

# How to Live Happy and Good Life? Secondary School Students' Views about Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Policy

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## ABSTRACT

The Bhutanese Gross National Happiness (GNH) development policy highlights traditional Bhutanese values promoting environmentally friendly, collective, societal happiness. In this case study, we describe the Bhutanese secondary school students' views about happiness and good life and view the values behind the GNH-policy-based teaching. The writings of 178 students, responding the questions addressing these topics, were analyzed using the thematic content analyses method based on GNH pillars and domains. The most important reason bringing happiness and good life, according to the students is good governance, and the second important reason is sustainable and equitable socio-economic development. Many of the students wrote that happiness and good life mean problem-free life. The values such as compassion, calmness and gratitude, occurred in many writings. Many students wrote about happiness, peace, equality and the importance of family relations. Least references on happiness and good life were related to the conservation of environment. Reason for the students not mentioning environment may be Bhutanese traditions to respect nature and environment in everyday life. The students' views were well connected with the GNH policy focused education and teaching. They reflect well the history of Bhutan, values connected Buddhist principles and the recent democratic development going on in Bhutan. The knowledge of cultures outside Bhutan was fairly low, so the basic education can be developed by adding to the curriculum the knowledge of different cultures.

**Keywords:** students' views, good governance, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, compassion, environment

## INTRODUCTION

The Gross National Happiness (GNH) development principle was first articulated in 1972 by Bhutan's Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. He declared that "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product (GNP)" (Freeman, 2005, p. 1). According to the GNH development policy, Bhutan aims at increasing happiness and wellbeing of the people in Bhutan instead of increasing the economic growth. International index measuring the economic growth, GNP, is also measured in Bhutan but as the second important index (Stutz, 2007).

Happiness discussion in Bhutan is closely connected with the history and traditions of the Buddhist world view. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, regarded as the founder of Bhutan, came to Bhutan from Tibet in 1616. His basic principle, when developing the constitution of Bhutan was to form the Government, which will bring peace and happiness to the people of the country. According to Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal the government is not needed, if this purpose is not realized. Happiness of all people and sentient beings manifested already during time of establishment of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1729 (Sangye, 2008). GNH -policy was developed

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when the Kingdom of Bhutan, after the long isolation, gradually united with the international community and became a member state of UN in 1971 (Powdyel, 2010.)

Bhutan's unique culture laid the foundation for the development of the GNH -principles and it gives a strong identity to the Bhutanese people. Preservation and promotion of the culture has been the most important function of the government and the people. Rich cultural diversity is evident in the fields of language, traditional arts, festivals, holidays, ceremonies, drama, music, dressing, and spiritual values (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012a). Numerous festivals and holidays connected with seasonal religious and secular events are celebrated in Bhutan including several Buddhist and Hindu festivals. Mask dances and dance performances are common scene in the festivals accompanied by traditional music. The dancers in colorful dresses and masks perform heroes, demons, animals, gods and caricatures of ordinary people (Bhutan Cultural Atlas, 2016).

According to the ideas of Jigme Singye Wangchuck Bhutan's way for development aims to development based on the Bhutan's own culture, institutions and values. A Guide to Advancing Gross National Happiness was developed to give guidance for implementing the policy (2011). The key principles of GNH are defined as pillars and domains focusing on sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, conservation of environment, preservation and promotion of culture and good governance (For more information of the pillars and the domains in **Appendixes 1 and 2**).

The GNH -principles have been actively carried out in different areas of governance and education after the first democratic elections in 2008. The second elections in 2013 strengthened the implementation based on the GNH experience over the past years. Starting from 2010 Bhutan's teachers have been trained to incorporate the GNH -principles into teaching at schools. Educating for Gross National Happiness, A Training Manual (from now on referred to as 'the training manual') was published by Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Education (RGOB, 2013) and distributed to all schools of Bhutan. It gives guidance on how to incorporate GNH values into the teaching of different subjects.

The first democratically elected prime minister Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley expressed the main objectives for education according to the GNH -principles in 2009. He sees important to have school graduates who are genuine human beings; realizing their full and true potential; caring for others; ecologically literate; contemplative as well analytical in their understanding of the world; free from greed and without excessive desires (NDP Steering Committee and Secretariat, 2013). Thakur Singh Powdyel (2013), Former Minister of Education, summarizes the objectives of the education in the training manual "We want our children to learn that culture is cultivation of sweetness and light, and environment is extension of ourselves. When we talk about governance, we would like to begin from self-governance to governance in the family, in the class, in school, in organizations and in societies at national level and link it to world governance" (RGOB, 2013, IX.)

During the last ten years some studies have been carried out on GNH related education in Bhutan. Already in 2003, Ezechieli's study explored the challenges that Bhutan and its educational system face in maintaining balanced and sustainable growth while avoiding the mistakes that have characterized the design and implementation of development programs elsewhere. Ten years later Kezang Sherab's (2013) study focused on GNH Education in Bhutanese Schools. According to Sherab prime minister Thinley was alarmed by what he termed "self-centered culture of materialistic development". Thinley called for "urgency about seeing GNH principles practices and values embodied quickly and without delay in our education system (Thinley, 2010, p.2). Since then Bhutan has been attempting to integrate the GNH philosophy into schools. The government plan was that the GNH will be in the key focus in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools and even in tertiary education. However, it is not taught as a subject but as overarching theme (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016, p. 8).

Gross National Happiness (GNH) Education has been implemented in all schools in Bhutan commencing in the 2010 academic session (Sherab, 2013). All schools were required by the Ministry of Education (2010) to infuse GNH values and principles through both curricular programs and extra-curricular programs. In taking up such responsibilities, it was envisaged that principals and teachers would become assertive, motivated and believe in their own capabilities to successfully implement GNH Education (Sherab, Maxwell, & Cooksey, 2014).

