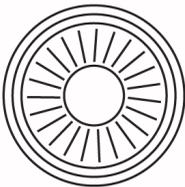


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The ethics platform in tourism research: A Western Australian perspective of Bhutan's GNH Tourism Model

Simon Teoh*

Abstract¹

This paper examines Bhutan's unique development model based on a philosophy called Gross National Happiness (GNH) through tourism. The discussion is framed by Macbeth's (2005) ethics platform in tourism research. The purpose of the paper is to investigate and understand a group of Western Australians' perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination and the likelihood of participants visiting Bhutan after understanding the GNH tourism model at a live display of Bhutanese culture. The aim is to report on three major findings of the case study (N=64) where: (i) 64% of respondents agreed that GNH is the best measure of a nation's development; (ii) 98% of respondents agreed that happiness is important for the 'well-being' of a nation, and (iii) 89% of respondents indicated that they were more likely to visit Bhutan after attending the event. The implication of the study is to emphasize ethical positions that are useful as unique selling points for a tourism destination. The study on the GNH discourse contributes knowledge to tourism authorities and researchers by acknowledging that when Bhutan's GNH model is in congruence with tourists' personal values, it can lead to the likelihood of an increase in tourist visitation to Bhutan. A limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size and gender imbalance. Further research on other factors that might influence decision-making to visit Bhutan is proposed.

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Introduction

There are many arguments regarding the determining factors when choosing a valued tourism destination, amongst them motivational factors to fulfill an authentic experience (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2007), whilst others might consider the price or costs involved (Kozak & Andreu, 2006). Within Asia, popular tourist destinations such as Bali, Phuket or Penang are reasonably priced and affordable (Hitchcock, King, & Parnwell, 2009). Bhutan however, offers a unique authentic experience of its cultural tradition and pristine trekking environments. Bhutan is the only living Mahayana Buddhism Nation and is strategically priced exclusively to the high-end market (Dorji, 2001). Bhutan has chosen this direction because of its 'controlled tourism' model that is guided by a developmental philosophy called Gross National Happiness (GNH). GNH is a concept introduced by its benevolent 4th King Jigme Singye Wangchuck (reign 1972-2006), who proposed a more equitable measure of development that embraces 'happiness' and the 'well-being' of its people, as well as the traditional western model of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP only measures the annual total output of goods and services of a nation.

The 4thKing advocates this alternative development paradigm in that,

Bhutan seeks to establish a happy society, where people are safe, where everyone is guaranteed a decent livelihood, and where people enjoy universal access to good education and health care. It is a society where there is no aggression and war, where inequalities do not exist, and where cultural values get strengthened every day. A happy society is one where people enjoy freedom, where there is no oppression, where art, music, dance and culture flourish (King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, 2000).

Such a philosophy appears idealistic in theory because of the many challenges that Bhutan faces in the face of modernity. Having emerged

from isolation in the 1960's, this former feudal kingdom has developmentally advanced after being unified under the Wangchuck dynasty in 1907 (Aris, 1998). A democracy since 2008, Bhutan faces scrutiny from its immediate neighbours of China to the north and India to the south, and from some western countries concerning its GNH model of development.

Background

The genesis of this paper stems from an idea to understand the GNH model of development through tourism. One method was to understand a group of Western Australians' perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination. In particular, I wanted to discover the likelihood of participants visiting Bhutan as a result of their understanding of the GNH 'controlled tourism model.' The key aim of this paper is to report on the major findings of a Western Australian audience's perspective on Bhutan as a valued tourist destination after attending an information session on Bhutan.

To this end, I organized a public Bhutanese Cultural Event in a university setting. The method was to expose participants to information on the GNH development philosophy and the GNH 'controlled tourism' model. The results of the event provided some interesting findings. The first find is that two thirds of respondents (N=64) agreed that GNH is the best measure of a nation's development. Second, 98% of respondents agreed that happiness is important for the 'well-being' of a nation. Third and the most significant find is that 89% overwhelmingly indicated that they were more likely to visit Bhutan after attending the cultural event. The evidence reflects the audience's perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination.

The rationales behind the event were three folds. First, I found that many people have little or no idea about Bhutan. Second, few people have

heard about GNH and the impacts this developmental philosophy has on tourism policy making. And finally, whilst there are studies on Bhutan's ecotourism (Dorji, 2001; Gurung & Seeland, 2008), and community-based tourism sustainability issues (Gurung & Scholz, 2008); political issues on cultural tourism (Reinfeld, 2003), and power and regional political approaches to tourism policy-making (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010), there appears to be a gap in the study on the effects of GNH on tourism. The study is part of a wider study on Bhutan's GNH 'controlled tourism' model and the impacts of GNH on tourism policy-making.

