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Rethinking society and knowledge in Finnish social studies textbooks

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relationship between knowledge and society in social studies by analysing how society is presented in four Finnish social studies textbooks currently in use in comprehensive education. Besides its empirical contribution, the paper examines the possibilities of applying Michael Young's understanding of powerful knowledge in social studies by complementing it with two additional theoretical approaches to society. Firstly, by applying Basil Bernstein's concept of recontextualisation, it is possible to elaborate on the way in which social studies textbooks reproduce societal power relations. Secondly, by observing the society of social studies textbooks in the light of Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory, it is possible to examine how social reproduction in social studies is related to temporal forms of knowledge in a functionally differentiated, multifaceted society. The findings indicate that due to the present-focused and institutional approach to society, the textbooks offer few tools for critical understanding and for changing society.

KEYWORDS

Social studies; Finnish basic education; textbooks; powerful knowledge; social reproduction; systems theory

Introduction—social studies in Finnish basic education and the quest for powerful knowledge

From a social scientific perspective, social studies as a school subject has a bidirectional approach to society. From the *theory of society* perspective, social studies aims to increase pupils' readiness to participate in society by presenting society in its various forms of manifestation. At the same time, from the power perspective, social studies is—or at least should be—a critical practice allowing students to recognize their relationship to society, and one that raises awareness of change and the ability to act when necessary. In previous studies, this bifunction of social studies has often been observed as a balancing between socialization and emancipation tasks (Anderson et al., 1997; Virta, 2006). Regardless of the approach one chooses to follow, the key question for social studies concerns what is recognized as knowledge about society and how this knowledge affects our interaction with society. In this research, we approach the question of knowledge in social studies by analysing how Finnish social studies textbooks present society. Besides its empirical contribution, the paper sheds light on how different theoretical understandings of society lead to different kinds of problematizations of societal knowledge in social studies.

In general, social studies as a school subject may refer to quite diverse combinations of societal and curricular aims as well as disciplines. In the North European context, social studies relates both in content and in terms of terminology to the Scandinavian (*samhällskunskap*) and German (*gemeinschaftskunde*) tradition, in which both the teaching of the social science subject matter and

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strengthening the students' civic engagement and critical thinking are considered to be important (Klafki, 1998; Sandahl, 2013). In Finland, social studies (*yhteiskuntaoppi*) refers to a combination of civics, economics and juridical content (Löfström, 2019). History, geography and religion are independent subjects.

Historically, the goals of social studies in Finnish comprehensive education are deeply rooted in socialization and state citizenship (Löfström et al., 2017). Social studies was taught as a part of the history curriculum until the late 20th century, when it gained independent status as a school subject in secondary education. Since 2014, social studies has also been taught as a school subject at the primary level for one year between classes four and six. The comprehensive level covers classes from first to ninth grade (children aged between 6/7 up to 15/16), but social studies is taught in only one grade at both the primary and lower secondary levels. More up-to-date contextual information can be found in the recent country report (Löfström, 2019).

Besides gaining an established position among other school disciplines, the content and goals of social studies have also changed. There are currently a growing number of researchers and curriculum developers promoting critical and skill-based social studies teaching, and criticizing traditional teaching and textbooks for only transmitting knowledge about existing societal institutions (Suutarinen, 2006; Virta, 2006). However, traditional teaching of national institutions has not disappeared but retained as a counter-movement to globalization processes (Børhaug, 2014; Reid et al., 2010). The focus of this study is on what counts as societal knowledge in the current social studies textbooks in Finland, and how this knowledge about society creates conditions for students to observe their own role and possible changes in society.

In the field of the sociology of knowledge, the idea of focusing on how knowledge about society makes us think and interact with society has been discussed ever since Émile Durkheim and Karl Marx expounded their theories. In educational sciences, there has been a growing interest in the sociology of knowledge and especially in the way in which British sociologist of education Michael Young has applied it to the analysis of school knowledge. Young has identified two contradictory trends emphasizing different aspects of school knowledge: The 'traditional' approach, emphasizing objective transmittable knowledge, and the progressive approach emphasizing emancipation and the social dimension of knowledge (Young & Muller, 2010). As already noted, the co-existence of these two trends can also be recognized in Finnish social studies. According to Young, however, both of these trends run the risk of going wrong. By over-emphasizing socialization and the objectivity and stability of knowledge, the traditional approach only reproduces the knowledge of those who are in power (Muller & Young, 2019). Alternatively, replacing objective knowledge with the idea of knowledge that is only knowledge in relation to the current interests of individuals and social groups leads to situations where knowledge is no different from an opinion.

As a solution to this general problem, Young has presented the idea of powerful knowledge. As the opposite of the knowledge of the powerful, powerful knowledge (PK) makes it possible to predict, explain and envisage alternatives (Muller & Young, 2019). Young defines some key features of PK. Firstly, he leaves the content of PK open by stating that it is specialized disciplinary knowledge that is often specific to a particular discipline. As Beck (2014) in his commentary on PK points out, disciplinary knowledge is not automatically powerful knowledge as disciplinary knowledge can serve both empowering purposes and the interests of the elite. Secondly, PK is systematic—it forms a network of concepts that are systematically related to each other. Thirdly, PK is distinct from everyday knowledge. Ideally, PK would help to unpack the knowledge of the powerful, which represents the knowledge of those who are in power. As Muller and Young (2019, 197) note, 'The point about PK is to affirm that social interests do not exhaust what is educationally significant about knowledge'.

Young's ideas on PK have attracted the interest of researchers focusing on subject-specific teaching (Gericke et al., 2018). Besides geography (e.g. Lambert et al., 2015; Maude, 2016; Roberts, 2014) and history (e.g. Bertram, 2019; Puustinen & Khawaja, 2020), the idea of PK might also be fruitful for social studies. When it comes to social studies, however, Young's delineating criteria for

discipline-specialized knowledge and one or more networks of concepts are not as straightforward as they may be for some other school subjects. Unlike many other school subjects, social studies is located at the intersection of multiple disciplines. The challenge for social studies is that many societal phenomena can be explored through the disciplinary lenses of economy, jurisprudence or sociology, for example.

