

# Protected areas and ecotourism: Charting a path toward social-ecological wellbeing

by

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## **EXAMINING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

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This thesis consists of material all of which I authored or co-authored: see Statement of Contributions included in the thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

In the Department of Geography and Environmental Management, doctoral dissertations may be presented in either a standard (traditional) format or a manuscript option. The latter format is centred on three or four publishable journal-type chapters on related issues, accompanied by introductory, methodology and concluding chapters that integrate the research purposes and findings to form a conceptual whole. This thesis adopts the manuscript option and fulfils its requirements, which can be found online at:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/waterloo-laurier-graduate-program-in-geography/general-information-current-students/manuscript-options>

I am the sole author of Chapter 1, 2, 4 and 6 of this dissertation. Chapters 3 and 5 were co-authored with Sanjay Nepal, and I was the lead author of these manuscripts. Chapter 4 was published in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (Karst, 2016). Chapters 3 and 5 will be submitted for publication in the near future. This thesis also cites a co-authored book chapter (Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016).

## Abstract

Protected areas (PAs) are changing rapidly in size and scope with the influx of development activities intended to benefit people living within and near their borders. In developing countries, integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), which include ecotourism, are expanding into environmentally fragile areas where remote local and indigenous people live. However, decades of research cite the inability of ICDPs to reach their full potential, suggesting that they do not adequately balance human livelihoods with natural resource conservation. Protected area stakeholder relationships in countries undergoing modernisation and democratisation, and local, indigenous perceptions of project development in relation to social and ecological wellbeing are two largely under-explored areas of research in conservation and ecotourism. Developing a better understanding of approaches to PA conservation and development is critical given the increasing evidence of global ecosystem degradation due to anthropogenic activities and, unless changes are made to policies, institutions and practices, the continued, uneven and detrimental impacts on poor people.

The purpose of this doctoral research is to explore the impacts of ecotourism on the wellbeing of human societies and nature in remote PAs, and the connections between community-level ecotourism and other development initiatives to broader PA policies and practices. The study pursues three research objectives: (1) to critically examine stakeholder relations in PA conservation; (2) to identify and assess indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development; and (3) to refine and apply an integrative framework of wellbeing to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in developing areas.

This research was conducted through a case study of three local, indigenous PA communities in the Merak-Sakteng region of Bhutan. Data were collected through unstructured interviews (n=20); community (n=68) and non-community (n=50) semi-structured interviews; focus groups (n=6); literature review and document analysis; participant observations; and debriefing sessions (n=4). An empirical analysis of stakeholder relations first examined the progress and outcomes of two recent development projects, revealing that indigenous communities face specific socio-cultural challenges that could benefit from operational adjustments and new approaches. The *buen vivir* (living well) perspective was then used to analyse indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing and the influence of socio-cultural factors, which illustrated the significant links between nature and indigenous cosmologies, socio-cultural values and spiritual beliefs that can impact ecotourism development and local PA governance. Lastly, a social-ecological wellbeing framework was developed to assess subjective, socio-relational, material and ecological dimensions of wellbeing in communities. The framework emphasised the importance of social-

relational aspects of wellbeing and their connection to declining ecological conditions, the capacity of power relations between stakeholders to bring about wellbeing, and the constant trade-offs between wellbeing dimensions regarding justice and authority at the local level.

This thesis refines an integrative framework of wellbeing to assess social-ecological sustainability by uniting theoretical perspectives from development studies (social wellbeing, *buen vivir*) and social-ecological systems, and empirically demonstrates the insights to be gained from adopting a multi-dimensional approach to wellbeing in ecotourism development projects. It offers a theoretical and methodological application of the *buen vivir* perspective to understand and analyse wellbeing in tourism scholarship through a biocentric, communal and culturally sensitive worldview. The dissertation makes an empirical contribution to research in terrestrial ecosystems in the context of Bhutan and provides much needed perspectives on wellbeing from a mountain environment. Moreover, the research findings contribute to broader debates around parks and conservation, indicating the need for more progressive social conservation science and practice, and support for participatory and collaborative governance approaches between local and indigenous communities and external PA stakeholders. These contributions, while situated in the context of Bhutan, are relevant for other development projects and terrestrial PAs around the world.

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*Namé samé kadrinché la.* Thank you beyond the sky and the earth.

## **Dedication**

To my mother and father, for loving me into being.

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## List of Abbreviations

CA	capabilities approach
CGI	corrugated galvanised iron
CSO	civil society organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
DOFPS	Department of Forest and Park Services
DSA	daily subsistence allowance
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GNHC	Gross National Happiness Commission
ICDP	integrated conservation and development project
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JDNP	Jigme Dorji National Park
MEA	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment
MOAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NCD	Nature Conservation Division
NEC	National Environmental Commission
NRED	Nature Recreation and Education Division
PA	protected area
RGOB	Royal Government of Bhutan
SES	social-ecological system
SEWB	social-ecological wellbeing
SLA	sustainable livelihoods approach
SWS	Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary
TCB	Tourism Council of Bhutan
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WWF Bhutan	World Wildlife Fund Bhutan

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Research Context and Problem Rationale

Protected areas (PAs) and ecotourism are common but contested strategies to achieve conservation and livelihood development goals worldwide. In developing countries, governments and donors increasingly favour integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) such as ecotourism to simultaneously protect biodiversity and promote social development, despite decades of research that questions their success (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Blaikie, 2006; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Hughes & Flintan, 2001). The expansion of ICDPs to remote and protected areas is important given current evidence in the biophysical and social sciences that human activities and reliance on natural resources are drastically degrading ecosystems globally. Current processes are having an uneven, detrimental impact on poor people, and ecosystem degradation will worsen the impact on marginalised people unless significant changes are made in policies, institutions and practices (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [MEA], 2005; Rands et al., 2010; Raudsepp-Hearne et al., 2010). As a result, local and indigenous communities that rely on natural resources and reside in remote places and PAs are at great risk of being negatively affected by changes to natural systems.

Popular definitions of ecotourism, most notably from The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), have been critiqued for compartmentalising humans and nature and serving as Western constructs that promote the interests of the Global North (Cater, 2006; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). In response, scholars have called for more non-Western and distant voices in ecotourism research (Cater, 2006; Prakash, 1994; Wearing & McDonald, 2002). Challenging the discourse of what ecotourism entails to intended beneficiaries is important because ecotourism is often introduced, supported or dominated by external actors or agencies (Blackstock, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2014). In addition, local belief systems and social values can have strategic implications for conservation-related policy and programmes. Specifically, indigenous knowledge and beliefs in sacred places may encourage the preservation of ecological integrity and promote sustainable development (Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, & Mansourian, 2009; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Verschuuren, Wild, McNeeley, & Oviedo, 2010).

Ecotourism grew out of the global environmental movement of the 1970s and quickly became an important sub-sector in the international tourism industry (TIES, 2016). However, issues of sustainability and conservation have been overshadowed by a strong human development agenda in recent years. The

literature and practice of (eco)tourism have become largely anthropocentric and focused on livelihoods and poverty reduction aspects of human wellbeing (cf., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Lacey & Ilcan, 2015; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). Research on social *and* ecological features of ecosystem dynamics and complex systems-based theory is often overlooked in the literature; it is more commonly addressed in interdisciplinary science journals in relation to ecosystem services and direct payments for conservation (Ferraro, 2001; Wunder, 2007) or biodiversity conservation and ecosystem functions (Gössling, 1999; Kiss, 2004; Tallis et al., 2008).