Until now, the Bhutanese teachers' (e.g. Drukpa, 2016) and teacher educators' (Deki, Sherab, & Maxwell, 2017) views on GNH education have been studied. However, it is also important to know what students think about GNH to get information for the development of GNH education. Our study describes how the Bhutanese secondary school students understand happiness and good life and what are the connections of their views

with the GNH development principles, the GNH pillars, and GNH domains. Bhutanese basic education teachers and sector officers as well as the international education partners, interested in learning and benefitting from Bhutan's experiences, may benefit from the information shared as results of this study.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

There is a broad variety of research on happiness within the philosophy tradition but much less in GNH due to its young existence. GNH's roots are in the history of Bhutan and Buddhism which is reviewed briefly below. When reviewing the origin of the GNH concept and idea, the international research about relations between happiness and economic development is shortly discussed. The contents of the training manual are introduced in the background, as the main source for applying GNH principles in school education. In addition, the background chapter shares the connections between Bhutan's GNH principles and recent happiness and sustainable development perspectives of UN, while UN was developing the new sustainable development goals.

### Background of Happiness Philosophy

Origin of Bhutan's development philosophy lies within the Buddhist tradition, which declares as a primary principle, the compassion towards all sentient beings, as well as the strong will to implement these principals in practice. People need to show the same empathy, patience and brotherly love towards all people as well as unshakable goodness towards the animal kingdom. According to the Buddhist philosophy, people can find happiness inside themselves, when they finish getting attached to external objects and start cultivating acceptance (Haidt, 2006). Dasho Karma Ura ponders community connections and enlightenment with Buddhism: "Enlightenment can be collective because people cannot develop ethically alone, without affecting positively other members of the community" (Ura, 2009, p.24). In 2012, Bhutan initiated the discussion in the UN for establishment of the annual international day to bring happiness and well-being to people of the world. All United Nations 193 member-states adopted a resolution of International Day of Happiness for March 20, calling for happiness of all human beings to be given greater priority.

The happiness principles have also been obtained in recent psychological research programs e.g. in USA. The effects of happiness to people have been explored in the University of Stanford in the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Seppälä's (2016) research shows that happiness is the secret of success, and kindness will increase good life. Furthermore, kindness and helpfulness towards other people will not help only those who need support, but also the person who is helping will feel oneself happier, healthier, and more productive. This means that all in the community will benefit (Seppälä, 2016.)

Considering moral values, happiness in Buddhism can be defined to be closely connected with philosophical tradition of altruism, paying attention to others benefits. Altruism is an ethical theory which argues that people can be motivated by unselfish reasons (Aikio & Vornanen, 1993). The word altruism dates to the Latin word *alter* meaning "another". It was used first time by August Comte. According to him altruism means "Eliminating of selfish desires and ego-centricity by living life devoted to other people's well-being" (Ricard, 2015, p. 15).

Considering principles, connected with peoples' ethical, equal and social development, other people can be recognized to be part of the both happiness research tradition and behind the principles of Bhutan GNH - philosophy. Bhutan's gross national happiness concept consists of the value tradition, which promotes collective, societal happiness. Favorable societal development proceeds by encouraging both material and spiritual development simultaneously. Definitions of spiritual development in Bhutan take into consideration different religious communities, predominant Buddhism and prominent Hindu minority, as well as agnostic and atheistic groups. Spiritual development of non-religious groups can mean the spirituality borne music, arts or nature (Ura et al., 2012a).

### Sustainable Development for Good Life and Happiness

According to O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb, and Steinberger (2018), almost everything we do, from having dinner to surfing the Internet, uses resources in some way, but the connections between resource use and human well-being are not always visible to us. O'Neill et al. argue that basic needs, such as nutrition, sanitation, and the elimination of extreme poverty, could most likely be achieved in different countries without exceeding global environmental limits. The statement is based on the research of the Stockholm Resilience Centre that identified environmental processes that regulate the planet and proposed safe "planetary boundaries" for each

that -- if persistently exceeded -- could lead to catastrophic change. They also state that radical changes are needed if all people are to live well within the limits of the planet. These include moving beyond the pursuit of economic growth in wealthy nations, shifting rapidly from fossil fuels to renewable energy, and significantly reducing inequality. (O'Neill, et al., 2018.)

Albert Einstein has said “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” (Cook, 2018). For achieving good life and human-well-being for maintaining the safe “planetary boundaries” the decision makers, governments and international institutions need system thinking. Systems thinking is a holistic way of analyzing how a system’s constituent parts are interrelated and how the system works over time and within the context of larger systems (Bunge, 2000; Sterling, 2009). Systems thinking could therefore be used to deepen people’s holistic thinking about sustainability.

Global development focus of Gross National Product (GNP), not implemented in Bhutan, is strongly related to economic growth. The key principles of Bhutan’s GNH are defined as pillars and domains focusing on sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, conservation of environment, preservation and promotion of culture and good governance. Kate Raworth has studied the connections between economic growth to sustainable development. She concluded that we need to change our understanding of what economy is and how it works. The aim of economic activity, Raworth argued, should be “meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet” (Raworth, 2012). Sustainable thinking is crucial for developing education for sustainable development and good life. The research on the people’s satisfaction and well-being show that material development is not the absolute value (cf. Bunge, 2000; Sterling, 2009).

### Economic Well-being and Happiness

It is a common belief that happiness and good life is based on economic prosperity and GNP. Niiniluoto (2015), however, questioned how GNP and increased consumption would bring happiness and good life to the people, referring to Layard, who has worked on the relations between happiness and good life and criticized the views of the current economists. Layard has called the traditional assumption of the economists about how money brings happiness “hedonist treadmill”. The same phenomenon has been called “happiness paradox”. According to the New Science principles of Layard, happiness can be thought to mean subjectively experienced well-being and contentment (Niiniluoto, 2015, pp.191-192). Features of good life and well-being, connected with Bhutan’s happiness philosophy, can also be found in the antique philosophies. Niiniluoto (2015) is referring to Aristotle, who defines that highest good for the people is happiness, which means the same as, “live well” or “succeed in life”. Living well can be characterized by following such natures of goodness such as righteousness and bravery. The development principle called capitalism in the modern world, was an alien form of life for Aristotle.

