

# Social Sciences, Social Studies or a New Term?: The Dilemma of Naming a Learning Area

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Prepared for the Ministry of Education, August 2004

**Abstract:** This paper outlines the dilemma relating to the name of the learning area currently known as 'Social Sciences'. There are currently two terms used within the area – one for the learning area name, and another for the curriculum statement name. Developments taking place in the New Zealand Curriculum Project provide an opportunity to consider which of these terms, or others, should be used to name the learning area of the future curriculum framework. It outlines arguments for and against three possible approaches to resolving the dilemma – retaining the term 'Social Sciences', renaming the learning area 'Social Studies' or using a new name - 'Society'. Principles are also suggested to underpin dialogue about other possible terms for the name of the learning area.

The New Zealand Curriculum project, taking place at present, aims to **reframe, refocus** and **revitalise** the New Zealand curriculum. This process is a particularly important one for Social Studies/Social Sciences since it provides an opportunity to address a significant issue for the learning area. That issue is **the incongruence between the learning area name (Social Sciences), and the name of the curriculum statement for the learning area (Social Studies).**

The use of two different terms to name the learning area and its curriculum statement is problematic. Incongruence between the names leads to confusion about the essence of the learning area and the outcomes that are intended for students. Each of the terms carries with them quite particular meanings and implications for curriculum. The 'Social Sciences' learning area name reflects the curriculum implemented largely at Senior Secondary levels, and guided by the History, Geography and Economics syllabi that were not replaced subsequent to the 1993 curriculum framework. The 'Social Studies' curriculum statement name reflects and guides the curriculum implemented mostly in Primary Schools and at the Junior Secondary levels, and to a limited extent at Senior Secondary levels.

Under the previous curriculum framework an 'Essential Learning Area' was defined as, "a broad, recognisable category of knowledge and understanding" (Ministry of Education, 1993). 'Social Sciences' and 'Social Studies' are both terms that are broad and recognisable categories of knowledge and understanding. The issue, though, is the use of two different terms to name the learning area and the curriculum statement. The alignment issue is intensified by the lack of explanation of the connection between the terms, and how they relate to each other. The 'Social Sciences' learning area name, is followed, in the 1993 curriculum framework document, by a statement that refers largely to important elements of the 'Social Studies' curriculum, with just a fleeting mention of other disciplines connected to the area. Remarkably, in the entire Social Studies Curriculum Statement (Ministry of Education, 1997), there is only one reference to the term 'Social Sciences', in the first sentence of the document. Understanding of the connection between Social Studies and Social Sciences is assumed, and not explained explicitly. These discrepancies have led to considerable confusion about the nature of the learning and the outcomes for students that are important in this area. It has also led to confusion about the relationship between the disciplines and subjects that 'belong' to this learning area.

As a result, Social Studies, History, Geography, Economics and other subjects have, despite the introduction of a Social Sciences learning area in the 1993 curriculum reforms, co-existed as relatively

isolated entities. There has not been a sense of these subjects contributing to, and being related to, a broader recognizable category of knowledge and understanding – the learning area.

The New Zealand Curriculum Project is currently engaging educators in developing an essence statement for each learning area along with a reduced and revised set of achievement objectives. The outcome of this process will be just one document encompassing both the essence statement and the achievement objectives for all learning areas. It is also likely to lead to the curriculum statements, including ‘Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum’, being un-mandated. It is then, timely to consider what term should be used to name the area currently referred to as ‘Social Sciences’.

### ***The Possibilities***

There are three main possible approaches for the name of the learning area. The first is to keep the name of the current essential learning area – ‘Social Sciences’. The second is to use the name of the current curriculum statement as the new learning area name – ‘Social Studies’. And the third possible approach is, of course, to consider an alternative name for the learning area. The section below outlines some definitions and interpretations of the terms ‘Social Sciences’ and ‘Social Studies’, and also considers arguments for and against each possibility.

### **Social Sciences**

#### **What does Social Sciences mean?**

According to Hill the social sciences are concerned with the interactions people have with each other and their environment. “The New Zealand Social Sciences provide a knowledge base and range of perspectives, on the patterns, interactions and relationships of individuals and groups in their social, economic, cultural and political spheres of activity and in their relationship to the natural environment. The knowledge base covers both historical and contemporary periods within New Zealand, and in its relationship with other countries” (R. Hill, 1997, p.2).

The curriculum framework document’s interpretation of Social Sciences focuses mainly on elements generally understood to represent Social Studies. It has a concluding statement that refers to the History, Geography and Economics subjects, that are understood to be significant subjects within the learning area, in the last sentence - “To provide balanced learning in the social sciences, schools will ensure that all students participate in a wide variety of experiences, drawing on a range of subjects. In particular, schools will provide for learning in social studies, history, geography, and economics” (Ministry of Education, 1993).

#### **An argument for retaining ‘Social Sciences’ as the learning area name:**

Retaining the term ‘Social Sciences’ for the learning area name would be beneficial for several reasons. Most obviously, it would maintain continuity, and avoid the negative responses that change might bring. ‘Social Sciences’ is an important term in that it signals, for those who teach Social Studies, History, Geography, Economics and indeed other subjects, the discipline base from which the content is drawn. Such connection to the academic disciplines could provide the learning area with both credibility and status. This would prevent the need for a ‘new’ subject, even in name, having to struggle for recognition as Geography did in the past (McGee, 1997). ‘Social Sciences’ also clearly connects to learning beyond the compulsory curriculum, to the senior secondary levels, and also to tertiary education.

## Social Studies

It is important when considering using the term ‘Social Studies’ as the name for the learning area, to also consider the meanings of the term itself.

Understandings of the meaning, purposes, content, and approaches of Social Studies are, perhaps more than any other curriculum area, diverse and lacking consensus. This diversity of perspectives, background, and philosophies emphasised in Social Studies are often referred to as ‘traditions’. A range of classifications of these traditions, camps or orientations have been made (see Figure 1). These signal the scope and diversity of the approaches that will inform curriculum development in this area. Aitken (2004) suggests that each of the traditions (History/Geography, Social Science, Social Action, Humanistic/Developmental, Life Skills, Social Reconstructionist) are represented to at least some extent within our current Social Studies curriculum statement, despite there being aspects of some of them that are incompatible. The current learning area name, though, clearly suggests just one of those traditions – Social Science.