A concept of wellbeing that is informed by multiple yet complementary perspectives, principally those of social wellbeing, *buen vivir* and social-ecological systems, would present a novel approach to understanding the impacts of ecotourism development on local and indigenous people living in PAs. Overall, wellbeing considers non-economic, non-materialistic forms of growth (e.g., culture, beliefs, ecosystems) when measuring development and progress (Coulthard, Johnson, & McGregor, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Social wellbeing offers a positive focus to poverty and development by focusing on psychological states and subjective perceptions of individuals in addition to material resources and social relations (White & Ellison, 2007). *Buen vivir* or ‘living well’ generally reflects the philosophies of various indigenous groups in Latin America that recognise ecological and social coexistence, particularly from the rights of nature<sup>1</sup> and the standpoint of the collective (Gudynas, 2011; Deneulin, 2012; Rühls & Jones, 2016). The social-ecological systems (SEs) perspective views social and ecological spheres as interdependent and coupled through ecological knowledge, ecosystem services and governance arrangements (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Glaser, 2006). A wellbeing approach that incorporates some of these principles, particularly a strong ecological component, could offer valuable insights in terrestrial contexts in the way that social wellbeing has for marine ecosystems and fisheries (cf., Britton & Coulthard, 2013; Coulthard et al., 2011; Weeratunge et al., 2014).

This research was motivated by interest in and concern over the reported influx of tourism to the largely agrarian, once-isolated country of Bhutan. Often depicted as a land ‘frozen in time’, Bhutan is a small Himalayan kingdom where intact ecosystems and traditional ways of life are changing rapidly. Nestled between the potential superpowers of China (Tibet) and India, Bhutan remained voluntarily closed off from the world until the late 1960s. Steps toward modernisation slowly began in the 1950s and by 2008 the country formally transitioned from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy (Turner, Chuki, & Tshering, 2011). Modernisation efforts continue to cultivate change in social and political realms.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Rights of nature’ refers to recognising and honouring that nature and the complex ecosystems that support our planet have rights. From a legal standpoint, nature is not regarded as merely human property but warrants protection (Rühls & Jones, 2016), since ecosystems are entitled to the right to be healthy and thrive.

In recent years, Bhutan has been recognised as a global leader in conservation practices (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2005). Article 5 of the Bhutanese constitution is dedicated to the environment, mandating that a minimum of 60% of all land must remain under forest cover in perpetuity (Wangchuck, 2007). At present, over 51% of Bhutanese land falls within a growing network of PAs and biological corridors (RGOB, 2014). Reducing rural poverty is equally high on the political agenda, with a focus on diversifying the largely subsistence agriculture economy and maximising foreign exchange earnings through the expansion of hydropower projects and tourism (Brunet, Bauer, De Lacey, & Tshering, 2001; Dorji, 2001; Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Zurick, 2007). To fulfil this mandate, the Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS) is in the process of introducing ecotourism to benefit local people living within and around park boundaries.

Tourism development is deemed to have great potential to contribute toward achieving Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan (NRED, 2012). The GNH philosophy, which shapes the national development strategy, is grounded in the Buddhist worldview that humans and nature are interdependent and inseparable (Brooks, 2011; Schroeder, 2015; Theerapappisit, 2003; Ura, 2001). Therefore, sustainable socio-economic development and environmental conservation, two pillars of the GNH paradigm, are equally compatible objectives for attaining wellbeing. While Bhutan upholds its constitutional commitment to maintain forest coverage, development activities accelerate with new farm roads and trekking trails cutting through old-growth forests to remote highlands where local and indigenous communities depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.

The significance of Bhutan's natural resources proliferates beyond the borders of this small country. The nation is situated in one of the 10 most biodiverse regions in the world (Mittermeier et al., 2004; Dinerstein et al., 2001; Dinertein, 2013; Jadin, Meyfroid, & Lambin, 2016), which provides water for one-fifth of the global population (Wahid et al., 2014). Its vast forests are an unparalleled carbon sink for mitigating climate change (Jadin, Meyfroidt & Lambin, 2016; RGOB, 2014), a fact that has been acknowledged during the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in December 2015 (Nelsen, 2015). Likewise, it has been coined 'the last Shangri-la', whose biological and cultural diversity are highly susceptible to human-induced impacts (Penjore & Raptan, 2004; Rands et al., 2010; Wangchuk, 2007), while its protected areas are home to nearly 50,000 indigenous and non-indigenous people (Tshering, 2010).

Bhutan represents the case of a unique nation in transition on several levels. As one of the youngest democracies in the world, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) has endeavoured to develop policies that embrace greater civic participation and emphasise social and natural wellbeing. Globalisation has paved the way for advances in technology and trade and increased exposure to Western lifestyles, thus

loosening the grasp of sub-policies that reinforce cultural values and elements, such as traditional style of dress (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Rinzin et al., 2009). The radical shift in political regimes and increasing exposure to global forces has permeated every level of Bhutanese society, including communities living within PA boundaries. Although the literature underscores the significance of local support for conservation practices (cf., Agrawal & Gupta, 2005; Dahal, Nepal & Schuett, 2013; Wells & McShane, 2004), it is nearly silent on the broader implications of modernisation and democratisation for stakeholder relations, particularly with regard to competing resource management priorities and practices.

To facilitate a comprehensive reading of this dissertation, this chapter includes the main research questions and goals, a condensed literature review, a conceptual overview, the empirical context of the research and a section outlining the organisation of the thesis. The literature review summarises the four main bodies of literature (biodiversity conservation, ecotourism, development studies, SES) pertaining to the overarching goal and objectives of the dissertation. Section 1.4 defines the purpose and boundaries of the framework, describes how the framework is synthesised from the relevant literature in order to examine social-ecological sustainability in Chapter 5, and presents visual and written artefacts of the proposed framework. The penultimate section outlines the empirical context of the case study (Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary), which is further elaborated in Section 2.3. The final section of this chapter details the overall organisation of the thesis.

## **1.2 Research Goal and Objectives**

This doctoral research is designed to explore the connections between community-level ecotourism and broader PA policies and practices, as well as the impacts of ecotourism on the wellbeing of human societies and their natural environment in remote PAs. This overall goal was developed in light of growing research over the last decade on human-environment relations that points to the negative cumulative impacts of human development activities on fragile ecosystems. As indicated in the preceding section, changes in social and political arenas, coupled with the expansion of PA-based ecotourism in countries such as Bhutan may present unique challenges to achieving social and ecological sustainability. Given the emerging development studies research in social wellbeing and *buen vivir*, a wellbeing approach would provide a novel way to explore these connections, impacts and challenges. To address the overarching goal, this research has three specific objectives:

- 1) to critically examine stakeholder relations in PA conservation;
- 2) to identify and assess indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development; and

- 3) to refine and apply an integrative framework of wellbeing to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in developing areas.

The first objective is the focus of Chapter 3, which provides a broad overview of the research context and environmental issues inherent in the case study of a remote PA in Bhutan. It situates the reader in the context of a period of continuous change in the Himalayan kingdom, specifically for indigenous PA residents. The PA context and current state of development are important to understand as PAs are increasingly becoming sites of development for local livelihoods options in developing countries (Watson, Dudley, Segan & Hockings, 2014). Since the nation of Bhutan is deeply committed to environmental conservation and sustainable socio-economic development for its citizenry, greater knowledge of the current state of stakeholder relations under specific circumstances such as periods of social or political change, such as democratisation, may provide valuable insight for future PA policy and planning initiatives, particularly in relation to current expansion of tourism in PAs across the country.