The scope of this paper is confined to a discourse from a Western Australians' perspectives on the GNH tourism policy and how this affects their notion of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination. The implication of this case study is the benefit through the lesson learnt, for tourism destination managers and policy-makers, in making clear to potential tourists the host country's development values that might be congruent to theirs when they are choosing a travel destination.

The next section begins with a literature review on traditional development measures with a discussion on the assumptions and flaws GDP make in a nation's developmental measure. This is followed by discussions on the merits of Bhutan's GNH philosophy that embraces 'happiness and well-being' as a nation's developmental measure. Next, I introduce Maslow's (1943) concept of the 'hierarchy of needs,' to suggest that 'happiness and well-being' progress in stages. This is next followed by the mechanisms of the Bhutanese 'controlled tourism' model. Following on, I discuss Macbeth's (2005) theoretical 'ethics platform' framework in tourism for understanding tourism's value on a potential destination. I then discuss the methodology, findings and discussion before the conclusion.

Literature review on the traditional development measures

Traditional development measures growth between nations using Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) or sometimes Gross National Product (GNP). Development is defined as, “the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced or stronger” (Hornsby, 2005,p.418). GDP accounts for the nation’s value of all final goods and services produced annually (Stiglitz & Walsh, 2002). It is the gross output of a nation. GNP, like GDP, measures the total output of a nation’s residents, that is, their incomes including returns on overseas investments. Both GDP and GNP measures assume comparisons between nations on the same level of wealth and standard of living (Stiglitz & Greenwald, 2003). Where GDP fails is to compare the real changes in natural environment or the social conditions between nations (Hamilton & Saddler, 1997). This flaw is problematic as GDP can be negligent in providing a true picture of the nation’s ‘well-being’ through the measure of the output of goods and services only in economic terms (Stiglitz, 1993). For example, when a tree is cut down, it is regarded as a resource that has value. This value is recorded as income as the resource is sold to another nation. However, what is not accounted for is the need to replenish this resource, because through depletion ultimately that resource is finite. Therefore, a reduction in the natural environment is not accounted for, only the output of that good and hence the problematic nature of GDP.

One of the originators of GDP as a system of national accounting, a Russian-American who was the 1971 Economics Nobel laureate, Simon Kuznets (1901-1985), warned the US Congress in 1934, claiming that “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income” (Cobb, Halstead and Rowe 1995 cited in Hamilton and Dennis, 2000, p.2). The team of three top economists, including John Keynes and John Hicks, was aware of the flaws and assumptions resulting in the shortcomings of using GDP as prosperity indicators. However, their warnings were disregarded by the US authorities (Hamilton & Dennis, 2000). Ultimately, in 1962 Kuznets questioned the GDP model suggesting a rethink as,

Distinctions must be kept in mind between quantity and quality of growth, between its costs and returns, and between short and long run... Goals for 'more' growth should specify more growth of what and for what? (Cobb, Halstead and Rowe, 1995 cited in Hamilton & Denniss, 2000,p.3).

This paper argues that to solely regard a nation's output of goods and services as growth and hence development appears somewhat negligent, since primarily these economic accounts do not reflect the real quality of life, in particular, the distribution of wealth in terms of human 'well-being.' For example, positive 'well-being' resulting in happiness can be achieved when, according to Maslow (1943), basic human needs are met. These basic human needs include physiological and biological needs, followed by safety needs. Hence, the assumption that economic growth only reflects positive 'well-being' may seem naïve. Furthermore, McDonald (2004) suggests that GDP is a problem as there is, "an increasing appreciation throughout the world that current priorities and in particular, the growth fetish of the Western economy, are misplaced and detrimental to our collective well-being" (p.2).

Hence, the problematic GDP assumption that conditions are equal when quantifying nations in comparative positions, in relation to the wealthiest and the poorest requires some more robust discourse (Sachs, 1989; Stiglitz, Meier, & World Bank., 2001). The inequality of GDP measure does not take into account environmental health, poverty levels, health and educational services, or unpaid labour such as 'in-kind' services like childrearing, or caring for the sick and elderly at home. In short, there is no accountability for natural, social and cultural capital. Nevertheless, GDP is still used as the national and international economic standard for comparison purposes.

Professors Costanza and Kubiszewski, both leading scientists from the Institute for Sustainable Solutions, Portland State University, estimated Bhutan's ecosystem services to be worth Nu 760 billion (USD 15.2 billion)

a year (W. Samten, 2012). The estimate is ten folds Bhutan's 2010 GDP of Nu 72.3 billion (USD 1.483 billion) a year (Global Finance., 2012). Such natural capital is absent from the GDP measurements. Furthermore, in terms of national 'well-being,' Hamilton and Saddler (1997) argue that GDP's negligence include:

- the failure to account for the way in which increases in output are distributed within the community;
- the failure to account for the contribution of household work;
- the incorrect counting of defensive expenditures as positives contributions to GDP, and
- the failure to account for changes in the value of stocks of both built and natural capital (p.1).