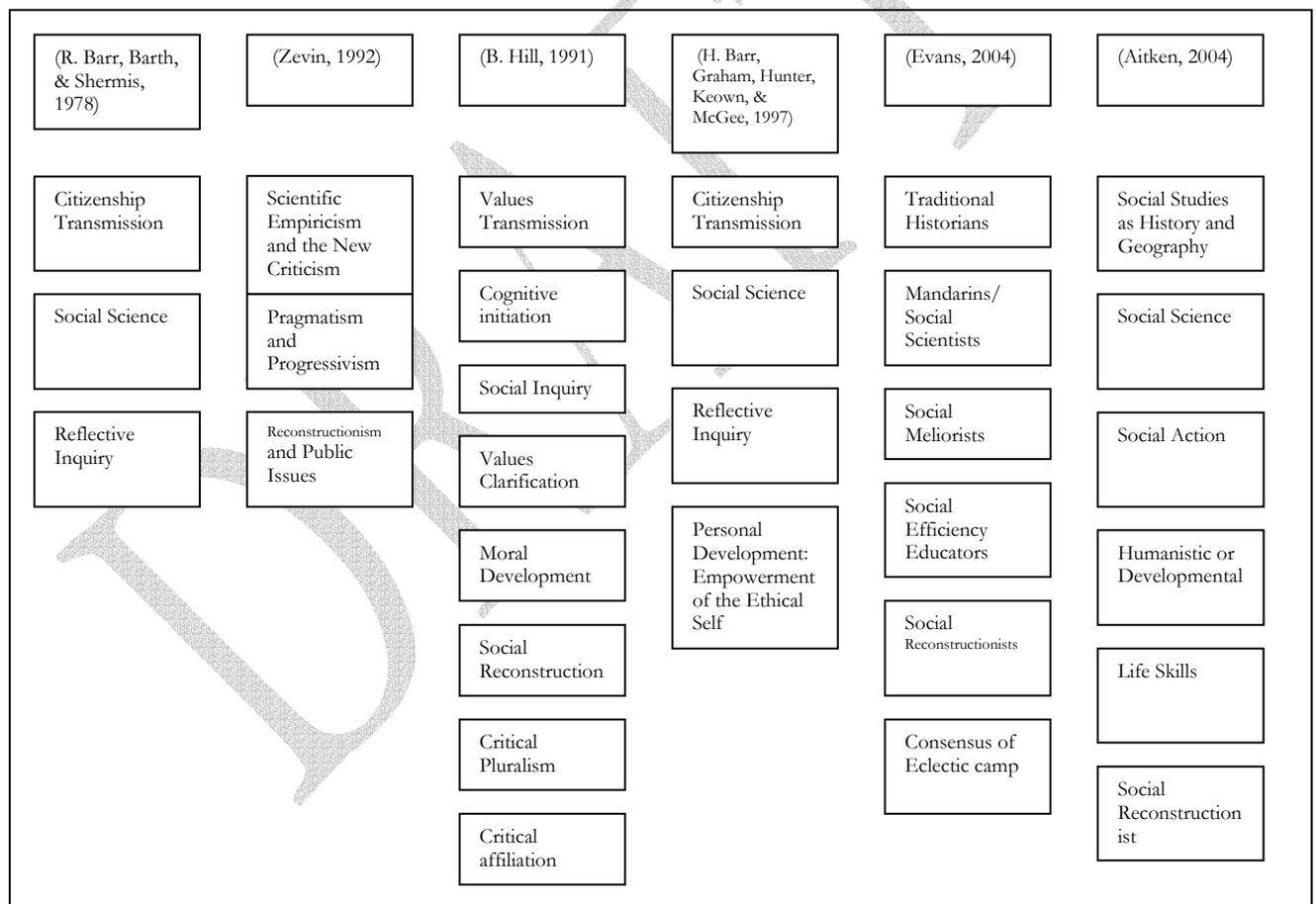


Figure 1. Traditions of Social Studies.

## What does Social Studies mean?

The traditions outlined in Figure 1 are reflected in different combinations, and to different extents, in the wide range of definitions given to Social Studies. A range of definitions, from New Zealand and beyond, are outlined below to highlight the diversity of understandings around this term. Firstly, is the definition expressed in the curriculum statement - 'Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum':

*“Social studies is the systematic study of an integrated body of content drawn from the social sciences and the humanities. It enables students to develop their knowledge and understandings of the diverse and dynamic nature of society and of how interactions occur among cultures, societies, and environments. Students develop and apply skills as they investigate society, explore issues, make decisions, and work cooperatively with others. The understandings and skills they develop enable them to participate in society as informed, confident, and responsible citizens”*

(Ministry of Education, 1997)

The 1997 “Position paper: Social Studies in the New Zealand School Curriculum” defined Social Studies as:

*“the subject most directly concerned with the study of society and human activity in the context of continuity, change, and contemporary issues. It is also concerned with the development of reflective thinking and social action through informed and enlightened civic participation.”*

(H. Barr et al., 1997)

In the the text ‘Making Sense of Social Studies’ Barr and Carryer claim:

*Social Studies is by nature inclusive. Social Studies evolved from History and Geography but it contains elements from Sociology, Anthropology, Economics and Politics.*

(H. Barr & Carryer, 1991)

This curriculum guide statement is an example of a school level definition of Social Studies:

*“Social Studies is about people, he tangata and the world we live in. Students can develop their knowledge and understandings of society and the interactions among cultures, ethnic groups and environments. Skills are developed and applied as students investigate society, explore issues, make decisions and work cooperatively with others.”*

(Papatoetoe High School, 2004)

and Kay Harrison (citing Giroux) suggests that:

*“Its [Social Studies] primary purpose must be to stimulate their passions, imaginations and intellects so that they will be moved to challenge the social, political, and economic forces that weigh so heavily upon their lives. In other words, students should be educated to display civic courage, ie the willingness to act as if they were living in a democratic society. At its core, this form of education is political, and its goal is a genuine democratic society, one that is responsive to the needs of all”*

(Harrison, 1998, p.78)

The most widely referred to overseas definition of Social Studies, from the United States is:

*Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school programme, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study*

*drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion and sociology as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decision for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.*

(National Council for the Social Studies, 2002)

