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Living in Transition

Societal transitions from a youth perspective in Bhutan



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to contribute to a more holistic understanding of youth experiences under the phenomenon of societal transitions caused by processes of modernization. Bhutan has been subjected to major changes in terms of economic development, political and societal transitions. The group mostly associated with this modernization and globalization process is the youth living in the capital Thimphu. Giddens, Beck and Bauman's theories on modernization and globalization have been employed to understand the transitions in Bhutan from an individual and structural perspective. Primary fieldwork was carried out in Thimphu from September to December 2014. Empirical data was gained through qualitative face to face in-depth interviews and observations. The findings highlight the importance of community vitality for youth experiencing societal transitions. The research suggests that modernization and globalization processes are experienced as contrasting by the youth, implying new freedoms and possibilities, and exclusions and constraints at the same time. Gross National Happiness as a development paradigm, which balances material, spiritual, cultural and emotional needs, was revealed as a bridge of traditional and modern life as well as the guide to envision a modern sense of self without losing traditional benefits.

Keywords: societal transitions, tradition, modernization, globalization, youth, Gross National Happiness, GNH, happiness, Thimphu, Bhutan

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*ōTo see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.ō*

William Blake

Paro Taktsang, Buddhist Sacred Site, Source: Author

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List of Acronyms

EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNP	Gross National Product
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1. Introduction

“There is no path to happiness.

Happiness is the path.”

Siddhata Gotama, Buddha

“Who to be? What to do? These are the words of a 20 year old woman living in Thimphu, Bhutan. Her parents probably did not think about these questions as she does now. With Giddens (1991b) analysis on the relation of modernity and self-identity there is a larger meaning to this question, namely, the creation of a self-concept as a condition of modernity. It means reflecting upon one’s own narrative and being part of creating it. Other renowned figures in social research have equally dedicated attention to these matters. Beck (1986) views individualization as a condition of creating one’s own biography within modern societies. With his (2002) concept of cosmopolitan societies he argues that an individual’s everyday consciousness is influenced by local and global processes. Similarly, Bauman (2000, 2001), who proposes the concept of liquid modernity for late modern societies, suggests that individuals have the task of creating their own narratives under the condition of liquid societal structures such as class. What these authors have in common is the approach to untangle the dichotomy between structure and agency as forces that create social reality. In contrast to modern settings, it has been proposed that in pre-modern contexts traditions are the frameworks for action, and therefore the possibilities of agency and consequent choices of self-creation are limited (Giddens, 1991b:48). How do these processes look in a country like Bhutan which is incorporating tradition and modernity in to its frame of social reality? What role does the unique development path of Gross National Happiness (GNH) play in these processes? As a “westerner” my fascination with GNH is not unique; there has been great interest from international organisations such as the UN and EU, researchers such as Stiglitz, Helliwell, Layard, Sachs, and educational institutions such as the Schumacher College (Ura et al., 2012c: 20).

Seen at large, the western dominant model of development has mainly been focused on material indicators of wealth (e.g., GNP) (Escobar, 2012). The introduction of concepts like “well-being” based on indicators such as the Happy Planet Index, OECD Better Life Index or Stiglitz Report have been seen as trends toward a more holistic model of development (White, Gaines & Jha, 2012; Binkley, 2011). In 2012, the United Nations explicitly adopted Bhutan’s resolution on happiness and holistic development based on the example of GNH (Helliwell,

Layard & Sachs, 2012). In Bhutan the emergence of this model has clear references in previous governmental ideologies. Already in 1729, Bhutan's legal code declared 'if the government cannot create happiness for its people, there is no purpose for the Government to exist' (Ura, Alkire & Zangmo, 2012a: 4). Such data informs us that the concept of social happiness has old roots in what has been identified as Buddhist philosophy (Ura, Alkire & Zangmo, 2012a; Drexler, 2014; Walcott, 2011). Such philosophy in turn is firmly seated in a holistic notion of development, which combines material, social, cultural and spiritual well-being (Ura et al. 2012b).

Through the course of the current research it was seen that the holistic understanding of development that is contained in GNH has been a source of attraction for tourists, seekers and researchers alike that come to Bhutan and who are eager to meet a society where such an understanding is upheld and institutionalized in its Government. 'Yes, Westerners like you are interested in Gross National Happiness', people said with a smile. However it did not take long to realize that I did not enter Shangri La – the utopian and isolated place associated with Bhutan – but a place which is going through major modernization and globalization processes. As Walcott (2011:253) accurately describes, Bhutan is a country which is creating a unique sense of a modern self. In the same line, Samarasinghe (1990: 560) describes Bhutan as a rare exception of modernization transitions. Bhutan's self-imposed isolation created a pre-modern state till 1960. It did not go through industrialization processes and did not follow the model of unlimited growth (Herrera, 2005:62). What the current research discovered was a capital city going through major changes in terms of economic development in areas such as industry, agriculture, and tourism as well as hydropower exports to India. All these areas have been identified in related research (National Statistics Bureau & World Bank, 2014b; Rinzin et al., 2007). In the social sphere, there have been important political transitions brought about by the change from monarchy to democracy (Kinjang, 2012; Sithey, 2013), and culturally these transitions have contributed to opening up to the outside world, and introduction of global media and freedom of religion (Drexler, 2014; Chua, 2008; McDonald, 2004). The group which is mostly associated with societal transitions in Bhutan is the youth. The discourses on youth in Thimphu describe a generation that challenges traditional values, explores 'Western' lifestyles and has the possibility to vote and freedom of religion (Suhonen, 2014; Walcott, 2011; Chua, 2008; Drexler, 2014; Knaster, 2008).

The purpose of this research is to obtain a more holistic understanding of youth experiences under the phenomenon of societal transitions in a country trying to create cautiously a modern self with GNH as development strategy. The theoretical framework is based on Giddens, Beck and Bauman and their respective perspectives on modernization and globalization processes. The aim is to connect the structural perspective of societal transitions in Bhutan with the experiences of the youth in the epistemological tradition of these researchers in order to couple structure and agency for a more holistic understanding of social reality. Therefore the following question guides this research:

How do youth experience societal transitions in Bhutan considering Gross National Happiness as development strategy?

The societal transitions happening in Bhutan are defined as the contrasts of rural and urban life. As indicated through the research question "How", this research is descriptive and explorative applying a qualitative research strategy lead by phenomenological methodology based on fifteen in-depth individual interviews and observations. The interviews were conducted during a three months stay in Thimphu with youth who moved from the traditional rural areas to Thimphu.

There has been limited youth specific research in Bhutan. Riikka Suhonen (2014) wrote her Master's thesis on youth civic engagement in Bhutan, UNDP (2013) wrote a report on youth unemployment in Bhutan, UNICEF (2012) wrote a situational analysis report of children, youth and woman in Bhutan, Melissa Chua (2008) wrote an article on the challenges youth are facing due to cultural changes, and Dorji (2005) collected narratives about struggles with family, education and employment from Bhutanese youth. The goal of this research is to contribute to a broader understanding of youth encountering societal transitions in Bhutan, including the role of GNH as a development strategy.

First I present the current youth discourse in relation to societal transitions in Bhutan. For further understanding of the phenomenon of societal transitions in Bhutan, Bhutan's transition path from an isolated, traditional and rural society to opening up to the world and modernization is described. The next chapter covers the development perspective which aims to move from a traditional to a modern society in comparison with Bhutan's GNH development approach which is interpreted as bridge of traditional and modern life. The theoretical section based on Giddens, Beck and Bauman describes the individual and

structural processes under the phenomenon of societal transitions. The theoretical section includes a general introduction to modern processes and relevant concepts to give meaning to the youth experiences in Thimphu: Risk, fears and doubts in modern societies, cosmopolitan societies, ontological security and self-concept as an endeavour. The methodological section explains the used methods for this research. The paper ends with the presentation of the results, a discussion and conclusion.

2. Setting the context

After a short time arriving in Thimphu I realized that societal transitions and their influence on youth is subject of a prominent discourse in the capital. In the next chapter I present the current youth discourses in Thimphu. The second part of this chapter describes societal transitions in Bhutan from a historical perspective to acquire a broader understanding of Bhutan's unique context and modernization transitions.

2.1. Youth within societal transitions in Bhutan

*“The future of the nation lies in the hands
of our younger generations.”*

Former King of Bhutan Jigme Singye Wangchuk

Vandenberghe (1999) suggests that sociology of the youth means to understand the everyday lives of young people within the larger socio-historical background. France (2007:8-43) dates the study of youth back to Victorian Britain and the work in 1903 of Stanley Hall, who viewed youth as a group challenging the social order and status quo. The early discourse of youth and modernity in Europe which France (2007) highlights is one of industrialization and rural to urban migration. He identifies urban migration as a youth phenomenon leading to urban unemployment and the emergence of urban youth cultures, including gangs. Urbanization processes were seen as dangers for youth because traditional regulation such as communities and families had less impact on youth life. Youth was constructed as the other; a group which needs to be controlled. The government and cities focused on controlling the youth who were feared to be perpetrators of crime and delinquency. Another discourse is youth as a group of consumption and lifestyle, which impacts the traditional and moral order

including forms of resistance such as the punk movement (ibid.: 27). Similar youth and modernity discourses are currently present in Bhutan.