In the Nordic context, where there is a strong tradition of a subject didactical approach to disciplines, some researchers have suggested core concepts which, following the example of the subject of history during recent decades, could be one step towards more powerful knowledge in social studies by supporting a more coherent conceptual structure (see Berndtson & Löfström, 2001; Sandahl, 2013). Departing from Young's notion of an 'epistemic community', Sandahl (2018) suggests that rather than an epistemic basis, social studies didactics could be built around an interdisciplinary field where researchers from different backgrounds could provide answers to the 'alleged crisis of the school subject' (see also Bronäs & Selander, 2002). While these suggestions pave the way for the idea of interdisciplinary PK, they also imply that no particular discipline—not to mention single sociological approach to education and society—can claim epistemic ownership of knowledge in social studies.

In order to illustrate the contingent relationship between society and knowledge in social studies, we have complemented Young's ideas on PK with two different views on society, namely social reproduction and a systems approach. Regarding the social reproduction perspective, we apply Basil Bernstein's idea of recontextualization to observe how social studies textbooks are transmitting not only societal knowledge but also power relations. While convergences and divergences between Young and Bernstein are acknowledged in earlier studies (see Beck, 2014; Hordern, 2018), we have used Niklas Luhmann's social systems approach here as an alternative lens for observing the multi-logicality and multi-temporality of societal knowledge in social studies.

Social studies knowledge in the light of social systems and social reproduction approaches

As pointed out earlier, the problem of defining PK in social studies is related both to the question of what counts as knowledge as well as to power issues, that is, whose society social studies is explicitly or implicitly representing. In the sociology of education, the question of how school knowledge produces the social power relations in society is often discussed in reference to social reproduction. Originating from Marx's idea of the reproduction of economic capital and the battle between social classes, sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Althusser established a base for a sociological research tradition in which education is observed both as a form of tradeable social capital and as a device that is used to maintain the social order. Social reproduction is also the epistemic point of entry into Michael Young's thinking. However, in his recent works, Young has distanced himself from some of his earlier ideas (cf. Young, 1971). Instead of linking scientific and disciplinary-based school knowledge straightforwardly to the hidden interest of the elite, Young (Young & Muller, 2010; Muller & Young, 2019) has started to emphasize the liberating potentiality of scientific knowledge. As Beck (2014) points out, the liberating potential of PK does not derive from counter-politics but from self-referentiality and the relative autonomy of science in society.

If one wishes to understand the autonomy and self-referentiality of science in society, one should not overlook Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. According to Luhmann (1995), modern society is without a centre. Instead of one guiding logic or omnipresent form of power, modern society makes itself understandable via functionally differentiated communication systems such as economics, law, politics, media, science and education, each having their own specific medium through which to communicate about society. Despite its all-encompassing interest in society, social systems theory is also an autological theory. It does not claim to be anything other than a scientific description of society. Even though science has emerged in co-evolution with society, science as communication is self-referential and an autopoietic system—it produces its own elements,

including its environment. Due to the functional subdifferentiation of science, each discipline observes and contributes to society differently (Luhmann, 1992).

As a subsystem of scientific communication, social studies didactics observes society through theories and conceptualizations of society, learning and teaching. Scientific ideas, such as powerful knowledge, do not directly instal themselves in school practices. This would also require school teachers to find a pedagogically useful application of the theory. It is not entirely clear whether social studies didactics always relies on science in its observations of society either. Pedagogy and didactics are not only scientific subsystems, they are also reflection theories for education (Luhmann & Schorr, 2000). As a reflection theory, the didactics of social studies not only reflects society, but also aims to guide teachers on how to present society in a feasible way by using knowledge that is accessible for the learner. It is this accessibility of knowledge that Young (2010) also emphasizes in PK.

A second perspective that the social systems approach opens up for powerful knowledge in social studies is the temporality of societal knowledge. As is the case in history didactics, the temporality of knowledge appears through second-order concepts (e.g. 'change and continuity') and constant reconnections between the past, the present, and the future (Bertram, 2019; Seixas, 2017). The idea of temporality is also included in PK, but not very explicitly. According to Young (2010), powerful knowledge should surpass everyday knowledge but also appear as something that could be challenged in the present. While the idea of historically constructed yet open knowledge is easy to adopt, the way in which Young links powerful knowledge to the future is, however, problematic.

Young (2010) himself links powerful knowledge to Future 3, which represents a subsequent step after Future 1 and Future 2. Here, Future 1 represents an ahistorical and monolithic concept of traditional school subject-based knowledge, while Future 2 refers to the idea of socially constructed knowledge open to change at any moment. As a theoretical construct, Future 2 has gained popularity in educational research ever since the 1970s, but according to Young it has also overlooked the potentiality of disciplinary knowledge. In Young's thinking, Future 3 means a further developed idea of knowledge in which both the disciplinary tradition and the social dimension of knowledge are acknowledged. Even though different approaches to school knowledge could be categorized according to these three chronological knowledge futures, the categorization also links temporality and knowledge in such a way that only one future can exist at a time.

What a system theoretical understanding of temporality offers instead is the idea of a society in which multiple, system-referential futures co-exist. This approach to temporality could be useful when observing the various futures that social studies education is expected to promote: ecological and social sustainability, economic development, democracy and work in a digital society, as well as the skills needed in further education. Thus, the future projections in social studies are not only used to describe the future but also to evoke the next, hopefully, better society.

Despite his sharp-sighted approach to modern society, Luhmann was not particularly interested in how school knowledge might transmit social power relations or social order, however. In this sense, Luhmann's theory is not consistent with Young's critique of knowledge of the powerful. To reflect the social power dimension in social studies, we have applied Basil Bernstein's understanding of social reproduction. As a reproduction theorist, Bernstein has focused on both micro and macro social control in pedagogical communication. Bernstein (2000) applies concepts such as pedagogisation and recontextualisation to describe how social control is hidden in the pedagogical context.