And Hartoonian suggests that:

*The purpose of social studies is the development of reflective, democratic citizenship. It does this primarily through the study of the content and methods of history, geography, civics, economics, and the other social studies, as well as selected content from law, philosophy, and the humanities. Social Studies also deals with local and global concerns and issues, as well as questions about economic, political and cultural well-being. Social Studies addresses six educational goals:*

- *Content (acquisition of knowledge and skills)*
- *Citizenship (loving critic of the republic and community)*
- *Character (practicing the intellectual virtue)*
- *Problem Solving (reflective thinking and policy making)*
- *Learn How to Learn (understanding the joy and work of learning)*
- *Cultural Heritage (understanding the concept of “many in one”... diversity within a powerful conception of unity)*

(Hartoonian)

The Ontario Curriculum states that:

*Social studies seeks to examine and understand communities, from the local to the global, their various heritages, and the nature of citizenship within them. Students acquire a knowledge of key social science concepts, including change, culture, environment, power, and the dynamics of the marketplace. They learn about Canada and the role of citizens in a democratic society within a culturally diverse and interdependent world. They also acquire skills of inquiry and communication through field studies and other research (Hartoonian) projects; the use of maps, globes, and models; and the consideration of various forms of historical evidence. Students apply these skills to develop an understanding of Canadian identity and democratic values, to evaluate different points of view, and to examine information critically in order to solve problems and make decisions on issues that are relevant to their lives.*

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004)

While there are some clear overlapping concerns across these definitions, it is also apparent that ‘Social Studies’ means different things to different people. Each definition emphasises in a unique way the important elements of the content and purposes of the subject. Zevin explains the nature of three different types of goals that lead to conflicting understandings about Social Studies – didactic goals that focus on telling, reflective goals that emphasise the need to digest, analyse and apply information, and affective goals that focus on the feelings, emotions and values based aspects of social change and citizenship (Zevin, 2000, p.4).

### **An argument for renaming the learning area ‘Social Studies’**

While ‘Social Studies’ as a learning area name would be a change, the term is the current name for the curriculum statement, and so would provide a great deal of continuity for many of the educators in this area. It would also reflect the ‘subject’ that has been the primary concern of those working in the

compulsory levels, years 1-10, that make up the majority of levels connected to the learning area. Having said that, any underlying structure could still be based on, or reflect, the important disciplines, as occurs in the 'The Social Studies' in the United States, and in some Australian states.

### **A new name**

Arguments for 'Social Sciences' or 'Social Studies' as the name for this learning area are overwhelmed by arguments against both of these terms.

### **Arguments against 'Social Sciences' for the name of the learning area**

'Social Sciences' mainly reflects a concern with discrete disciplines. It would be appropriate for a compulsory curriculum, which is concerned with outcomes for students as young as 5, as well as those towards the end of their secondary education, to have a curriculum area name that reflects some recognition of the connections between the social sciences. Many New Zealand social scientists themselves acknowledge that these connections exist. In a report on 'Social Sciences: The New Zealand Knowledge Base' (R. Hill & New Zealand. Ministry of Research Science and Technology., 1997), 17 academics made contributions in relation to their discipline area, and that contribution was peer reviewed by at least 4 other academics from institutions across New Zealand. They identify the connections in these ways:

*"History is connected to many other disciplines or fields of knowledge...Maori studies, anthropology, sociology, demography, economics, and politics often have an historical dimension. Likewise history uses some of the insights, concepts and methodological tools developed by these disciplines....Historians have identified a number of sub-disciplines which include social history, political history, economic history, cultural history, and the history of ideas"*

Professor Raewyn Dalziel, Department of History, University of Auckland, p.96

*"human geography has a range of links with other field areas...population studies, development studies, urban and environmental planning...recent initiatives have brought human geography closer to such fields as history and management studies"*

Associate Professor Eric Pawson, Department of Geography, University of Canterbury, p.49

*"social anthropology....is in a unique position to bridge the social sciences and the humanities"*

Professor Jeffrey Sissons, Department of Social Anthropology, Massey University, p.45

*"conventional boundaries between sub-fields within the discipline and between social science disciplines are breaking down"*

- Professor David Thomas, Department of Sociology, University of Canterbury, p.39

*"Political science has a close association with philosophy, economics, law, history and sociology as well as policy studies.....women's studies and Maori studies"*

Associate Professor G Antony Wood, Department of Political Studies, University of Otago, p.31

The shared understanding about connections between disciplines, particularly in a report with chapters drawn from independent contributions, is quite significant. Hill also highlights the connections the Social Sciences have to other fields such as the humanities and suggests that there are opportunities for further development through greater integration of the disciplines. These kinds of connections and an integrated body of content have been desired features of Social Studies in New Zealand. The term Social Sciences though, may actually create boundaries that limit the potential for meaningfully

integrated content from a range of disciplines, since relevant content may actually lie outside the Social Sciences field.

When asked about the term ‘Social Sciences’ many teachers, mainly in the primary sector, express confusion around the ‘science’ aspect of the term, and a concern that this suggests different kinds of pedagogical approaches and values to those they perceive as important and appropriate.

### **Arguments against Social Studies for the name of the learning area**

Social Studies has been plagued by ongoing confusion about its content and intended outcomes, and this has often been reflected in class programmes. The multiple and conflicting purposes of Social Studies, and its tendency to be perceived as a ‘mish mash’ are perhaps not helped by the name itself.

Educators are aware of the impact curriculum design and content, and their names are a key part of that, has on the pedagogical approaches in the implemented curriculum. The ‘studies’ aspect of Social Studies promotes pedagogical approaches that are in fact contradictory to those that are most desirable. It suggests to me a quite outdated notion of the way in which students should engage in their learning that is passive and unfocused. Indeed, definitions of ‘study’ in the Oxford English Dictionary are “*to apply the mind to the acquisition of learning, whether by means of books, observation, or experiment*” or “*to make a close study of (a subject) in preparation for some display of knowledge*”(Oxford University Press, 2004). The term fails to encourage teaching and learning in which students engage, participate and recognise the significance of learning to their own lives, by drawing on rich, relevant and diverse sources. Rob Gilbert agreed that there are pedagogical implication of terms like ‘Social Studies’ and ‘Social Sciences’. He suggested that the term ‘study’ implies pedagogy that is academic, reflective, ‘bookish’, and solitary (R. Gilbert, personal communication, July 30, 2004).

