
	<p>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</p> <p>Issue 2, Vol. 9, 2026</p> <p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <h2 style="text-align: center;">Social Change in Contemporary Societies: A Comprehensive Theoretical Review of Concepts, Determinants, and Sociological Perspectives</h2>
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<p>Keywords</p>	<p>Social change; Social transformation; Sociological theory; Social development; Modernization; Social structure</p>
<p>Abstract</p> <p>Social change represents one of the central and enduring themes in sociological inquiry, reflecting the dynamic transformation of social structures, institutions, values, and patterns of interaction across time. In the contemporary era, accelerated processes such as industrialization, urbanization, globalization, technological development, and cultural transformation have intensified the pace and complexity of social change, making its theoretical understanding increasingly important. This study aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical introduction to the sociology of social change by systematically reviewing its conceptual foundations, related notions, major determinants, and key theoretical perspectives. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive and analytical approach based on an extensive review of classical and contemporary sociological literature. The study examines the conceptual evolution of social change and distinguishes it from related concepts such as social evolution, progress, development, and growth. It also identifies the major factors driving social transformation, including economic, political, technological, demographic, and cultural forces. Furthermore, the article analyzes the main theoretical frameworks that have attempted to explain social change, including evolutionary theories, functionalist approaches, conflict perspectives, modernization theories, and contemporary multidimensional interpretations. The findings indicate that social change is a complex and multidimensional process that affects the structure and functioning of societies in both positive and negative directions. It is not limited to linear progress but includes transformation, adaptation, and sometimes regression within interconnected social systems. The study highlights that understanding social change requires an integrated analytical perspective that considers structural conditions, human agency, and contextual factors simultaneously. This article contributes to sociological scholarship by providing a structured and comprehensive theoretical framework that clarifies the conceptual boundaries of social change and synthesizes diverse theoretical interpretations. The study also offers a reference for researchers in social sciences seeking to analyze contemporary societal transformations from a systematic and theoretically grounded perspective.</p>	
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Introduction

The issue of social change is among the most widely addressed and significant topics in sociology. Its importance stems from the fact that change affects the social structures of human societies in general, albeit to varying degrees. Hence, the study of social change has become inseparable from the study of society as a whole. Accordingly, the concept of social change is considered one of the most frequently used concepts in the theoretical and empirical heritage of sociology and sociological studies. This has led to a multiplicity of meanings and connotations of the concept, corresponding to the diversity of schools of thought and theories, as well as their differing objectives in studying the dynamics of change occurring in human societies.

Therefore, it has been difficult to arrive at a single, precise definition or to achieve consensus regarding how to interpret social change and identify its causes and contributing factors. However, sociological analysis generally indicates that social change, in its comprehensive sense, involves change in the social structure, in specific social systems, or in the relationships among systems. It is also closely linked to political, economic, cultural, and technological changes within a complex network of interrelated relationships involving reciprocal interactions whose role cannot be overlooked. These interactions necessitate focused attention through objective scientific study and research.

On this basis, this article is concerned with the phenomenon of social change, as it is a topic that deserves further study, analysis, and rereading from different perspectives and angles. From this standpoint, it is appropriate to begin by asking: What is meant by change? What do we mean by social change? What are its factors? How has it been addressed by theoretical approaches? And what are its most significant outcomes?

1. Social Change and Related Concepts

1.1. The Concept of Social Change

Linguistic Definition of Change: Ibn Manẓūr defined change in *Lisān al-'Arab* as follows: “A thing changes from its state: it transforms; to change something is to transform and alter it, as if making it other than what it was. To change a matter is to transform it. Things differ when they are not the same.”

In this linguistic definition provided by Ibn Manẓūr, there is a concise and condensed indication of the terminological meaning, especially since the technical meaning does not differ from its original linguistic root. His statement, “as if making it other than what it was,” reveals the reality that change is not absolute substitution, but rather a transition from one state to another, and states are inherently subject to change. His statement, “to change a matter is to transform it,” encapsulates the concept of change that involves intention and will. When the second part of the term—*social*—is added to the word change, the reference becomes one of “transformations or fluctuations connected to society: its elements, structures, processes, and the relationships among its components.” Thus, social change is closely linked to the various transformations occurring across different patterns of social life (Izzat, 2005, p. 23).