About one fifth of Bhutan's population is considered youth (ages 15-24 years) and half of the population is under the age of 25 (National Statistics Bureau, 2014a: 5). In Bhutan, mostly educated youth move from rural to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities though they risk ending up with no job at all (National Statistics Bureau, 2014b: 46,112). Bhutan's unemployment rate is low at 2.1% but the rate of youth unemployment amounts to 9.5% among males and 11.6% among females. Especially in urban areas the rate of 29.5%, compared to the rural areas with 20.2% is high (UNDP, 2013: 6). Youth unemployment in Bhutan is related to rural-urban migration and the rising level of education amongst youth in Bhutan which creates demands in new employment areas. (Dorji, 2005)

Gosai & Sulewski (2014: 1-14) claim Bhutan's internal migration rate (6%) and lack of educational facilities, employment and living standards in the rural areas as main pull factors for rural to urban migration. The Bhutanese government is taking steps to reduce rural to urban migration with, for example, rural electrification projects (ibid.:14). Seventy per cent of the population live in rural areas but it is expected that within the next decade 70% of the population will live in urban areas (National Statistics Bureau, 2014).

Urban youth unemployment combined with urban violence and drug abuse is a common discourse in Thimphu (Walcott, 2011; Drexler, 2014; Chua, 2008; UNDP, 2013). According to United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) by Panda et al. and their latest assessment on drug abuse in Bhutan from 2009, the drug use is in an early phase in Bhutan. Especially drug use among the youth has been a concern by government and civil society. 46% of the male drug users and 67% of the female drug users were unemployed. Another discourse in Thimphu is the changes in family units from extended family networks to nuclear families through rural to urban migration (Knaster, 2008; Chua, 2008: 15). France (2007: 10-11) explains this shift as a common feature of modern transitions. Not only the shifts in family units but the time spent with the family is viewed as reduced. For Chua (2008) the time youth spend in front of the TV (currently Korean Soap Operas and dramas are popular among youth) reduces the time spent with family (ibid.:13). McDonald (2004: 69, 73) views global television as a key factor for social isolation preventing people from real-life interactions. Habermas (1997) would agree on this critique, yet he sees mass-mediated consumer cultures as degradation processes of the public sphere in general. McDonald (2004) is concerned about the promotion of consumerist values through global media in Bhutan. Bhutan's culture entails

the cultivation of a slow and collective life. Media as a sensational attraction for the new generation creates a risk that traditional life looks boring (ibid.:75). The view that global media or globalisation as economic and social processes promotes consumerist and capitalist values, and reduces cultural variety is a concern of globalisation critical researchers such as Brand and Wissen, (2002). Bauman (2007a) argues that 'individual exposure to the vagaries of commodity-and-labour markets inspires and promote division, not unity; it puts a premium on competitive attitudes, while degrading collaboration' (ibid. 2-3). He views modern societies as societies of consumers. He defines consumerism as follow:

'a type of social arrangement that results from recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak 'regime-neutral' human wants, desires and longings into the principal propelling and operating force of society, a force that coordinates systemic reproduction, social integration, social stratification and the formation of human individuals'. (ibid.:28).

The concerns in Thimphu are related to cultural influences from the 'West' such as young people dressing in 'Western' fashion with only school students still wearing the national dress. Nightlife in Thimphu is growing with 700 bars where 'Western' music and clothing dominate (Drexler, 2014:8; Knaster 2008). As France (2007:11) mentions, in modern societies the cities or governments try to regulate the behaviour of the youth. Youth are constructed as the other and governments try to control their behaviour. The government in Bhutan bans smoking and certain TV programs such as wrestling (because of violence) and MTV (because of Western fashion, music and materialistic lifestyles). Despite these bans, youth are able to watch these channels on YouTube or buy cigarettes on the black market. Tattoo parlours are not allowed in Bhutan but young people make their own tattoos with needles and ink or go to India to get them (Chua, 2008: 12-21).

Lama¹ Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, a very popular Lama amongst the youth and movie producer, advocated presenting elements from the ancient culture that are alive, dynamic, vibrant and inspiring for the youth. He particularly addresses the youth and the processes of alienation during the transition to modernity. His point is to select principles and core values from the tradition that are important for the well-being of the people and drop elements which are no longer meaningful. Cultural practices and performances or folk stories are lively promoted by the government (Walcott, 2011: 253-260). As described, Bhutanese

¹ Lama is a spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism.

urban youth is viewed through discourses of unemployment, delinquent behaviour, increasing consumerism, as challenging cultural values and the group with the highest level of education. To understand these current discourses, the broader development picture of Bhutan is described in the next section.

2.2. Bhutan's transitional path

In this section Bhutan's transitional path is descriptively presented in a chronological order. Bhutan is a mountainous South Asian country located in the Eastern Himalayas, landlocked between Tibet (China) in the north and northwest, the Indian state Sikkim in the west, Arunachal Pradesh in the east and Assam in the south and southeast. Bhutan's population of 759,929 inhabits a land area of 38,394 square kilometres with approximately 70.5% forest coverage (National Statistics Bureau, 2014).

Figure 1: Map of Bhutan, Source: National Geographic Society (2014)



Since 1907 Bhutan has been ruled by a lineage of monarchs in the Wangchuk family, and has never been colonized by an outside power. The traditional structure of Bhutan is monarchical (Kolig, Angeles & Wong, 2009:59). Until 1959 Bhutan was a state of voluntary isolation relying on subsistence agriculture. At this time Bhutan did not have a centralized government administration, average life expectancy was 33 years, modes of transportation were mules, yaks and horses, and the entire nation was rural with no paved roads, no postal service, no village schools, no hospitals, no airports and no currency (Crossette, 1995:10). A point of modernization took place in 1959 when Bhutan's Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck created

cautious policies to open Bhutan to the outside world and align it with India. He started to build paved roads, schools and hospitals and created a free health care and an education system with English as the language of instruction in public schools (Drexler, 2014:7-8). In the 1960s Bhutan started to join international organisations starting with the Colombo Plan to take part in the South Asian cooperative for economic development. In 1968 Bhutan had its first permanent shops (Rhodes, 2000:89). In 1971 Bhutan joined the United Nations and in 1981 the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. One year later the Asian Development Bank and European Union began to have a presence in Bhutan, following with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in 1983 (Savada, 1991). Starting in 1972 and in parallel to the opening up of International Development Organisations, the 4th King Jigme Singye Wangchuck declared GNH to be more important than GNP, and from this time onward, the country oriented its national policy and development plans formally towards GNH. Along with economic modernisation follows monetisation and in 1974 the first Bhutanese banknotes were issued (Rhodes, 2000:89). The modernization processes continued with the allowance of foreign visitors in 1974 and an acceleration of rural to urban migration in the mid-1980s (Walcott 2011:260, Khamrang, 2013:7-8).

Bhutan is historically a multi-ethnic country with four major ethnic groups: the Ngalongs (Tibeto-Mongoloids), Sharchops (Indo-Mongoloids), Khengs (earliest inhabitants) and Lhotshampas (Nepalese origin) (Kolig, Angeles & Wong, 2009: 58). The Drukpas which belong to the Ngalongs and follow the Buddhist belief system are the majority of the population. As Evans (2010:25-29) describes, during the 1980s Bhutan started to promote a homogenous national identity adopting in 1989 a "one nation, one people" policy, promoting the national language (Dzongkha) and dress (Gho for men and Kira for women), hence values of the majority, the Drukpa. The Lhotshampa were mostly affected by these policies and a census reclassified previous granted citizenships. Political leaders of the Lhotshampa demanded increased cultural and political rights in response to the Bhutanese governments. The protests of the Lhotshampa were suppressed by Bhutanese authorities, creating an unstable situation of conflicts in Southern Bhutan. Bhutanese with Nepalese origin fled the ethnic tensions or became refugees due to denied citizenship rights.

In 1998/1999, Internet and the first national TV stations, including cable with Indian and American programming, arrived in Bhutan (McDonald, 2004: 68). In 2014, 55.3% of households owned TVs and 93% a cell phone (Drexler, 2014: 3-47). In July 2008 Bhutan adopted a new constitution that separates monastic royal institutions headed by the king and

consists of an elected Parliament and independent judiciary. The democratization process in Bhutan is viewed as 'top-down democracy' due to the fact that the King decided to have elections for a new Parliament (Muni, 2014:158). With this constitution Bhutanese citizens have freedom of religion and enter the era of democracy (Walcott, 2011: 253-260). The constitution consists of several clauses to uphold the principles of GNH (Masaki, 2013: 53). In the next chapter development discourses are discussed.

3. Development Discourses

To understand the modernization processes in Bhutan within its broader developmental context, in these sections the root of an understanding of development to progress from a traditional to a modern society is explained. In comparison the underlying assumptions of GNH are presented. This follows an understanding of progress which in turn bridges traditional with modern life.

3.1. Development as progress

Bernstein (1971) describes the sociology of modernization as the sociology of development. As the author proposes, the aspiration of development is the transition from a traditional to a modern society (ibid.: 143-144). The notion of development seems to convey direction and aims for the improvement of current conditions. Kolland (2005: 9) and Raymond (2005: 67-68) suggest development as a project of modernity based on a linear timeframe striving for progress and growth. In this process, the ideas of traditional and modern are conceived as polar qualities with the goal to move from one to the other. The understanding of progress is far from obvious. Bossard (1931) investigates the historical roots of the concept of progress. The etymological meaning of the word progress arises from Latin and means to walk forward. Progress is viewed as growth, development and improvement (ibid.: 5). Lucretius Carus (99BC ó 55BC), a Roman poet, was the first to use the word 'progress'. His poem sketches a picture of a struggling humanity which, while beginning life like beasts of the field, works itself forwards through successive stages on the basis of various discoveries, such as speech, fire, improved methods of life, gods, metals, roads, clothes and songs (ibid.: 6). Medieval thinkers prophesied progress in terms of a better future. It was an optimistic philosophy which believed in a movement to a higher level of perfection (ibid.: 8). For Comte (1798-1857)

progress meant moving from a human animalistic nature to higher intellectual stages; a mental development (ibid.: 9).