From the above shortcomings, development indicators such as people's health, life satisfaction, level of education, living conditions, 'well-being' and happiness would arguably provide a more robust picture of development growth rather than what GDP figures might indicate (Haq, 1995). From these GDP assumptive, negligent and limited reasons, I would argue that Bhutan's GNH as an alternative development model is a necessary discourse. In the context of this study, I asked the audience in the cultural event about their perceptions of whether GDP or GNH is the better measurement of development. The next section provides an insight to the Bhutanese controlled tourism model based on the principles of GNH.

The merits of GNH development philosophy

As mentioned above, the concept of GNH as an alternative development philosophy, was announced by Bhutan's 4thKing, who in 1986 had the wisdom to declare that the end product of development is more important than the means to achieve it (Karma, 2003). The GNH concept is a development philosophy that focuses on four pillars, namely:

1. the conservation of the natural environment,
2. preservation and promotion of cultural values,
3. establishment of good governance and,
4. equitable and sustainable socio-economic development (Karma, 2003).

The first pillar is explicit in the treatment of the natural environment since when damaged, it is an irreplaceable resource. The second pillar significantly positions culture as a value to be preserved and promoted. The third pillar emphasizes the need for good governance for fairness and justice. The fourth pillar examines socio-economic policies that promote an equitable and sustainable future. As such, GNH as a developmental philosophy appears to be more holistic in nature as it incorporates nature, culture, politics and socio-economy.

In the pursuit of happiness, there are nine domains present in GNH that is measured: psychological well-being, time use, community vitality, cultural diversity, ecological resilience, living standards, health, education and good governance. Within these nine domains, there are seventy-two indicators. And from these indicators, there are 124 variables. Such a complex system of measuring happiness is beyond the scope of this paper, however for readers who are interested, please refer to the works of Pankaj (2007), Karma and Zangmo (2008).

In comparison, the GDP model as a measure of development focuses on a nation's overall economic output (Stewart, 2005). Hamilton and Saddler (1997) defines GDP as,

The total monetary value of final goods and services produced in a country in a year. It can also be measured by the total value added at each stage of production or by the payments to the factors of production used to produce goods and services (p.1).

According to the purely economic GDP measurements, the higher the

resource output, the higher the GDP level. GDP, however, does not account for depletion of natural, social and cultural resources. Hence, absent from these calculations is the 'well-being' or happiness of the people. It is important, however, to acknowledge that the achievement of basic human needs is essential (Maslow, 1943) before one can aspire for happiness. Whilst material 'well-being' is essential, research has shown that beyond a certain level, an increase in material consumption is not necessarily accompanied by a concomitant rise in happiness (McDonald, 2004; Veenhoven, 2000). A study by Kahneman and Angus (2010), based on some 45,000 Americans' survey responses, found that people's emotional well-being measured, expressed in recent joy or sadness, stop accelerating after income threshold of about US\$75,000 a year (cited in Porter 2011, p.74). In furthering the cause of GNH to the world, the Bhutanese Prime Minister Jigme Thinley (2004), stressed that,

While conventional development model stress economic growth as the ultimate objective, the concept of GNH is based on the premise that true development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occur side by side to complement and reinforce each other (cited in Acharya, 2004).

We find that the conventional development model or the GDP model, which was fundamentally modelled on Utility Theory (Hicks, 1981), and Keynesian Economic Theory (Beinhocker, 2006; Maddison, 2007), stresses on the value of all final goods and services produced in a nation in a given year (Stiglitz, 1997). In other words, according to the GDP model, the higher the resource output, the more developed is a nation. However, what is not measured are the lost or irreplaceable resources, and the non-payment services such as domestic care for children, the sick or elderly, unpaid housewife works and volunteer works. A recent report by Karen Hayward and Ronald Colman of Genuine Progress Index for Atlantic (GPI Atlantic) placed volunteer work in Bhutan, recorded in the time

section of the latest GNH survey 2010, to be valued at Nu 320 million or USD 6.4 million (Y. Samten, 2012). Therefore we come to understand that the key issue remains that economic outputs in the production of goods and services alone does not account for the 'well-being' of the nation.

Maslow's (1943) concept of the 'hierarchy of needs'

Let us turn briefly to Abraham Maslow's work on motivation theory (Maslow, 1943), through his hierarchy of needs in order to better understand 'happiness' and 'well-being.'

The five levels listed in Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs model include:

1. Biological and physiological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Belongings and love needs
4. Esteem needs
5. Self-actualization

Maslow argued that basic living needs such as food, shelter, warmth, sleep and other biological and physiological needs must first be met, before the next level is deemed to be more important. The second level looks at safety needs such as security, law and order, and personal safety and 'well-being.' Once basic living needs and safety needs are met, there is room for family, affection and relationships to develop, before self-esteem needs, such as responsibility, achievement and reputation is achieved. And finally, self-actualization through personal growth and fulfilment results in 'happiness' to the self.

