

**Creative Economy, Creative University  
and Creative Development. Ideas, Knowledges and Paths  
towards Sustainability, Happiness and Wellbeing.  
3rd Creative University Conference**

Thimphu, 14–16 April 2014

Creativity was the central theme of an international conference organized by the Institute for Gross National Happiness Studies (GNHaS) of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB, Thimphu), together with the International Creative University Network (ICUN), the Centre for Global Studies in Education (CGSE, University of Waikato, New Zealand), and Future Education Groups and Organization Studies (FUEGOS, University of Marburg, Germany). It was supported by the Commission of Organizational Education of the German Educational Research Association (GERA-OE).

The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) had invited academics from around the world for an exchange of concepts and ideas with the growing group of Bhutanese scholars. Originally founded by a Jesuit priest as a secondary school in Tashigang, a small town in Eastern Bhutan, in 1964, it subsequently became Sherubtse College in nearby Kanglung, one of the dozen or so colleges of what is now RUB. Established by royal charter in 2003, RUB has 8,500 students taught at campuses spread all over the country. The number is expected to rise to 13,500 within the next few years. The venue of the conference was the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, the core institute of the University of Medical Science of Bhutan, founded in 2012.

In their Concept Note the organizers expressed their fear that the university is turning into “an economically shaped institution to advance and promote the production of market knowledge”. An alternative development agenda addressed the interconnectedness of the creation of academic economic and social knowledge and higher education. Therefore, “[c]ombined with traditional academic approaches, the conference [was to] enable the participants to engage in a transformative learning process through dialogue, introspection and self reflection”.

The general theme of the conference covered a wide range of topics in four fora and corresponding workshops: 1) Creativity and the Educational Mode of Development – Creating Developmental Spaces and Supporting Modes of Change; 2) Creative University: Strategies of Creation and Creative Development of the Future – Developing and Discovering Mindfulness Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Development; 3) Methodology and Methods of (Action) Research – Using Action (Research) for the

Transformation of Society; 4) Creativity, Open Science & Travelling Ideas – Ideas and Practices of Partnerships, Co-operations and the Development of Academic Programs. Participants were requested to stay in their respective groups; panel hopping was not encouraged. Given the aim to include Bhutanese scholars, mostly young and still working on their MA and PhD theses, this was a perfect approach.

They could be seen interacting more and more actively and competently as the conference progressed. The fact that English is the medium of instruction in the country facilitated this; moreover, advanced studies abroad are preferably pursued in English-speaking countries.

Participants were welcomed by the Vice Chancellor, Dasho (Dr) Pema Thinley, shown the Men-jong Pharmaceutical Unit (part of the Institute of Traditional Medicine), the Institute's museum and Men-lha Lhakhang (altar room). Plenary sessions included meditation. Finally, all were invited to join a traditional dance, before the farewell party turned disco style.

Altogether there were 57 foreign participants from 14 countries, mainly from the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Germany. This impressive attendance was due to the fact that it was already the third international conference of its kind, the previous two having been held in New Zealand and Germany. The concept of creativity was developed mainly in Australia before becoming an international topic.

Participants had to cover their own expenses plus a conference fee. Instead of paying the obligatory 250 US dollars per day, only a nominal visa fee was charged. The rapporteur made use of the opportunity and, with a colleague, went across the country (with a special permit) to visit three more colleges, especially in Kanglung, where the university started, and where one of the rapporteur's students could be placed, to our knowledge the first German student formally admitted to RUB.

Compared to the rapporteur's first visit to Bhutan 14 years ago, tremendous change had taken place. Then TV and internet had just been introduced; now it can be found everywhere. The number of foreign tourists has risen 20-fold (excluding Indians visiting Bhutan). Parts of the country that were off-limits can now be visited.

The country still pursues gross national happiness, but also sees the concept's limitations: the academic sector is developing so fast that the country no longer can guarantee employment and has started sending graduates abroad as migrant workers. Conferences like this one, so far the most ambitious in the country, not only are a good means to acquaint young Bhutanese scholars with current international ideas and trends, but could also establish Bhutan as a venue for international academic exchange. It is still a dream destination for many and can be reached without much dif-

faculty, although there are no cheap flights and travelling overland is time-consuming. Bhutan enjoys excellent international relations, but has to take account of Indian sensibilities. Opening up without being swallowed by any of the neighbouring Asian giants is not easy for a small country with a population of a few hundred thousand people. It certainly needs creativity.

There are plans to publish the proceedings under the editorship of Professor Susanne Maria Weber, one of the organizers of the conference, and her team at Marburg University. The next conference will be held either in New Zealand or Australia. More information on the conference, RUB and ICUN can be found on the internet under [www.rub.edu.bt](http://www.rub.edu.bt).

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