Pedagogisation refers to the transmission of knowledge through pedagogy. Where Luhmann defines pedagogy as a reflection theory for education, Bernstein constructs a theory of a 'pedagogic device', a set of rules or procedures via which knowledge is transformed into pedagogical purposes (Singh, 2002). These rules determine, for example, the selection of knowledge deemed worthy of pedagogic transmission, the recontextualisation of this knowledge to the pedagogic context and, finally, pedagogic transmission itself (Singh, 2002, 573). We focus for the most part on recontextualization, which can take place on different levels from the societal level to a single classroom, and include ideological contests. Whether intentional or not, recontextualisation is thus a struggle over 'the power to regulate consciousness' (Bernstein, 2000, 38). This is also a feature that links Bernstein's

idea of recontextualisation to Young's critique of knowledge of the powerful. Knowledge of the powerful is recontextualized knowledge in which unrecognized social expectations and social relations pass unnoticed and take the defining power of objects of knowledge and subject positions. Even though this could also certainly take place in disciplinary-based teaching, it is even more likely to take place in interdisciplinary contexts where the epistemic criteria for knowledge are unclear (Hordern, 2018).

Research problems, methodological approach and research data

In this study, we investigate the problem of powerful knowledge in social studies as both a theoretical and an empirical question. As a theoretical research problem, our aim is to investigate how two different theoretical approaches to society, as expounded by Luhmann and Bernstein, enable us to rethink Young's idea of powerful knowledge in social studies. As an empirical research question, our aim is to investigate how Finnish social studies textbooks present society and how these representations of society link social structures, temporalities and identities.

In our case, Finnish social studies textbooks offer a glimpse into pedagogical representations of society. Even though textbooks are used differently by different teachers (Karvonen, 2019), they are nonetheless important converters of knowledge and vehicles for the promotion of official curricula (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). This also applies to the Finnish teaching culture, in which textbooks have traditionally played an important role (Heinonen, 2005). It is also worth pointing out that social studies teachers seem to use textbooks almost all the time during lessons (Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012). One explanation for this might be teacher education. Class teachers, who are responsible for teaching social studies at primary school, study education as their major and have usually taken only a short course in social studies didactics. At secondary level, social studies teachers have typically studied history as their major, which may influence their disciplinary orientation. More information about the education of social studies teachers in Finland can be found in Löffström (2019).

In terms of research design, we opted for theory-informed content analysis as an empirical method for the study. As a research method, content analysis has a long and strong footprint in social studies textbook analysis (Ahghar & Eftekhari, 2016; Wade, 1993). In general, the purpose of content analysis is to review texts and their contextual meaning systematically by deriving the analytical units and concepts either from data, from theory, or by using counting and comparison (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Among the different approaches, we combined a qualitative and theory-informed approach with quantitative content comparisons. While our content analysis was based on the categorization of different explicit representations of society at first, we subsequently moved towards critical content analysis, which also allowed us to use our theoretical concepts to reflect on what was not said (see Beach et al., 2009).

Starting from the Luhmannian understanding of the social differentiation of society, we began our analysis by comparing textbooks and identifying criteria according to which different social science textbooks break society down into observable parts. By cross-reading different textbooks and discussing the different parts and their distinctive features, we ended up with five domains: *society of communities*; *society of participation and decision-making (politics)*; *society of rules, safety and well-being*, *society of economics, work and markets* and *society of media*. Moving on to Bernstein's (2000) idea of textbooks as vehicles for promoting curricula, we also compared the domains and their frequencies between different textbooks and the national curriculum.

In the second phase, we approached the textbooks with a specific focus on sources of knowledge, that is, what is regarded as knowledge in social studies textbooks and how this knowledge relates to criteria that PK should be distinct from everyday knowledge and provide tools for envisaging alternatives (Muller & Young, 2019). In this phase, we also paid attention to Bernstein's ideas of pedagogisation and recontextualisation by focusing on how social studies textbooks mediate different social virtues and identities. We operationalized pedagogisation by examining how social power relations are reproduced when society is brought into the pedagogical context. Lastly, we

investigated the temporal dimension of knowledge and how the textbooks present society in relation to the past, present and future.

As empirical research data, we selected a total of four social studies textbooks that are currently in use in Finnish comprehensive education. Two of the selected books are from series for primary school (*ME NYT I & II*; *FORUM I & II*) and two for lower secondary school (*TAITAJA*; *FORUM 9*). Of these, *FORUM* (Latin loanword) and *TAITAJA* (*expert, master* in Finnish) are published by two of the biggest Finnish book publishers. In contrast, *ME NYT* ('We Now') is produced by a smaller publisher. We have excluded separate exercise books and digital materials from our study.

There are two reasons for the relatively modest amount of data. First, including all of the possible social studies textbooks would have made the theoretical comparison too challenging. After all, the research task at hand is not to state something that applies to all Finnish social studies textbooks, but to test different theoretical understandings of society and knowledge by examining a small selection. Another reason for selecting only four books concerns the fact that the markets for book publishers in Finland are small, and there are just four major textbook publishers in addition to a few smaller publishers. In the case of social studies textbooks, the three biggest publishers and their textbook series cover the overwhelming majority of all textbooks used in schools (see also Löffström, 2019).

Five domains of society and their emphasis with respect to the national curricula

All of the selected book series introduce the subject by talking about the nature of society. The primary-level textbooks *FORUM* and *ME NYT* start by discussing society as an entity comprising many communities. In addition to *society of communities*, the first two chapters (*FORUM I.I* and *I.II*; *ME NYT I.1* & *I.2*) of the elementary book series also frame communities according to their geographical and functional regimes. For example, *FORUM* uses Finland as an example of a society consisting of everyone inhabiting the country. *FORUM* also presents the state as a heterogeneous, family-like social society—something into which a child is born and which also takes responsibility for nurturing and educating children. The other primary textbook series under analysis, *ME NYT*, takes a slightly different approach to the society of communities by approaching the emergence of society in communities more familiar to students, such as school and home. In the first section of *ME NYT*, 'School' is framed as a community that makes decisions together, while the second section, 'Home', focuses on the importance of shared rules in the community.