There has been longstanding critique (see Fanon, 2008; Illich, 1971; Kapoor, 2002; Loomba, 2009; Polanyi, 1944; Sachs, 1993 and Spivak, 2010) of 'Western' development or progress paradigms, which are seen as hegemonic projects enforced all over the world. Escobar (2012:3-42) unmasks the universal truths of 'Western' development and suggests the start being Harry Truman's 1949 (33rd US president) Fair Deal proposals which aimed to save the 'underdeveloped' areas of the world using technologies and scientific knowledge from industrialized nations. In the same year the Bretton-Woods system and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) were created. From this time onwards, poverty and 'developing' countries became an object of analysis and management of International Organisations. The construction of the 'Global South' based on statistics and the formation of theories, models and concepts justifies various forms of intervention. Modern production, rapid growth, democracy and good living standards became the unquestioned desirable goals. 'Clearly the strategy of postdevelopment theory stands in opposition to mainstream modernization discourse' (Ruccio, 2011: 251). As Boaventura de Sousa (2014: 20-34) suggests, the 'West' cannot make sense of the world at large with universal ideas and general theories. This includes allowing for histories other than the universal history of the 'West' and learning in noncolonial terms. As Brun, Blaike and Jones (2014:1-12) explain, alternative development identifies alternative practices and redefines the goals of development. Alter-native stands for the marginal voices, often related to restricted access of decision making and instead of viewing it as binary relationship to mainstream development it highlights the importance of various understandings of development.

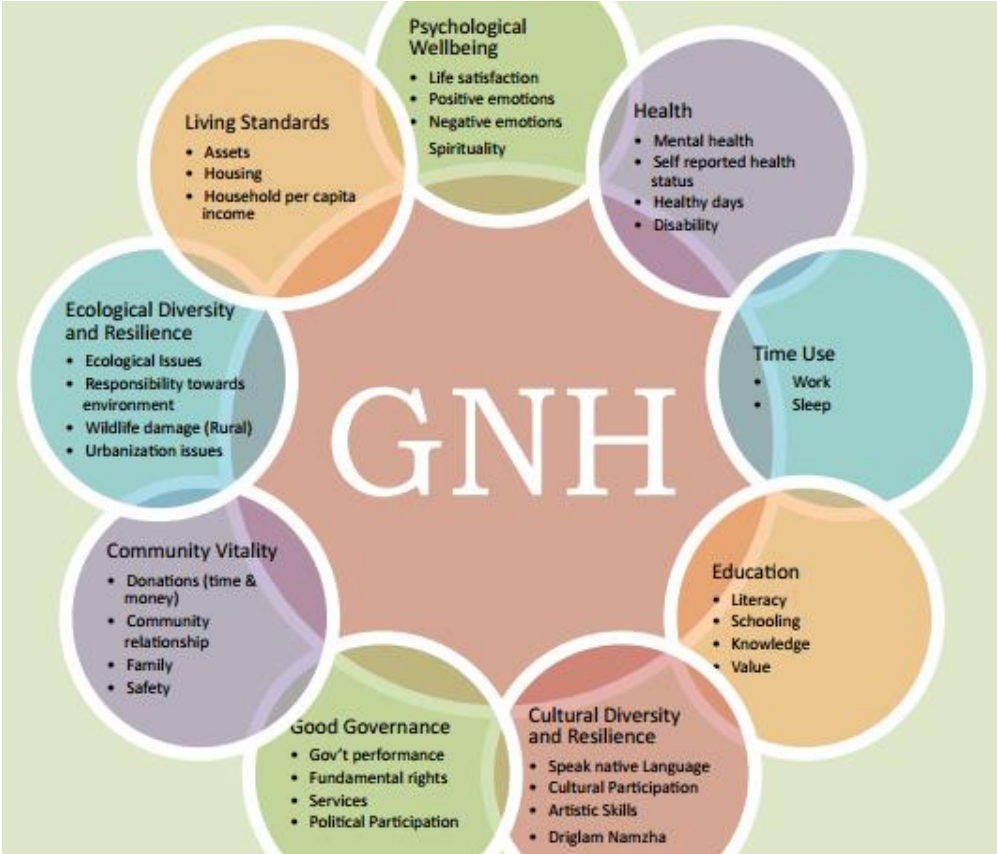
The analysis of development discourses indicates a change in the concept of development and progress. In 1987 the Brundtland commission called for *a new era of development*, introducing the concept of sustainability. Societies should not only ensure well-being for this generation but also for the next generations. This created a development discourse which changed from maximization to optimization of progress (Kolland, 2005: 14). In 1999, Amartya Sen suggested development as freedom, placing great emphasis in the importance of individual agency. In his interpretation, progress is achieved if people have more freedom and possibilities, not only as a goal but also as means of development. Sen and Mahbub ul haq were the ones to introduce in 1991 an approach of measuring progress not only in economic terms. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures life expectancy, education and per

capita income (Khalid, 2014). The Human Development Report published by UNDP ranks countries according to HDI. Bhutan was ranked 136 out of 197 in 2013, similar to India and Cambodia, in the category of *medium human development* (Khalid, 2014: 159-162). However Bhutan's vision of progress is broader than life expectancy, education and per capita income. Thus, Bhutan follows GNH which is discussed in the following section.

3.2. Gross National Happiness as development strategy

The Constitution of Bhutan (2008, Article 9) directs the state to promote those conditions that enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness (Ura, Alkire & Zangmo, 2012a: 4-5). GNH is defined as the balance of material, spiritual, cultural and emotional needs. It consists of four pillars: 1) sustainable and equitable social economic development, 2) preservation and promotion of culture, 3) conservation of environment and 4) good governance. As can be seen in the figure below, these pillars consist of nine domains: 1) living standards, 2) education, 3) health, 4) cultural diversity & resilience, 5) community vitality, 6) time use, 7) psychological well-being, 8) ecological diversity and 9) good governance. Thirty-three indicators, as presented in figure 2, are measured by 72 variables (Ura et al. 2012b).

Figure 2: Gross National Happiness Indicators, Source: Ura et al., (2012b: 13)



The comprehensive indicators reflect the material, spiritual, cultural and emotional dimensions, as one can see in the following examples. Living standards do not only include per capita income but also meaningful work. Community vitality reflects not only crime but also volunteerism. Education not only includes levels of schooling, but also the involvement of parents in their children's studies (Drexler, 2014: 20). Knowledge reflects not only knowledge about HIV/AIDS but also knowledge in myths and local legends. "Culture is not only viewed as a resource for establishing identity but also for cushioning Bhutan from some of the negative impacts of modernization" (ibid.: 144). The diversity of culture is present in various forms such as traditional arts and crafts, language, festivals, events, music, dress and ceremonies. Ura et al. (2012c: 144-145) acknowledges that creating a Bhutanese character has to include a diverse set of cultures in a multi-ethnic country such as Bhutan. As described above, cultural promotion based on the majority group was already a cause of conflict in Bhutan.

The GNH Commission is the central planning agency for GNH. All public policies, plans and programs are screened through the mandatory screening tool to promote the nine domains of GNH (Ura et al. 2012b). In 2008, for example, the GNH policy-screening tool stopped Bhutan from joining the WTO. WTO membership would have forced the country to open up to junk food franchises (McDonald's or Domino's Pizza) which would have negatively influenced domains of GNH such as health and culture (Drexler, 2014: 21-22). GNH as a screening tool filters outside influences which would negatively impact the GNH domains. Bhutan is trying to create a modern self without losing community vitality or cultural diversity. Every two years Bhutan conducts a survey to assess the life of the Bhutanese. Questions are, for example, as follows: How much do you trust your neighbour? Do you know the names of your great-grandparents? Are men better leaders than women? Did you plant a tree in the past year? How much is your total household income? Do you feel safe from ghosts? Etc. If a respondent achieves at least a minimum level of sufficiency in six out of the nine domains, he/she is considered happy. Gaining a high score in one domain does not compensate for a low score in another domain. In the 2010 survey, 40.8% of the respondents were considered happy (Drexler, 2014: 21-23). In comparison, the Happy Planet Index measures experienced well-being (data from world value survey) multiplied with life expectancy divided by the ecological footprint (new economics foundation, 2012). There is no comparable data for Bhutan in the Happy Planet Index 2012. "Lack of comparable data has meant that we are

unable to calculate an HPI for Bhutan, a nation which has achieved great deals in terms of measuring progress differently (new economics foundation, 2012: 25).

The starting gun for the happiness discourse among international organisations was Seligman's publication on happiness in 2000 (Binkley 2011: 373-374). The first Happy Planet Index was published in 2006 as a global measurement for sustainable well-being. After the 2007 'Beyond GDP' conference - which included representation from the EU, Club of Rome, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and WWF - the EU developed the Beyond GDP initiative to develop an indicator to measure prosperity and well-being (European Commission, 2015). The Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission (2009) created a multidimensional indicator for well-being to measure happiness of people and ecological sustainability. The OECD developed the Better Life Index in 2011 as part of the Better Life Initiative, and every two years publishes the report *How's life?* comparing well-being across OECD countries plus the Russian Federation and Brazil based on 11 dimensions: 1) community, 2) education, 3) environment, 4) civic engagement, 5) health, 6) housing, 7) income, 8) jobs, 9) life satisfaction, 10) safety, and 11) work-life balance (OECD, 2013).