Chapter 4 addresses the second objective. It delves deeper into the case study by examining the perceptions of indigenous communities in the PA. Many studies suggest ecotourism is frequently designed with limited or no community involvement (Blackstock, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014), resulting in a disjuncture between PA policies and management practices. Chapter 4 begins with a critical examination of the definitions of ecotourism and wellbeing from a local indigenous perspective while addressing the call in Chapter 3 for richer analysis of ideological and socio-cultural factors that may influence local motivation, thought and actions. Inspired by the central question “What does ecotourism mean?” and the dearth of non-Western voices in the ecotourism literature (Cater, 2006; Wearing & McDonald, 2002), the intent of this chapter is to reach beyond general conceptualisations from the Anglo-dominated literature (cf., Aalbers & Rossi, 2006; Restrepo & Escobar, 2005; Sánchez-Tarragó, Bufrem, & dos Santos, 2015) to include the perspective of indigenous people from the Bhutanese context. Furthermore, the chapter explores how the new ecotourism guidelines that RGOB developed and introduced to the PA network in recent years have played out in reality. Finally, it introduces the reader to the concept of wellbeing from the emerging discourse on *buen vivir*, which resonates with Buddhist beliefs and multiple worldviews on the interrelation of ecology and society.

Chapter 5 examines the third objective. Findings from Chapters 3 and 4 indicate the need for a contextualised, holistic and integrative framework to understand the linkages between social, cultural, economic and ecological components of ecotourism and its relevance to human-nature interactions. This chapter builds on the theoretical underpinnings of social wellbeing by incorporating *buen vivir* and SES thinking. The framework is then used to empirically examine how ecotourism strengthens and challenges social-ecological sustainability in the case study.

## **1.3 Literature Review**

This section summarises the four bodies of literature most germane to the thesis objectives. It reviews current debates in relation to past theories, highlights relevant key concepts and emerging trends, and identifies the knowledge gaps that provide the impetus for my doctoral research. I draw upon applied (development studies, ecotourism) and interdisciplinary (biodiversity conservation, SES) fields of study (Bennett et al., 2016) that align with the three main themes of this thesis: conservation, wellbeing and ecotourism. The literature is presented in the order in which it is explored in this dissertation: Chapter 3 covers biodiversity conservation, Chapter 4 addresses ecotourism and development studies, and Chapter 5 draws on ecotourism, development studies and SES. Although the areas of scholarship outlined here are distinct bodies of knowledge, they are bound together by two common issues: tensions between anthropocentric and biocentric positions, and environmental sustainability. This section discusses specific, relevant areas of conceptual overlap and gaps in knowledge.

### **1.3.1 Biodiversity conservation**

Over the last decade, a divergence of values and narratives has developed between conservationists who focus on minimising species extinction and protecting ecosystems, and those who focus on how ecosystem services can improve human wellbeing (Hunter, Redford, & Lindemayer, 2014; Kareiva & Marvier, 2012; Miller et al., 2011; Roe, 2008). These contrasting positions bring to light the continuum of anthropocentric (people-centred) and biocentric (nature-centred) views, which are embedded in much older debates about the linkages between environment and development (Roe, 2008). In the field of biodiversity conservation<sup>2</sup>, the long dominant conservation narrative has been one of protectionism, which has been challenged by a counter-narrative centred on human development, livelihoods and poverty reduction (Adams, et al., 2004; Adams, 2008; Campbell et al., 2008; Petriello & Wallen, 2015). As a result, one of the most significant intellectual developments in the conservation field has been the recognition that ecological and human dynamics cannot be separated (cf., Folke et al., 2011, Liu et al., 2007). These debates have carried through to the discussions and practices of protected areas (PAs).

At present, the form and function of PAs around the world are changing. They are expanding in number and size, stretching beyond their original designs as strictly sites of conservation and environmental protection (Gray, Gruby, & Campbell, 2014; Watson et al., 2014). In this thesis, PAs are understood as geographically defined spaces that are managed through legal or other measures with the goal of achieving the long-term conservation of nature in association with ecosystem services and cultural

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Biodiversity conservation’ is a much-favoured term in the literature. It is used broadly and interchangeably with ‘conservation’ in this thesis to refer to the conservation of wildlife, nature or living wild resources (Roe, 2008).

values (Brandon & Wells, 1992; Campbell et al., 2008; Dudley, 2008). The term PAs include national parks, nature reserves and marine protected areas. Integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), ranging in approach from community-based wildlife management and ecotourism to extractive reserves, aim to safeguard biodiversity and alleviate poverty, but have been equally critiqued for their negative social and environmental impacts and their limited success (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Blaikie, 2006; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Kiss, 2004).

Inconsistencies between stakeholder anticipation and practical outcomes can be traced throughout the evolution of PAs, dating back to the time of elite colonial game reserves (Adams, 2008; Roe, 2008; Wilshusen, Brechin, Fortwangler, & West, 2002) and continuing to the more participatory, pro-poor, community-based ICDPs (e.g., community-based conservation) favoured by international development agencies since the 1990s (Mulder & Copolillo, 2005; Newmark & Hough, 2000; Salafsky & Wollenberg, 2000). As a result, attention to the concept of livelihoods in development studies and practice has informed biodiversity conservation literature, and studies on ecotourism highlight issues of sustainability and tensions between PA stakeholders in conservation-development projects (Chapter 3). Although new types of projects and approaches have emerged, including payment for ecosystem services (PES) schemes, reduced emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) and alternative livelihood projects (cf., Bridgewater, Régnier, & Cruz García, 2015; Redford, Padoch & Sutherland, 2013; Roe et al., 2015), ICDPs remain relevant because the basic concepts behind conservation and development projects (i.e., focus on livelihoods and biodiversity conservation) continue. This is germane in the context of developing countries such as Bhutan, where ICDPs have been part of the foundation for policy and planning in biodiversity conservation and development in recent years, such as the *National biodiversity strategies and action plan* (RGOB, 2014) and the *Eleventh five-year plan 2013-2018* (GNHC, 2013a).

Local participation, good governance and consideration of trade-offs are issues of concern in PA governance (Garnett, Sayer, & du Toit, 2007; Hayes & Ostrom, 2005; Lockwood, 2010; Miller, Minter & Malan, 2011), raising questions about who the greatest beneficiaries of ICDPs are. This thesis defines governance as the requirements for decision-making and power-sharing (Brechin, Wilshusen, Fortwangler, & West, 2002). Research shows that national governments wield considerable power and as a result, local people living in and around PAs often feel that they have little control over their environment or livelihoods (Roth, 2004; West & Brockington, 2006; Wilshusen et al., 2002). Even successful projects in which community members participate do not necessarily target the poorest households (Dahal et al., 2013; Spiteri & Nepal, 2008b). Participation does not automatically connote equality and fairness among stakeholders; instead, recognition and discussion of trade-offs and hard

choice can counter disappointments such as differences in stakeholder expectations and delivery (McShane et al., 2011).

Conservation is a social and political process (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Brechin et al., 2002). The literature tends to emphasise the importance of grassroots practices in enlisting local support for conservation. Broader influences of modernisation and political reforms on stakeholder relations in developing country ICDPs are understudied, particularly in Asia. Research in developing regions tends to engage with either modernisation or democratisation but not with both processes (cf., Brockington, 2007; Fischer & Chhatre, 2013; Sunam et al., 2015). The implications for resource management priorities and practices advocated by different stakeholders in the context of remote, indigenous communities are somewhat uncertain. Therefore, residents' perceptions can be explored and used to improve park-people relationships and foster meaningful interventions (Allendorf, Aung & Songer, 2012).

### **1.3.2 Ecotourism**

As a niche branch of sustainable tourism, ecotourism is often considered a sustainable strategy to increasing wellbeing in local communities and is prominently connected to scholarship in development and biodiversity conservation. Since its inception as a practice and body of scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s, it broadly seeks to provide predominantly nature-based attractions and experiences that offer educational opportunities for tourists, to conserve natural ecosystems while benefiting communities, and often to advocate for local participation in tourism development and implementation (Harris, 2009; Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Ecotourism scholarship has been greatly influenced by the concept (and subsequent theory) of sustainable development. This concept was popularised through the so-called Brundtland Report, which prioritises the wellbeing of the poor and asserts that development should meet the basic needs of present and future generations (Hardy, Beaton, & Pearson, 2002; Roe, 2008; World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). Not only can tourism be analysed as an agent of development within the theoretical framework of international development studies (Sharpley & Telfer, 2002), but tourism and development studies are conceptually entrenched in the principles of sustainability (Briassoulis, 2002; Saarinen, 2006). In biodiversity conservation literature, terrestrial and marine PAs and ecotourism are examples of conservation interventions.