Sociological Definition of Social Change: From a sociological perspective, social change is defined as: “Those transformations that have partial or comprehensive significance for the social system in its constituent parts and modes of action” (Dabla, 2011, p. 88).

Both Gerth and Mills addressed the nature of social change, considering it to be: “The transformation that occurs in the social roles performed by individuals, as well as in social systems and the rules of social control embedded in the social structure over a specific period of time” (Istīyāh, 2010).

The Canadian sociologist Guy Rocher defines social change as: “All observable changes over time that affect, in a non-temporary or non-accidental manner, the structure or function of the social organization of a given society, thereby altering its course throughout its historical trajectory” (Dabla, 2011).

Researcher Mustafa Al-Khashab views social change as: “Any transformation in social systems, structures, and institutions, whether in structure or function. Since social systems within a society are structurally integrated and functionally interdependent, any change occurring in one phenomenon necessarily leads to a series of subsidiary changes affecting most aspects of life to varying degrees” (Khalifa, 2011, p. 84).

Abdel-Basit Mohamed Hassan defines social change as: “Any transformation that occurs in a society over a specific period of time and affects its structure, class composition, social systems, prevailing values or norms, patterns of behavior, or dominant types of social relations” (Bouti & Riyab, 2020, p. 167).

1.2. Concepts Related to Social Change

- **Social Change and Evolution:** The Dictionary of Sociology defines social evolution as: “The process through which human societies achieve continuous development by passing through successive and interrelated stages” (Al-Rubaic, p. 64).

This implies the transition of societies from simple or primitive forms to more complex and advanced forms through successive stages without interruption, regression, or sudden leaps. This does not fully correspond to the concept of social change, which encompasses not only progress but also social regression.

- **Social Change and Progress:** Progress implies change for the better and refers to a continuous process through which society moves toward a more desirable or improved state. It may encompass both material and non-material aspects, or only material aspects due to the relative ease of measuring them.

In most cases, judging the direction of change depends on criteria that are difficult to establish, even in material cultural matters (Othman, 1999, p. 333).

This indicates that the concept of progress refers to a form of progressive change associated with sustained improvement in the material and immaterial conditions of society, moving toward a specific goal, whereby each form of society is necessarily considered better than its predecessor.

- **Social Change and Development:** The concept of development, in its general sense, refers to humanity’s attempt to change reality and its conditions in order to achieve a preconceived future state. Change here is intentional, based on human will, awareness, study, capacities, planning, selected methods, and organizational structures. Development is thus a deliberate and organized process, guided—albeit relatively—by human agency to achieve desired objectives (Hassan, 1964, p. 64).

In other words, development refers to the efforts aimed at producing a series of functional and structural changes necessary for societal growth. It can be considered intentional change rather than spontaneous change, as the latter is unplanned and occurs without prior design.

- **Social Change and Growth:** The term growth refers to the process of gradual and continuous maturation of an organism, involving an increase in size or in its parts through a series of natural stages. It includes both quantitative and qualitative change, and its ultimate purpose is growth itself (Badawi, p. 187).

Social growth refers to growth related to society and signifies the development of individual traits in accordance with established social patterns and the broader social environment (Al-Daqs, p. 32).

From this perspective, it can be concluded that **social change is broader than social growth**. Social growth is concerned primarily with quantitative aspects and refers to improvement or attempts to achieve better conditions while preserving and developing what already exists. In contrast, social change represents a transformation that may take both positive and negative directions and affects the overall structure of society. Unlike growth, it is not characterized by stability; rather, it is more dynamic, realistic, and scientific in nature.

2. Characteristics of the Process of Social Change

Guy Rocher identified four main characteristics of social change, as follows:

- Social change is a social phenomenon, meaning that it pertains to the group rather than the individual.
- Change must be structural in nature, encompassing the social organization as a whole or some of its components.
- Structural change presupposes the necessity of defining it within a temporal framework and describing all transformations and their sequence.
- Structural change implies continuity; transformations should not be temporary or superficial.

Wilbert Moore, on the other hand, identified the characteristics of social change in five key points:

- The phenomenon of change is an inherent attribute of every society and every culture and can be continuously observed.
- These changes cannot be isolated from their temporal and spatial dimensions, as they occur within a continuous chain of interconnected processes; therefore, they do not necessarily represent manifestations of temporary crises requiring reconstruction.