Karma Ura, the Director of the Centre for Bhutan Studies came up with a quantifiable number for GNH (Drexler, 2014: 2-33). The exact method and formula of quantifying GNH can be found in Ura et al. (2012b: 46-53). A difference of GNH compared to 'Western' happiness indicators has its origin in Buddhism (Ura, 2009; Drexler, 2014). With GNH Bhutan is trying a compassionate development path for collective and individual happiness (ibid.: 20). The *Gross* in Gross National Happiness means aggregate or collective (Ura, 2009). Drexler (2014:6, 12) writes about her talk with Lama Ngodup Dorji who describes the core Buddhist understanding of GNH as the realization of compassion. To understand societal transitions not only from a structural development perspective but in its interaction with the individual perspective the next chapter focuses on modernization and globalization theories which combine these two perspectives.

4. Societal transitions

For a better understanding of the phenomenon under study, I have chosen theories of modernization and globalization processes based on Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and Zygmunt Bauman's work, which provide the lenses to understand the stories of the youth. First a general background on modernization and globalization processes is presented. It is important to highlight that Bhutan's context is not the same as the European or North American one, where these theories developed. Yet, the described theories give meaning to the phenomenon of societal transition through the eyes of the youth.

4.1. Setting the modern scene

The modern world is a 'runaway world': not only is the pace of social change much faster than in any prior system, so also is its scope, and the profoundness with which it affects pre-existing social practices and modes of behaviour (Giddens, 1991b: 16).

Giddens (1991a: 1-14a) suggests that 'modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence' (ibid.: 1). He views modernity as multidimensional on the level of institutions thus his approach includes the capitalist and class lens of Marx, the rationalisation lens of Weber, and the division of labour lens presented by Durkheim. Giddens is looking at the nature of modernity to understand its consequences in the present day. He calls his approach a 'discontinuist interpretation of modern social development' (ibid.: 3). He stresses the importance of discontinuist transitions, like Marx described history, but with an overall direction with some principles. Not a 'grand narrative' but a 'story line'. 'Deconstructing social evolutionism means accepting that history cannot be seen as a unity, or as reflecting certain unifying principles of organisation and transformation' (ibid.: 5-6).

Different authors use different terms to describe modernization processes. What Giddens (1991b) describes as late modernity is similar to Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity. Thus when the terms late and liquid modernity are used within this work, they describe the same phenomena. Yet tradition, modernity, late modernity and globalisation are not distinctive categories or processes on a continuum as one follows the next but they are overlapping. These processes are themselves major topics which are not able to be presented in detail in

this work, however they are interwoven and essential to explain the phenomena of societal transitions in Bhutan.

Giddens (1991b: 4-48) describes the contrasts between traditional (pre-modern) and post-traditional (modern) cultures. Modernity is a post-traditional order thus social relations are no longer organised by traditions, which does not mean that traditions are no longer relevant. Giddens (1991b: 4-48) and Bauman (2000: 8-10) suggest that one of the key features of modernity is the rapidity and scope of change. Liquid modernity is disembedded from time and space without reembedding. In pre-modern societies, time and space exist as not separated from living practice. "Modernity starts when space and time are separated from living practice and from each other and so become ready to be theorized as distinct and mutually independent categories of strategy and action" (Bauman, 2000: 8). In modern societies time and space are objectified symbolic categories, and virtual transformation of time and space creates new forms of practices besides traditional forms. Not only practices, but the forms of managing society differ. In modern contexts, institutions within the nation state or global institutions manage social activities, whereas in traditional ones traditional practices passed on by elders are the frameworks for social activities. Our physical bodies situate us locally in time and space but the phenomenal world is a global one (Giddens, 1991b: 4-48, 187-201).

In discussing the disembeddedness of time and space the key term is globalization. Giddens (1991a: 64) describes globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". Similar to Beck (2007) he views globalization as an advanced form of modernity. As Osterhammel and Petersson (2004) suggest, international trade, financial relations and transnational cooperation, including the technological advantages in communication and knowledge, influence economic and cultural developments worldwide. Kolig, Angeles & Wong (2009) claim that the effects of globalization, as the rise of new connectivity, promotes new ways of self-consciousness and looking at the world itself. Concepts like identity and nationalism rooted in a specific locality are challenged. Thus globalisation processes require a "fundamental reorientation of traditional identities to take note of one's embeddedness in a world-wide context" (ibid.: 11). According to Beck (2007:29) ecological, cultural, economic, political and civil society processes can only be understood in their global interdependences. The logics of these processes exist side by side without the possibility to reduce them into one another. Hence these global interdependences

create complexity and uncertainties not only on a global but on a local level. Therefore Beck (1986) describes advanced modern societies as risk societies.

4.2.Risk, fears and doubts in modern societies

Several authors such as Giddens (1991b), Beck (1986), Bauman (2007a) and Fromm (2011) define doubt and risk as prominent features of modern societies. Doubt is ingrained in modern institutions, science and modern life at least as a background phenomenon (Giddens, 1991b: 181-182). The mentioned authors engage with the topic of risk in modern societies. Beck's famous risk society consists of individuals who live within a constant risk of possible positive or negative actions. Modern societies are no more risky compared to pre-modern societies, but constant changes and various possibilities create a feeling of uncertainty. Yet global crises such as ecological catastrophes, nuclear wars or economic crisis can influence the day to day life of individuals. Media on both a national and global level plays an important role in presenting certain risk discourses to society.

Giddens (1991b: 134,183) proposes that modern societies try to calculate and plan the future also in terms of risks. Management and control over the living world is a feature of modern societies. Thus modern life is infused with abstract systems such as technologies or money, which create and at the same time minimize security in day to day life. This is also a means of seeking to stabilise outcomes, a mode of colonising the future (ibid.: 134). The way money is used in modern societies connecting global processes with the local day to day life brings the abstract into the concrete. It creates the possibility of regulating even distant (time and space) exchanges. The provision of daily services and goods is routinized, regulated and not bound to time and place. To have trust in abstract systems which are not bound to time and space can be another challenge of modern societies. Bauman (2007a) views globalisation processes as risks of increased anxiety and fear on a local level due to the unpredictable and unstable global world which cannot be controlled from a local level. He sees the real cause of anxieties and fears in the lost control over the social dimensions of life. Not only are governments and work places constantly changing but also communities. This creates uncertainties and fears. Beck (2002) argues that to understand societies that have been influenced by globalisation processes, the cosmopolitan sociology lens is valuable.

4.3. Cosmopolitan Societies

According to Beck (2002:17), in modern societies, global issues become part of daily experiences which creates processes of 'cosmopolitanisation' (Cosmopolitanisation means internal globalization, globalization from within the national societies. This transforms everyday consciousness and identities significantly) (ibid.:17). How individuals interpret the world and themselves is influenced by local and global processes. Cultures influence each other beyond national borders. He describes the cosmopolitan perspective as 'an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities, which include the otherness of the other. It puts the negotiation of contradictory cultural experiences into the centre of activities: in the political, the economic, the scientific and the social' (ibid.: 18). For him this means holding together contrasting worldviews and methodologies in everyday life. Global values are grounded locally in a specific time and space. 'Thus a cosmopolitan sociology imposes fundamental questions of redefinition, reinvention and reorganization. The challenges are related to two fundamental processes: globalization and individualization' (ibid.: 21). In this regard individuals can make use of diversity for the creation of a distinctive self. The narrative about the self includes elements from different contexts.

Giddens (1991b:4-14) suggests that media plays an important role in modernity as an experience which influences the organisation of social relations and self-identity. Traditions and lifestyles are in making and unmaking of the local and the global. People are influenced by and also influence global and traditional lifestyles. 'Yet because of the 'openness' of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of 'authorities', lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity' (ibid.:5). The way a person would like to behave, what they would like to eat and what they would like to wear are day to day decisions which have to conform the self-understanding. In this sense, modernity holds the possibilities of emancipation and exclusion at the same time (ibid.:14), much like the various choices individuals have to make in the 'process of finding oneself which the social conditions of modernity enforce on all of us' (ibid.: 12). As Habermas (1997: 42) suggests, modernism is a force which promotes the principle of unrestrained self-realization. It therefore demands authentic self-experience and reflections on hedonistic motivations, which do not fit moral or professional life requirements of the society.

4.4. Ontological security

As Giddens (1991b: 35-37) describes, *practical consciousness* is the cognitive and emotive anchor of the feelings of *ontological security* characteristic of large segments of human activity in all cultures (ibid.: 36). Ontological security is a sense of continuity and order in an individual's experience. Individuals need a framework of reality, shared with other people, to know how they would like to act. In modern societies a persistent framework of actions is missing and individuals have to create their own. As well a secure base is missing which can create anxiety. This raises 'questions of time, space, continuity and identity' (ibid.: 37). It can overwhelm people to have to define one's own being in the world. Ontological security is related to existential questions and the fundamental sense of safety. Ontological security is the feeling of knowing the answers to the questions of the self. This involves trust in oneself and in other people (ibid.: 38). Trust and everyday routines of social interaction can help to cope with defining oneself. Therefore rituals can serve as attitudes of general trust especially if shared with others (ibid.: 50). Individuals create a frame based on routines in order to feel ontologically secure and create a sense of being (ibid.: 39). As Nanda & Warms (2010: 290) explain, rituals provide order and structure in an individual's life and are an integral part of traditional societies. Individuals create a frame based on routines to feel ontological secure and create a sense of being (ibid.: 39).