Maslow's model, therefore, provides some rational understanding that 'happiness' can be achieved as the hierarchy of needs progresses. But how can 'happiness' be achieved when 'happiness' by definition, according to social psychologist Ruuth Veenhoven is, "about the

subjective enjoyment of one's own life?" (Veenhoven, 2000). This definition appears to be incongruent with the goals of GNH, in that happiness is seen as a somewhat selfish pursuit of the enjoyment of one's own life without regard for others. Veenhoven however, later concluded that,

Economic wealth and material satisfaction are useful in terms of creating happiness up to a certain level but after individuals and countries have got most of their basic materials taken care of, other non-material needs become more important as a source of increasing happiness. The quality of intimate social relationships is particularly spoken of in this context (Veenhoven, 2010,p.42).

Based on Veenhoven's sound study to support the idea that increasing 'happiness' is resultant from the 'quality of social relationship,' in this sense, GNH can be seen as a societal effort for the 'common good' rather than based on an individual's subjective enjoyment of the self. According to Thinley (2009) then, "GNH is a policy of equitable and balanced distribution of the benefits of development for all spectrums of society" (p.128 cited in Brahm, 2009). Hence we come to understand that the GNH concept focuses on a 'gross effect' for the 'common good' of society, rather than individual happiness per se.

To challenge this concept however, Torra (2008, p.458) argues that, "here is enormous bias in using GDP as a well-being proxy, but is there any less bias in the alternatives?" since the end product is 'happiness,' and 'happiness' as we know, is the subjective 'well-being' of society. Torras' argument seems to resonate amongst the audience. To understand the subjective nature of happiness, we turn to Thinley (2009) who further purports that,

You cannot quantify the causes of happiness. Living with happiness is the most important element to be measured. To

quantify is to adopt the same economic approaches that we are seeking an alternative to (p.128 cited in Brahm, 2009).

As 'happiness' and 'well-being' is subjective, some would argue that GNH is a less robust form of developmental measure compared to GDP (Kusago, 2007). The compelling argument for GNH as a development philosophy maintains that a more equitable examination of a community's socio-cultural values, rather than just the economic outputs embedded in the traditional GDP model, provides for a more rigorous and robust measure of outcomes (Cowen & Shenton, 1996; Stiglitz, Chang, & World Bank., 2001; Torras, 2008). The subjectivity implicit in objective measures that is contradictory of 'well-being' is well articulated by Torras (2008), who suggests that, "the problem with emphasising material consumption is that progress, development and well-being improvements involve many other dimensions not reducible to income" (p.478). These include contributions of family and community on one hand and the natural environment on the other (Hamilton & Denniss, 2000).

The courage to argue that GDP be considered a fallible instrument to measure a nation's growth and development is indeed challenging, since there is no other national accounting system that offers an alternative. The 4th King theory, in which GNH is a more equitable form of measuring development, therefore invites us to examine above the limitations of GDP that can scarcely account for the national 'well-being' of a nation. In this empirical study, I have asked the audience for their perception of whether 'happiness' is important for the 'well-being' of a nation. The next section discusses Bhutan's GNH Tourism model.

Bhutan's GNH tourism model

Nestled between China in the north and India in the south, Bhutan is a small kingdom roughly the size of Switzerland. A relatively unknown tourist destination for many, including West Australians, the Bhutanese

tourism product is highly priced making it less attractive to the 'mass tourism' market. Instead, Bhutan, whom many believe to be the utopian 'Shangri-la,' is unique because of its 'controlled tourism' model. This model encourages 'high value low volume' tourism, where there is a relatively high minimum spending requirement known as the tariff system, and restrictions on the number of international tourists allowed into the country (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2010). The two key objectives of this model are firstly to contain acculturation and second, to protect the country's fragile natural environment.

How does the Bhutanese 'controlled tourism' model function?

The 'controlled tourism' model is synonymous with the fall of the Iron Curtain and is mainly practiced in line with socialistic ideologies by the former European Eastern Bloc countries and the Former Soviet Union (D. R. Hall, 1990), and currently in North Korea (Kim, Timothy, & Han, 2007). This model is underpinned by socio-cultural protection against the open-market forces aligned to the Keynesian economic theory. Researchers have suggested that the free market enterprise approach to tourism, or better known as the mass tourism model, focuses on large-scale tourist numbers (Aramberri, 2010; Bramwell, 2004; Pons, Crang, & Travlou, 2009; Segreto, Manera, & Pohl, 2009; Sinha, 2005). Studies indicate that this large-scale approach can lead to impacts such as environmental destruction, acculturation, and a false promise of long-term benefits (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Boissevain, 1996; Ghimire, 2001; Ghimire & United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1997).