- The scale of contemporary changes—whether planned or resulting from modern innovations—has taken on a comprehensive character in terms of their degree of impact, far exceeding the changes that occurred in earlier periods.
- The term social change refers to new forms of behavioral regulation or outcomes resulting from change in a particular subsystem, an aspect of social existence, or the natural or social environment (Rahali, 2010, p. 44).

3. Stages of Social Change

Social change does not occur suddenly; rather, it unfolds through several stages. Herbert Lionel Berger argues that individuals pass through a sequence of stages before adopting a new pattern, namely (Ben Harath, 2014–2015, p. 07):

- The awareness stage: This represents the initial exposure to or knowledge of the new phenomenon.
- The interest stage: At this stage, information about the new phenomenon is collected in order to determine its usefulness.
- The evaluation stage: This involves selecting and assessing the acquired information and examining its suitability for adoption in light of prevailing conditions.
- The trial stage: This is the stage of testing or experimenting with the new idea.
- The adoption stage: This refers to accepting the new phenomenon and adopting it so that it becomes part of the new pattern.

4. Factors of Social Change

The social life of societies undergoes continuous processes of transformation and change affecting most social, economic, political, cultural, scientific, and other domains. This phenomenon is referred to as social change, whose intensity and forms vary from one region to another and from one society to another depending on its sources or causal factors. Social change does not occur randomly or spontaneously without cause; rather, its sources are often compelling in nature and aim at adaptation to other ongoing changes. Accordingly, social change cannot be attributed to a single factor; instead, it results from a combination of factors, the most important of which are the following:

4.1. Environment

The availability of certain natural resources within a society undoubtedly influences the process of change and constitutes a significant factor therein. Human exploitation of the natural environment, along with the utilization of human capacities and energies to harness and relatively direct that environment in favor of change, leads to transformations in the environment itself. This, in turn, results in changes in adaptive strategies, modes of compatibility between environmental conditions and ways of life, as well as patterns of living and social relations among individuals and groups (Matar, 1988, p. 15).

Moreover, some social changes originate from factors beyond human control, such as natural events—earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, droughts, or famines—which affect people’s customs and alter population structures due to mortality, followed by the spread of other social consequences such as famine and disease after natural disasters (Istīyah, 2014, p. 64).

4.2. Population

Human resources constitute the fundamental driving force behind all change; they activate and support its various dimensions. This is closely related to population distribution, growth rates, traditions, norms, moral values, and belief systems, all of which play a significant role in producing social change.

There is a clear relationship between the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of the population, their distribution, and the process of social change. This relationship is also linked to birth and death rates, the ratio of productive individuals to consumers within society, and migration patterns. The migration of labor and expertise from one society to another is considered a key factor of social change, both in the source society and in the society that attracts these human resources (Matar, 1988, p. 16).

4.3. Technological Factors

Technological progress has had a profound impact on societies, and inventions have played a major role in generating significant changes in human communities. Technologies such as the automobile and radio, for

example, have brought about notable social changes that are widely recognized. Social scientists, however, express concern regarding the potential repercussions of technological factors, which may produce changes that threaten societies with serious social problems such as crime, homelessness, and the erosion of values and morals. This concern is justified when societies fail to introduce deliberate social changes to address the consequences of technological transformation (Istīyah, 2014, p. 54).

This underscores the importance of social planning and community organization in achieving appropriate and fundamental changes that help prevent the emergence of social problems associated with technological development, the industrial revolution, and the intensification of communication among societies. As a result, changes occurring in one society increasingly have repercussions in others due to expanded global communication networks (Istīyah, 2014, p. 54).

4.4. Religious Factors

Religion is considered one of the principal factors influencing the degree of social change, whether as an impediment or as a catalyst. In particular, in Islamic societies, religion constitutes a fundamental source for the construction of social culture and a determinant of both individual and collective behavior.