The significance of the arguments ‘against’ each of these terms provides a rationale for considering a name other than Social Studies or Social Sciences. That is not to suggest that the significant professional expertise and wisdom about the subjects be rejected, but that a new name be considered to capture the essence of the learning area as a whole. A name that I suggest deserves consideration is ‘Society’.

### ***‘Society’***

The term ‘Society’ is one that should be considered as the learning area name and a useful one for to engage in dialogue about. The following ideas about the meaning of the term ‘Society’ (merged from a number of the definitions in appendix A) would be useful to take into account:

- entirety of a community
- web of relationships among people and their environment
- populations of humans that have organized ways of life in their locations
- extended social group with particular social/cultural/political/economic organizations and institutions
- body of institutions and relationships of a relatively large group of people
- human communities in particular locations
- connection, participation and partnership between groups of people
- primarily how we live and cooperate together in social groups
- a focus on participation in and contribution to a group for the common good

Each of the current subjects is concerned, at least to some extent, with engaging students with knowledge and understanding about society (their own, others’, in the past and present), and with preparing them to participate in society.

## Arguments for adopting 'Society' as the learning area name

### **1. 'Society' has connections to the previous Social Studies curriculum statement, and the History, Geography and Economics syllabi**

The suggestion of changing the learning area name to 'Society' is likely, for some, to be a radical one. It is important to recognize that while the term 'society' has not been fore fronted in the name previously, it has certainly been an important notion in the intentions of each of the curriculum statements and syllabi (See Table 1).

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Table 1.

References to 'Society' in key documents in the Social Sciences learning area

Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1997)	
Aims	<p>“Social Studies education aims to enable students to participate in a changing <b><i>society</i></b> as informed, confident and responsible citizens” (p8)</p> <p>“Student will achieve this aim by developing knowledge and understandings about human <b><i>society</i></b>”(p8) [and they will develop] “skills as they use the social studies processes: to learn about <b><i>society</i></b> and to enable them to participate responsibly in <b><i>society</i></b>” (p8)</p>
Settings	“Students will develop understandings of the <b><i>societies</i></b> , cultures and environments” [of New Zealand, The Pacific, Europe, Asia, Other Setting
Perspectives	<p>Bicultural – “explore the bicultural heritage of New Zealand <b><i>society</i></b>” (p21)</p> <p>Multicultural – “encourage students to understand and respect the different cultures which make up New Zealand <b><i>society</i></b>...acknowledge the place of Pacific Islands <b><i>societies</i></b> in New Zealand <b><i>society</i></b>” (p21, quote from The NZ Curriculum Framework, p7)</p> <p>Future – “develop in students the confidence that they can contribute to the future of their <b><i>society</i></b> and help to shape it” and “develop understandings of how future changes in work patterns and in technology may affect <b><i>society</i></b> and individual people” (p22)</p>
Essential Learning about NZ <b><i>Society</i></b>	Students will have opportunities to develop their knowledge and understandings about New Zealand <b><i>society</i></b> ... (p23)
History Syllabus for Schools Forms 5 to 7 (Ministry of Education, 1989)	
The Place of History in Schools	“[History] provides students with the knowledge and sense of perspective to comprehend and appraise their own changing <b><i>society</i></b> ...Moreover, history examines the heritage of other <b><i>societies</i></b> ” (p5)
Aims	“[History will] further students’ understanding of some major trends and developments in New Zealand <b><i>society</i></b> and beyond through the perspective of history” (p7)
Knowledge and Understanding	<p>“[History] students will discover that while the past cannot be changes, the way it is viewed can and does change in the light of new evidence, new concerns in <b><i>society</i></b>, and differing perspectives”</p> <p>“[History] students will have studied in depth some key historical developments of yesterday’s world which will contribute to understanding their <b><i>society</i></b>” (p11)</p>
Geography Syllabus for Schools Forms 5 -7 (Ministry of Education, 1990b)	
General Objectives	<p>“develop an empathy with people in our own and other <b><i>societies</i></b>” (p5)</p> <p>“contribute to <b><i>society</i></b> through being able to participate in making soundly based decisions about the relationships between people and the natural environment, and associated issues”</p>
Attitudes and Values	“moral values, which are the standards or ideals deemed important by various groups within <b><i>society</i></b> ” (p7)
Economics Forms 3 to 7 Syllabus for Schools (Ministry of Education, 1990a)	
Introduction	“An understanding of basic economic concepts and the way in which the New Zealand economy operates is important for young people if they are to function in and contribute to our <b><i>society</i></b> ” (p5)

[emphasis added]

'Society' is then a term broad enough to encompass the many disciplines that contribute knowledge and understanding about the learning in this area including the traditionally privileged subjects of Social Studies, History, Geography and Economics as well as the many others.

'Society' also features in definitions of these subjects in Australia and the United Kingdom: In the UK National Curriculum, for example, History is described as important because:

*History fires pupils' curiosity about the past in Britain and the wider world. Pupils consider how the past influences the present, what past **societies** were like, how these **societies** organised their politics, and what beliefs and cultures influenced people's actions. As they do this, pupils develop a chronological framework for their knowledge of significant events and people. They see the diversity of human experience, and understand more about themselves as individuals and members of **society**. What they learn can influence their decisions about personal choices, attitudes and values.*

*In history, pupils find evidence, weigh it up and reach their own conclusions. To do this they need to be able to research, sift through evidence, and argue for their point of view - skills that are prized in adult life.*

(Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2001, emphasis added)

'Society' is also a major conceptual focus in the Queensland Years 9 and 10 Geography syllabus:

*Geography is a discipline through which people study the Earth's surface as the space in which people live. It is the integrated study of the Earth's places, peoples, **societies** and environments and the relationships between them.*

*Geography promotes investigation of the dynamics of cultures, **societies** and human behaviour (human geography) and environmental processes and physical landscapes (physical geography).*

*Geography puts this investigation of social and physical processes within the essential spatial context of places and regions. It recognises the differences in cultures, economies, political systems, environments and landscapes across the world, the connections between them, and the ways they change over time. Geography applies these understandings to develop solutions to problems.*

*Geography as a discipline-based field of study is distinguished by its method of inquiry, its essential concepts, and the key questions guiding its research, enhancing students' capacity to explain rather than simply describe. These skills of description and explanation are the essential basis for effective criticism and evaluation. Geography thus promotes the rigorous investigation of issues required of all decision makers and citizens of the future.*

(Queensland Studies Authority, 2003, emphasis added)

In 'The Draft National Curriculum Statement: A Discussion Document for Primary and Secondary Schools', which resulted from an extensive curriculum consultation process in the 1980s, it was recommended that eight aspects of learning be developed. One of those was entitled 'Living in Society'. References to 'Society' have then been apparent, not only in current curriculum documents in New Zealand and beyond, but also in curriculum development work in the past.