Obtaining money and property has its limits and material development cannot be the absolute value. The virtue ethics of Aristotle fosters life-affirming moderate way of life: in addition of greed at the other end and stinginess the other, is also regarded as vice (Niiniluoto, 2015). The Aristotelian tradition highlights more profound principles than economy as a moral objective of life and relates strive the way of life focusing on money in disapproval (Järveläinen, 2010). Ura (2009) is dealing with the conflict between permanent growth and good life. He warns that the continuous growth is getting very problematic during the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Training Manual for Educating for Gross National Happiness

The development based on Bhutan’s GNH happiness index highlights, unlike other development indicators, communal happiness, and importance of cultural and spiritual values. These views and principles have been disseminated to Bhutanese school education through the training manual. The GNH values of four pillars and nine domains (**Appendixes 1 and 2**) are integrated into the teaching of all subjects in the basic education. Since 2010, teaching at the Bhutanese schools has been focusing more than earlier on values representing GNH philosophy such as bravery, honesty, empathy, compassion, respect, understanding moral principles as well as openness towards cultural values and traditions, which values are educating global citizens (Walker, 2006).

According to Sherab (2013), teachers managed to include the GNH principles well in the subjects outside the main curriculum, but they had difficulties when applying them in some subjects. Language of instruction is one of the challenges because English has originally been the media of instruction and it has focused on subject teaching rather than cultural issues. Teaching in national language Dzongkha has gradually increased, which has in turn increased teaching of GNH. Interestingly, GNH based teaching was most

successfully implemented at schools, where students were responsible for arrangements of the out of school teaching.

The Ministry of Education decided to train all the teachers after the evaluation of the first round of training of school principals and few teachers. Consequently, most of the Bhutanese teachers have obtained four days training on how to incorporate the GNH development principles into the teaching of all subjects. (Sherab, 2013.)

The training manual guides the work of teachers giving suggestions on how to include value education into different subjects as part of the curriculum, how to manage the broader learning environment and how to teach critical thinking and media literacy (RGOB, 2013). The Broader Learning Environment unit of the training manual is given advice to educators on how to “Appreciate the influence of the learning environment on learning” (RGOE, 2013, XVII).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Students answered in writing to next questions: “What kind of life is good life?”, “What makes Bhutanese people happy?”, “What kind of teaching makes you interested in learning?”, “How should people of the world live not to harm the planet?” and “What are the main reasons for climate change?”. In this study, we present and discuss the answers concerning the first and second questions. The selected questions were regarded as most relevant to answer our research questions because they are closely connected with the GNH development principles. The three other questions were pedagogically and environmentally associated and the student’s views concerning them are presented in other articles (Ahonen, Thinley, D., & Korkeamäki, 2013; Ahonen, Jeronen, & Korkeamäki, 2018). The results are aimed to support GNH education and its development in the basic education especially in Bhutan but also in other countries.

### Research Questions and Analysis Methodology

Students’ understanding about happiness and good life, related to the GNH development policy and practice, are analyzed by answering the following research questions:

1. How do the students in Bhutan view the emphasis of good life and happiness of Bhutanese people in relation with the contents of the GNH pillars and domains?
2. How are the students’ views on good life and happiness connected with the values of the GNH training manual?

In this case study the purpose is to find out how Bhutanese students’ understand the GNH principles and issues. According to Creswell “Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems” (Creswell, 2003 p. 73). In our study we used the former one. The students from one middle sized town from three schools answered the same questions during one lesson of 45 minutes.

When outlining the analyses methods mixed methods approach appeared to be best way to analyze students’ writings. Our central premise was that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provided a better understanding of respondents’ views than either approach alone (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

We followed ‘Describe, compare, relate’ (Bazeley, 2009 p.10) a simple three-step formula when we worked through the analysis. Thus, first, the analyzes the training manual was conducted for finding out how GNH development policy has been implemented in education. Second, the student’s responses were reviewed and analyzed thematically according to the theory and the conceptual structure of GNH principles introduced in the training manual (RGOB, 2013).

Dasho Karma Ura initiated the discussion on how to re-orient education values to be unified with GNH values (Ura, 2009). The values were presented concretely in the GNH Training Manual in 2013, introduced in **Table 2**.

According to Riessman (2008) the main focus of thematic analysis is to survey the contents of what is told or written and furthermore go beyond the writings to the thoughts behind them. The analysis of this study aimed at finding out, how the students understand good life and happiness. Finally, the initial quantitative results were analyzed qualitatively (Bazeley, 2009; Neuendorf, 2017). In next chapter, we describe more exactly how the analyses were carried out.



**Table 1.** Examples of student's writings positioned into pillars and domains according to the training manual (2013)

Student's answer	Pillar /domain positioned
People of Bhutan are happy when there is good governance and free education	Pillar 4: Good governance; Domain 6: Good governance and Domain 4: Education
Good life is to live with the family and friends, when environment is not polluted and when no harm to the animals	Pilar 2: Conservation of environment; Domain 2: Community vitality and Domain 9: Ecological diversity
Our traditional dresses, cultural values, national identity and cultural preservations make the people of Bhutan happy.	Pilar 3: Preservation and promotion of culture; Domain 7: Cultural diversity

**Table 2.** The GNH values introduced in the training manual (2013)

	Unit I GNH Contextualize in education	Unit III Infusing GNH into school curriculum	Unit IV Broader learning environment	Unit VI Media Literacy and critical thinking
Core values of the Educating GNH Training Manual (2013)	Reliable Faithful Patient Thankful Analytical Creative Non-materialistic Skillful Sustainably functioning	Eco-consciousness Environmental wellbeing Enriching learning with GNH values	Self-awareness Coping with emotions Coping with stress Empathy Decision making Problem-solving Creative thinking Critical thinking Effective Communication Interpersonal relations	Enhance intellectuality Differentiate facts from opinions Creative problem-solving skills Skillful consumer skills The importance of media in society

## Data Collection and Analyses

At the time of the study the teachers of the schools had been trained for GNH based teaching, and GNH based education had been implemented at schools for three years. The data was collected at three secondary schools in the middle-sized town in Bhutan. At the beginning of the study, the principals, the teachers, and the students were informed about the study and its purpose. The lower secondary school students (N= 178) participated voluntarily in the study. They replied in writing for the questions on the topic of GNH -policy, happiness and sustainable development during the forty-five minutes lessons. The teaching in most subjects is given in English language in Bhutan, so an interpreter was not needed.