Both secondary books begin with a short section that aims to define the idea of society and, to a lesser extent, social studies as a school subject. *FORUM* argues how every individual wants to live a happy life, for which purpose communities, society, state and politics are needed. In the subsequent chapters, as at the primary level, *FORUM* focuses on people that live in Finland. The introductory chapter in *TAITAJA* outlines society as a community of communities discusses what knowledge about society entails, and how knowledge and values both influence decision-making. At the end of the first chapter, *TAITAJA* covers media skills. In the chapters that follow, *TAITAJA* takes a largely juridical view of childhood and families.

After the initial chapters, all of the books adopt a more structure-oriented approach to society. Following a slightly different order and emphasizing different aspects, all of the books contain the same four *domains*: *Society of participation and decision-making*; *Society of economics, work and markets*; *Society of media*; and *Society of rules, safety and well-being*. The idea of society as an entity of these domains is not far from the system theoretical understanding of society but instead of opening up the different logics of these domains, the books situate the operations of these systems in individuals, social virtues and institutions.

The section on *Society of participation and decision-making* entails discussions about skills and the reasons for equal participation in decision-making. Similar to the way in which social systems theory understands the function of politics (Luhmann, 1990), the idea of this domain is partly linked to the question of how to make a collectively binding decision in society. In terms of societal structures, the focus at the primary level is firstly on local channels for participation in school and family, but later on

the focus gradually shifts to the political tasks and members of municipalities, political parties, the government, the president, the state, NGOs, and Europe. At the secondary level, the focus is mainly on the national level. The books have extensive coverage of institutions like the parliament of Finland, the government, and the president. These institutions are presented as forums for decision-making, but not in a tone that invites participation.

The *Society of economics, work and markets* could be understood as a functional equivalent of the system of economy and its primary function to regulate scarcity (Luhmann, 1988). The section begins at both levels by focusing on the principles of home economics: how spending and consumption must be balanced with family incomes and how consumption is also subject to marketing and ethics. Later on, the focus shifts to work and markets. Both primary books put a lot of emphasis on this domain, but there are some differences between their approaches to economics. *ME NYT 2* emphasizes the difference between home economics and economics, and stresses the importance of all work, including voluntary work. *FORUM II* takes a more market- and career-oriented approach. The same applies when discussing entrepreneurship: *ME NYT 2* discusses entrepreneurial attitudes and the many responsibilities that entrepreneurs have. In *FORUM II*, entrepreneurs are presented as a special group of individuals who have certain characteristics and who are able to prosper and employ people by adapting to the supply and demand of markets. Similarly to the primary-level books, *FORUM* and *TAITAJA* start from home economics and consumption. Both series build connections between an individual's rights and financial decisions or pitfalls. After a few chapters, the textbooks switch their focus to economics. Economic cycles, unemployment, foreign trade, and the importance of entrepreneurship are emphasized, demonstrating a focus that is more at the macro level compared to the primary-level books.

As a narrower domain, *Society of media* follows a different order by starting from the various forms of media such as newspapers, the internet, books and radio, before proceeding to critical reading skills and netiquette. Instead of approaching media as an attention-seeking system that 'keeps society on its toes' (Luhmann, 2000), the books present media in the light of external values such as truthfulness and objectivity—or as potential violators of these ideals. Interestingly, *Society of media* is almost non-existent in the secondary textbooks. Even though *TAITAJA* mentions the term propaganda in the introductory chapter, none of the books discusses phenomena such as false balance.¹

The fourth domain, *Society of rules, safety and well-being*, constitutes a less coherent entity. From a systemic perspective (e.g. King & Thornhill, 2003), this domain contains elements from law and the legal system as well as from the care and health systems. Content-wise, the domain combines legislation, ethical values, positive and negative rights, welfare services and social responsibilities. At the elementary level, the introduction to this domain starts at a very early stage by discussing the diversity of society and the social origins of shared rules and mutual respect. In the secondary-level textbooks, this domain is the largest of the four domains. As in the primary books, *FORUM* and *TAITAJA* devote many chapters to introducing an individual's rights and duties, the authorities, and social norms.

All in all, the social studies textbooks seem to adopt a wide perspective on society. Contrasted with the system-theoretical approach to society, there are some domains that the social studies textbooks don't discuss as a part of society. Interestingly, neither of the book series presents knowledge about society as being an intrinsic part of society, but rather as an extra or as statistics—something that emerges when different parts of society are being observed, but also something that has no particular form itself. Moreover, education is mainly discussed in reference to careers. The only exception is *ME NYT*, which introduces social studies as a school subject that enables students to practise collaborating in different communities. Otherwise, the textbooks do not link social studies to society, but describe society from the position of an external observer instead. They are neutral mediators of non-neutral social rules and values.

There is also some variation in how the textbooks emphasize different content areas and the type of content that is included in the domains. More detailed information about the themes included in each domain and their respective percentages is presented in [Table 1](#).

In regard to Bernstein's (2000) notion of textbooks as a promoter of curricula, the domains of society in social studies textbooks are partly compatible with the content areas (CA) of social studies as defined by the national curriculum (see Löfström, 2019): CA1 Everyday life and managing your own life (*S1 Arkielämä ja oman elämän hallinta*), CA2 Democratic society (*S2 Demokraattinen yhteiskunta*), CA3 Active citizenship and participation in decision-making (*S3 Aktiivinen kansalaisuus ja vaikuttaminen*), and CA4 Economic activities (*S4 Taloudellinen toiminta*). In addition, the topic of communities as an entry point to society is in line with the Finnish national curriculum, in which communities are discussed in the first three content areas (CA1–CA3). However, unlike in curricula where the emphasis in different content areas is on the *Society of participation and decision-making (politics)*, the greatest attention in all of the textbooks is paid to two domains, *Society of rules, safety and well-being* and *Society of economics, work and markets*. In addition, it appears that each content domain is dealt with separately in the textbooks.