Along with community-based approaches in conservation, ecotourism presents an optimistic, powerful, and prevalent narrative that appeals to the needs of diverse stakeholders by suggesting a 'win-win' solution for humans and nature (Campbell, Gray, & Meletis, 2008; Harris, 2009; Ross & Wall, 1999). Yet, widely accepted definitions of ecotourism have been criticised for separating humans and nature, and for promoting Western interests (Cater, 2006; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Wall, 1997), which

has prompted scholars to call for additional diverse and distant voices in ecotourism studies (Cater, 2006; Prakash, 1994; Wearing & McDonald, 2002). These criticisms are important for expanding the discourse on what ecotourism means to its intended recipients and particularly local people (cf., Blackstock, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014).

Local traditions and belief systems are considered critical to the success of conservation policies and programmes that seek to involve indigenous communities because local traditions and values are embedded in indigenous resource management practices. Academics and practitioners have argued that indigenous knowledge and beliefs in sacred places may encourage ecological integrity and promote sustainable development (Higgins-Desboilles, 2009; Verschuuren et al., 2010). The link between the culture and spiritual beliefs of indigenous peoples and their natural environment has been explored in ecotourism (Fennell, 2008; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011; Zeppel, 2006) and pilgrimage tourism (Andriotis, 2009; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). There has been a surge in the literature on local narratives and indigenous perceptions of ecotourism, including cases from the Global South (Farrelly, 2011; Hutchins, 2007; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Ramos & Prideaux, 2014), yet there is limited research on the correlation between indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and notions of wellbeing, particularly from subjective, social-relational, material and ecological spheres (cf., Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Hutchins, 2007; Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2010).

In recent years, subjective analyses related to wellbeing have proliferated in tourism research but current approaches do not necessarily equate ecological and social concerns. Influenced by the earlier capabilities and sustainable livelihood approaches (see Section 1.3.3), existing perspectives that are currently at the forefront of tourism scholarship and relate to wellbeing include quality of life, subjective wellbeing and community wellbeing (cf., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Liburd, Benckendorff, & Carlsen, 2012; Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, & McGehee, 2013; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). These largely anthropocentric concepts eschew an ecological perspective that recognises the inextricable relationship between humans and nature. Buckley (2009) notes that fewer mainstream studies address the application and success of the means to achieve ecotourism in practice or ‘controversial topics’ (e.g., local empowerment, poverty alleviation), while Weaver & Lawton (2007) observe that ecological impacts are not often linked to socio-cultural impacts in community-based ecotourism literature. The shift in attention away from ecological concerns suggest the need to revisit biocentric values.

### **1.3.3 Development studies: Wellbeing**

Mapping the landscape of wellbeing literature and its origins requires extensive reading both across and within numerous cognate disciplines (Camfield, Streuli, & Woodhead, 2009; White 2009), particularly

development studies. Notions of wellbeing can be traced back to Eastern and Western philosophical traditions that contemplate hedonic and eudaimonic perceptions of happiness and ‘living well’ (Box 1.1). While needs-based approaches have existed in international policy development since the 1970s (Doyal & Gough, 1991), modern conceptualisations of wellbeing in development studies have altered, weaving together different theoretical strands from merging schools of thought (i.e., welfare economics and social psychology), with special attention to cognitive aspects of wellbeing<sup>3</sup>. Although wellbeing is not new to the literature, it has gained renewed interest in recent years and continues to evolve as an analytical concept and tool in academic, policy and development practice circles (Camfield, Streuli, & Woodhead, 2009; Gough, McGregor & Camfield, 2007; McGregor & Sumner, 2009; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009; White 2009).

### **Box 1.1 Philosophical roots of wellbeing**

Social science researchers have traced the philosophical underpinnings of wellbeing and happiness back to ancient Buddhist and Greek philosophies (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Two contrasting yet complimentary approaches from the Classical period have enriched the view of the nature of wellbeing. Hedonism, the school of thought that declares pleasure as the sole intrinsic good and supports its maximisation as a life goal, follows the teachings of Aristippus of Cyrene (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Later embraced and moderated by the Epicureans, it relates most closely to the modern concept of “subjective wellbeing” (Sirgy et al., 2006). Eudaimonism, in comparison, stems from Aristotelian philosophy and considers living a virtuous life as key to a ‘life well lived’ (Nussbaum, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). These theories focus on self-realisation and activities related to personal growth and development rather than purely pleasure-seeking pursuits and are often referred to as ‘psychological wellbeing’ (Sirgy et al., 2006).

Over time, interest in human wellbeing has ebbed and flowed through multiple streams of inquiry in the social sciences. More than 2,000 years after the era of ancient Greece, wellbeing emerged as a central issue to early neoclassical economic theorists in Europe, such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills (Collard, 2006). Research around socio-economic indicator variables gained popularity in US policymaking during the 1960s and was mainly divided along parallel trajectories in sociology (objective social indicators); economics (preferences); psychology (subjective wellbeing); and health sciences (mental and physical wellbeing) (Gasper, 2004; Sirgy et al., 2006).

Two of the most persuasively argued development approaches that have preceded, and to some extent influenced, the wellbeing approach are Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach (CA) and the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA). The CA focuses on individual freedom to achieve wellbeing or ‘agency’, where freedom refers to individual ‘capabilities’ (Sen, 1985, 1993) and social arrangements should aim to expand one’s capabilities and agency<sup>4</sup> to achieve *telos* (living well) (Sen, 1985; Deneulin & McGregor, 2005). The SLA grew out of CA and has featured more prominently in tourism research than CA (cf.,

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Richard Easterlin’s (1974) landmark study examining the links between income and happiness not only incorporated psychological and sociological inquiry on subjective wellbeing and lay the foundation for ‘happiness economics’, but also sparked a paradigm shift toward economic development measures that connect human needs-based approaches to subjective wellbeing (Clark, 2006, Gasper, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Sen’s approach has been further developed through Martha Nussbaum’s incorporation of eudaimonic perspectives of virtue, political distribution and ‘human flourishing’ (Nussbaum 2000; Robeyns, 2005).

Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2010; Tao & Wall, 2009). Building on the concept of capabilities and assets, it considers the links between five ‘capitals’ or ‘assets’ (natural, financial, human, physical and social) and people’s ability to cope and recover from stresses and shocks (i.e., social, economic, political, environmental) without undermining natural resources (Chambers & Conway, 1991; DFID, 1999). Because capabilities and sustainable livelihood approaches tend to focus more on certain wellbeing concerns of human interest (e.g., socio-economic and/or relational dimensions) (Weeratunge et al., 2013) and less on environment and sustainability (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005), the notion of human wellbeing, which has been rekindled in current policy debates on environmental sustainability (Coulthard et al., 2011), may be a useful lens for understanding impacts of ecotourism and other sustainable development activities.

### *Social wellbeing*

The concept of social wellbeing consists of three core dimensions (material, relational, subjective) that constitute what people have, what they can do, and how they think or feel about what they have and can do (McGregor, 2007). This perspective initially emerged from work of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Group (WeD) at the University of Bath, UK<sup>5</sup>. Major strengths of this approach include its strong subjective and relational dimensions, which reflect the significance of economic development and social psychological perspectives, and acknowledge wellbeing as both an outcome and a process (Armitage, Béné, Charles, Johnson, & Allison et al., 2012; Gough et al., 2007). This focus on the importance of relationships and socially generated meanings extends Sen’s designation of *telos* (living well) to one of ‘living well together’ through exploration of the inter-subjective space of human relationships (Deneulin & McGregor 2010). Essentially, the concept of social wellbeing permits the exploration of relationships between economic, social, political and environmental sustainability (Coulthard et al., 2011).