For answering the research questions each student's response was positioned on one or several GNH -pillars and -domains. The GNH -pillars and -domains cover the well-being including both human beings and nature. They also include the good governance, the importance of good community living and cultural values (**Appendixes 1 and 2**).

The analyses of the data followed the deductive content analysis method. Deductive approach is structured according to specific aim to be accomplished (Byanjankar, 2016). Specific aim in this study is to review which GNH pillars and domains the students envision as the most important in creating happiness and good life for Bhutanese people. **Table 1** gives examples of how students' writings were viewed and positioned in the GNH pillars and domains.

The GNH values introduced in the training manual (**Table 2**) were taken into consideration when the first author had positioned the students' answers into different pillars and domains. The results section is discussing paralleled about the students' views concerning the pillars and domains and the relations of their views to the GNH values.

The six units of the training manual are the basis of GNH -focused education. The core education values are presented in the Unit I GNH Contextualize in education, Unit III Infusing GNH into school curriculum, Unit IV Broader learning environment, and Unit VI Media Literacy and critical thinking (**Table 2**). According to the training manual Unit II Meditation and mind training, and Unit V Holistic assessment of children are less connected to the GNH values.

## Reliability and Validity

In the qualitative research, the qualitative content analysis is a particularly reliable approach to handling data (Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). The main reliability of the qualitative research deals with the consistency, dependability and replicability (Nunan, 1999, p. 14). The consistency means correspondence or

uniformity among the parts of the study. It can be ensured through intensive engagement with the data. So, during the analysis phases, we moved backwards and forwards between the data and the interpretation of it. The dependability of the results can be ensured e.g. through the use of an audit trail. (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985; Merriam, 1998.) For that matter we have described in detail, how the data was collected, how it was analyzed, how different themes are derived, and how the results are obtained. The replicability can be ensured through external reliability. The choice of informants is described as fully as possible, and the procedures of collecting data are explicitly explained.

Internal reliability deals with the consistency of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Nunan, 1999). The possibility to ask the students to write answers to the questions only in three schools in the same medium sized town in Bhutan is affecting the internal reliability of this study. The time does not have effects on it, because the students in all three schools replied the questions during the same week and they were given forty-five minutes for writing. The teachers of the three schools had all attended the training of GNH focused education organized by the Ministry of Education. However, the different interests of teachers to increase the GNH focused teaching may have influenced the internal reliability. In addition, in order to guard against threats to internal reliability, another researcher supported the first one concerning the analysis, interpretation and validation of the conclusions (Nunan, 1999.)

Validity in qualitative research is assessed in terms of how well the research tools measure the phenomena under investigation (Punch, 2005). It concerns how truthful the research results are (Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). Validity of this study has been carefully considered while answers to research questions were analyzed according to the main principles of GNH development. Careful reading of the student's answers gave possibility to position students' answers to most relevant of the four GNH pillars and nine GNH domains.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results section starts by delineating the results of analyses according to the first research question of how the students review the emphasis of good life and happiness in relation with the contents of the GNH pillars and domains.

From the broad division of the students' views it can be concluded, that good life and happiness have different meanings to the students participated in this study. Nearly all GNH -pillars and domains are mentioned one way or another as shown in **Figures 1** and **2**. Only one domain, time use, was not mentioned by any student.

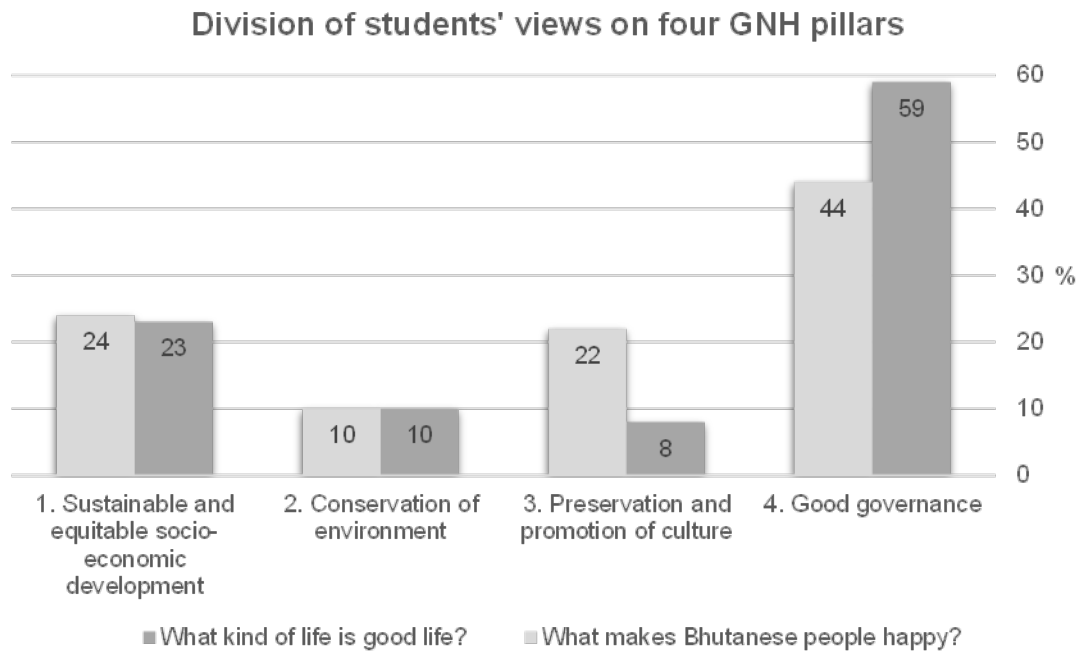
The Good governance pillar is mentioned most often in the students' answers for creating good life and happiness. Behind the popularity of good governance pillar may be the recent political reforms in Bhutan, particularly the two elections in 2008 and in 2013. Current king of Bhutan, Namgyal Wangchuk is strongly supporting the GNH development principles, and as a young king (born in 1980), he is popular among young people. The result is surprising, and therefore it would also be interesting to study how students see the relationships between governance, good life and happiness in other countries.