Institutionalized and personalized knowledge of different social domains

As Young (2010) and Beck (2014) argue, the empowering potential of powerful knowledge is related to the systematic use of disciplinary-based concepts, which allows students to conceptualize society and reappraise their own relationship to it. In this section, we analyse the knowledge of social studies textbooks by focusing on how they construct and utilize societal knowledge and whether the concepts used relate to disciplinary knowledge. In addition, we apply Bernstein's (2000) ideas on pedagogisation to investigate how social power relations are reproduced when society is brought into the pedagogical context. All in all, we found very few references to science and the systematic use of scientific concepts. Starting from the primary level, *FORUM* makes a passing reference to scientific knowledge by introducing social scientists as 'a group of people who are studying and observing different parts of society and their relations to regular people' (*FORUM I*, 15). Society is presented as a puzzle consisting of families, regions, schools, healthcare centres, shops, money, traffic, newspapers, television, the internet, the police, laws, traditions and habits. By observing the different pieces of the puzzle, pupils are also considered to be working as everyday social scientists (*FORUM I*, 14–15). At the secondary level, *TAITAJA* refers to future studies once, and to economics once. However, rather than academic research, the economics of social studies textbooks refers more to economics as a reflection theory for the economy, providing information about the state of the economy and financial forecasts.

What seems to be characteristic of all of the books is that after the introductory part, they bypass the scientific approaches to society and approach the latter either in the light of personal opinions or in the light of social virtues and institutions within different domains. The emphasis on opinion formation in social studies textbooks relates to the third content area—*Active citizenship and participation in decision-making*—which highlights the significance of students' opinion formation as an important learning goal. From the analysed textbooks, *TAITAJA* uses separate text boxes to ask students' opinions about contemporary topics such as compulsory military service and taxation. These 'opinion boxes' are literally about opinions, since they do not encourage drawing on disciplinary perspectives or knowledge to support opinion-making. Similarly, *FORUM* includes some exercises that call for forming an opinion or interpreting social phenomena, as a part of assignments that appear at the end of every chapter. In one example, two separate assignments ask students to form reasoned opinions about public debt and the EU (*FORUM*, 148). However, students have few tools at their disposal because the principles that economists rely on in order to produce knowledge are not described.

As a counterpoint to opinions, the textbooks offer facts about institutions within different social domains. It is the domain itself and particularly the institutes of the social domains that determine what constitutes knowledge. The facts that are presented largely concern different social institutions and the way they present themselves. For example, in all of the books, excluding *ME NYT*, *Society of participation and decision-making* is largely about the local, national and European institutions that

Table 1. Domains of society in relation to the content of social studies textbooks.

Domain	FORUM I & II(228 pages)	ME NYT I & II(156 pages)	FORUM 9 (250 pages)	TAITAJA (226 pages)
<i>Society of communities</i>	communities, state, municipalities, families, minorities, population movements[ch I.I, I.II, II. II; 26 pages, 11%]	communities, families, minorities,population movements[ch I.1, II.2; 13 pages, 8%]	communities, families, minorities,population movements [ch 1–3, 9; 15 pages, 6%]	communities, families, minorities,population movements, demography [ch 0, 2, 5; 9 pages, 4%]
<i>Society of participation and decision-making</i>	local and national decision-making, opinion, elections, democracy, ways of influencing, student board, politicians, demonstrations[ch I.I, II.II; 26 pages, 11%]	local decision- making, meetings, student board, active citizenship, ways of influencing[ch I.1, II.2; 18 pages, 12%]	local-, national- and EU- level decision-making, political parties, lobbying, democracy, elections [ch 1, 25–33; 55 pages, 22%]	local-, national-, EU- level and global-level decision-making, political parties, democracy, elections [ch 26–35; 61 pages, 27%]
<i>Society of economics, work and markets</i>	consumption, home economics, taxation, saving, mediums of transaction, loans, (subliminal) advertising, fair trade, preferring domestic products, entrepreneurship, services, pricing, companies, (future) worklife, education, professions [ch I.V, II.III, II.IV, II.V; 72 pages, 32%]	economics, consumption, marketing, worklife, professions, entrepreneurial citizenship, networking, profit, education [ch I.3, I.4, II.3, II.4; 70 pages, 49%]	consumption, entrepreneurship, worklife, investing, taxation, economics, economic policy, public finances, social transfers, central banks, foreign trade, unemployment, labour market [ch 11–13, 16, 19–24; 62 pages, 25%]	consumption, entrepreneurship, worklife, investing, taxation, economics, economic policy, public finances, social transfers, central banks, foreign trade, unemployment, labour market [ch 3, 6, 13–15, 18–25, 30; 53 pages, 23%]
<i>Society of media</i>	news, media influencing, social media, netiquette[ch I:IV; 24 pages, 10%]	news, source criticism, media influencing, social media, netiquette, trolling [ch II.1; 14 pages, 9%]	media as watchdog, advertising [ch 14, 28; 9 pages, 3%]	media skills [ch 0, 16; 4 pages, 2%]
<i>Society of rules, safety and well-being</i>	children’s and individual rights, immaterial and material rights, school and family rules, age restrictions, laws and safety, school counsellor, school nurse, help services[ch I.I, I.II, I.III, I.IV, II.I; 51 pages, 22%]	school and family rules, children’s, individual and material rights, laws, criminal liability, safety, age restrictions, gambling, responsible citizenship [ch I.1, I.2, II.2; 28 pages, 18%]	individual rights, rules, laws and safety, demography, families, welfare state, authorities, criminality, legal system, fundamental rights, national defence, global threats, the future of public welfare services [ch 4–11, 14–15,17, 34–35; 82 pages, 33%]	individual rights, rules, laws and safety, services of the welfare state, authorities, criminality, legal system, fundamental rights, national defence, global threats, the future of public welfare services [ch 1–18, 23, 30, 34–36; 78 pages, 35%]

make up the political system, how they work, and who the key actors are. In addition to information on local and national institutes of participation and actors such as NGOs, national political parties, parliament, ministers, government, president and municipalities, the textbooks frame political virtues, namely the ability to listen and present arguments, activity, and courage. *ME NYT* is an exception here, since it focuses mainly on participation and political influencing at the student’s level, and encourages all citizens to participate regardless of their personal capabilities.