## 2. 'Society' is aligned with new ideas about the meaning of "knowledge" and "learning"

Jane Gilbert, in considering ideas about the knowledge society, suggests that our society is in the midst of a significant "paradigm shift" in our thinking about the meaning of knowledge. She explains that "knowledge is important now, not because it is *true*, but for what it can *do*, for its *usefulness*". The shift from previous ideas of "truth" and "factual" knowledge, to ideas about what Lyotard (cited in (Gilbert, 2003)) refers to knowledge's "performativity". She goes on to explain a similar distinction made by Castells, who says that **knowledge** is:

“no longer an “object” or a “thing” that you can classify or divide up into different “disciplines”: it is more like a form of *energy*. It is not something that just “is”, or that is produced in order to be stored away “just in case”. Instead, it is something dynamic, fluid, something “generative”, something that *makes things happen*”

cited in (Gilbert, 2003)

Similarly, in the knowledge society literature **learning** is talked about, according to Gilbert, as:

“primarily a *group* activity, not something that happens in individuals. It is something that happens in “real world”, problem-based contexts, not done “just in case” for when you might need it, some time in the future”

(Gilbert, 2003)

‘Society’ as the term to name this learning area would be far more suggestive of these shifts in the conception of knowledge and learning than either of the current terms. Society is the venue for and purpose of “performativity”, and society itself is dynamic, fluid, generative and makes things happen. Society is itself a real world, problem based context which students can relate to and engage with in the here and now. Social Sciences and Social Studies, on the other hand, both suggest much more strongly classifications and divisions of knowledge, and a concern for disciplines, as well as areas of study in which to gain true, factual knowledge to store away.

### 3. ‘Society’ is aligned with ideas about the curriculum of the future

Michael Young’s distinctions between Curriculum of the Past, and Curriculum of the Future (Table 2.) reflect many of the ideas discussed above about a shift in the meaning of ‘knowledge’.

Table 2.

*Distinctions between curriculum of the past and curriculum of the future*

Curriculum of the Past	Curriculum of the Future
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It embodies a concept of knowledge and learning ‘for its own sake’</li> <li>• It is almost exclusively concerned with transmitting existing knowledge</li> <li>• It places a higher value on subject knowledge than on knowledge of the relationships between subjects; and</li> <li>• It assumes a hierarchy and a boundary between school and everyday knowledge, thereby creating the problem of the transferability of school knowledge to non-school contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expresses a transformative concept of knowledge which emphasizes its power to give learners a sense that they can act on the world</li> <li>• a focus on the creation of new knowledge</li> <li>• an emphasis on the interdependence of knowledge areas and on the relevance of school knowledge to everyday problems</li> </ul>

(Young, 1999)

Recent curriculum developments have failed to move significantly enough from these features of ‘curricula of the past’, towards ‘curricula of the future’. One explanation for this in relation to Social Sciences/Social Studies may lie in concerns about the **status** of the learning area and associated subjects. Young suggests that there are four dominant characteristics of high-status knowledge, which also represent the organizing principles underlying academic curricula (Young, 1999). They are **literacy** (an emphasis on writing as opposed to oral communication), **individualism** (an avoidance of group

work or cooperation in how academic learning is assessed), **abstractness of knowledge** (structuring and compartmentalizing independent of the knowledge of the learner), and **unrelatedness** (curricula frequently 'at odds' with daily life and common experience'. Young suggests that curriculum of the future will need to be **connective, broader** and with **low degrees of stratification**. This 'connective specialization' in curriculum, Young argues, will "develop new relationships between school subjects and between them and the world outside of school".

The terms 'Social Studies' and particularly 'Social Sciences' signal a concern with the above characteristics of high-status knowledge that are features of past curriculum. The learning area could benefit from a name that signals new concerns. Interestingly much of the student work generated and annotated as part of the recent Social Studies Exemplar Project, reflects just such concerns. After much research and analysis, work deemed to exemplify quality learning and achievement was frequently the result of oral communication (rather than just written work), group work (rather than individualism), with a focus on participation in learning communities (rather than abstractness), and the personal and social significance of learning (rather than un-relatedness).

#### **4. Changing the learning area name signals a need for shifts in pedagogy and assessment, and avoids signaling less desirable pedagogy and assessment**

A number of concerns have been expressed in the literature about the quality of teaching approaches and outcomes for student learning in this area. For example, criticisms have been made of some Social Studies programmes being 'topic' based in the sense that students will "DO Japan" in Social Studies. Similarly there has been concern about some over-reliance on text book material, and 'talk and chalk' teaching approaches. Criticisms have been made too of the lack of integration between the process and knowledge strands of the curriculum statement, and the lack of understanding of the series of steps involved in the Inquiry, Values Exploration and Social Decision Making processes (Education Review Office, 2001). Crooks, 1988 meta-analysis of more than 240 studies about classroom evaluation practices highlighted that teacher assessments tend to place 'heavy emphasis on the recall or recognition of comparatively isolated pieces of information...this encourages surface (memorizing) approaches to learning' (Crooks, 1988). And as a final example, there has in the past been consistent anecdotal evidence of Social Studies lessons that centre on the colouring in of title pages, designing page borders, or aimlessly printing out material to paste in topic books. These failings could, at least to a small extent, be connected to the naming of the learning area and curriculum statement. The implications for classroom practice of terms like 'studies', as have already been outlined, and 'sciences' are significant.

A change in the learning area name would not, quite obviously, solve all of these problems, but would perhaps signal a need for change, and affect some consideration of the teaching and learning programmes in which our students participate in this area.