Both Fustel de Coulanges and Benjamin Kidd emphasize that religion is the primary force influencing progress, asserting that “religion unites generations, achieves social integration, and enables continuous and gradual social progress” (Mahmoud, p. 147). Religion plays a significant role in guiding individuals and mobilizing their capacities to confront life’s changes and strive toward higher moral ideals. Through the beliefs it provides, religion profoundly shapes individuals’ ideas and concepts and encourages change through educational systems that transform individuals, thereby transforming societies. While no single factor alone can account for social change, religion—through its comprehensive perspective on individuals, society, and the nation—can encompass other factors that contribute to social transformation (Matar, 1988, p. 20).

4.5. Ideology

Ideology may either lie at the heart of change or act as a force resisting it. In this regard, the broadly defined conception proposed by Louis Althusser is particularly relevant. He defines ideology as “the imaginary representation of individuals’ relationship to their real conditions of existence.” Among major ideological forms, one can distinguish those whose primary role is social regulation (such as myths, religions, and collective spirit) and those—such as political ideologies—that seek to indicate, in a general sense, the true meaning of collective actions, the model of society and its organization, and the goals a group sets for itself along with the means of achieving them (Jean-Pierre & Will, 2019, p. 555).

Accordingly, the plurality of intellectual doctrines within society influences people’s lifestyles and the process of social change. Religious, capitalist, and socialist ideas all shape the activities of individuals and groups within society, form specific patterns of interaction and social relations, and exercise power by imposing their ideologies through mass media in order to bring about social change in the social environment and its relational structures (Al-Rubaic, p. 86).

4.6. Social Movements

Social movements are considered among the most important factors contributing to and driving social change, as they seek to alter the social structure. This occurs when certain groups within society become dissatisfied with prevailing political or economic conditions. Through interaction and shared experiences, a sense of awareness and collective consciousness emerges, accompanied by a desire to establish or form an organized social group that demands change in matters that conflict with their convictions (Ma’an, p. 113).

Examples include revolutionary social movements that aim to achieve forms of secular and radical social transformation. The emergence of such movements is associated with the modern era and coincided with the rise of the idea of general citizenship rights alongside concepts of equality and democracy. While these concepts had some roots in the classical world, they acquired their modern formulation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From the late eighteenth century onward, these concepts became systematically linked to movements exerting pressure for political, social, and revolutionary renewal (Giddens, 2006, p. 113).

4.7. Cultural Communication

The process of cultural communication is a complex one, involving numerous interrelated sub-processes that vary according to the operative conditions in which they occur. Above all, however, it is a process that contributes to large-scale social change, particularly within cultures that receive or consume elements of a dominant culture. The impact of cultural communication becomes evident in political and religious ideas and beliefs, lifestyles, technology, and other cultural elements. Its influence depends on factors such as the depth of communication,

the degree of resistance within traditional cultures, the role of political systems in disseminating dominant culture, and the multiplicity of communication channels (Zayed & Allam, 2001, p. 31).

Cultural communication may occur as a result of colonialism, invasion, military occupation, or missionary activities. It may also arise through various forms of spontaneous cultural contact, such as voluntary labor movements, commercial, artistic, and tourist exchange—especially in light of the contemporary communication revolution, which has transformed the world into a “global village.” This process of interaction between cultures is referred to as acculturation, whereby two cultures come into contact, resulting in influence exerted by one upon the other or in mutual influence between them (Zayed & Allam, 2001, p. 31).

4.8. Social Factors

Social factors refer to the set of changes that occur in the structural and organizational frameworks of society. As Gerth and Mills explain, society consists of structural institutions with defined functions and objectives, such as religious, political, economic, familial, educational, and military institutions. These institutions are interconnected and mutually complementary. Any change affecting one institution inevitably produces effects and repercussions on others, leading to a transformation of the social structure from one form to another.

For example, when economic institutions shift toward greater reliance on industry and trade rather than agriculture, accompanied by changes in production methods from primitive to modern and technological forms, this transformation necessarily impacts the family system, cultural and educational systems, and other social systems (Moumen Bekouche, 2017, p. 73).

Such change extends to various social groups and categories and their positions within the social hierarchy, as well as to networks of social relations and the activities they organize, in which individuals participate through prescribed social roles (Moumen Bekouche, 2017, p. 73).

4.9. Economic Factors

There exists a strong relationship between the economy and social change. The growth of agricultural, industrial, and service sectors contributes to meeting societal needs and relatively determines a society’s status among nations, as well as the standard of living of its members. Poor utilization of natural, human, and climatic resources inevitably leads to deterioration in living standards and destabilization of a state’s political standing. Moreover, it contributes to the erosion of social relations, thereby threatening societal stability (Abdel Salam, 2018, p. 126).