The different domains adopt a very different approach to the relationship between society and knowledge. In *Society of media*, the emphasis is on multiple sources of knowledge and critical thinking as a basis for knowledge. Knowledge requires us to exchange our worldviews by reading

books and engaging in discussions with others. Googling is not seen as knowing. Similarly, not everything in the media can be construed as knowledge, such as opinions and experiences mediated by blogs and commercials. Knowledge in society is mediated not only by text but also by images. On the other hand, images can be manipulated as well.

As the domains change, the importance of knowledge also seems to change. Instead of focusing on what constitutes knowledge in terms of economics or different professions, the textbooks address students by presenting the social virtues of different domains. As Bernstein (2000) argues, recontextualisation, that is, bringing society into the pedagogical context, implies not only the transformation of knowledge from the scientific domain into education, but the utilization of social identification in a manner in which students understand social and society as a personal mission or obligation. For example, in *ME NYT*, the different domains are discussed in reference to citizenship. Participation and political participation are discussed by referring to active citizenship, rules and laws by bringing up responsible citizenship, and economics by referring to entrepreneurial citizenship.

The social virtues of economics are, however, largely twofold. On the one hand, when dealing with home economics, the social virtue emphasized in *FORUM I*, *FORUM 9* and *TAITAJA* points to prudent, rational, shrewd and forward-thinking citizens who are able to recognize the importance of saving, and balancing between income and outgoings. Patience is also an economic virtue when dealing with the psychology of advertising and the importance of resisting commercial temptations. On the other hand, when the focus switches to market logics, entrepreneurship and business, the social virtues change. Instead of a prudent and humble attitude, students are encouraged to adopt a resolute mindset and to become less risk-averse, by emphasizing the social and personal benefits of being an entrepreneur and—in the case of *FORUM II*—by referring to the entrepreneurial attitude and personal characteristics of one of the most popular Finnish rap artists, known as ‘Cheek’ (*FORUM II*, 180).

At the secondary level, the combination of individual virtues and macro-economics creates an interesting paradox. Most of the time, the economic system based on consuming and consumers’ needs is taken for granted. However, at the same time, the books paint a picture of an ideal citizen who can take care of their personal finances, avoids impulse buying as well as quickie loans, and (in some cases) is an ethical consumer (*FORUM*, 85, 93–95; *TAITAJA*, 75–76). Basic economic concepts like supply and demand are dealt with only fleetingly. For example, *FORUM* begins the section dealing with the economy by explaining the idea of needs, goods and factors of production. However, after less than half a page, the book starts to argue how important economic competitiveness is for Finland.

Compared to other domains, *Society of law, justice and social well-being* relies more heavily on normative rules as a source of knowledge. The books are loaded with facts and information about national and international legislation, rules and rights, as well as information about institutions specialized in citizens’ health, wealth and safety. Rules and laws are seen as necessary to enable everyday social order, to ensure equality and to protect material and immaterial rights. Laws and rights are also discussed simultaneously in terms of parents’ power over their underage children, as well as in terms of pointing out that child welfare is a special concern of social services and jurisdictions alike.

The conceptual load gets even heavier when moving on to the secondary-level books. The books are laden with juridical and bureaucratic terms, which are often generated by the authorities themselves. Formal decision-making in particular, such as legislative processes, governmental and judicial procedures, and the economy, seems to require extensive terminology. For example, the difference between terms like ‘plenary session of the cabinet’ (*hallituksen yleisistunto*) and ‘the president’s presentment’ (*presidentin esittely*) are hardly needed to understand national decision-making (*TAITAJA*, 189–190). By contrast, social and political influencing methods and the media are dealt with using simpler vocabulary. One illustration of this is the number of boldface words that the books use to highlight important terms.

To conclude, according to Bernstein (2000), social power relations are reproduced through education. Unpacking, or even acknowledging, these unspoken relations require systematic tools like PK. Based on our empirical analysis, we argue that most parts of the textbooks represent given or

fixed views of society. Presenting society as an unchangeable entity with rules that have to be learned resonates with the idea that a socially and politically 'living' society is camouflaged by objectified institutions. The four textbooks include only a few elements that would encourage thinking differently.

Regarding knowledge, there do not seem to be any organizing principles that would make the content knowledge meaningful. The primary school books take as their starting point the everyday life of pupils and slowly shift their focus to the institutional level, from where the secondary books continue. Despite their differences, both of the analysed primary books deal with reasonably concrete themes and topics. At the secondary level, society is introduced right away in the light of social institutions. This shift away from the everyday does not imply examining everyday phenomena through disciplinary concepts, however. Hence, the knowledge in the secondary-level textbooks derives neither from the pupils' own experiences nor from disciplines. A cursory look at history education illustrates the problem: when building historical knowledge, second-order concepts are seen as necessary in order to organize and build substantive knowledge. Social studies textbooks, however, seem to deal with non-cumulative substantive knowledge only.

Considering both power relations and knowledge, it seems that students are not given analytical or disciplinary tools that would foster an emerging understanding of power relations, that support going beyond everyday conceptions (e.g. Young & Muller, 2010), or that separate powerful knowledge from a list of contents (Muller & Young, 2019). As a result, students are left with uncertainty about the way in which reliable societal knowledge is constructed. It could be further argued that this uncertainty leaves them more vulnerable to manipulation, through disinformation for example.

Temporalities of societal knowledge: contemporized society vs. predetermined futures

Following the system-theoretical idea about social time (Luhmann, 1976), societal knowledge is always knowledge in relation to the temporal forms of modern society, namely the past, the present and the future. By referring to the past, it is possible to discuss how the domains and structures of society have taken their current form and how history is present in contemporary societies. The idea of time-tested knowledge that transcends the present necessities is one of Young's (2010) criteria for powerful knowledge. However, Young also highlights the possibility of change. This possibility is also created in reference to temporality either by re-evaluating the correctness and consequences of knowledge in the present moment, or by projecting a future which requires us to change our present expectations.