Bhutan's 4th King had the hindsight and wisdom to note the impacts of mass tourism from the experiences of neighbouring Nepal. Large scale mountaineering tourism has left Nepal in an environmentally destitute state (Rogers, 1997), with rubbish left all over the mountain trails and economic instability due to the seasonal nature of tourism (Bansal,

Gautam, & Institute of Integrated Himalayan Studies (Simla India), 2007). When Bhutan opened its door to tourism in the 80s, it adopted a carefully managed 'controlled tourism model,' one that limited the extent of incoming tourists, mainly because of its limited infrastructure. However, underpinning the wise King's decision on a 'controlled tourism' policy were the four GNH pillars outlined earlier. This policy saw that the environment was protected above all, whilst limiting outside influence and pressure on its socio-cultural integrity (Basu, 1996) .

The essential feature of this model, known as 'high value low volume' is its explicit daily tariff of US\$ 200 (equivalent to around AU\$ 180 Australian dollars) per tourist during the high season, which is increased to US\$ 250 from 2012. For the unfamiliar, this rate appears to be a rather high charge, however upon closer examination, the daily tariff includes the following: accommodation (three-star hotel), all meals, tours, transport and the services of a tour guide throughout the duration of stay, and is a condition attached to obtaining a tourist visa (Rogers, 2002). Another interesting feature is that out of this daily tariff, a tourism 'royalty fee' of US\$ 65 or AU\$ 59, increased to US\$ 70 in 2012, is channeled into a fund for the nation's universal free access to education and health services. A further US\$ 10 or AU\$ 9 is directed towards tourism development fund.

Bhutan's controlled tourism model therefore provides direct transparent benefits as a 'common good' to its citizens. For example, Bhutanese nationals enjoy free educational (up to secondary level) and health services. Hence, this paper argues that this tourism model deliver direct value to its people. More significantly, the tourism benefit is made tangible and transparent in Bhutan through the ethical compass of GNH philosophy that directs equitable distribution of tourism revenue (royalty fee) towards the 'well-being' of its citizens.

In the mass tourism model, the economic impact is measured through Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) system. Because a tourism product is co-

dependent on a host of different economic production components, for example transportation by airline, taxi, bus; tour agency business enterprise through sight-seeing activity; accommodation as in staying in a hotel/motel; food and beverage enterprise through food consumption in a restaurant; and retailing business; it is difficult to show direct tourism economic contribution in the national accounting system. Each of the tourism service components has a classification. The purpose of TSA therefore is, “to provide the means by which the economic aspects of tourism can be drawn out and analyzed separately within the structure of the National Accounts” (Richardson & Fluker, 2004, p.100). Therefore, the economic benefits in national accounting using GDP calculation are difficult to ascertain, if not for TSA.

It is important to mention that in the mass tourism model, a significant amount of revenue (profit) goes back to the parent company, which is often a foreign investor, known as ‘leakage’ (Richardson & Fluker, 2004). In sustainability terms, this raises the question of how effective is the flow of direct benefits to the local community. In some cases, attractive incentives such as tax break is provided by governments, in efforts to entice potential large scale tourism developers (Butler & Aramberri, 2005; Butler & Pearce, 1999; Coopers & Lybrand. & Western Australia Tourism Commission., 1997; Inskip & World Tourism Organization., 1994; Singh & Singh, 1999).

The main issue arising between the two models, that of ‘high value low volume’ and ‘mass tourism’ essentially lies in the real term benefits to the local community. As mentioned earlier, around 30% of Bhutan’s tourism revenue directly contributes to the nation’s education and health revenue portfolio called the ‘royalty fee.’ In 2009, this amount was US\$11.5 million dollars (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2011). Under the TSA system however, it remains unclear as to where the tourism benefits might end up. In this respect, it is important to keep in mind and understand that a

key function of Bhutan's 'controlled tourism' model is to provide some 'common good' to its people. Receiving free education and health services may help achieve Maslow's hierarchy of needs model in meeting basic living and safety needs. To this end, I measured the audience's perception to discover if they valued Bhutan's tourism model and the likelihood that they might visit Bhutan, knowing that around 30% of their tourism spending contributes direct real benefits to the Bhutanese people. In this sense, I would argue that tourism plays a responsible and ethical role, to which we will turn to Macbeth (2005) for further discussions in ethics platform in tourism in the following section.