4.5. Self-concept as an endeavour?

Giddens (1991b) and Beck (1986) view the process of developing a self-concept as a reflexive process in modern societies. The conditions of modernity give individuals more freedom from cultural and traditional constraints. Self-identity is a reflective endeavour. The story of who we are is not a pre-given narrative. As Berger (1979: 16) suggests, instead of fate or destiny people make decisions, and as Bauman (2000:7-8) explains, institutions are the frames of possible action-choices which can also create dependencies. Individuals have the task to relocate themselves but only in the 'ready-made niches', such as classes, which are available to them. The category of class already diminishes the number of possible life choices. Categories like class become a stable orientation point for individuals to follow appropriate rules and modes of conduct. In the era of liquid modernity, orientation points like class are no longer stable. This does not mean that individuals have infinite choices but life undergoes constant changes also in terms of structural categories. In this sense, 'the liquidizing powers have moved from the 'system' to 'society', from 'politics' to 'life-policies'-or have descended

from the 'macro' to the 'micro' level of social cohabitation (ibid.: 7). It is the individuals task to weave his or her pattern and if the person fails, it is primarily on his or her shoulders. As Bauman (2007a) claims, individuals are now expected to be 'free choosers' and to bear in full the consequences of their choices (ibid.: 3-4). Next to the power of self-creation lies the powerlessness in modern societies. Giddens (1991b: 191) views powerlessness as a dilemma of the self in modern societies. In modern societies control is in the hand of external agencies whereas in traditional societies control was located in the intermediate surroundings. Once again modern societies are contradictory holding power and powerlessness at the same time.

5. Methodology

In this section the field study's methodological process is explained. First the research design is described, followed by the presentation of participants and selection processes. Next the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and observations are explained. The chapter ends with quality and ethical considerations, reflectivity & positionality and a discussion of methodological choices and empirical data.

5.1. Research Design

Philosophical ideas and a researcher's ontology influence the practice of research and the research design. As Bryman (2008:25) suggests, ontologies and epistemologies need to be disclosed to understand the conducted research. The ontological position taken in the research presented here is social constructivism: the world is seen as subjectively constructed and interpreted. Individuals view the world from different perspectives based on their experiences and backgrounds. The epistemology of social constructivism is interpretivism. 'Interpretivists take reality to be both pluralistic and constructed in language and interaction' (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006: 7). Interpretivism is concerned with understanding the world from/through the eyes of the studied person (Bryman 2008:15, 20). Knowledge is viewed as something continuously created through interpreting events and actions, thus as subjective, contextual and situated (Harraway, 1988; Bryman, 2008).

To understand the phenomenon of societal transitions from a youth perspective, in-depth meaning is relevant; therefore a qualitative approach was used (Creswell, 2009: 23-26). As Silverman (2008) mentions, qualitative data collection is an open-ended process and not

limited to a particular instrument or set of variables. This research was explorative and followed an abductive or iterative approach. Indeed, the approach moved back and forth between data and theory (Bryman, 2008: 12; Brinkmann, 2014: 722). This research focuses on individual experiences and meanings of the phenomenon of societal transitions through the eyes of youth. Thus hermeneutic phenomenology is applied as methodological approach. As Creswell (2009: 30) suggests, "phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants". Phenomenology, with its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl, is the study of lived experiences. Hermeneutics is the science and art of understanding, interpreting and creating meaning which is not stable and fixed but open to constant interpretation. "Hermeneutic phenomenology is consequently the study of experience together with its meanings" (Friesen, Henriksson & Saevi, 2012: 1). Compared to other phenomenological methods, hermeneutic phenomenology views experiences embedded in cultural and historical locations. Thus it does not imply universal essences of an experience. Descriptions of lived experiences are put into the context of the individual's life. Meanings can be implicit and hidden. Hermeneutic phenomenological research does not predict but rather describes the lived experiences through the eyes of the participant. Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses the relationship of researcher and researched and realized intersubjective interconnectedness. Therefore the reflection of one's own positionality and assumptions is crucial (ibid.: 22-14). The aim is not generalization of the empirical data but in-depth perspectives of the individual. The research is based on data collection during a three month internship for a youth organisation in the capital of Bhutan, Thimphu. Through this internship the possibility was given to work, live and spend free time with young people in Thimphu. This thesis is based on primary data, in-depth interviews and observations, and secondary data on the Bhutanese context and youth discourses in Bhutan.

5.2.Participants

Participants were identified through purposeful and convenient sampling (Creswell, 2007: 125). Using the purposive sample strategy, individuals were selected who had experienced the phenomenon of societal transitions from the traditional rural to the urban modern life in Bhutan. Societal transitions are a phenomenon which is strongest in the capital of Thimphu. The contrast of rural traditional and modern urban life is present in Bhutan. Therefore I choose youth who lived in the rural traditional areas and moved to Thimphu and frame it as an experience of societal transitions. Yet the focus of this thesis is not rural to urban migration

but societal transitions present as contrast between traditional and modern life. Participants who have lived at least a minimum of one year in Thimphu to be familiar with urban life were selected. To obtain a more diverse picture of worldviews and experiences, youth from different socioeconomic, gender, ethnic, educational and occupational backgrounds were selected. The youth working at the Youth Media Center introduced me to their friends, thus the Youth Media Center was the gatekeeper for meeting young people in Thimphu. Fifteen in-depth face to face interviews were conducted, with the shortest being forty minutes long and the longest being one hour and ten minutes long. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 24.² Six were female and nine were male. All the names of the youth have been changed to guarantee anonymity. All interviews were conducted from September till December 2014 in Thimphu. Most interviews were held at the house of the interviewee and a few were held at the researcher's residence. I provided drinks and snacks.

Leki is a 24 year old man born in a village close to Thimphu. He has lived in Thimphu for 10 years.

Radha is an 18 year old woman born in an Indian border town southwest of Bhutan. She has lived in Thimphu for one year.

Karma is a 20 year old woman born in the southern part of Bhutan. She has lived in Thimphu since three years.

Tshering is a 24 year old man from a village from the East of Bhutan. He has lived in Thimphu for three years.

Tandin is a 23 year old man from a village close to Thimphu. He has lived in Thimphu for four years.

Rai is a 24 year old man and from a village in the South of Bhutan. He has lived in Thimphu for five years

Kezang is a 24 year old woman and comes from an Eastern village. She has lived in Thimphu for 10 years.

Ugyen is a 24 year old man. He has lived for 10 years in a village west of Bhutan, for one year in a village south west of Bhutan and the rest of his life in Thimphu.

Lotay is a 24 year old man and from a village in the East of Bhutan. He moved to Thimphu ten years ago.

Jampel is a 22 year old man from a village in the East of Bhutan and lives since two years in Thimphu.

² The age of 18 instead of 15 was chosen for ethical considerations.

Namgay is a 20 year old woman born in the southern part of Bhutan. She has lived in Thimphu for 10 years.

Rigzin is a 21 year old man born in a village close to Thimphu. He has lived in Thimphu for 5 years.

Nima is an 18 year old woman born in a village close to Thimphu. She has lived in Thimphu for 2 years.

Cheki is a 24 year old man born in a village close to Thimphu. He has lived in Thimphu for 4 years.

Suman is a 19 year old woman born in the western part of Bhutan. She has lived in Thimphu for 1 year.

5.3. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were used as method to understand societal transitions through the eyes of youth. In-depth or unstructured interviews as a common qualitative strategy view the personal account of people as meaningful. Compared to questions of fact, the individual's unique context and changing perspectives are interesting. It follows the idea that the macro- i.e., the society can be constructed through the micro- i.e., the individual, as a subjective perception of an impermanent structure and not a fixed reality (Miller 2000:12-16). As Legard, Keegan & Ward, (2003) describe, in-depth interviews are a means to construct knowledge about the social world within human interaction. Even though in-depth interviews appear naturalistic, it is not the same as an everyday conversation (ibid.: 138). Kvale's (1996: 4) description of the 'traveller metaphor' was followed in this research as a constructivist interview approach. 'The traveller asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as 'wandering together with' (Kvale, 1996:4). The interpretation of the stories of the interviewee is developed together with the researcher - the traveller. As Legard, Keegan and Ward (2003) explain, the combination of structure and flexibility is a key feature of in-depth interviews. The interviewer has themes in the mind, but the structure has to be flexible for the topics of the interviewee (ibid.: 141). The interviews followed a flexible approach with guiding questions about experiences in the rural and urban areas. It was attempted as much as possible to have the interviewer be led by the interviewee and for the interviewer to only ask questions to understand the stories better, or if the interviewee lost the flow of speaking. I applied Carl Rogers' 'Active Listening' approach for conducting the interviews. This approach originates from the person centred therapy which strongly focuses on the human potential everyone

holds inside. As Rogers and Farson (1987) describe, Active Listening is based on a non-critical, non-evaluative or moralizing climate with a person. Instead, sincere equality, understanding, acceptance and warmth are the frames. The interviews were held in English, recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed as suggested by Bryman (2008: 451).³ The transcribed interviews were interpreted using Mikkelsenø (2005: 181-182) approach of establishing broad themes considering the richness, multidimensionality and complexity of the phenomena of societal transitions and their influences in the life of the youth. As Gadamer (1997) suggests, the hermeneutic circle is a circular movement between understanding and interpretation. Theoretical pre-conceptions are the lens to understand the empirical data which creates a new understanding of the situation and rearrangement of the theoretical framework. The phenomenon is explored through a dynamic movement from theory to data and data to theory, the hermeneutic circle of understanding and interpretation.