There is also a close link between economic factors and physical (geographical) factors, which together have significantly contributed to societal transformation. Physical factors constitute the foundation of economic activity by providing natural resources and basic inputs for industry. The greater the availability of such resources, the more prosperous a state’s economic activity becomes, directly influencing its social structure through changes in individuals’ lifestyles and life requirements resulting from broader societal change (Abdel Salam, 2018, p. 126).

4.10. Expansion of Education

If formal and informal education serves as societies’ primary means of transmitting accumulated social heritage to new generations and supporting continuity, then the growth of knowledge constitutes, in another respect, a major factor driving social change in the modern era and across all societies. The dissemination of education enables change in multiple directions and facilitates diversity in norms, adaptation to different cultures, and the emergence of new patterns of work and behavior (Ali Ghanem, 1998, p. 274).

Thus, social change is a comprehensive human-driven process, the rhythm, objectives, and content of which are shaped by human productive capacities, guiding values, and self-defined goals. These elements, however, are not innate; they require prolonged preparation and special care within institutions specifically established by society for this purpose—namely, educational institutions, through education, learning, and personality development. Accordingly, any deliberate change in the trajectory of society must be preceded, prepared for, and reinforced by change in education. In this sense, education can serve as the engine of change, provided society intends it to do so and employs it effectively (Khudour, 2009, p. 425).

5. Theories Explaining Social Change

5.1. Deterministic Theories

Deterministic theories focus on a single factor in explaining social transformation or change, treating it as the primary criterion through which all other factors are interpreted. This dominant factor is assumed to drive and subsume other variables. Consequently, such theories are referred to in social thought as reductionist theories or single-cause explanations. Among the most prominent deterministic theories are the following:

Geographic Determinism: Huntington

Although determinism is a very old idea, it has been employed by some thinkers to explain social change in geographically diverse societies. One of the most notable proponents is the American geographer Huntington, who used geographic determinism not only to explain differences among human groups but also to interpret social change. He argued that “if geographical conditions determine people’s characteristics and behavior, then such behavior will change only when geographical conditions themselves change.” On this basis, Huntington interpreted the rise and fall of civilizations (Zayed & Allam, 2001, p. 43). He also presented evidence drawn from geographical changes in the Mediterranean basin over the past three thousand years to support his theory.

Biological Determinism: de Gobineau

Biological determinism is founded on the assumption that humanity is divided into biologically distinct races and groups, whose capacities to develop and advance social life differ. According to this view, the quality of life of a given people reflects their biological or racial capacity. On this basis, differences among peoples are explained, as well as both negative social changes (associated with backwardness and civilizational decline) and positive ones.

This theory also draws on an idea prevalent in early social thought, namely that social stratification results from biological differences, with each class possessing inherent biological traits that distinguish and elevate it above others. Some classes are thus perceived as destined to rule, while others are destined to be ruled. De Gobineau promoted this notion in his work on *The Inequality of Human Races*, in which he linked the superiority or decline of peoples to racial characteristics and vehemently opposed socialism for its attempt to establish equality among humans. Since then, proponents of biological determinism have supported explanations that attribute all forms of variation and social change to biological variables (Istīyah, 2010, p. 121).

Among the biological variables emphasized in this context are the following (Attari, 2011, p. 119):

- The impact of genetic inequality on social change.
- Differences in intelligence and physical and psychological capacities.
- The influence of a population’s general health environment on its development.
- The effects of natural and artificial reproduction on different forms of population pyramids (e.g., sex ratios and age distribution).

As noted earlier, this theory falls within single-cause or reductionist approaches, as it focuses exclusively on the biological dimension while dismissing other factors without rigorous scientific examination. Social change cannot be adequately understood solely through biological traits or geographical indicators, particularly given the diversity of intellectual and physical development within the same family, within a single society, and among societies sharing similar geographical and physical conditions.

5.2. Evolutionary Theories

Proponents of the evolutionary approach argue that human societies follow a specific developmental direction involving defined stages akin to fixed laws. Although they share this general premise, they differ regarding the number of evolutionary stages, the primary driving forces of development, and the direction and form of change. Consequently, two major orientations emerged: one viewing evolution as linear, and the other as cyclical.