Macbeth's ethics platform in tourism

The perspectives of tourism development scholarship has evolved since mass tourism originated with the movement of large numbers of visitors by train from English industrial cities to the coastal towns for recreation (Sigaux, 1965). Tourism literature have pointed out that whilst economic benefits resulted from such mass movements, the tourism impacts such as overcrowding, littering, seasonality, exploitation of limited infrastructure, environmental degradation gave rise to critical appreciation of the tourist dollar (C. M. Hall, Jenkins, & Kearsely, 1997; C. M. Hall & Lew, 2009; Mill & Morrison, 1992; Swarbrooke, 1999). On the one hand, mass tourism has created jobs and opportunities; on the other hand, it has left behind a host of impacts mentioned above. Proponents of mass tourism continue to argue on the net benefits provided (Butler, 1989), whereas opponents point out that elusive costs (externality) outweighs such net benefits (Beech & Chadwick, 2006; Buhalis & Costa, 2006; Ihalayanake, 2007).

Macbeth's (2005) seminal piece on the *ethical platform* in tourism, seeks to challenge and invite serious questions of 'morality' in tourism. Taking the cue from Jafari's (1990) four tourism platforms of advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy and knowledge-based approaches towards tourism development, Macbeth advances two further platforms, namely,

value-based and *ethics*. The key concept Macbeth introduces is the discourse of, “ethical positions of stakeholders, in what each values and how each prioritizes those values” (p.967). It cannot be denied that tourism contributes significantly to developing countries, especially elevating poverty (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000; C. M. Hall, 2007). However this paper calls for caution in tourism development that may cause tourism ills such as acculturation, economic leakage, seasonality, externalities and environmental decline previously mentioned.

Jafari’s (1990) four platforms set out the foundation of tourism development after World War II. The ‘advocacy’ platform focused on the economic prospects and benefits of tourism that overshadowed all else. The ‘cautionary’ platform arose as a result of alarming discrepancies in the promise and spread of economic benefits and environmental degradation resulting from tourism. The ‘adaptancy’ platform calls for efforts to alleviate some of the tourism impacts resulting from earlier platforms. This resulted in tourism forms which are responsive to the host communities, for example rural tourism, ecotourism and a more holistic approach termed sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism as a concept was derived in the late eighties, as a spin-off from the infamous *Brundtland Report* (Brundtland & World Commission on Environment and Development., 1987), where the notion of sustainable development was first conceived as, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the activity of the future generations to meet their own needs” (p.34).

Maturing into the ‘knowledge-based’ platform, rather like a ‘helicopter-view’ with a systems approach facilitates a more comprehensive tourism development based on scientific objectivity. These four platforms of scholarship appeared to satisfy tourism academia until Macbeth (2005) brought enlightenment by arguing that, “tourism scholarship by becoming overly “scientific” in its epistemology, would be limited and

restrictive in its understanding of the world" (p.965). Macbeth may have taken the cue from Tribe's (1997) suggestion that scientific routes may have resulted in technical straitjacket of quantitative data. Nevertheless, the currency of Macbeth's argument for a subjective approach, evident in a 'value-based' and 'ethics' platform does deserve our attention.

Such a subjective platform approach has shaken previous stable foundations, if not created a seismic tremor within tourism academe, for Macbeth bravely defended the need to not ignore *ethical positions* of tourism stakeholders. In other words, whilst objective quantitative data does indicate system findings, 'values and ethics' do not only enrich but further add a whole new dimension in tourism development scholarship. This is important, I would argue, in understanding the political economy of tourism stakeholders.

Ethical positions in practice then, to reiterate Macbeth (2005) is, "what each values and how each prioritizes those values" (p.967). In the context of potential visitors, I would argue that, when the distribution of tourism revenue is made transparent and aligns ethically with visitors' values, the value of that destination is secured. In short, when tourists' direct contribution to tourism is made known to the tourist, as in the case of Bhutan, where a *royalty fee* of 30% of the tourism revenue driven by the GNH policy, is channeled into the nation's *common good* coffers (health, education and tourism development), tourists may tend to value such a model.

Such knowledge could lead to the likelihood that increases a tourist's desire to visit Bhutan. For some tourists, this may be due to an altruistic endeavour, nevertheless, ethically it aligns to one's own value system, and hence is subjective in nature. As the purpose of the study is to investigate the West Australians' public perception of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination, such knowledge may help establish the likelihood of participants visiting Bhutan, as a result of their understanding of the 'controlled tourism' model. A survey questionnaire is used which will be

further discussed in the following section.

The study is informed by Macbeth's ethical paradigm for tourism research, and may be of interest to tourism managers and researchers. The idea of ethics also applies to tourists. By extension, I am applying Macbeth's paradigm in a practical way through understanding a group of Western Australians' perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination. Ethical standpoints of tourists should not be dismissed. Rather, ethical standpoints of tourists when aligned with those of the host country may attract visits to that country. In this context, by illustrating the concept of the GNH philosophy, the possibility of potential visitors' personal value being in congruence with the GNH philosophy, may plausibly give rise to the likelihood of many more visitors regarding Bhutan as a valued tourist destination and wanting to visit Bhutan.