5.4. Observations

To obtain a deeper understanding of youth life, non-participant observations were conducted during a three month stay in Thimphu. I went to youth events ranging from events put on by various youth NGOs to those types of events held at youth related locations such as coffee shops, clubs, etc. Youth street life in general was also considered. This method allowed for more awareness and understanding of the local youth context. A field diary on observations and daily reflections was maintained. This field notes were used to interpret the interviews of the youth.

5.5. Quality considerations

Tracy (2010:839-848) suggests eight criteria of quality considerations in relation to qualitative research which were applied. "Worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence" (ibid.: 839). A *worthy topic* is a topic which is relevant, timely, significant and interesting. Particularly contextual priorities can lead to the development of a worthy topic. I chose the topic of societal transitions through the eyes of the youth due to its contextual relevance in Bhutan. *Rich Rigor* as using a variety of theoretical constructs, data- sources and samples to be as rich as the studied phenomena was applied. In terms of validity, rigor is concerned with being reasonable and appropriate. The criterion of *sincerity* is characterized by self-reflectivity, consideration of the subjective

³ English is the language of instruction in public schools.

values, biases and inclinations of the researcher, and the transparency of methods and challenges. *Credibility* refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings (ibid.:842). The interpretation of the analysis should be plausible with in-depth illustrations of situated meanings. This includes using multiple lenses and data sources to explain the phenomena. *Resonance* is described as being able to provide an emphatic experience for the reader and asking oneself while writing the thesis if it affects me. The research should be presented with clarity to the audience. In regard to *significant contribution*, the research should contribute conceptually, theoretically, practically, morally, methodologically and heuristically. For a Master's thesis the significance of the contribution is limited by time constraints. *Ethical* is considered in relation to the participants of the study and the contextual and culture specific ethics of the research location. This will be described in more detail below. *Meaningful coherence* means that the research is based on methods, theoretical frameworks and literature which are meaningful for the research problem.

5.6. Ethical considerations

As Mack et al. (2005: 9-11) states, research ethics are about the interactions between researcher and participants, and the well-being of the participants is the first priority. This involves the respect and autonomy of every respondent and the community in general. Kvale's (2007: 4, 8) ethical considerations for conducting individual interviews were followed. All individuals were informed about the purpose and the objectives of the research with an informed consent. The participants agreed that their data would only be used for research purposes in a confidential manner. Before starting the interview it was explained that the interview could be stopped at any time and participation is still voluntary even after the interview has been held. Due to ethical concerns about age, only participants above 18 years old were chosen. During my research I was sensitive to the cultural context and code of conducts.

5.7. Reflectivity & Positionality

As Sulatana (2007: 375-376) suggests, doing fieldwork especially in another country involves being attentive to the local context. Representation is a key challenge, with the specific question arising in the case of the current research of how can a Western white woman conduct research with youth in Thimphu? The interviews and in general the time spent with the youth were not dominated by power relations even though hierarchies and power relations

are traditionally common in Bhutan.⁴ Sultana (2007) argues that 'ethical research is produced through negotiated spaces and practices of reflexivity that is critical about issues of positionality and power relations at multiple scales' (ibid.: 375). I tried to be aware of my position as a researcher from Austria in Thimphu. The subjectivity of a given researcher is relevant particularly in cross-cultural studies (Scheyvens 2003: 106). As a researcher, one has to be aware of what expectations are brought to the research environment. Regarding the current research, before arriving in Bhutan, I read about the context, particularly about GNH. Another area of reflectivity is emotions. The youth brought up stories about divorce and psychological challenges which stimulated emotions from the research participants as well as the researcher which I tried to be sensitive about.

5.8. Discussion of methodological choices

The process of data collection was explorative following the phenomenological methodology. The limitation and benefit of this method is the focus on the individual's unique experiences and the local context, but therefore findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Conceptualization and the theoretical framework were built abductively. From my interpretivist standpoint this is an advantage but I am aware that from the viewpoint of other epistemological traditions this is a disadvantage. Conducting open in-depth interviews was a good choice to explore societal transitions through the eyes of the youth without having too much influence with the researcher's own prefixed concepts. Combining flexibility with structure was the biggest challenge with in-depth interviews for me. Indeed it was challenging to create a structure out of the various experiences and themes told by the youth.

The strength of the empirical data is the richness of different perspectives and complexities on the phenomenon of societal transitions. This is at the same time the limitation, because due to the focus on a holistic perspective the focus on details is reduced. Through this research various perspectives on the phenomenon, but no specific knowledge in one area of societal transitions could be gained. Structural categories of the interviewed youth were taken into consideration but not applied to compare experiences. I used the richness of the backgrounds to gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomena. To apply observation as a second

⁴ Bhutan follows a code of conduct called *driglam namzha*. It emphasises 'strong kinship loyalty, community-oriented behaviour, hospitality to guests, respect for one's parents, elders and superiors and mutual cooperation between rulers and ruled, parents and children, and teachers and students' (Rinzin et al., 2007:60).

method was useful to interpret the interviews. The three months spent in Thimphu were too short to understand on a deep level the local context such as culture, history and the political situation.

6. Results and Analysis

In this section of the paper the empirical findings are presented based on the experiences and themes of the youth under the phenomenon of societal transitions. To create meaning out of the experiences of the youth, the lenses of the theoretical framework based on Giddens, Beck and Bauman were applied. Bhutan's development strategy GNH, secondary literature on the local context and the researcher's observations were combined to give meaning to the youth experiences.

6.1. Rural traditional and urban modern life

Even though, as Kezang said, *for most of the foreigners Thimphu is like a village*, 122,618 people live in the capital Thimphu which amounts to 16% of the total population (National Statistics Bureau, 2014). In Bhutan, traditional life is directly correlated to rural life according to the youth and visits made to rural areas. Not only did the youth in the interviews speak of rural life as traditional life but throughout the course of research in Thimphu people suggested to me to visit the rural areas because this is where one can experience *authentic Bhutanese life*. The youth described rural life in terms of *simplicity*, *peacefulness*, *humbleness*, *less tension and stress*, *backward*, *quiet*, *serene*, *no noise, pollution and traffic*, etc. *Everyone knows everyone and people are hospitable and friendly to each other* and *people eat together and follow the same routine every day*. Lotay described how he had to walk to school three hours two times a day in his village whereas in Thimphu it only took him 15 minutes. Yet, before he came to Thimphu he had no idea about the big differences because when he lived in the village he was happy with whatever he had. They did not have balls but they made balls out of socks. The sentence *Village life is real GNH because people are happy with what they have* was not only present during the interviews but a common phrase during my stay in Thimphu. However, according to Ura et al. (2012c) the results of the 2010 GNH survey suggest that rural people are not in general happier, but happier in different areas compared to the urban population.

In rural areas, community vitality, cultural diversity and good governance contribute more to happiness. In contrast, living standards, education and health contribute more to happiness in urban areas. Urban people experience insufficiency in governance, time use and culture, while in rural areas insufficiency is worst in education and living standards (ibid.:49).

What the youth described conforms to these results. The reason why they had left the rural areas was due to lack of educational and employment possibilities and the reasons why they would like to go back are community vitality and time use. A key term in describing traditional rural Bhutan was community vitality and the focus on the collective. The most common factor for the youth to leave Thimphu and move back to the rural area was their families, and in general the collective life experienced in rural areas. Family and kinship were experienced by me as ingrained in Bhutanese society.⁵ People constantly asked about the well-being of my family even though my family had never entered Bhutan. It was explained that the well-being of the individual is embedded in the well-being of the family and in broader terms the collective. Rinzin et al. (2007: 60) explain that Bhutanese culture includes a code of conduct called *driglam namzha*. It not only promotes the traditional dress but emphasises strong kinship loyalty, community-oriented behaviour, hospitality to guests, respect for one's parents, elders and superiors and mutual cooperation between rulers and ruled, parents and children, and teachers and students (ibid.:60). *Driglam namzha* is included in GNH under cultural diversity and resilience as visible in figure 2.

Community-oriented behaviour was valued by the youth not only in the rural but urban areas. Kezang said, *the happiness I give to others makes me feel alive*. She practices Buddhist rituals such as praying in the morning for all sentient beings. Leki expressed the importance of caring for and helping other beings and also animals; therefore he decided to live a vegan. He is also concerned with the spirits and leaves a little bit of food aside on the plate for the sky god (lha).⁶ Living in harmony with the natural environment is part of GNH (Ura et al. 2012: 8) and still prominent in the urban life of youth. Karma addressed the importance of an individualistic and collectivistic perspective since she moved to the city. She would like to do social work to benefit the community and she acknowledges that *at the end of the day everyone is selfish and everybody wants to be happy in their own ways*. She expressed the importance of caring for the community and caring for oneself. What is present from the youth experiences under societal transitions is the reflection of values, such as presented in

⁵ Nanda & Warms (2010:170) state, *kinship refers to those relationships understood in a society as connected through blood and marriage*.

⁶ Bon is a pre-Buddhist animistic nature religion. The perception of a spirit world existing in nature is present (Carpenter & Carpenter, 2002:32-34).

the philosophy of *driglam namzha*, and the importance of these values not only from a collective but also from an individual perspective, which does not always conform to the traditional code of conduct. This was expressed by the youth also in terms of social constraints as mentioned in the next chapter.