Starting from the historical approach, content that includes the historicity of society is generally rare in the analysed textbooks. At the primary level, the past is mentioned in passing when discussing the history of markets (*FORUM II*, 182–183), changing forms of money (*FORUM II*, 106), and changing family models (*FORUM I*, 38). History is also present in the form of proverbs such as 'Money doesn't grow on trees' (*ME NYT II*) and in pictures of family trees (*FORUM I*, 38). At the secondary level, *TAITAJA* briefly discusses the Enlightenment and the philosophical justification for democracy (151), describes the changes in the prerogative of the president of Finland (192–193), and uses the Finnish tradition of a self-reliant and credible national defence as an argument for maintaining national service as the foundation of the Finnish army (67). *FORUM 9* justifies the EU as a historical peace project (212). Before that, it briefly touches upon history while describing human rights (26) and the global population growth (233). Both secondary books recognize the changes that have occurred in family models throughout history.

Apart from these few examples, the temporal mode for social studies is mainly the present society. There are many ways in which the textbooks contemporize and regenerate society for students who, as underage citizens, are still in many ways excluded from different domains of society. The primary-level textbooks often use pictures and illustrative stories written from a child's perspective to elicit opinions and potential action. In addition, societal domains are

presented in the light of contemporary phenomena and currently famous people. Anti-bullying, NGOs and entrepreneurship are introduced in reference to popular singers and TV celebrities (*FORUM I*, 67, 72, *FORUM II*, 38, 69). Similarly, politics is introduced by means of an interview with a young and trendy politician and by showing images of young demonstrators (*FORUM II*, 36–42).

Besides the present, the social studies textbooks also discuss the society of the future. The future is depicted both as a society that students are allowed to enter when they grow up, and as a society that will be different from the one at present. In these discussions, the main focus is on *Society of economics, work and markets*. At the primary level, the discussion about the future starts by talking about dream jobs, namely what the child wants to be when they grow up (*ME NYT 2*, 50; *FORUM II*, 98). Education is presented here as a pathway to the future, while celebrities from everyday reality TV shows are used as an example of unstable jobs (*ME NYT 2*, 54; *FORUM II*, 98, 99). In *FORUM II* there is a chapter on a future society that is characterized by technologisation and constant change, pointing to the potential for many current jobs to disappear. The book argues that 'According to business executives, future employees must get along with other people and should be ready to continuously learn new things' (*FORUM II*, 213). The book does not set any requirements for future employers, however.

At the secondary level, *TAITAJA* (97) presents a similarly fixed narrative for working life in the future: 'Nowadays an individual cannot expect to graduate to a single profession, in which he/she works until retirement [...] Traditional long-term employment is becoming rare, since working life is becoming more project-based. The ability to keep on learning will be of paramount importance in the future world of work'. All in all, the section in *TAITAJA* dealing with societal restructuring is a short one, even though it deserves a whole chapter that could consider society as a constantly changing entity. In the current edition, restructuring is presented only as automatization. Both secondary books associate the future of the Finnish welfare system with the ageing population as well as with the so-called 'sustainability gap' in public finances. The secondary-level books discuss the financial challenges that the public healthcare system is expected to face in the near future quite extensively. To this end, the future is depicted in the books as more of a threat than as an opportunity to aim for a better society.

To sum up, all of the textbooks contain references to all three forms of temporality. Even though the authors of such books are often history teachers, the past dimension is dealt with fleetingly. The books often use images of action, stories, and celebrities to contemporize and make things more immediate and attractive to the pupils. As a downside, embracing the present and contemporary life means that societal knowledge quickly becomes outdated. Celebrities and media phenomena change fast and books that introduce societal phenomena by referring to already forgotten persons are not very interesting for students. In addition, the representation of society becomes scattered. Besides the present, the books also outline the future, but not in a particularly encouraging or attractive way. Economically and technologically determined futures suggest that students should never stop learning and adapting to change, while demographic changes and the uncertain future of the European Union depict a distracting and unclear future from the current perspective. None of the analysed books fleshes out the possibility of a future that is better than the present. The future knowledge of social studies textbooks is filled with current expectations of the future, not with futures that are still open and possible for the next generation to dream about or to reject.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have examined the societal knowledge of social studies by contrasting Michael Young's idea of powerful knowledge with Niklas Luhmann's systemic conception of society and Basil Bernstein's notion of recontextualization and pedagogisation. Regardless of their different approaches to the respective constitution of 'social' and 'society', both Luhmann's and Bernstein's conceptions helped us to rethink the relationship between society and knowledge in social studies.

On the one hand, Luhmann's understanding of society and temporality provided us with tools for describing the domains and temporal dimension of societal knowledge—an issue to which Young has also contributed but which has not attracted much attention in earlier studies. On the other hand, Bernstein's concepts offered us tools for contrasting textbook knowledge with curricula content and, more importantly, for reflecting on how different representations of society within social studies utilize social identities as well as institutions as objectified facts.

The empirical analysis of four Finnish social studies textbooks started by focusing on the construction of society. In all of the analysed books—especially at the primary level—society was introduced by emphasizing social society, that is, a *society* consisting of *communities*. After the introductory part, however, the social approaches to society were invariably replaced by four independent domains, comprising *Society of rules, safety and well-being*; *Society of economics, work and markets*; *Society of participation and decision-making (politics)*; and *Society of media*. While both the community approach and the content included in the four domains follows the content areas of the national core curriculum, there was an imbalance between the curriculum, which emphasizes participation, and the textbooks, which stress societal and juridical rules and expectations. Moreover, the *Society of participation and decision-making* domain consists for the most part of introducing political institutions, which does not seem to encourage participation. In this sense, the social studies textbooks fall short of the goals of the national curriculum.

There are, of course, some overlaps between the different domains, making it difficult to describe the respective percentages with a high degree of accuracy. However, when describing society, the textbooks tend to situate each social phenomenon within one societal domain instead of discussing them in reference to many domains. The insensitivity to alternative domain approaches may be the cause of an unreflected approach to society as a whole. The puzzle metaphors and strong community approach adopted by the textbooks overlook the possibility of interrelations—or what Luhmann calls *structural couplings*—between different societal domains. The puzzle consisting of pieces with no overlaps does not offer any solutions as to how the distinctive logics of society are re-emerging simultaneously in contemporary situations.