Methodology

The Bhutanese cultural event

The Bhutanese cultural event occurred in August 2010. I gave an introduction on the kingdom of Bhutan and highlighted the concept of GNH, in addition to using GDP as a developmental indicator. I explained to the audience about the four pillars of GNH which are: (1) conservation of the natural environment, (2) preservation and promotion of cultural values, (3) establishment of good governance, and (4) equitable and sustainable socio-economic development (Karma, 2003). As the aim was to discover whether GNH is the best measure of a nation's development, I explained that GNH is structurally divided into nine domains including the: standard of living, health of the population, education, ecosystem vitality and diversity, cultural vitality and diversity, time use and balance, good governance, community value and emotional 'well-being.' These nine domains are further broken down into seventy-two indicators. I did

not discuss what they were, as the focus was not to carry out the indicator measurements but rather to understand the concept of GNH and how it applies to tourism in Bhutan.

Next, I provided the audience with general information about Bhutan (location, demography, economy, government, etc.). I then discussed about the concept of GNH, what the principles entail and how 'happiness' is measured in Bhutan through surveys and interviews and showed the audience a fifteen minutes DVD about Bhutan's main tourist attractions. Then, two experienced Australian tour guides provided more information about their experiences on Bhutan. Following on, ten Bhutanese scholars sang and performed two cultural dances. I then showed the audience a Bhutanese movie about Bhutanese values in the face of modernity, subtitled in English. During the movie intermission, the audience were invited to taste Bhutanese food and drinks. At the end of the movie, the purposive audience of 120 were asked to answer a survey questionnaire. Three key questions asked were whether the audience: (1) believed that GNH is the best measure of a nation's development; (2) believed that 'happiness' is important for the 'well-being' of a nation, and (3) were more likely to visit Bhutan after attending the cultural event.

Apart from these three key questions, participants were asked if this event has affected their desire to visit Bhutan and if they will tell their friends about Bhutan. Additionally, three open-ended questions invited participants' qualitative perspectives with three words that best described Bhutan; aspects of GNH that participants liked or disliked and any further comments. This allowed participants to voice their opinions freely rather than being restricted with the close ended questions (De Vaus, 2002). A return of 64 questionnaires produced a 53% response rate.

Sample description

The purposive population sample (N=64) consists of academics, students

and the wider public. The population sample gender is made up of two thirds females (67%) and a third males (33%). The most significant age group of the sample is between 50-59 years old, representing a third of total respondents (37%). A great majority (88%) of respondents have never visited Bhutan.

Data analysis

The data analysis tool SPSS 18 program was used to analyse quantitative nominal data using the Likert scale (1-5), to determine the relative intensity of responses, where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree (Babbie, 2005, p.485). The quantitative data collected is presented using descriptive statistics, which summarizes the characteristics of the sample population such as percentage (%) or the relationship between the subgroup (n) to the total group (N); the mean (\bar{x}) which is an average value; standard deviation (σ) which is a measure of the dispersion around the mean, and mode (m) which is the most frequent appearing value (Sarantakos, 2005, pp 429-433). The qualitative data is presented using content analysis, which is the "study of human recorded communications" (Babbie, 2005, p.328), where coding of words is used to transform data into themes conceptualizing the findings.

Findings and discussions

The most common three theme words that best describes Bhutan were 'peaceful' (15%), 'beautiful' (14%) and 'nature' (13%) from a total of 168 descriptive collected. 'Happiness' was fourth position with 9%. Further findings revealed that a significant majority 88% of survey respondents (N=64) have not visited Bhutan. This may indicate that Bhutan is less popular or more expensive than other mass tourism destinations such as Bali, Singapore or Thailand. Of these, almost three-quarters (72%, N=59) of respondents indicated that they would like to visit Bhutan in the future.

The findings revealed that two-thirds of respondents 64%, (N=64, $x=3.89$, $\sigma = .81$, $m = 4$) agreed that GNH is the best measure of a nation's development, whereas only a third of respondents preferred GDP 36%, (N=63, $x= 2.95$, $\sigma =1.08$, $m = 2$). The significant difference suggests that a majority of the respondents think that GNH should be a key component for measuring development. By understanding the GDP flaws by Simon Kuznets, GDP negligence (Hamilton and Saddler, 1997) and assumptions of GDP (cited in Hamilton & Denniss, 2000) the findings showed that respondents were able to appreciate the compelling argument for a more equitable form of development measured through GNH. This could be attributed to what Torras (2008) terms as the 'non income' dimensions embedded in the GNH philosophy.

Overwhelmingly, 98% of respondents, (N=64, $x= 4.65$, $\sigma =.48$, $m =5$) agreed that happiness is important for the 'well-being' of a nation, whilst a great majority 81% (N=62, $x= 3.98$, $\sigma =.77$, $m =4$) think that economic development is important. That 81% of respondents saw economic development as being important aligns with Maslow's (1943) notion of the hierarchy of needs, which essentially says that the first two levels of basic human needs of biological, physiological, and safety must be met first. Once these basic needs are met, higher needs such as belonging, love, esteem, self-actualization and personal growth can begin. On the other hand, a significant 98% of respondents saw happiness as important for the 'well-being' of a nation. This clearly shows that essentially higher needs including happiness are very extremely important in the 'make-up' of a nation.