The four pillars constitute the basis for the GNH development principles. The nine domains, GNH subprinciples, give more concrete contents for the pillars. The writings of most of the students covered several themes of four pillars and nine domains.

### Students' Views on Happiness and Good Life Divided into Four GNH Pillars

In the **Figure 1**, the students' views to two questions: 'What makes Bhutanese happy?' and 'What kind of life is good life' are positioned after the analysis into four GNH pillars.

The largest number of the views were positioned to the **Good Governance** -pillar; it was referred 44% to happiness question and 59 % to good life question of all the views to different pillars. Behind the students' views of Good governance there are probably good knowledge and understanding about the principles of GNH development policy due to the public discussion, which has been going on in Bhutan for decades. Teaching at school according to the guidelines of the training manual (RGOB, 2013), may have also inspired the students to mention good governance. Students wrote e.g. "GNH and our laws, made by our kings and governments make people of Bhutan happy" and "Having equal rights and having good government make the people of Bhutan happy". The elections as part of the political reforms, implemented in Bhutan during the last years, could have affected the students' views highlighting good governance. The elections have been actively discussed publicly for bringing the voters to the polling stations. Students have also been encouraged to learn



**Figure 1.** The students' views of happiness and good life divided into four GNH pillars

and understand the traditions of democratic governance and develop the skills to be responsible citizens. Children's Parliament was established for this purpose some years ago (Tobgay, 2015).

Second largest number of the views were positioned to the pillar **Sustainable and Equitable Socio-Economic Development**; 24 % for the happiness question and 23 % for the good life question. The pillar was mentioned by the students in the context of equal development among family members, communities and among all citizens of Bhutan. Besides the GNH focused teaching at schools, the students' views on equal development may have roots on the traditional Buddhist worldview, which is reflected in the community values and teaching values at schools. According to Ura (2009, p. 3): "Buddhist moral development is based on strong principles of equality and co-partnership of all community members". One student wrote "To gain happiness to ourselves we should give happiness to others. Most important is to live friendly with people, animals and plants".

The **Preservation and Promotion of Culture** -pillar received 22 % of the student' happiness answers and 8 % of the answers for good life question. The answers connected with happiness are describing participation in national festivals, strongly connected with Bhutanese culture. Festivals are most often held on the courtyards of monastery temples and squares. Masked and humorous clowns are part of the festival programs and they amuse especially children and young people. Students wrote e.g.: "Bhutanese people are happy, when we celebrate during the festivals and in important ceremonies" and "We in Bhutan are happy, when people from outside Bhutan join our festivals and rejoice with us". Another theme bringing happiness related to the pillar preservation and promotion of culture, is strong tradition to dress into Bhutanese national costumes during the festivals. Students use national dresses also at schools, and civil servants and municipality administrators are wearing national dresses during the office hours. One of the students wrote: "Our national dresses, values based on our culture, our national identity and preservation of culture, make Bhutanese people happy".

The **Conservation of Environment** -pillar was referred on rare occasions. Only 10 % of the students' answers for both questions mentioned well-being of environment and nature as a source of happiness and good life. Students wrote e.g. "People of Bhutan are happy because of friendly and healthy environment" and "To live good life we need to reduce the number of vehicles". The low amount was not expected because Bhutan is regarded as an example in the conservation of nature and as a country taken actions against the climate change and climate warming. The representatives of Bhutan were invited to participate in the preparation of the background document of UN Framework Convention of Climate Change 2015 (National Environment Commission Report on the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference).

