamics” in response to a changing reality (Turner, 2003, p. 95).

In this sense, the Comtean perspective remains valid for analysing the economic institution as an entity oscillating between the logic of maintaining order and the logic of responding to the laws of change. Nonetheless, this reading remains incomplete without considering the dimensions of conflict and class disparity, which were not given a central place in the Comtean conception.

D. In the Domain of the Public Institution:

Public institutions (such as ministries, municipalities, hospitals, public universities, etc.) serve as a practical living model of Auguste Comte's duality between statics and dynamics, as they simultaneously exhibit features of order and continuity on the one hand and imperatives of change and adaptation on the other.

From the perspective of social statistics, the public institution embodies an element of maintaining social order, representing the state's instrument in ensuring security, education, health, justice, and other fundamental functions. It is based on hierarchical organisation, strict legal rules, and defined functional divisions, which reflect what Comte termed “elements of social cohesion” (Comte, 1975, p. 17). These structures produce what is known as the “stable institutional system,” enabling the public institution to persist over time, despite changes in governments and policies.

On the other hand, the public institution is not immune to transformation; rather, it is part of the social change that compels it to adapt. This is evident in the application of Comte's dynamic vision through attempts to modernise public administration, reform civil services, and implement principles of good governance and digitalisation. Concepts such as

results-based management, new public management, digitalisation, and transparency have become dynamic drivers of the restructuring of public institutions (Turner, 2003, p. 97).

In the Algerian context, for example, since the beginning of the millennium, the state has launched several reforms to modernise public institutions, such as the generalisation of digital portals for administrations, the updating of land registers, and the automation of administrative services (e.g., the single window system). These measures express the tension between the logic of traditional bureaucratic continuity and the logic of transformation towards greater efficiency and responsiveness to social demand tensions that are clearly understood through the Comtean lens (Parsons, 1951, p. 38).

In this sense, the public institution suffers from a persistent gap between its conservative function and rigid structure and the requirements of a changing society and new economic and political contexts. Comte's theory thus provides a preliminary framework for understanding this fragile balance between stability and renewal.

Conclusion

Analysing the institution from the perspective of Auguste Comte highlights a fundamental dialectic between stability and change. It demonstrates how social life is founded on a delicate balance between order and development. The institution, whether political, economic, public, or religious, can be understood only through the interaction between its conservative structure (statics) and the historical dynamics that necessitate transformation and adaptation. An application to contemporary contexts, especially in Algeria, has shown that this perspective retains its explanatory relevance; however, its limitations are apparent in its neglect of factors such as conflict and disparity. Thus, the positivist approach advanced by Auguste Comte represents one of the foundational building blocks for analysing social structures, offering a systemic vision that conceives of society as an interconnected whole governed by comprehensible and interpretable laws. This vision facilitated the establishment of sociology as a discipline independent of philosophy and based on the principles of stability ("social statics") and change ("social dynamics").

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this conception in approaching contemporary social reality remains limited unless complemented by modern critical approaches that account for the complexity, intertwinement, and conflicts of social phenomena. Modern societies are no longer subject to a model of linear evolution or structural stability; instead, they are characterised by the acceleration of changes, the multiplicity of actors, and the fragmentation of values and identities. Therefore, investing in the Comtean perspective today requires moving beyond positivist determinism and embracing more flexible and dynamic analytical models capable of understanding social transformations within their complex and ever-changing contexts.

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