

ABSTRACT

Political Economy of Happiness: Greatest happiness for the greatest number

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Nations, institutions and researchers around the world are increasingly demanding their governments set out a systemic change to humanize the present order of the world. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index is a deliberate attempt to embed Bhutanese values into national governance structures. GNH provides clarity of what it means to be a politician, a public servant as citizens and government machineries and as individual human being, and that clarity is primarily the need to pursue everything in moderation, and the need to provide policy, focus and sharpness. Bhutan measures happiness through nationwide GNH surveys every five years. The latest GNH survey report shows that the perception of government performance is among the lowest of the 33 indicators, and was the most prominent decrease in the sufficiency level on people's perception of the government performance across the 33 indicators. For Bhutan to achieve GNH, this indicator must be investigated in depth, therefore, this thesis centres on a significantly understudied context of government performance as it explores the nature of GNH qualitatively. This work is of national importance to Bhutan, representing a high-level and intellectually rigorous engagement with national policy for social good. The qualitative exploration in this study offers a unique examination into the interpretations and complexities of perceptions of the political economy of GNH, underpinning an intricate and textured picture of the lives of Bhutanese. The greatest strength of this thesis is that I have been able to conduct in-depth interviews with policy experts: such as the Presidents of political parties, Members of Parliament, Chief Policy Officers of government, and leadership of government, corporate and private institutions. In addition, this study has wider educational, economic, and social policy implications for countries seeking to structure national identities which go beyond employability, clearly aligning with AUT's vision for its graduates.

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