Studies using the social wellbeing lens have made substantial contributions to research in sustainable resource management and governance, particularly in fisheries and marine (protected) areas. Evidence from fishery (Abunge, Coulthard, & Daw, 2013; Britton & Coulthard, 2013; Coulthard et al., 2011; Jentoft, 2013; Weeratunge et al., 2014) and forestry (Kusel, 2001; Kusel & Adler, 2003, Pullin et al., 2013) sectors demonstrate that wellbeing shifts analysis away from the sole individual to include communal relations, which is pertinent to rural communities that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Although wellbeing challenges Western ideologies of individualism, it recognises people as

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<sup>5</sup> The work of this multidisciplinary team was initially undertaken in tandem with the Institute of Development Studies between 2002 and 2007. The research cluster transformed into the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways research project, which ran from 2010 until 2014.

unique, complete persons with biological, psychological and emotional constitutions (Bevan, 2007) and it appreciates the heterogeneity of community members, which has implications for governance and policy-making (Britton & Coulthard, 2013; Coulthard et al., 2011; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999). It also identifies the crucial role of culture in defining the wellbeing experience (Camfield, Choudhury, & Devine, 2009; Uchida, Norasakkunit, & Shinobu, 2004), as seen in social wellbeing research in different developing countries (cf., Camfield, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2009; Copestake, 2009; McGregor, 2007).

Some scholars have critiqued social wellbeing for its emphasis on human dynamics over ecological sustainability, which suggests anthropocentric over ecologic interests (Armitage et al., 2012; Fabinyi, Evans, & Foate, 2014). They caution that a 'singular focus' on wellbeing may hide or ignore ecological decline (e.g., deforestation) or feedbacks (e.g., nearing biophysical thresholds or tipping points). White (2009) makes allowances for the 'enabling conditions' of the external 'enabling environment' that permit the experience of wellbeing. However, the context of 'enabling environment' does not distinguish biophysical systems from built environment (e.g., infrastructure, amenities). From this viewpoint, 'enabling environments' appear to disregard the disabling aspect of physical environments. Further, ecosystems are not clearly distinguished from other 'enabling environments', thus diluting their importance.

Social wellbeing has also been noted for its insufficient attention to issues of power (Armitage et al., 2012). Power is a complex and contested area of study (Haugaard & Clegg, 2009; Lukes, 2005). Theorists have referred to power in myriad ways: as an entity or resource that flows through actors and networks and can be 'stored up' (Giddens, 1976); as a form of domination (*power over*) (cf., Dahl, 1957; Lukes, 2005; Weber, 1978); or as a means for action (*power to/with*) (Arendt 1970; Parsons, 1963). Following Allen (2003), this thesis views power as an 'immanent force' that is relational, practised and situated in space. His perspective is distinct from resources or means of power and realises power can be both *power to* and *power over* (Haugaard, 2013).

Discourses on power evidently link to theories of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Okazaki, 2008) and empowerment (Cole, 2007; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Scheyvens, 1999) commonly found in sustainable and community-based tourism studies. In social wellbeing research, White (2010) has asserted that power is implicit. I argue that social wellbeing can be strengthened through the interplay of additional concepts to heighten awareness of ecosystem dynamics and power relations between stakeholders, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. This thesis draws on relationships to power but does not conduct a thorough power analysis.

### *Buen vivir*

The concept of *buen vivir* (also *vivir bien*) provides novel insights into research on wellbeing and indigenous peoples in rural areas. In Latin America, it is viewed as an alternative to models of development that entail judgment and control over life and nature (Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010). Roughly translated as ‘living well’ or ‘collective wellbeing’ (*bienestar colectivo*), the growing literature on *buen vivir* has been shaped by Western critiques of capitalism and human-nature dualism and by indigenous belief systems (e.g., Aymara, Mapuche) across South America (Escobar, 2015; Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010). The *buen vivir* perspective emphasises the importance of fullness of one’s life within a society and a sense of existing in harmony with other people and nature (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). *Buen vivir* can also play a salient role in social movements and struggles to protect the rights of nature and particularly lands and waters considered sacred to indigenous and local groups, as recently evidenced in the Patagonia region of Chile (Latta, 2014), the central Andean valley (Kauffman & Martin, 2014) or the Amazonian rainforests of Ecuador (Deneulin, 2012; Gudynas, 2011).

In *buen vivir*, development is understood as the realisation and reproduction of the balanced state of humans living in harmony with nature. *Buen vivir* circumvents the conventional, dominant conception of sustainable development that is based on Western ideals of ecological sustainability and economic growth, because it neither seeks to dominate nature nor protect it from human intervention (Gudynas, 2011; Kauffman & Martin, 2014). It eschews the idea of a linear progression of accumulation and is difficult to define because it is not intended as a pre-formulated path to sustainable development (Kauffman & Martin, 2014). Consequently, *buen vivir* manifests differently in diverse social and environmental contexts.

In 2011, when I began my PhD studies, the concept of *buen vivir* was only found in the works of activists, politicians and academics based in Latin America that were mostly written in Spanish<sup>6</sup>. Today, the discourse on *buen vivir* appears to be gaining momentum in institutions beyond South America (cf., Deneulin, 2012; Kauffman & Martin, 2014) and is being linked to similar ideologies (indigenous and otherwise) from around the world, particularly among scholars who seek alternative concepts to development and wellbeing in times of prevailing neoliberalism and materialism (cf., Escobar, 2012, 2015; Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2014; Walsh, 2011). Specifically, *buen vivir* resonates with biocentric (e.g., ecocentric, deep ecology) philosophies that speak to the rights of nature, environmental justice, and economic reform and re-education (Acosta, 2010; Leopold, 1949; May & Daly, 2015; Naess, 1989; Shiva, 2006). Escobar (2015) argues that through indigenous ontologies “*buen vivir* makes possible the

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<sup>6</sup> When I began my doctoral research, I was introduced to the concept of *buen vivir* through Cristobal Pizarro, a good friend and colleague from Chile who knew of my research interest in wellbeing and encouraged me to engage in the emerging literature.

subordination of economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice” because it is “influenced by critical currents within Western thought, and it aims to influence global debates” (p. 455). Debates about the plurality of visions for *buen vivir*, and what form *buen vivir* might take in modern urban and rural contexts have begun (cf., Kothari et al., 2014; Santana, 2015; Villalba, 2013). Adopting an approach that is inclusive of other worldviews could lend important insights for wellbeing studies of local people in their given cultural context.

*Buen vivir* is not limited to indigenous Andean postures. It broadly relates to ecology-focused worldviews found in multiple indigenous and non-indigenous cultures and traditions on a global scale (see Chapter 4). Examples of other indigenous cultures include the Dene peoples of northern Canada (Berkes, 2012; Holmes, Grimwood, King, & the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, 2016) and the Arrernte Aboriginal people of Australia (Walsh, Dobson & Douglas, 2013). Similar approaches can be found in mixed or multicultural settings, such as the notion of the ‘quiet life’ of Camba (multi-ethnic) forest dwellers in the northern Bolivian Amazon (Gudynas, 2011; Henkemans, 2003), or the Indian concept of ecological *swaraj* or radical ecological democracy (Kothari et al., 2014).