5.2.1. The Linear Evolutionary Approach

Key advocates of the linear approach include Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Henry Morgan. These linear theories themselves took two directions in defining evolutionary stages: one focused on a single element of social life—such as economic or familial organization—as a measuring tool, while the other emphasized intellectual development without isolating a specific factor.

Auguste Comte

Comte was concerned with studying the laws governing social movement and the automatic progression of societies, as well as revealing the extent of human progress in growth and development. His theory of social dynamics rests on two fundamental ideas: the law of the three stages and the law of human progress (Mohamed Hassan, 2015, p. 111).

Comte viewed social change as the outcome of intellectual growth and the development of the human mind. He proposed the law of the three stages, representing successive phases of development (Bouskera, 2019, p. 267):

- **The theological stage:** Dominated by supernatural explanations and absolute knowledge, characterized by monarchical systems.

- **The metaphysical stage:** Marked by abstract philosophical thinking and the rise of popular governance.
- **The positive stage:** Representing the modern scientific and industrial era, in which observation replaces religious and philosophical speculation.

Based on this conception, Comte divided sociology into two branches: social statics, concerned with order, and social dynamics, concerned with the laws of social growth and progress. The fundamental law of social dynamics is intellectual progress, embodied in the law of the three stages (Bouskera, 2019, p. 266).

Herbert Spencer

Spencer was the first to provide a scientific interpretation of evolutionary theory and apply it to sociology, seeking to transform it into a discipline comparable to the natural sciences of his time. He published his early principles of evolution in 1860 and his essay *The Hypothesis of Progress* in 1852, in which he articulated his theory of organic evolution, emphasizing the struggle for survival (Mohamed Hassan, 2015, p. 113).

Spencer argued that change is inevitable and unavoidable, with societies moving from integration toward functional differentiation. Evolution, according to Spencer, proceeds along two interconnected paths (Bouskera, 2019, p. 268):

- The first path involves movement from simple to increasingly complex societies.
- The second path involves transformation from military to industrial societies, characterized by a shift from compulsory to voluntary cooperation.

Spencer attributed social evolution primarily to population growth, a biological factor that necessitates laws regulating division of labor and specialization, leading to new forms of social life governed by customs, norms, and laws. Social change thus progresses from homogeneity to heterogeneity and from militant to industrial organization.

Henry Morgan

In *Ancient Society*, Morgan posited that stages of technological development and kinship systems are linked to social and political institutions. He identified three main stages of human progress:

- a) Savagery
- b) Barbarism
- c) Civilization

Both savagery and barbarism were further divided into lower, middle, and upper stages (Attari, 2011, p. 122). Each stage began with a fundamental technological innovation, such as pottery in lower barbarism, agriculture and animal domestication in middle barbarism, and the invention of the phonetic alphabet in civilization. Morgan emphasized the reciprocal relationship between technological development and changes in family organization, religion, political systems, and property relations (Istīyah, 2010, p. 127).

5.2.2. Cyclical Theories

Cyclical theories, also known as theories of rise and decline, are based on the idea that all living entities—including human societies—undergo life cycles characterized by growth and decay. Applied to social life, proponents of this approach argue that change does not culminate in perfection but eventually leads to decline. While change and development are seen as inevitable, they follow a cyclical rather than linear pattern. Notable proponents include Ibn Khaldun, Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, and Sorokin.

Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun sought to uncover the causes underlying the emergence of states and civilization, emphasizing the role of social conflict and group solidarity (*‘asabiyyah*) in the rise and fall of states. He viewed history as a continuous cyclical movement from nomadism to civilization, with states carrying within them the seeds of their own decline (Ben Aoun, 2012, p. 08).

According to Ibn Khaldun, the state passes through three main stages (Al-Jabri, 1994, p. 211):

1. **Foundation and construction**, characterized by strong group solidarity.
2. **Glory and prosperity**, marked by luxury and political centralization.
3. **Decline and senescence**, where solidarity weakens, paving the way for collapse unless replaced by a new group.