#### **5. 'Society' clearly signals what learning in this area is about**

'Society' provides both a focus for the learning area, as well as being a broad enough term to encompass important ideas and approaches from a number of disciplines. It provides a strong and clear conceptual basis, and aligns with most other learning areas that signal quite clearly what learning in the area is about.

It also makes clear the unique and distinctive focus of this learning area. It clarifies for teachers the distinction between the reference to people and social interactions in, for example, the Health and Physical Education Curriculum, and the reference to people as members of societies inherent in Social Studies.

Furthermore, just as there are not learning areas called 'scientific studies', 'technological studies' or 'literary studies', there is not a strong argument for 'social studies'. Each of the other learning areas

signal in their name what the learning, or the studies, are *about*. An overriding term for what learning in this area is about, is ‘Society’.

## 6. ‘Society’ connects to ideas of citizenship

There has been an international revival of interest in citizenship education, and a move towards focusing on or at least including Citizenship in national curriculum. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement’s (IEA) Civic Education Study (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001), found that England was the one country, of 28, that didn’t have any sort of citizenship education in the formal curriculum (New Zealand did not participate in the study). In 2000 the UK introduced ‘Citizenship’ as a key learning area in the national curriculum, to be implemented from 2002. In Australia citizenship goals are expressed in ‘The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century’ (Department of Education, 1999) and are represented in each state’s curriculum or syllabus. In the Social Studies Curriculum of Canada’s provinces, citizenship outcomes are also a focus in the ‘strands’ (Ontario – ‘Civics’: ‘Purposeful Citizenship’, ‘Active Citizenship’, ‘Informed Citizenship’ ‘Citizenship and Heritage’, ‘Rights and Freedoms’; Atlantic Canada – ‘Citizenship, Power and Governance’; Atlanta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut - ‘Citizenship in Canada’; British Columbia – ‘Canadian and Global Citizenship’; Saskatchewan – ‘Governance’; Manitoba – ‘Canadian Society: Political and Legal Processes’/ ‘Government, Federalism and Politics’).

There is an enormous literature around ‘citizenship’, but the following definition is a broad and useful one for considering the relevance of the name ‘Society’ to citizenship education goals. It is drawn from the Crick Report that led to the introduction of citizenship to the United Kingdom curriculum:

*‘the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature and practices of participative democracy; the duties, responsibilities, rights and development of pupils into citizens; and the value to individuals, schools and society of involvement in the local and wider community...both national and local and an awareness of world affairs and global issues, and of the economic realities of adult life’*

(Crick, 1988)

Dialogue around the place of citizenship in New Zealand’s curriculum has begun to, and will continue to occur. A learning area titled ‘Society’, because it relates to people contributing and participating in groups, would signal an appropriate place to focus on citizenship if those goals are to be included in our curriculum framework.

## 7. ‘Society’ does not-predetermine or overtly influence any particular organizing structure

A key issue for the essence statement, structure and title of this learning area is, according to Graeme Aitken, the dilemma around adopting an ‘integrated’ or ‘discipline-based’ approach. ‘Society’ as the learning area name, it could be argued, leans more towards an integrated approach than a discipline-based one. It does not though entirely preclude a discipline-based approach, or elements of, from being adopted in the essence statement and organizing structure.

There are many underlying structures that could appropriately underlie the term ‘Society’ as a curriculum area name. These could be organised around strands similar to those in the current Social Studies curriculum statement, discipline based, or conceptually based, or it could also be based on combinations of the ideas above, or others, at different levels and still relate well to a ‘Society’ learning area. So ‘Society’ does not limit the possibilities for the organisation of the curriculum content, as other titles may.

## **8. 'Society' reflects the direction of the Emerging Essence Statement being developed as part of the New Zealand Curriculum Project**

By far the most compelling argument to name this learning area 'Society' is based on current material developed by the community of educators in the area itself. At two recent Hui, held as part of the New Zealand Curriculum Project, leaders from the Social Sciences and Social Studies community worked together to begin development of an essence statement for this learning area.

At the first Hui (May 2004, Wellington) subject/discipline groups worked on statements about the important aspects and aims of individual subject areas including Social Studies, History, Geography, Economics and Business Studies. At the second Hui (July 30<sup>th</sup> 2004, Auckland) participants created a list of ideas about the important and unique learning outcomes for students in this learning area, drawing on the previous work done in subject groups. A lengthy list of the knowledge, understandings, concepts and processes considered as those unique to this learning area was compiled. Leaders then worked together in cross-disciplinary groups to organise those ideas into appropriate groupings. The ideas were colour coded and grouped together based on the extent to which they had common characteristics or concerns. The outcome, achieved with remarkable agreement given the number and diversity of the leaders present, was four categories of ideas. Each category was labelled in order to further the progress towards an essence statement for the learning area. These labels head the columns of ideas in Table 3.

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Table 3.

*Emerging Draft Essence Statement for the Social Sciences, developed at the Social Science/Social Studies leaders Hui, Duxton Hotel, Auckland, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2004*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>A society, and people’s participation in it, is influenced by their culture, their past, their place, and their resources.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>In Social Science students learn how people participate as individuals and groups and how societies operate</b></p>			
Actively engage and participate in society by being informed citizens	Identify and apply multiple perspectives to develop understanding about people and societies	Explore values and beliefs to develop an understanding of how these impact on the functioning of societies	Have a critical understanding of social organisation/society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students will be able to take a position on a social <b>issue</b> of personal and social significance that affects <b>people</b> in <b>society</b></li> <li>- Students will participate/engage in social action and social decision making</li> <li>- Empowerment</li> <li>- Meaningful</li> <li>- Individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use multiple lenses to understand how people interact within societies – including historical, cultural, values based, social, environmental, economic, political</li> <li>- ...Social Science approaches to the use of evidence to develop understandings of multiple perspectives.</li> <li>- Lenses with which we view evidence to draw conclusions – syntactical knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Values and beliefs</li> <li>- Influence – interaction – interconnectedness</li> <li>- Telling “our” stories – Understanding “their” stories</li> <li>- Need for all disciplines to be taught in Years 1 – 10 – all Social Science perspectives.</li> <li>- Identities – self identity, belonging, connectedness</li> <li>- Diverse Maori and Iwi perspectives</li> <li>- Bicultural perspectives</li> <li>- Current and future perspectives</li> <li>- Multicultural perspectives</li> <li>- Knowing where my cultural perspective comes from in order to better appreciate that of other <b>people</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connectedness – past – present – future – learning how the events of the past and today might affect the future</li> <li>- Will understand the interaction of people with their economic, political, physical and cultural environments</li> <li>- Local – national – global</li> <li>- Diversity</li> <li>- Society –</li> <li>- Social justice and equity</li> <li>- Governance and leadership</li> <li>- <u>Changes – influence</u></li> <li>- New Zealand</li> <li>- Critical awareness of own society’s strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>- What is critical to know about society?</li> </ul>