*Buen vivir* is not a one-size-fits all approach, nor is it immune to the associated biases, strengths and weaknesses that are present in all approaches and models. In particular, *buen vivir* pays close attention to collective relationships and as a result can underestimate aspects of personal, subjective perceptions of wellbeing. Furthermore, humans tend to take a dominant view of nature and consider themselves to be custodians of the Earth and all its resources (cf., MEA, 2005; Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, current debates in the *buen vivir* literature do not delve deeply into issues of social equality and hierarchy beyond post-development or biocentric critiques. Gudynas (2011) argues that *buen vivir* could benefit from feminist perspectives with radical views on gender roles relative to social hierarchy and domination over nature (cf., Gudynas, 2011; Saunders, 2002). Although this thesis does not specifically examine power, it is important to acknowledge the need for further analysis on this topic.

Given that cultural contexts can shape the experience of wellbeing (Camfield, Choudhury, & Devine, 2009; Uchida, Norasakkunit, & Shinobu, 2004), it is appropriate to utilise approaches, like *buen vivir*, that foster contextualisation and allow researchers to adapt to the societies in which they work. Furthermore, it has been argued that indigenous worldviews and socio-cultural factors can play a persuasive role in promoting sustainable development activities (Brooks, 2011; Escobar, 2015). The concept of *buen vivir* contributes to the notion of a ‘pluriverse’ and helps transition beyond the view of one world or universe with certain conceptualisations of the individual, rationality, economy, and science, which is applicable in a globalising world of deepening social and natural crises (Escobar, 2012).

### 1.3.4 Social-ecological systems

The fourth significant area of academic research that underpins this thesis is social-ecological systems (SESs, or human-environment systems). The SES perspective is historically rooted in ecology and has converged with diverse social science perspectives (Patterson et al., 2016). It is based on complex adaptive systems theory, which emerged alongside resilience thinking (Berkes, Folke & Colding, 2000; Fabinyi et al., 2014). This perspective bridges human and ecological realities through ecological knowledge, governance arrangements and ecosystem services (Berkes, Folke, & Colding, 2000; Glaser, 2006; Ostrom, 2007). The MEA (2005) describes ecosystem services as the benefits that humans obtain from ecosystems, which are categorised in four groups: *provisioning*, *regulating*, *cultural services* that directly affect people, and *supporting services* necessary for maintaining the other services. These services impact five interlinked components of human wellbeing: *security*, *basic material needs*, *health*, *good social relations*, and *freedom of choice and action*, which overlays all components. Along these lines, human wellbeing is directly linked to the use of natural resources and changes in ecosystem functions. Furthermore, SES is making inroads into tourism-related research, as in a recent SES analyses of tourism and water inequality in Bali (cf. Cole & Browne, 2015) and tourism development in a Taiwanese marine protected area (Wu & Tsai, 2016).

In connecting social and biophysical sciences, the SES perspective seeks to understand human action and engagement with nature over time by examining behaviours that can reinforce or modify subsequent behaviour in positive and negative feedback loops in resource systems, particularly common-pool resource management situations (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014). Since commons (or common-pool) resources are shared resources typified by issues of exclusion and deduction, the role of institutions or rules (formal and informal) is important (Ostrom, 2005). Complex adaptive systems are characterised by scale (e.g., hierarchical, nested ecosystems or institutions), uncertainty, non-linearity and self-organisation<sup>7</sup>, and by resilience to cope with complexity and change (Berkes, 2010; Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003).

Learning, sharing knowledge and adapting are central components when dealing with complex systems, and signify a heuristic approach to resource management and policy-making. In SESs, natural and social systems are complex systems. Sustainability is seen as a dynamic process that requires society to have the adaptive capacity to contend with change, or developing systems where people can learn from

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<sup>7</sup> For Berkes, Colding and Folke (2003), non-linearity, highlights the inadequacy of determining conservation effectiveness based on parameters that assume stability (e.g., productivity, abundance) instead of resilience properties (e.g., diversity, complexity) that indicate the capacity of the system to deal with change and recover after disturbance. Non-linearity is linked to inherent uncertainty. Open systems have the capacity to re-organise when they hit critical points of instability, which is realised through feedback mechanisms and applies to both biological and social systems. (Berkes, Colding, & Folke., 2003).

experience and alteration over time (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Ostrom, 2007; Tàbara & Chabay, 2013). Therefore, management processes and policies can be improved when they are made to be flexible, able to cope with uncertainty and build their capacity to adapt to change (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Olsson, Folke, & Berkes, 2004).

Likewise, the consideration of different ways of knowing offers a clearer perception of the entire complex system, particularly when alternate types of knowledge tend to relate to different geographic scales (Folke, 2004; Reid et al., 2006). Berkes, Colding and Folke (2003) argue that “a complex social-ecological system (SES) cannot be captured using a single perspective. It can be best understood by the use of a multiplicity of perspectives” (p. 8). Different types of knowledge of the dynamics of human-environment relations can include ecosophy, environmental ethics, and traditional ecological knowledge, or indigenous knowledge. For example, Berkes (2012) found important interconnections between Western science and traditional knowledge of Denesoline, Cree and other indigenous peoples regarding climate change. These knowledge systems have been explored in the context of several natural resource areas, such as community-based conservation and fish and wildlife management (Almudi & Berkes, 2010; Berkes, 2007; Berkes, 2010), providing greater insight than descriptions of local knowledge do alone (Berkes, 2012).

As the SES perspective expands from its niche audience in ecology and complex systems into broader academic and policy arenas, it has been critiqued for underplaying social diversity and power. Fabinyi, Evans and Foate (2014) posit that emphasis on human relations with the environment has resulted in less theorisation of the ‘social’ in the SES model. In response, scholars have offered different renderings of what the ‘social’ should entail, ranging from inclusion of social wellbeing (Armitage et al., 2012) and emphasis on culture (Crane, 2010) to the role of power and values (Cote & Nightingale, 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014; Hatt, 2013; Jones, Shaw, Ross, Witt, & Pinner, 2016). Kittinger (2013) cautions that much research that documents local people’s knowledge of environmental quality and change are based on the presumption that this knowledge (or lack thereof) significantly influences social norms and practices. Fabinyi, Evans and Foale (2014) argue that as a result of this presumption, socio-political and cultural roots of local institutions are minimised or overlooked. Greater emphasis on organised social units (e.g., agencies, committees, communities) and institutions tends to downplay the importance of human agency, politics (local and global) and cultural context (Agrawal, 2005; Crane, 2010; Fabinyi et al., 2014). Greater insights on social diversity coupled with SES thinking could add value to current debates on social-ecological dimensions of sustainability.

### 1.3.5 Summary

The four bodies of literature described in this section come together to address respective areas of overlap and gaps in knowledge on the key themes (conservation, wellbeing, ecotourism) of this research.

Biodiversity conservation hails from a strong environmental conservation perspective that increasingly grapples with human dimensions of change (Adams, et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2008; Petriello & Wallen, 2015). This has resulted in less attention to views or systems that integrate social and ecological aspects of wellbeing (cf., Folke et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2007) or analyses that consider a subjective focus of social wellbeing. In contrast, ecotourism literature has drifted from its original concern with ecological stability in recent years (Buckley, 2009; Weaver & Lawton, 2007), which is reflected in current subjective analyses that are attentive to human aspects of wellbeing (cf., Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Moscardo et al., 2013; Uysal et al., 2016).

Alternately, development literature presents two important but slightly divergent strands of thinking. *Buen vivir* embraces an biocentric, communal worldview to natural and material resources that is context-based but eludes views of subjective wellbeing, while social wellbeing balances subjective and relational aspects but places less emphasis on ecological sustainability and (implicit) power (Armitage et al., 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014; White, 2010). Finally, SES offers a scientific, ecologically driven, systems-based governance perspective on social and ecological dimensions of ecosystem change (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Ostrom, 2007). Although it is rooted in Western, scientific philosophy, SES embraces multiple ways of thinking, including indigenous knowledge systems (Berkes, 2010; Berkes, 2012; Reid et al., 2006). However, SES tends to downplay the importance of human agency, politics and cultural relationships (Agrawal, 2005; Crane, 2010; Fabinyi et al., 2014). These bodies of literature can be integrated by building upon one another to contribute new insights on issues of conservation, wellbeing and ecotourism.