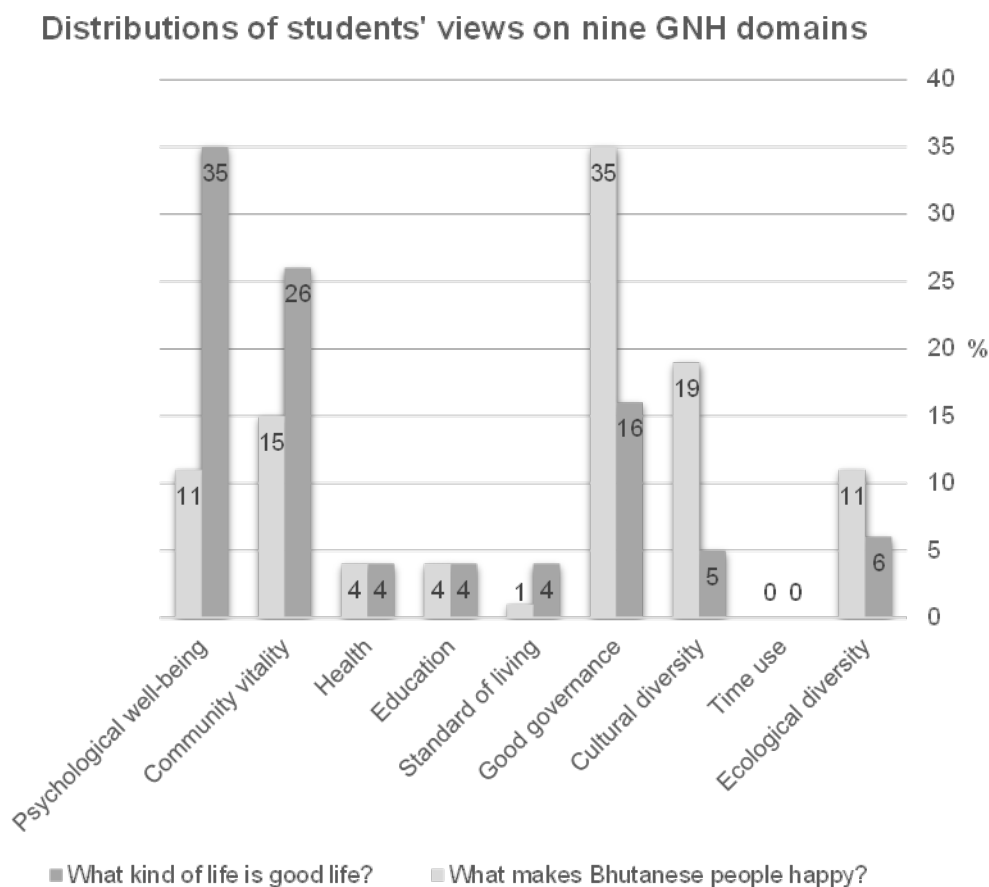


The purpose of the Unit IV Broader Learning Environment, in the training manual (RGOB, 2013) is to expand education and learning into new learning environments for encouraging the schools to arrange teaching outside schools for giving students a chance to learn from nature and environment. For environmental well-being, the training manual gives contents to increase teaching outside the schools in engaging nature conservation ethics, conservation of electricity and water and ecological literacy by being aware of climate change, pollution and overconsumption. Students are encouraged to adopt parts of rivers and forests and follow up regularly the life in adopted areas for increasing the well-being and protecting the nature. One reason for the students not mentioning environment may be the strong, deeply rooted Bhutanese traditions to respect nature and environment in everyday life. The students may experience natural that streets and roads are clean, and forests are growing well. Climate change may also be frightening and not the first thing in mind, when considering happiness and good life.

The division of students' views on happiness and good life into the GNH pillars of Good governance, Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, Preservation and promotion of culture and Conservation of environment, can be interpreted so that the students respect the renewed administrative practices in Bhutan, they value the equality among community members and that Bhutanese culture and traditions are important part of their everyday life. Students wrote: "The people of Bhutan are happy by GNH and our laws made by our kings and government" and "People of Bhutan are happy because of our culture, equality in education and health, and because of good ruler". Conservation of Environment was not mentioned often, and it may be explained by long- term strong emphasis of respecting and valuing nature and environment in Bhutan (Ura, 2009).

### Students' Views on Happiness and Good Life Divided into Nine GNH Domains

The **Figure 2** shows the content analyzed students' views on the questions: 'What makes Bhutanese happy?' and 'What kind of life is good life', divided into the nine GNH domains.



**Figure 2.** The students' happiness and good life views divided into nine GNH domains

The different conclusions on happiness and good life can be drawn from the students' views divided into the nine GNH domains. The issues and themes which can be found less often in the student's answers relate to the domains of Time use 0 %, Health 4 %, and Education 4 %. The students' views classified into Standard of living domain received also fairly few, only 4 % to the 'good life' question and 1% to the 'happiness question. Reasons for the students' few references to the GNH domains **Health, Education and Standard of living**, may be found from the students' everyday life. Basic public healthcare and education in Bhutan are free, as reflected in the Constitution of Bhutan (Adhikari, 2016). Parents, however, pay a small token fee towards the welfare of the students during the school years (National report on the development of education, 2004). Well managed health services and free education can be the reasons why students don't experience important to mention health and education as a source of happiness and good life. One student wrote about educations: "Good life is inspired by love and guided by knowledge".

Five domains mentioned most often in the students' writings are *Psychological well-being* (happiness 11 % / good life 35 %), *Community vitality* (happiness 15 % / good life 26 %), *Good governance* (happiness 35% / good life 16 %), *Cultural diversity* (happiness 19% / good life 5%) and *Ecological diversity* (11% / 6%). Students' answers about good life as 'happy and successful life without problems', have been placed to the **Psychological well-being** GNH domain. Many students wrote that people live good life when they are satisfied with what they have. One student wrote: "Good life is life without problems, without sorrow, without wars, when all people are equal". The students' writings classified to the GNH domain **Community vitality**, express that it is important that all people own equally; people are feeling well; people respect each other and are honest and helpful towards each other. Typical views were such as "Good life is life when we respect each other, when we are happy together, we collaborate, and we do not damage the environment", and "When we are happy and compassionate towards each other, we understand each other, and we comply with the law." The students' views classified to the Community vitality domain include the opinions, which can be featured altruistic. Their views of good life are responding well to the conclusion of the latest psychological happiness research whereby given seems to be as rewarding, or even bringing more good life than receiving (Seppälä, 2016, pp, 10-13).

The answers referring to peace, good governance and GNH -principles have been categorized to the **Good governance** -domain. One student analyzed: "Good governance makes Bhutanese people happy; because we have good government, and good monarch, we are happy. We are happy because we have a unique culture and traditions and we live in GNH -country". While reading and defining the students' views on the GNH pillars and domains, good governance turned out to be the main origin and context for happiness. Reason for the popularity of good governance among both four GNH pillars and nine GNH domains, can be the students' interpretation of the GNH development policy as good governance. The other reasons may be the democratic development of the recent years and the popularity of the king of Bhutan. The first elections organized in the democratic, constitutional monarchy of Bhutan in 2008 (turn out 79.38%) and in 2013 (turn out 45.15%), have drawn a lot of attention and discussion both nationally and internationally. The elections transformed Bhutan from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. The voting process is a challenge due to the mountainous terrain as officials had to trek for many days to set up some polling stations (Statistical Information on Elections in Bhutan 2006- 2015).

### Relations of the Students' Views and GNH Values

Another research question is related to the GNH -based teaching in Bhutanese schools. The results describe the connections of the values detected in the students' responses about happiness and good life with the values of five GNH domains and the values of the training manual.