The emerging draft essence statement signals quite clearly, that this learning area is fundamentally about Society. Regardless of the discipline or subject involved, the contribution that this learning area makes to the education of New Zealand school students endeavours to enable students to:

- Actively engage and participate in ***society*** by being informed citizens
- Identify and apply multiple perspectives to develop understanding about people and ***societies***
- Explore values and beliefs to develop an understanding of how these impact on the functioning of ***societies***  
(OR Identify and explore the complexities of people's identities, values and beliefs  
OR Have a critical understanding of the complexities of people's identities, values and beliefs  
OR Have a critical understanding of the role of culture, identity and perspectives in ***society***)
- Have a critical understanding of social organization/***society***  
*'Emerging Draft Essence Statement' Social Science Leaders Hui, Auckland, July 30<sup>th</sup> 2004*

Hugh Barr once said that 'as the name suggests, social studies is the study of society'. The name could actually state explicitly, rather than suggest, what learning in this area is about, and use the term 'Society' as the learning area name. This is not to say that other concepts are not important to the disciplines and subjects involved, but in the collective, integrated or associated nature of these subject areas, makes the choice of a 'common' concept an appropriate one for the name. Other important concepts, such as interaction, identity, continuity, change, scarcity, choice and others will almost certainly claim important places within the curriculum structure. The same can be said for the concept of environment, which many would argue should also be considered for the learning area name, since Australian curriculum include a learning area called 'Studies of Society and Environment'. The arguments proposed above for 'Society' would not all be addressed were the term 'environment' also included in the title. Most importantly, combining both terms would significantly shift the focus, and the clarity of the name, and weaken the connections of the learning area name to all subjects and disciplines involved.

### **Arguments AGAINST using the term 'Society' as the learning area name**

There are several arguments against changing the learning area name to 'Society'. The first is its lack of obvious and direct connection to the academic disciplines, though as outlined above, that is not necessarily an important criterion for the worth of a learning area name. Secondly, while each discipline connects to the concept of 'Society', these disciplines would not necessarily see the name as inclusive of their unique interests and perspectives. The strength of the link between the title 'Society' to secondary subjects is weaker than the current term 'Social Sciences'. The third relates to the establishment and status of subjects/disciplines, and the time this takes to achieve. As Barr (1997) suggested, recognition for any new discipline takes time. He reminds of the need in the past for geography, sociology and political science to establish themselves through the identification of clear parameters, clear goals and a reputable body of research based literature. A change in the learning area name might be perceived as interrupting the efforts of Social Studies to establish itself, and unnecessarily shifting the place of established subjects. It could on the other hand be perceived as a step towards establishing the clear parameters and goals for the learning area as a whole that could ultimately benefit teaching and learning in this area.

### **Previous NZ curriculum development**

Previous curriculum development in Social Studies has led to considerable criticism, as summarised by Wendt Samu (1998, p.95-97), in relation to the definition, purpose and aims of the subject, and particularly the status of the traditional disciplines. Criticisms have also related to issues including the representation of bicultural, Maori, and British perspectives, and a lack of rigour, challenge, focus and

thread in the subject (Donnelly, 2002; Hawes, 2002; Partington, 1998). Similar criticisms were made at the time of 'Studies of Society and Environment' (SOSE) being introduced in Queensland, Australia. Fraser outlines the criticisms during the controversy, which reflected concern for different traditions and were from those from a range of political persuasions (Fraser & Uusimaki, 2001). Conservatives for example expressed concern with the syllabus' support for a socially critical approach to education. Technocratic liberals were concerned about a perceived 'anti-business' perspective in the curriculum, and the unlikelihood of it preparing students for the 'real/work/business world'. Some were concerned that traditional History and Geography disciplines had not been retained, and suggested that integrated studies would result in the dilution of these disciplines. Others disagreed, making clear that meeting SOSE outcomes would not preclude the rigour of disciplines being used. A new learning area name would almost certainly spark reactions that would reflect, just as the curriculum itself does, diverse traditions, backgrounds, perspectives, and philosophies.

These critiques primarily relate to the ideological frameworks expressed in the content and structure of a curriculum, but are relevant to consider in contemplating the name for this learning area, since the name will to a certain extent imply a dominant guiding tradition.

### **Principles for the name of the learning area**

If agreement to change the name of the essential learning area was established through the Curriculum Project process, principles should be developed to underpin and provide a rationale for the name of the curriculum area. I would suggest that these principles include - that the name should:

1. connect to curriculum of the past
2. reflect new understandings of "knowledge"
3. indicate a move towards a curriculum of the future
4. signal clearly for teachers, students and parents alike what the learning in this area is about
5. be aligned with, rather than contradict notions of good pedagogy in the area
6. be relevant to all curriculum levels (see Figure 2.) ie:
  - strongly relate to the learning for all levels of the compulsory curriculum
  - also be relevant to the many disciplines, subjects and fields of study that have connections with the area in the post-compulsory curriculum levels