The ensuing section brings together prominent and emerging concepts from three of the four bodies of scholarship to form a framework for examining the social-ecological sustainability of ecotourism development in an effort to bridge the conservation-wellbeing-ecotourism knowledge gap.

## 1.4 Conceptual Overview

### 1.4.1 Integrating the literature

Development of a conceptual framework to examine how ecotourism activities enhance or constrain social-ecological sustainability required ideas from literature in development (wellbeing) and social-ecological systems. In this thesis, the term is used as suggested in Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014):

A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, constructs or variables—and the presumed relationships among them. Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive or causal. (p. 20)

This definition can be supplemented by Maxwell (2012), who argues that a conceptual framework strives to identify ‘presumed relationships’ among key factors or constructs to be studied. Ravitch and Riggan (2016) add that the rationalisation for these presumptions may derive from multiple sources, including the researcher’s own prior research or ‘tentative theories’ and theoretical or empirical work found in the literature. Ultimately, the conceptual framework incorporates thoughts and ideas borrowed from elsewhere, but the coherence is developed by the researcher, based on his or her own point of view. In this sense, the framework serves as a tool and a product of the learning process. This framework seeks to synthesise a set of empirically-tested concepts and approaches in a straightforward, rational, descriptive manner both graphical and narrative in form.

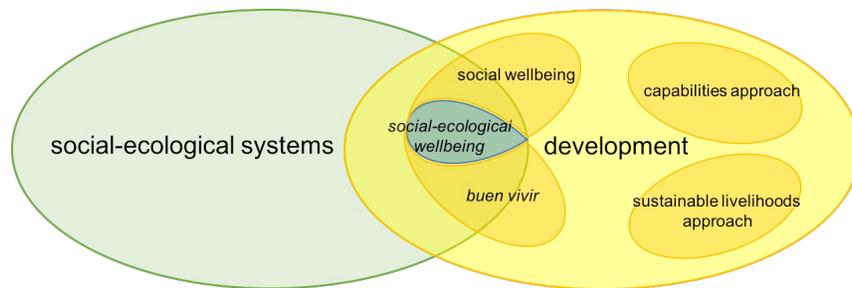
Building a framework that integrates strands of knowledge from several bodies of literature is a complex endeavour. It requires extensive reading across said literature from different intellectual traditions that hold diverse assumptions and epistemologies. This thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive or an in-depth account of the epistemological and ontological natures of the respective literature<sup>8</sup>. Rather, it focuses on a set of ontological similarities and complementarities between them. In particular, there are four areas of similarities and differences in terms of their positions on the anthropocentric-biocentric continuum, power, basic units of analysis, and sustainability. These complementarities are included in Chapter 5. Ultimately, differences in perspectives from one literature can complement those of another (Figure 1.1). However, it is important to recognise that epistemological or ontological contradictions and tensions may exist between the different approaches and concepts used in the proposed framework.

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<sup>8</sup>For detailed insight, I recommend: Becker (2012), Berkes et al. (2003), Cote and Nightingale (2012) for SES; Bevan (2007), Deneulin and McGregor (2010), White (2010) for social wellbeing; and Acosta (2010), Deneulin (2012), González and Vázquez (2015), Gudynas (2011), Walsh (2010) for *buen vivir*.

The framework is an integral part of Chapter 5. Since it is a stand-alone manuscript chapter, the framework is included here to contextualise the materials presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

**Figure 1.1 Social-ecological wellbeing at the nexus of wellbeing (development) and social-ecological systems approaches**



Differences of **positions along the anthropocentric-biocentric continuum** are evident in the biocentrism predominantly found in *buen vivir* (Jiménez, 2011, Gudynas, 2011) and SES (Becker, 2012; Binder, Hinkel, Bots, & Pahl-Wostl, 2013; Cote & Nightingale, 2012), compared to the relatively anthropocentric leanings of social wellbeing (cf., Armitage et al., 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014). In both perspectives, social systems (humans) and ecosystems (nature) are coupled, co-evolving and dependent on one another such that one is not superior to the other (Fabinyi et al., 2014; Walsh, 2010). Due to the interdependence of these systems, people must play a secondary role to nature, which supports all life on Earth. These perspectives are used to emphasise ecological concerns of wellbeing. In contrast, social wellbeing focuses on the psycho-social constitutions of individuals (Armitage et al., 2012; Deneulin & McGregor, 2010). Since humans are inclined to consider themselves caretakers of the Earth and its resources (cf., MEA, 2005; Walsh, 2011), a human ontology that attends to subjective perceptions could offer valuable insights to more biocentric visions.

Attention to **power** is another area of complementarity between the perspectives. Social wellbeing and SES have been criticised for their vague engagement with power (Armitage et al. 2012; Cote & Nightingale, 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014). White (2010) argues that power in social wellbeing is implicit: the centrality of the relational dimension re-positions the importance of social structure and power relations. Rules (formal/informal) around entitlement can be negotiated and contested; relations can be hierarchical; and force, violence, and cumulative structural differences (e.g., age, sex, class and race) can impact opportunities and wellbeing, often leaving women and children especially vulnerable (White, 2010).

While power relations are implicit between wellbeing dimensions and mediate access to wellbeing, it is important to note the significance of power relations among stakeholders as they explicitly relate to the

governance of ecosystems, resource use and potential overexploitation. As such, *buen vivir* clearly focuses on relationships, economic and social structures, and the changing distribution of power (Deneulin, 2012) and directly supports self-determination and self-empowerment of nature and humans. The governments of Ecuador and Bolivia have incorporated *buen vivir* into their constitutions, thus codifying the ‘Rights of Nature’ (Gudynas, 2011, Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). The Ecuadorian constitution specifically defends the inalienable rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish, gives people the authority to protect and petition on behalf of ecosystems, and obliges the government to rectify violations.

Differing views on the **basic unit of analysis** is another key area of complementarity between the perspectives. *Buen vivir* and SES prioritise the collective over individual agency or politics (Agrawal, 2005; Fabinyi et al., 2014). Social wellbeing makes it possible to link *buen vivir* and SES through its focus on individual and collective units. It also recognises the importance of dimensions of heterogeneity, which offer space for different articulations of what it means ‘to live well’ in different communities (cf., Coulthard et al., 2011). In turn, *buen vivir* and SES accept multiple belief systems and therefore could support the inclusion of subjective analyses, since how people conceive of wellbeing and think they should pursue it is a major driver of behaviour and decision-making (Chapin et al., 2009; Coulthard et al., 2011; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999; Jones et al 2016). From a governance and policy perspective, the combination of social wellbeing and *buen vivir* approaches could provide a holistic view of societal impacts on different governing regimes and highlight successes and failures in public policy. Both the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia have incorporated *buen vivir* into their constitutions, thus codifying the ‘Rights of Nature’<sup>9</sup> (Gudynas, 2011, Gudynas & Acosta, 2011).

Finally, attention to **sustainability** varies between the perspectives. Recent efforts have attempted to connect wellbeing and sustainable development (e.g., Kjell, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Rauschmeyer, Ohmann and Fruehmann (2012) focus heavily on needs-based sustainable development policies but acknowledge that further elaboration is needed. Many ethical arguments of *buen vivir* can be found in older sustainability debates (cf., Hardy et al., 2002; WCED, 1987). Complex systems theory appreciates sustainability as a dynamic process that requires the capacity for societies to adapt to change or develop systems to learn from experience (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003). The addition of *buen vivir* and SES can fortify social wellbeing to develop a novel framework of wellbeing that re-focuses on sustainability.