More significantly, 89% of respondents, (N=62, $x= 4.37$, $\sigma =.65$, $m =5$), agreed that they were more likely to visit Bhutan after attending this cultural event. This result may reflect on the understanding of the benefits of 'controlled tourism,' such as the tourism 'royalty fee,' which is channelled into education, health and tourism development funds. As this paper argues that Bhutan's tourism model adds direct value to its people through Macbeth's (2005) framework of *ethical positions* of tourism

stakeholders, it may appear that the audience identified with the value in the GNH tourism model that benefits the 'common good' of the people. Whilst other tourism model may add value to the local economy through its Tourism Satellite Account, there is little evidence to show that indeed the local population benefits from tourism, since as discussed earlier, 'leakages' do occur. Therefore, through the mechanism of the GNH policy, there is evidence of ethical distribution of tourism revenue towards the 'well-being' of the Bhutanese. In this sense, I would argue that it would be in the interest of tourism authorities to highlight such transparency in their marketing efforts, since there can be alignment between tourists' *ethical positions* and the benefits tourism provides.

And finally, after learning about GNH as a development philosophy, a significant majority of respondents 84%, (N=62), agreed that they would tell their friends about GNH. This reflects a good indication of the awareness of GNH as a valuable alternative model of development. Furthermore, only 9% of respondents indicated that the event has not affected their desire to visit Bhutan compared with 91% of respondents who have been affected.

Some aspects of GNH that respondents (R) like about GNH include:

- Clear government focus on community (R4),
- It's probably the only sustainable way for human beings to live (R18),
- Respect for the people and recognition of the importance of their happiness (R40).

On the other hand, respondents also pointed out that they dislike GNH as:

- It is harder to measure as happiness mean different things to different people (R9),

- It is not easy for other governments to implement (R11),
- It is a subjective form of measurement (R17).

Despite the varying comments on GNH, there appears to be some recognition of the importance of happiness, subjective form of measurement and the role good governance plays in facilitating GNH for the 'common good' in the community through tourism. This may imply that GNH is a relatively new and obscure concept; however, one that beyond doubt requires more discourse. Two further comments that are of significant relevance were that,

I really like the concept of controlled tourism. Many countries in Asia have been ruined by uncontrolled tourism. It is good to see that Bhutan is protecting its culture in such a manner (R12), [and] Bhutan is one step ahead from developed countries (R4).

These positive comments further suggest respondents' belief that GNH is a more equitable developmental concept than GDP. Additionally, one respondent declared that GNH is, "Wonderful! If only the Australian government shared these values" (R29). Some of these responses do suggest that there are lessons to be learnt from respondents whose personal values is in alignment with the principals of GNH, and the ethical values embedded in this development model.

Conclusion

Many people have not heard of Bhutan, let alone the idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Bhutan's unique development model includes GNH, apart from the traditional western development measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This has given rise to some skepticism. This study is part of a wider study on Bhutan's 'controlled tourism' model and the impacts of GNH on tourism policy-making. The purpose of the paper is to understand a group of Western Australians' perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination and the likelihood of

participants visiting Bhutan after understanding the GNH tourism model. The key aim here was to report on three major findings of the case study where: (i) 64% of respondents agreed that GNH is the best measure of a nation's development; (ii) 98% of respondents agreed that happiness is important for the 'well-being' of a nation, and (iii) 89% of respondents indicated that they were more likely to visit Bhutan after attending the cultural event.

The evidence significantly indicated the audience's cognizance of Bhutan's 'controlled tourism' model, with 'royalty fee' that provides health and education for its people, where 89% of respondent were more likely to visit Bhutan after knowing what they now know. Hence, the notion that Bhutan is an expensive destination is plausibly identified as a misjudgment. The evidence strongly reflects the audience's perspective of Bhutan as a valued tourist destination. The implication of the study for tourism authorities and researchers is to emphasize their ethical positions, and use that as their unique selling point in their marketing campaigns.

A limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size and gender imbalance. Another limitation was that it was unclear if money or value was the determining factor to visit, or not visit, Bhutan. A recommendation for future research could focus on other factors that influence visitors' decisions to visit Bhutan.

The case study has contributed to knowledge, especially for policy-making and strategic tourism destination management through the discourse in highlighting and advancing Bhutan's 'controlled tourism' model through the philosophy of GNH to potential visitors. This may result in a stronger likelihood of more visitors visiting Bhutan possibly due to their personal value being in congruence with the GNH philosophy.

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