When it comes to the forms and origins of societal knowledge, we interpret that pedagogisation is embodied in how institutions speak about themselves in the textbooks, and how students are mainly addressed via social virtues and as potential members of these institutions. A disciplinary basis for knowledge, participation or envisaging alternative scenarios for the future are not supported. Based on our analysis, the four textbooks do not fulfil the promises made at the beginning of the books, such as 'The goal of studying social studies is to learn to change the world' (*FORUM* 9, 11). Considering the lack of references to disciplines and transparent argumentation about how we know about society, most parts of the four textbooks represent the knowledge of the powerful as defined by Muller and Young (2019). The analysed textbooks do not encourage thinking about concepts that would be more powerful in the sense that they would permit going beyond everyday conceptions of society. The heavy load of administrative and juridical terminology, which is not cumulative in the sense of second-order concepts (e.g. Lee, 2005; Sandahl, 2015), can be seen as illustrative of how institutions make themselves important and, on the other hand, as something that is easy to test at the classroom level. As Børhaug (2014) argues, the wish to emphasize political institutions in social studies textbooks might also relate to globalization processes which are increasingly challenging national institutions.

On the other hand, one should not think that the institutional approach to society automatically relates to knowledge of the powerful alone. Even though we can understand society as something that is happening here and now, it is hard to make sense of modern society without understanding the historically formed, structural side of it. After all, institutions—or organization systems—play an important role in processing and stabilizing the communication of social systems (Nassehi, 2005). By increasing the probability of communication, they also create better opportunities to collectively discuss and promote socially valuable things. For example, if we transferred the responsibility for

promoting learning and social values such as social equity, democracy and mutual respect from school organizations to individuals, the impact would probably conflict with the ideals of powerful knowledge.

Indeed, one crucial point in Young's (2010) critique of knowledge of the powerful is the problem of falsely recognized emancipation within education. An exemplification of this as well as the way in which pedagogisation reproduces power relations in the analysed textbooks is the combination of finances and the economy. The books create an image of an ideal citizen who balances his/her own finances, avoids debt, saves, and invests. This kind of financial literacy is presented as a virtue that includes skills and competencies. These skills are not connected to *economic literacy*, namely a wider understanding of how every individual is part of an economic system that is, in turn, created and regulated through national and international decision-making. Thus, the separation of financial skills from the economy and politics makes financial skills an example of both pedagogisation and Future 2 knowledge that leaves an individual blind to the structures that determine the space in which the individual can operate, as well as failing to provide the tools or impetus for changing those structures. Overall, we would argue that the domain of *Society of economics, work and markets* in particular promotes the knowledge of the powerful in the sense of how a citizen is expected to be and live as a humble Lutheran.²

Our main critique of the analysed textbooks concerns the narrow temporality of the presented society in which the future is given and the past is unspoken. The ahistorical approach to society in social studies is not only common to the textbooks but also to the national core curriculum (OPS2014). The reason for this de-historisation of social studies might lie in the differentiation between social studies and history as school subjects. While social studies in Finland used to be taught exclusively by history teachers and with a strong emphasis on the historical approach to society (Löfström, 2019), in recent years there has perhaps been a counter-movement to shift the temporal focus away from the past towards a more open-ended and work-in-progress style of society. Paradoxically, the aim to diminish the role of history in social science does not automatically lead to a better understanding of present and future possibilities.

The chosen view blurs the temporality of societies. In other words, it diminishes the opportunity to understand the interaction between interpretations of the past, the present, and the future (i.e. historical consciousness). While understanding temporality in the same depth as in history education may not be the ultimate aim of social studies, an ability to understand and analyse competing ideological and political ideas that offer very different perspectives on the future certainly should be (Sandahl, 2015). Like the somewhat threatening narratives of the future of the welfare system or of working life in our data, every interpretation of the past affects our understanding of the present society, and the way in which we envisage alternatives for the future (Puustinen & Khawaja, 2020). Another important justification for the temporal view is the difference between the past and the present day, as articulated by historian Tosh (2008, 28): 'By giving us another vantage point, it enables us to look at our circumstances with sharper vision, alert to the possibility that they might have been different, and that they will probably turn out differently in the future'.

Whether approaching society from an historical, current or future perspective, social studies teaching materials should at least try to mediate the possibility of a realistic utopia. These realistic utopias emerge when social reality is no longer regarded as a list of facts and opinions, but as a contingent relationship between things and ways of knowing things. Besides the factual dimension, 'knowing society' also entails social and temporal dimensions. While the dilemma between factual and socio-historical dimensions is well recognized by researchers working with post-colonial global citizenship education, more attention should be devoted to the question of temporalities and societal knowledge. If we really want adolescents to change the world, we need to give them the tools to do so.

To conclude, in Young's argumentation, where powerful knowledge is a third way between a list of facts and pure opinions, knowledge can be created through disciplinary standards. The nature of social studies as a combination of thematic content and diverse views of background disciplines creates a challenge for didactic research and curriculum development. It is not clear whether there

should be one or many powerful knowledges in social studies. It would be tempting to lean towards the latter to quite a large extent, since this resonates with Muller and Young (2019) idea of boundary maintaining and boundary crossing as conditions for creating new knowledge. However, a practical challenge in the school context would be limited time resources. It would require very careful curriculum planning to be able to merge these individual disciplinary or powerful 'knowledges' so that they appear meaningful to both teachers and students of social studies. Perhaps one possible step towards PK in social studies research and praxis would be the idea of approaching society not as something that is known, but as something that emerges systemically when trying to make sense of it. This would require more interdisciplinary research on social studies (Sandahl, 2018) but also pedagogical ability and the time to marvel at society together with researchers, teachers and students.

Notes

1. By false balance, we refer to bothsidesism, i.e. that an issue is presented as being more balanced between opposing viewpoints than the evidence supports, and so-called argument to moderation, i.e. the fallacy that the truth is a compromise between two opposite positions. Typical examples include discussions about vaccinations or climate change.
2. By 'humble Lutheran', we refer to religious doctrine stressing obedience to the government as a Christian duty. Despite the several religious and non-religious worldviews nowadays, the Lutheran Church has had a strong socio-historical influence on Nordic civic virtues (Nelson, 2017).

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