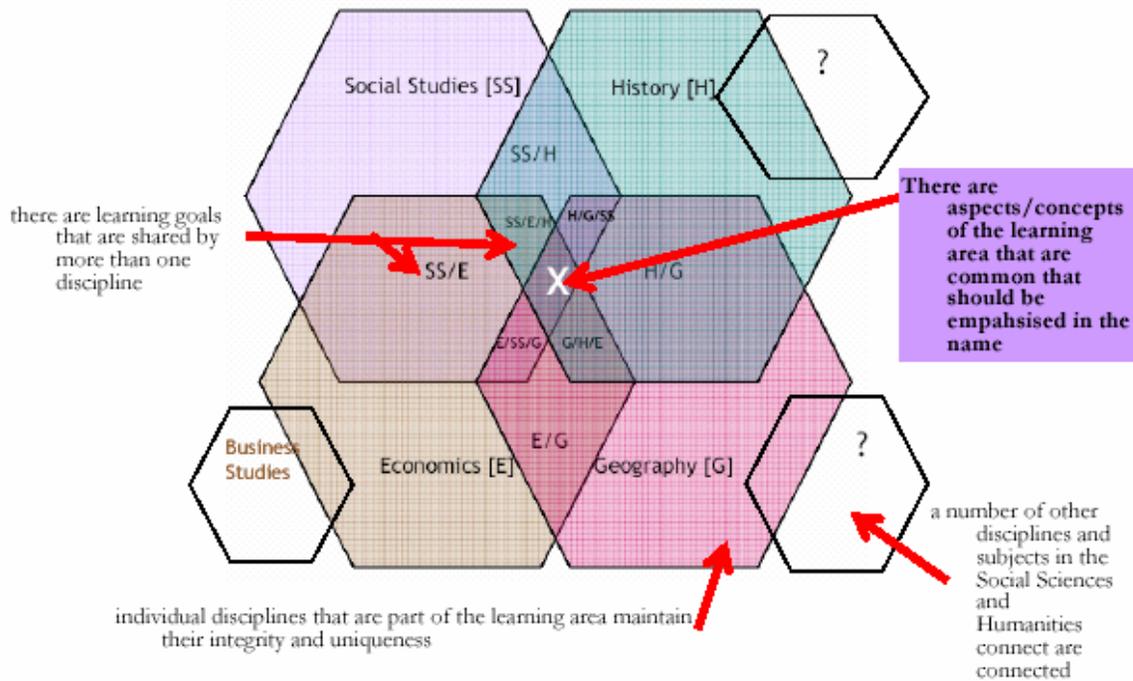


Figure 2. Connections between ‘subjects’ in this learning area

This paper has sought to establish that the name of the learning area currently known as ‘Social Sciences’ is an important consideration in the work of the New Zealand Curriculum Project. There is a dilemma to be resolved about the name since there are currently two terms used within the area – one for the learning area name, and another for the curriculum statement name. I have outlined that there are three possible approaches to resolving that dilemma – retaining the term ‘Social Sciences’, renaming the learning area ‘Social Studies’ or using a new name. ‘Society’ has been put forward as a name worthy of consideration on a number of counts. ‘Society’ connects to many current and previous curriculum statements and syllabi, it is consistent with shifts in the meaning of ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ and notions of curriculum relevant to the future. Changing the name would also signal a need for careful consideration of, and perhaps changes, in pedagogical approaches in this area. It is an appropriate term to encompass aspects of citizenship education, and would allow for a range of curriculum structures to organise the curriculum content. Most significantly, ‘Society’ is a concept that has relevance for each of the connected, yet diverse, subject communities within the learning area. A change in the learning area name to ‘Society’ would make a significant contribution towards achieving the aims of the New Zealand Curriculum Project. It would bring about for Social Sciences/Social Studies some much needed reframing, refocusing and revitalizing.

Appendix A. Definitions of 'Society'

Definition of 'Society'	Source
Society: A human community, usually with a relatively fixed territorial location, sharing a common culture and common activities. There is cultural and institutional interdependence between members of the society and they are, to some extent, differentiated from other communities and groups. Societies are generally identified as existing at the level of nation states, but there can be regional and cultural communities within nation states that possess much of the cultural distinctiveness and relative self-sufficiency of societies.	<a href="http://socialsciencedictionary.nelson.com/SocialDict.asp?page=2&amp;alpha=&amp;criteria=society&amp;TOS=1">http://socialsciencedictionary.nelson.com/SocialDict.asp?page=2&amp;alpha=&amp;criteria=society&amp;TOS=1</a> Online dictionary of the ss – Thomson Nelson
From a Latin root meaning "companion." Society in the broadest sense refers to the entirety of a community, the whole web of living relationships among people, their Culture, and their Environment.	<a href="http://www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/glossary.htm">www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/sustainable-state/glossary.htm</a>
[n] A population of humans or other animals that has an organized way of life.	<a href="http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/post/htmls/gloss.html">www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/nat_amer/post/htmls/gloss.html</a>
an extended social group having a distinctive cultural and economic organization	<a href="http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn">www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn</a>
Society is the most general term in modern English for the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live.	(Williams, R. 1976) <a href="http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/sshglo.htm#Totem">http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/sshglo.htm#Totem</a>
The term 'society' describes the complex web of human relationships, usually defined in terms of beliefs, cultural practice, nationality and location in time and space. The term 'environment' describes the "interdependent combination of natural and social landscapes and processes"	(Australian Education Council, 1992). <a href="http://WWW.DISCOVER.TASED.EDU.AU/BOSE/BOSEANDELS.DOC">HTTP://WWW.DISCOVER.TASED.EDU.AU/BOSE/BOSEANDELS.DOC</a>
- The state or condition of living in association, company, or intercourse with others of the same species; the system or mode of life adopted by a body of individuals for the purpose of harmonious co-existence or for mutual benefit, defence, etc.: a. In reference to man  - The aggregate of persons living together in a more or less ordered community	Oxford English Dictionary (2004) <a href="http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz">http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz</a>
1. The relationship of men to one another when associated in any way; companionship; fellowship; company. 2. Connection; participation; partnership. [R.] 3. A number of persons associated for any temporary or permanent object; an association for mutual or joint usefulness, pleasure, or profit; a social union; a partnership; as, a missionary society. 4. The persons, collectively considered, who live in any region or at any period; any community of individuals who are united together by a common bond of nearness or intercourse; those who recognize each other as associates, friends, and acquaintances	Webster's 1913 Dictionary
The organizations, institutions, and collective patterns of human relations. "Society" includes government, education systems, the civil sector, health systems, volunteer organizations, patterns of crime, history, tradition, culture, and any other aspect of human life on earth that relates primarily to how we live and cooperate together in social groups.	<a href="http://indicators.top10by2010.org/glossary.cfm">indicators.top10by2010.org/glossary.cfm</a>  <i>glossary for the original Sustainable Seattle "Indicators of Sustainable Community, 1993"</i>

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