The five most popular GNH domains identified in student's answers were Psychological well-being, Community vitality, Good governance, Cultural diversity and Ecological diversity. The GNH values appear most clearly in the **training manual** units, GNH Contextualize education (Unit I, 46%), Infusing GNH into school curriculum (Unit III 41%), introducing the Broader learning environment (Unit IV 51%) and emphasizing Media literacy and critical thinking (Unit VI, 17%) (See **Table 1**. The GNH values introduced in the training manual, 2013, p.10).

The analyses about the connections of the students' views with the values of the GNH-development principles show that students' views of happiness and good life are quite well connected with the values of GNH focused education and teaching. Plenty of the students' views (35 %) about 'Good life' are placed into the Psychological well-being GNH domain (**Figure 2**). These students wrote about *happiness, peace, equality and family relations*. An example of the writings is: "Peace, harmony and positive attitude to each other is good

life". Also, *compassion, calmness, and gratitude* were values of psychological well-being mentioned by the students.

The second popular 'Good life' area in the students' views, was the Community vitality GNH domain, receiving 26 % of the answers. The students' views focused on *helping others, friendliness, equality, confidence, lack of suffering, and well-being of the family*. One student wrote: "Good life is when person has proper job and good relations with friends, family and with all the people". Many students highlighted also that life is good, when you are not hurting and causing trouble to other people. Community vitality values are closely connected with the values expressed by the students. Such values as *family closeness, solidarity, unity, and hospitality* are consistent with the basics of life mentioned by the students. Some of the values presented in the students' views about happiness and good life match up with the values of Unit IV Broader learning environment of the training manual. This is well in line with the principles of to include into the teaching the features of the community and the condition of environment around the school. The values and qualities, such as *empathy, problems solving skills, creativity, and interpersonal skills*, are needed in the living community. Some of the values connected with Unit I. GNH Contextualizing in education, for instance, *reliable and sustainably functioning*, describe well the activities of a vital community. Also, the values such as *eco-consciousness and environmental wellbeing*, connected with Unit III of GNH values in the school curriculum, describe the community vitality.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Bhutanese students' answers show that students' values and principles about sources of happiness and good life, defined into four GNH pillars and nine GNH domains, focus on good governance and community vitality. An answer of one student "Good life is life when we respect each other, when we are happy together, we collaborate, and we do not damage the environment" shows the values of community vitality, sustainable and equitable socio-economic development and conservations of environment. Answers show that the threatening results of the international studies for pursuing economic growth within the limits of the planet, are not appearing strongly in Bhutan. The reason for the popularity of the Good governance pillar and domain among the students appears to be both the GNH development policy and the democratic development of Bhutan in the recent years. The background of the GNH development policy is related to the statement of Bhutan's Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck already early 70s indicating "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product (GNP)" (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012b, p.6).

The study concludes that the mankind needs alternative plans, for an economic growth for safe existence of the planet based on systems thinking (Bunge, 2000; Sterling, 2009). Bhutan's GNH development policy represents an alternative plan for economic growth focused GNP, Gross National Product. GNH development policy includes sustainable and equitable socio-economic development and conservations of environment. Connections between economic well-being and happiness in student's answers can be seen in the low reference in students' writings on Standard of living domain. Only 4 % of students mentioned the importance of standard of living creating good life and making people happy in Bhutan. It can be concluded that the GNH development policy and the recently initiated GNH value education has succeeded. The purpose of the GNH teacher training, according to the GNH training manual is: "Provide participants with the necessary skills and approaches to principles and values of GNH into curriculum, the learning environment, and into the daily school routine" (RGOB, 2013, p. XIV).

One of the four GNH pillars is Preservation and promotion of culture connected with the domain Cultural diversity. It has also been considered in the objectives of the training manual. However, the results show that these issues are not yet fully taken account in GNH education practices. International education values and openness towards the values of different traditions and cultures, are only marginally part of the teaching values of the Bhutanese schools. According to Walker (2006), teaching values should pay respect to the openness towards the values of different cultures and traditions. Thus, the GNH -domain of Cultural diversity could be broadened to include curriculum development and teaching experiences also from other countries.

The lowest scoring in the students' answers received the views related to environmental well-being and clean environment as one source of good life and happiness. The results were surprising, since Bhutan is internationally well-known of clean air, clean rivers and litter-free streets. Conservation of environment and education for sustainable development are also well connected to the GNH development principles. The former Minister of Education is quoted in the GHN training manual: "When we talk of governance, we would like to begin from self-governance, to governance in the family, in the class, in school, in organizations, in societies,

at the national level and link it to world-governance". (RGOB, 2013, p. 46). The reason for low scoring maybe be that environment is so well taken care in Bhutan and students don't see the need to emphasize the values of conservation of environment. Further research on student's values about well protected and clean environment both in Bhutan and globally would bring more information to teachers about environmental protection. This is important to take into account because based on the Agenda 2030 and UN Education 2030, the UN member states should ensure that by 2030 all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (UN, 2015, p. 48). The views of Raworth (2012) and O'Neill et al. (2018) about the importance to be aware of the connections between economic growth and sustainable development, and the urgency to increase the education for sustainable development, are strongly supporting the Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015). The education values and pedagogical practices of Bhutan focusing on sustainable development need to be shared globally for promoting sustainable development education. Based on our results it is recommended that Bhutan educators should increase the global sustainable development education in the school curriculum and teaching. The global sustainable development education can be taken as a theme in annual teacher training. The teaching can give credit to the clean and well cared environment in Bhutan and learn from the environmental conditions in other parts of world.

In summary, it can be stated that the students' views of happiness and good life are well connected with the values of GNH focused education and teaching. The findings show the connections of the student's values with the history and traditions of Bhutan and the values related with Bhutan's latest democratic development.