Oswald Spengler

Spengler is among the most prominent advocates of cyclical theories of social change. He likened civilizations to living organisms that pass through stages of youth, maturity, and old age. In *The Decline of the West*, Spengler examined seven civilizations, seeking to identify the factors behind their rise and decline. He argued that each culture possesses a unique “soul” that defines its identity in early stages but gradually transforms, leading to cultural homogenization, urban individualism, and internal decay—signals of civilizational decline (Atif Gheith, 1982, p. 36). Thus, for Spengler, human civilization follows an inherently cyclical pattern.

Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975)

Toynbee’s ideas concerning the cycle of civilization revolved around the concept of **challenge and response**. Each civilizational cycle begins with a challenge—namely, adaptation to the environment and the exploitation of its potential. This challenge is met by a response that may be successful, allowing the society to survive and confront further challenges, or unsuccessful, leading to societal collapse. Accordingly, civilizations emerge in specific places and times, grow and persist as long as they are capable of responding to challenges; however, they do not endure indefinitely. Eventually, they decline, and history transforms into a sequence of multiple civilizational cycles (Zayed & Allam, 2001, p. 47).

5-3. Structural Functionalism Theory

Structural functionalism represents a dual sociological perspective rooted in positivist thought. It seeks to overcome the limitations and shortcomings of both structural and functional theories by relying on the concepts of **structure** and **function** to analyze the structure of society and the roles performed by its components.

Proponents of this theoretical approach argue that human society consists of a set of parts or systems, each of which performs specific functions within a comprehensive system—the society—that also encompasses distinct cultural patterns. Structural functionalists maintain that social systems are subject to a defined organization and that patterns of social action are constructed upon a specific structure rooted in human needs and interests, supported by strong emotions, and embodying social values. Culture, in this sense, is viewed as the material, intellectual, and spiritual apparatus closely linked to social systems.

Thus, every society, institution, or organization constitutes a structure composed of interconnected elements, each fulfilling a function that contributes to the continuity, stability, and equilibrium of the whole. For this reason, these theories are sometimes referred to as **equilibrium theories**. Structural functionalists often viewed social change as exceptional or accidental—particularly among conservative perspectives emphasizing stability—because change disrupts social systems. Nevertheless, some functionalists attempted to analyze and interpret aspects of social change, considering conflict among societies in the pursuit of progress as one of its causes (Moumen Bekouche, 2018, p. 67).

Functionalism began explicitly analyzing cultural change in the early twentieth century, seeking to understand cultures through the ways their components contribute to maintaining the overall system. This approach rests on several assumptions, including (Moumen Bekouche, 2018, p. 67):

- Social stability and organization stem from functional value; thus, no social pattern can be properly understood except through its outcomes and functions for society.
- Any change in one part of the social system leads to changes in other parts, which ultimately reintegrate into a unified whole. Societies strive to preserve equilibrium.
- Social change results from two primary factors: internal factors arising from individual differences within the system, and external factors whereby external forces introduce new ideas through coercion, competition over land and resources, or warfare.

Talcott Parsons

Parsons and his students were among the most prominent advocates of the functionalist approach and applied the concept of equilibrium extensively in their studies. Parsons explained equilibrium by stating that the social system undergoes states of balance and imbalance similar to those experienced by living organisms. When sudden disruption occurs, the system gradually works to overcome it and restore equilibrium. This implies that society possesses mechanisms and social arrangements that enable it to maintain stability (Al-Samalouti, 1989, p. 11).

Parsons emphasized that social progress and growth are not based on deterministic evolutionary stages through which all societies must pass—as suggested by Marx or Comte—but are achieved through individuals’ active commitment to transcendent values. He argued that the conditions present within the capitalist system provide humans with the necessary foundation to attain gradual and continuous perfection, asserting that industrial society

and technological development are governed by values capable of sustaining social stability (Al-Samalouti, 1989, p. 543).

By integrating his theory of social action with systems theory, Parsons analyzed behavior within the social system and regarded **role** and **status** as fundamental to understanding, analyzing, and maintaining social equilibrium.

Structural Functionalism in the Thought of Radcliffe-Brown

Radcliffe-Brown's key ideas regarding social change can be summarized as follows:

- Social change is primarily a matter of interaction.
- Change may be internal or external, with particular emphasis on intellectual factors—especially religion—as drivers of change.
- Progress enables humans to control the physical environment through increased knowledge and the enhancement of technical skills via inventions and discoveries.