6.2. Traditional & modern constraints

The youth criticized certain traditional frames promoted through their parents, which did not conform to their individual needs. Tshering's parents have tried to arrange his marriage, but he explained that he has his own plans for life and does not want to be restricted by traditions such as arranged marriage. Arranged marriage is a traditional concept only in some parts of Bhutan and not common in Thimphu (Lham, 2003). For Radha, who is of Nepali origin, the freedom not to be obliged to the caste system is important.⁷ The caste system restricts Radha in her individual choices and lifestyle. She belongs to the highest caste, the Brahmin caste.⁸ As Radha explained, in Thimphu she does not oblige to the rules but as soon as she enters the village where her parents live she follows the collective caste rules for the sake of her parents. She experienced the societal transition as the freedom to not oblige to the caste rules while staying in Thimphu. Radha does not identify herself by her caste because, as she stated, *öCaste is my parent's problem not mineö*. Radha explained that caste is a traditional Hindu concept and that many young people in Bhutan do not conform to it anymore. Literature could not be found on the caste system in Bhutan, where the majority follows the Buddhist tradition, and the people of Nepali origin follow the Hindu religion based caste system. According to Radha, the caste system is more alive in the rural areas and not in Thimphu. The traditional caste system restricts her in creating her own narrative and living in the capital gives her the possibility to make her own decisions.

Leki mentioned ethnicity in relation to nationality as a factor of structural constraints in the urban areas. His friend with Nepali roots lost her Bhutanese citizenship during the uprisings in Bhutan. Without a citizenship it is difficult to find employment or attend higher levels of education according to Leki. The question of ethnicity was, according to literature, officially a concern starting in the 1990s when Bhutan created its national identity policies. According to

⁷ As Nanda & Warms (2010: 282) explain, the caste system is based on birth and the movement from one caste to another is not possible, thus it is a closed stratification system. The caste system is not a tradition of the Bhutanese majority but Bhutanese with Nepali origin.

⁸ As Burbank (2002:47) mentions, Hindus believe that all humans come from Brahma, the god and creator. Brahmins come from his head and mouth, and thus they are at the top of the priestly caste. They are forbidden to drink alcohol and eat certain food. They are also the only group allowed to read religious Hindu texts.

Gellner (1983), who reflects on the relationship of modernization, culture and nationalism, the ethnicity question starts in times of modernization. He describes nationalism as a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent (ibid.:1). He views nationalism as a component of moving from an agrarian to an industrialized society with the state in the role of promoting the homogenization of culture to create a community. Bhutan's approach to promote culture of the majority Bhutanese population arose during modernization processes. The promotion of culture is a two-edged sword because the promotion of the majority traditions can exclude the traditions of minority groups in the country.

Kezang told about her experience being a woman in the rural area and in Thimphu. Since she moved to Thimphu and attended university she feels more confident in her role as a woman. As Crins (2004) suggests, in Bhutan there are no sharply defined male or female domains within the society, and in most cases, women own and inherit land and assets (ibid.:581). As researchers (Pain & Pema 2010; Collins, 2012; Crins, 2014) propose, the traditional matrilineal inheritance of land kept women in equal positions in Bhutan. Emery (2013) suggests that gender norms in Bhutan allow for greater degrees of freedom for women in the conduct of their social and sexual lives (ibid.: 135). On the other hand, according to Ura et al. (2012c) and the results of the 2010 GNH survey, women are less happy than men. Forty-nine per cent of men compared to 33.3% of women are considered happy according to the survey (ibid.:50).

What is present in the stories of the youth is their questioning of traditional structures presented by society which do not fit their individual aspirations. As described in the theoretical framework, through modernization processes, individuals receive the freedom and task to create an individual narrative. The individual narrative does not stand isolated of collective social structures but creates the task to question and reflect on what makes sense for one's own life and what does not. To question and reflect on societal constraints was experienced by Lotay as an urban phenomenon. Lotay noticed, *the youth in Thimphu does not only wear different clothes but young people are confident and outspoken*. As Suhonen's (2014) research on youth civic engagement, *obedient citizen or social activist*, suggests, youth in Thimphu are aware of their active role in society and criticise structural constraints and inequalities. Youth have a voice and are the first generation in Bhutan growing up within a democratic system. The youth experiences political participation and fundamental rights as more relevant since they moved to Thimphu. GNH includes political participation and

fundamental rights as good governance dimension. The awareness of traditional inequalities, which the youth presented, challenges traditional hierarchies and code of conducts presented by the government or parents. What can be deduced from the youth experiences is the challenge to combine GNH areas of promoting code of conducts such as *driglam namzha* with areas of political participation and fundamental rights. What can be interpreted is the prominent sociological debate of structure versus agency. As explained in the theoretical framework, structure and agency are not a one directional process but affect each other. Yet the youth did not only criticise inequalities based on tradition but inequalities related to modernization processes.

6.3. Urban modern challenges

Leki presents a voice of critique on the urban system in relation to money and consumerism. He critiqued money as a societal constraint which creates inequalities and egoism between people. *“If there is lots of money people boost the ego, they have lots of ego, I do not like it, money makes all the things and people different, money makes all things evil.”* He mentioned that he did not experience consumer and egoist behaviour in the village where he comes from. People did not use money and produced the products they needed themselves. Comparing with Collins (2012) generational research in Bhutan, the respondents were concerned about the local currency which replaced the traditional barter economy. They expressed concern that nowadays through money some people can afford different things in comparison to others (ibid.:1061). Rhodes (2000:79-91) describes monetisation as necessary with economic modernisation processes. Money can give economic freedom of choice but the lack of money is viewed as an individual failure, whereas in nonmonetised societies poverty is blamed on external forces such as famines, war and droughts. Bhutan has been a latecomer in introducing money, and *“traditional Bhutanese values are based on non-monetary principles”* (ibid.: 90). Still today it is common in rural areas to live free of cash with agricultural produced goods and self-made clothes (ibid.: 90). As described in the theoretical framework, modernization processes influence local structures. Leki described the modernization of the economic system as a factor, which changes societal values from collectivistic to egoistic values. Leki’s experiences reflect Bauman’s (2007a) thesis that modern societies are based on individualism and consumerism promoted by the capitalistic market system. The traditional system based on self-sufficiency relied on the barter economy which promotes collectivistic values in traditional communities. As Polanyi (1944) argues, modern societies are not based on the social order of pre-modern societies. He argues that the capitalistic market economy is

based on competitive and individual values compared to collectivist values in pre-modern societies.

Cheki tells his experience of educational possibilities and economic exclusion. He describes educational possibilities as rare in the rural areas compared to Thimphu. There is the perception in the villages that if people move to the city and obtain a degree they will in turn acquire a good job in Thimphu. For him this was not the case because after finishing his degree he had to wait for two years till he found a job, and it was not the job he wanted. *It was a difficult time for me because living in Thimphu is more expensive compared to the country side. In the village people don't have to pay for rent or food because people grow themselves.* The situation of being unemployed in the city and not self-sufficient was challenging for Cheki. Moreover the people in his village were expecting him to have a good job with his degree. Bauman (2007a) argues that globalization processes create a generation of surplus people which are excluded from the employment sector. As Giddens (1991b) claims, 'modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by standardising effects of commodity capitalism' (ibid.: 196). What I interpret is the condition of new possibilities and choices as a condition of widening the traditional bounds, initiated through opening up to modernization processes. Yet the new possibilities and choices outside the traditional bounds are regulated by structural conditions such as the monetisation system or global market economies. In Thimphu youth are experiencing new freedoms and possibilities (e.g. education, questioning traditional structures) and new exclusions and constraints (e.g. unemployment, new inequalities such as class) at the same time.

What the youth experienced in Thimphu is youth unemployment as a big risk not only from an economic perspective but in regard to safety. Kezang mentioned the fear of going out at night in Thimphu because of youth gangs under the influence of drugs and picking up on fights. In general the youth expressed less trust in urban areas compared to rural areas. The feeling of no longer knowing everybody in urban areas creates less trust. Not only the feelings of less trust are present in the urban areas but loneliness and stress were mentioned. Rai has felt more tension and stress since he is living in Thimphu. He described that he had to work hard in his village but this work felt less stressful compared to life in Thimphu. Jampel experienced city life as more complex in terms of choices and formal systems. He told about his challenges with formalities in the city such as housing contracts which he often does not understand. *In the village we talk personally and don't read five pages contracts.* As Giddens (1991b) describes, abstract systems regulate social life in modernity. Informal and

personalized agreements are common in traditional societies compared to the regulations of social life through formal systems.

Radha described the missing community life in Thimphu which she enjoyed in her home-village. *“I feel lonely in Thimphu I miss my friends and family in the village.”* Fromm (2011: 89-91) describes loneliness and isolation as a condition of leaving traditional communal bounds. What the interviews with the youth highlighted is the importance of community vitality and time use not only in rural but also urban areas. One respondent described in the interview how he had become addicted to drugs after only a short time arriving in Thimphu. He chose the wrong friends and did not find other meaningful activities, but eventually ended up in a program for drug addicted youth which helped him to become clean. He thinks the government should create more activities for young people to prevent them from taking drugs. Modern life in Thimphu is experienced as riskier and creates a condition of less trust. The youth experiences less trust in the cities compared to the rural areas where everybody knows everybody.