It's important to note that a very limited number of students participated in this study and that all participants were from three lower secondary schools from the same medium sized town in Bhutan. The results are not covering the rural areas, because the material was collected during the rainy season, and the roads to rural areas were not safe for driving. The further research for developing the GNH -based education is therefore clearly needed. The educators' and students' views, from different parts of the country both from rural and urban areas, are needed for developing teaching according to the local needs and for developing the local curriculum.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## APPENDIX 1

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>, [www.un.int/bhutan/bhutan/gross-national-happiness](http://www.un.int/bhutan/bhutan/gross-national-happiness)

### The Four pillars of Gross National Happiness



**Pillar 1: Sustainable & Equitable Socio-Economical Development** The emphasis of national policy on people centered development has seen the continual improving of the social conditions of people through the efficiency and quality of social services. This high priority was appropriately reflected in scaling up of resources allocated for the social sector at the central and the local levels. The country has exceeded its commitment to the Global 20:20, compact agreed on at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, for developing countries to devote twenty percent of their national budget for basic social programs. Bhutan has progressed in advancing general social conditions. The government is seeking balance between economic growth and spiritual traditions. Bhutan has always paid attention to the development of the country's human resources. This is made evident in the successive national development plans, whereby almost one-fourth the budget has always been allocated to health and education sectors

**Pillar 2: Environmental Preservation** Sustainable development and environmental care is in the interest of every being. Strong ethics of conservation, underpinned by the traditional reverence for nature, have influenced the country's environmental ethics and practice long before global concerns for environment were raised. More than 26 percent of the country's area is managed as protected areas to preserve the country's rich biodiversity. 72 percent of the country is under forest cover, most of it in pristine condition. Forest is one of the main natural resources of the country, but it is not to be exploited indiscriminately. The natural environment has become an important economic asset, particularly in the field of energy and tourism. The ethics of conservation is now broadening to cover also waste management, pollution and recycling, which will increasingly impact the quality of life in the future.

**Pillar 3: Promotion and Preservation of Culture** For a small country like Bhutan, preservation of its rich cultural heritage is critical to its very survival as a nation state. In addition to safeguarding a sense of identity in a rapidly globalizing world, the living cultural heritage is a source of human values and beliefs that are of eternal relevance and critical for sustainable development. The traditional beliefs and customs underpinned by a strong reverence for all sentient beings and the environment promoting tolerance, compassion, respect, and charity, are fundamental values for harmonious co-existence between humankind and nature. A strong sense of identity and values to all Bhutanese and the preservation of the rich cultural heritage also provides a strong link and support between the individual and society acting as an effective social security net. The breadth and quality of social relations lie at the root of happiness throughout a person's entire life cycle, from childhood to old age.

**Pillar 4: Good Governance** Bhutan is dedicated to establishing a system of governance that promotes well-being and happiness of its citizens. The vision in the evolution of its political and social structures, encompass both the strengths of the country's resilient and ancient society, and genuine virtues of democracy. The Royal Government and its institutions continue making every effort to serve the people with integrity, accountability and transparency. In November 2001 the 4th King took historic step. He commanded the drafting of the constitution of the country. The year of first elections, 2008 is momentous in all aspects in the history of Bhutan, in political developments and good governance. Institutional arrangements were in place to support the policy of good governance and recent developments to complete the transition of the national polity to a democratic constitutional monarchy.

## APPENDIX 2

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>, [www.un.int/bhutan/bhutan/gross-national-happiness](http://www.un.int/bhutan/bhutan/gross-national-happiness)

### Gross National Happiness (GNH) Nine Domains

**1. Psychological well-being domain** Psychological well-being refers to how people evaluate their lives. Most people evaluate their life as either good or bad. Further, people can experience moods and emotions, which have a positive effect or a negative effect. Psychological well-being leads to desirable outcomes, even economic ones. If a society regularly assesses well-being, people will provide their attention on it and learn more about its causes. Psychological well-being has beneficial consequences.

**2. Living standard domain** Standard of living is one of the important determinants of well-being or happiness. It has been a subject widely studied by various disciplines and agencies- governmental, non-governmental, multilateral, academic, etc. There are variety of themes, with poverty being the most common one. Inequality is another popular theme. The disparity in standards of living between rich and poor, sub-populations, ethnic groups, etc. are important.

**3. Good governance domain** There are plenty of definitions of governance; various institutions define it differently depending upon their own contexts. From the development view point, the World Bank identifies three aspects of governance; i) the form of the political regime; ii) the process by which authority is exercised for the management of a country's economic and social resources; and iii) the capacity of government to formulate and implement policies and discharge functions. Good governance is aimed towards enhancing the well-being of the Bhutanese people.

**4. Health domain** State policies are increasingly directed towards enhancing well-being of its people, which for so long have been concentrated only on economic fronts. Health and happiness have very thin line separating from one another. For instance, education, income and exercise can lead to good health and to happiness. Bhutanese believe that happiness is the result of good health.

**5. Education domain** Conventional education in Bhutan largely focused on structured school-based outcomes like pass percentages, dropout rate, school infrastructures, pupil-instructor ratios and enrolment rates. The education indicators, currently available, assess only educational attainments. Education need to include different types of knowledge and skills that people have acquired in their life course such as history, culture, civic, ecology and indigenous knowledge and skills, which are mostly acquired informally.

**6. Community vitality domain** For meaningful development and vitality of the community the emphasis on the quality of life of the community, not just on the economic aspects of it, is clearly important. The research has shown that an increase in material well-being does not increase the happiness of the people.

**7. Cultural Diversity and resilience domain** The significance of cultural diversity for humanity is now being increasingly recognized by several international organizations. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity represents the first international instrument aimed at promoting cultural diversity. Developing cultural resilience can be understood as the culture's capacity to maintain and develop cultural identity, knowledge and practices, and able to overcome challenges and difficulties.

**8. Time use domain** Time is an important resource for everyone. It is also a limited resource in that we have only 24 hours in a day to put to competing uses. How we use this limited resource is important and has implications for our economic and social well-being. Time use knowledge enables policy makers to understand the needs of special groups of people, such as the old or disabled.

**9. Ecology domain** According to the constitution of Bhutan every Bhutanese citizen shall contribute to the protection of environment, conservation of the rich biodiversity of Bhutan and preservation of all forms of ecological degradation including noise and physical and pollution conditions.