In other words, Brown viewed scientific discoveries and inventions as the main sources of social change, contributing automatically to transformations in social structure and function in order to restore social balance and overcome social problems that disrupt the overall system (Al-Samalouti, 1989, p. 87).

5-4. Marxist Theory

Marxist—or conflict—theory introduced a set of fundamental concepts such as conflict and competition, based on the premise that conflict is a natural and universal condition across societies and historical periods. Conflict is considered the driving force of history and the source of social change. The struggle for change occurs at various levels and between social and economic classes with differing structures and objectives, aiming to establish a desired social and economic system for oppressed groups against dominant classes. Its major proponents include **Karl Marx** and **Ralf Dahrendorf**.

Karl Marx: Class Conflict and Social Change

Marx argued that social change arises from class struggle, which he regarded as the engine of history. In late medieval Europe, conflict existed between the aristocracy and the emerging bourgeoisie; in capitalist society, the primary conflict is between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The fusion of the new class marks a turning point toward a new historical era (Khalaf Abdel-Jawad, 2011, p. 67).

Social change, according to Marx, originates from disparities in ownership of the means of production, which drive classes into conflict. These conflicts shape social consciousness and determine individuals' roles within their social groups, influencing their participation in social events and fulfillment of social functions. Collective outcomes emerge through the dialectical negation of individual activities.

Marx also emphasized the historical progression of societies from simpler to more complex forms, encapsulated in his famous assertion: "*The history of all human society is the history of class struggles*" (Cooper, 2006, p. 322). Consequently, economic change is viewed as the primary force generating all other forms of social change (Cooper, 2006, p. 323).

Ralf Dahrendorf: Authority Conflict and Social Change

Dahrendorf, a leading figure of neo-Marxism, argued that conflict is not limited to class competition but may also occur among ethnic, racial, religious, or national groups. Social change results from tensions among groups with conflicting interests. Unlike Marx, Dahrendorf viewed authority—not ownership of the means of production—as the primary source of conflict, since private property may be abolished while inequality of authority persists indefinitely.

Those in power seek to preserve existing systems and values that enable control over material and symbolic resources, while those excluded from authority struggle to transform these systems. Dahrendorf criticized functionalist assumptions of shared values, asserting instead that social order is based on coercion rather than consensus (Ben Aoun, 2012, p. 89).

Thus, society is never static or balanced but is constantly subject to change. Conflict is a pervasive and inherent feature of social life, driven primarily by political authority rather than purely economic factors, as Marx suggested (Ben Aoun, 2011-2012, p. 80).

06. Manifestations of Social Change

The process of social change produces diverse outcomes depending on a society's change factors, intellectual and cultural capacities, and available resources. Consequently, social change is accompanied by new manifestations that may be positive or negative.

Positive Manifestations

- Expansion of education, reducing illiteracy and promoting scientific development, thereby enhancing individual and collective well-being.
- Rapid technological advancement generating new knowledge, innovative production methods, and advanced transportation and communication systems.
- Emergence of new institutions and social movements advocating freedom, equality, and improved social, political, and economic conditions.
- Increased urbanization, accompanied by urban development, expanded employment opportunities, and improved living standards.
- Empowerment of women socially, economically, and politically.
- Growth of creativity and innovation due to openness and competition.
- Expansion of individual and collective choice and increased social and political representation.

Negative Manifestations

- Disintegration of traditional social relationships and the dominance of utilitarian, self-interested interactions.
- Transformation of the traditional family structure, changes in marital relations and authority patterns, and the loss of some core family functions.
- Cultural and intellectual invasion emphasizing material values at the expense of moral ones, leading to the globalization of local cultures—especially among youth.
- Increase in social problems and behavioral deviations due to the erosion of traditional norms and values.
- Heightened social fragmentation, individualism, and indifference.
- Growing psychological and social pressures resulting from excessive urbanization and rapid technological change.
- Neglect of tangible and intangible local cultural heritage.

Keywords

Social change; Social transformation; Sociological theory; Social development; Modernization; Social structure

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of published academic literature and secondary sources. No human participants, personal data, or experimental procedures were involved. Therefore, ethical committee approval was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with academic integrity and publication ethics standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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