Karma and Leki experienced the divorce of their parents while living in the city. As Bauman (2007a) describes, the conditions of liquid modernity consist of complexity and uncertainty also in respect to social ties such as kinship and social bounds. Giddens (1991b) views divorces as a crisis of the self, a loss of ontological security. It challenges one of the main reference points in a person's life presented through the parents. The authors view the phenomena of divorces as a condition arising as a result of modernization processes which provide individuals with new freedoms also in terms of partner choice. This concept does not seem to apply in consideration of the Bhutanese context. As Emery (2013) describes, divorces are traditionally common and not stigmatized in Bhutan. The reason he gives for this is that, *“strong and uninterrupted Buddhist tradition was never formally part of the British Empire, and therefore it was immune to the sociolegal prescriptions of a normative colonial modernity”* (ibid.: 134). For both men and women it was traditionally common to have multiple spouses. Marriage did not have a big importance and was often not accompanied by ceremonies. *“The traditional ease of having multiple spouses, serial marriages, and separations can be linked to the requirements of isolated mountainous rural communities in bygone times, where structures of kinship evolved to suit functional needs”* (ibid.: 135). During the processes of modern transformations, such as institutionalization, marriage became formal and previous traditional practices are legally restricted today (ibid.: 135). Thus, the marriage as a formal institution can be considered as an outcome of modern

institutionalizing processes in Bhutan but not necessary the phenomenon of divorces. However what is relevant from Karma and Leki's experiences are the emotional challenges they had to face losing one of their parents. As Leki expressed, *“I will never marry and get children. I don't want to see my children suffering like me coming in this world.”* Leki and Karma experienced ontological insecurities through the divorce of their parents. As the theoretical framework suggests, the loss of kinship bounds can create anxieties and ontological insecurities. After presenting experiences of modern challenges from the youth the experiences of urban modern possibilities are presented.

6.4. Urban Modern Possibilities

The youth experienced in the cities new forms of exposure and possibilities. Ugyen told about life in the city as a possibility of new forms of exposure not only locally but globally. As Ugyen described, *“I feel more connected to public life and the outside world in Thimphu.”* For Kesang, material benefits, such as Ipads or Macbooks, provide her with access to the world. Ugyen and Kesang experienced global (Internet & TV) and local (volunteering, public life) exposure and connection. Not only communication technologies provide youth with global exposure but travelling and studying abroad. Namgay studied in Thailand and explained in her interview how confident the experience outside Bhutan made her. Bhutan does not offer Master's programmes and 46% of Bhutan's population migrates due to lack of educational facilities (Tobgay, 2009). Tandin mentioned his interactions with tourists in Bhutan. *“I enjoy talking to them, telling them about Bhutan and asking about their countries.”* He explained me that through these interactions he had already learnt a lot about foreign countries. In this respect, Beck's (2002) concept of the cosmopolitan society becomes relevant. Bhutanese youth are active and influenced by lifestyles and ideas outside of national boundaries. In Thimphu, Bhutanese-made rap in English and Dzongka is available as well as traditional Bhutanese music in English. To understand Bhutanese youth experiences, a national perspective or the image of the Bhutanese society as a container is not sufficient. The youth did not necessarily describe themselves as global citizens but the global dimension was included into their experiences in Thimphu. The youth expressed curiosity about different lifestyles and cultures, and their wish to travel around, though they stated that they would surely come back to Bhutan. Youth are proud to be Bhutanese which was also a result of Suhonen's (2014) youth research.

6.5. Reflective Self-Concept

In Karma's story, the experience of creating a self-concept as a reflective endeavour was described. She described how she started to ask herself questions and make statements such as, *õWho to be? What to do?* and *õI want to find my true and authentic selfö. õI am trying to find out who I am by trying as many different things as possible and never stay with the same.ö* She explained that she wants to be free to create her own structures with values and morals she believes in. For Karma, reflectivity of herself is important. She writes a diary about reflections on herself and her life. Right now she is writing a diary on how to die well to include death in her life. In Bhutanese traditional culture it is important to think about death. Bhutanese prepare for death during the famous mask dances so as to not be scared when seeing evil deities during the process of dying in their real life (Weiner, 2015). Karma mixes reflectively traditional and modern aspects to create her own structures to make sense out of the world and herself. She described the benefits and challenges of the creation of her own narrative. She experienced anxieties and feelings of uncertainties and doubt of not knowing which way to go. What can be interpreted in her story is the experience of creating an individual narrative in consideration of traditional concepts such as thinking about death. Yet, she reflects on its usefulness for one's own personal life instead of unreflectively adapting to it. In this sense Karma reevaluates collective traditional practices for her individual narrative. Rai, for example, expressed the ethical concepts of Gandhi as important for him but religion itself as not being important in his life. Lotay explained that every religion is the same but Buddhist practices and rituals present for him community life, like visiting Buddhist religious festivals. As explained in the theoretical framework, rituals can serve as a structure not only in traditional but also modern societies. For the youth certain rituals were meaningful to provide them with ontological security and a structure to establishing a self-concept. One respondent, who experienced drug addiction when he moved to Thimphu, mentioned rituals as a form of stability in times of uncertainty. The drug addiction programme he was part of worked with Buddhist rituals to provide the addicted youth with structure. Yet besides the importance of structures, the youth expressed the freedom to decide which rituals are personally meaningful as a positive urban experience. Nima explained that while she was living in the village she did not think about the practiced rituals but just practiced them. Since she lives in Thimphu she chooses freely if she goes to religious festivals or practices rituals. In the next chapter the experiences from the youth under societal transitions including GNH as a development strategy are discussed and concluded.

7. Discussion & Conclusion

What is evident from the interviews with the youth and observations is the complexity of societal transitions on a structural and individual level. Giddens, Beck and Bauman explain how processes of modernization and globalization affect the individual's perspective and vice versa. One could argue that these processes have not only affected the perspective of the individual but even created an individual perspective. Modernization processes are contrasting because modern life does not replace traditional life; both are present and influence each other. It is not an *either/or* it is an *and* approach. As Bhutan's transition path describes, the government opened up cautiously to the world, to modernization and to globalization. At the same time it created GNH not only as a vision but a development strategy based on a holistic understanding of human needs including material, emotional, cultural and spiritual well-being. Instead of following a development model of progressing only in economic terms and modernization, community vitality and cultural promotion are held as important as household per capita. The youth experienced the phenomenon of societal transitions as a loss of traditional community life and kinship bounds but also as gain of individual freedom and possibilities. The community life in the county side was mentioned as the most common reason for moving back from the urban to the rural areas. Yet traditions which are more prominent in rural areas such as arranged marriages or the caste system were criticized by the youth as constraints. In this regard the youth experienced new freedoms under the condition of societal transition, from accepting to questioning traditional concepts. Youth presented themselves as active agents, who criticise traditional societal structures and modern structures which do not make sense to them.

As the experiences of the youth describe, by leaving the bounds and frameworks of traditional life, the creation of an individual self-concept and narrative becomes more relevant. The personal story is to a certain extent pre-given from the family and the collective but holds the possibilities of individual design within the societal frame. Bhutan's promotion of culture and community vitality through GNH can be interpreted as creating ontological security on one side but as constraints of freedom on the other side. Promoting traditional cultural values to keep craft, arts and languages can create exclusions if minority cultures are not included. From the youth experiences I interpret that youth reflectively creates their own structures out of traditional, modern and global elements but also experiences constraints through traditional concepts promoted by their parents and modern societal structures such as the economic system. Using the concept of the cosmopolitan society, the youth have their own conception

of 'Western' and 'Bhutanese' values through travelling, tourism and communication technologies such as the Internet and Television. The interviewed youth left traditional areas for better educational and employment possibilities, exposure to the global world and benefits of modernization processes such as increased living standards. The youth enjoyed these possibilities but also experienced urban drawbacks such as less trust, increased stress and loneliness in the urban areas. One of the respondents got addicted to drugs not as a reason of unemployment but lack of meaningful activities in the city.

As the youth experiences suggest, GNH presents a bridge of traditional and modern life by promoting factors such as community vitality, cultural diversity and at the same time education and living standards. According to Ura et al. (2012c) the 2010 GNH survey highlight that community vitality, cultural diversity and good governance create happiness in the rural traditional areas, whereas living standards, education and health contribute to happiness in urban modern areas. Can GNH as a development strategy lower the disadvantages of modernization in the cities and bring the benefits of modernization into the rural areas without losing culture and tradition? This would be an interesting subject for further investigation.

The research suggests that modernity and globalization processes are contrasting or even contradictory. Ambivalence is a side product of modern societies and their aim to order and manage life (Bauman, 1993). Processes involving traditional, modern, late modern or global elements are not discrete and distinctive entities. These processes are fluid and present at once. Is it the strength of GNH that coordinates these processes? Is GNH a screening tool that filters unwanted outside influences such as the WTO? Or is GNH the outcome of fear of losing national control and order in a globalised world? Research has already been done on the idea that nation states lose sovereignty due to global forces such as International Organisations (Beck, 2007) as well as on the concept that globalization processes operate in the dominant logic of neoliberalism (Chomsky, 1999; Harvey, 2005). Can Bhutan keep its sovereignty with its own local policy of GNH? Not only are local realities influenced by the global one but Bhutan itself is a multi-ethnic country. The youth enjoy exposure to different lifestyles but also critique modern economic forms. The youth expressed the need for diversity of possible choices outside the traditional bounds; however, they also expressed the challenges of exclusion and dependencies within the new possibilities. There is the possibility to create an individual narrative but if there is a failure it is also an individual one. It would be interesting to investigate further the relationship of agency and structure of youth in Bhutan

and to which extent traditional and modern structures serve as meaningful orientation points? How free is the youth to create individual narratives in the urban areas? How does the youth explicitly experience traditional and modern constraints? How did societal categories and societal stratification change through modernization processes?

After this research I have even more questions than before on how Bhutan's story and the youth narratives will develop in a country which is trying to bring the ancient in the modern time. Bhutan's transitional path of including traditional and modern life based on the vision of happiness has only existed for a few decades, and lots of challenges and opportunities are lying ahead. However as Buddha already said: "There is no path to happiness- Happiness is the path".

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