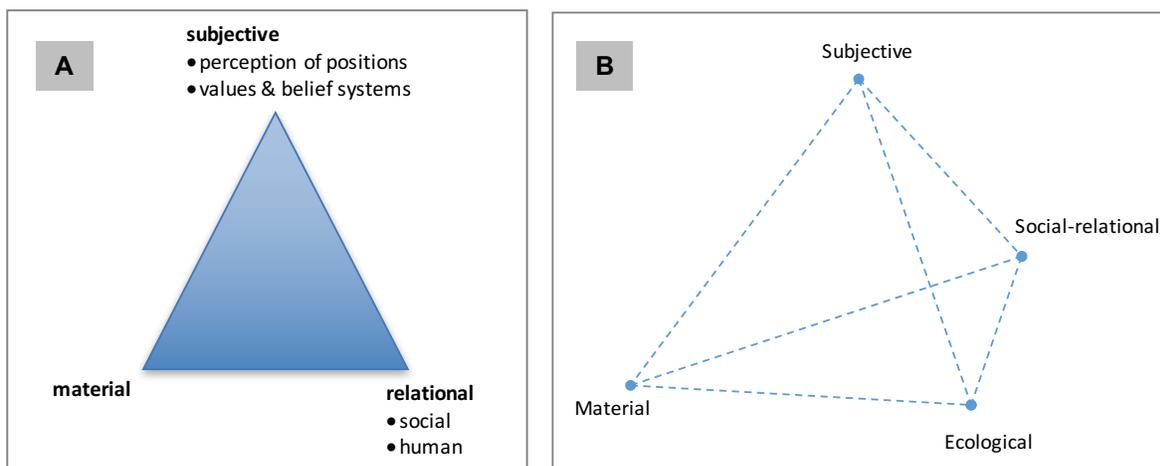
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<sup>9</sup> The Ecuadorian constitution specifically defends the inalienable rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish, gives people the authority to protect and petition on behalf of ecosystems, and compels the government to take remedial action if violations occur (Deneulin, 2012; Guydnas, 2011).

### 1.4.2 Social-ecological wellbeing

The triangle of social wellbeing (Figure 1.2 A) was used as the foundation for the framework to explore social-ecological dimensions of sustainability because it provides many of the muted or missing elements in *buen vivir* and SES, as described above. The social wellbeing ‘3-D’ model incorporates subjective, material and relational (cf., Deneulin & McGregor, 2010; White, 2010). Next, dimensions from the triangle model were expanded into the pyramid of social-ecological wellbeing (SEWB) (Figure 1.2 B), which includes an additional dimension focusing on ecological elements.

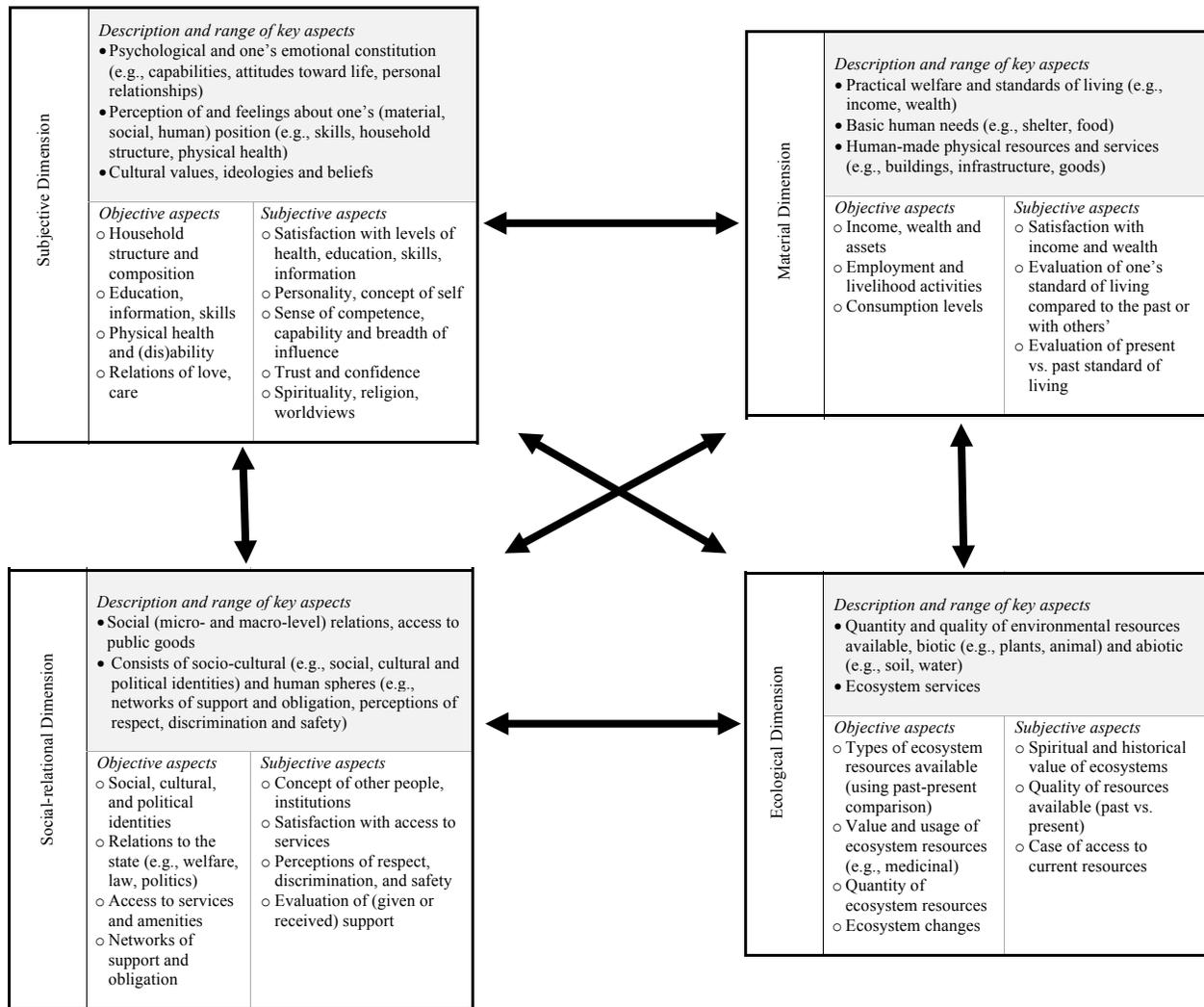
**Figure 1.2 (A) Triangle of social wellbeing (McGregor, 2007; White, 2009). (B) Pyramid of social-ecological wellbeing, adapted from White (2010) with inclusion of the ecological dimension**



In Figure 1.2 B, the **subjective dimension** is placed at the top of the triangular pyramid as the lens through which **material**, **social-relational**, and **ecological dimensions** are interpreted. The dashed lines represent the interplay and interdependence between the dimensions and the relationships of power between stakeholders that mediate the degree of wellbeing experienced through the different dimensions in ecotourism development. Power is an inherent force that can be given to, wielded over or shared with people (Allen, 2003; Haugaard, 2013). In the SEWB pyramid, it is important to note that power is situated not only in personal relationships but it is pervasive in institutions, organisations and other structures. Rather than providing a comprehensive power-based analysis, the framework explores wellbeing from development (*buen vivir*, social wellbeing) and SES perspectives.

Key dimensions of SEWB depicted in (B) of Figure 1.2 can be expanded into a framework of the four dimensions, in which each dimension or category contains objective and subjective aspects or elements (Figure 1.3). The dimensions are not fixed but interchangeable, as indicated by the arrows that link the domains.

**Figure 1.3 Dimensions social-ecological wellbeing and range of key aspects**



**Source: Adapted in part from White (2010)**

As further elaborated in Chapter 5, the **subjective** dimension addresses psychological and emotional facets of human life and individual perceptions of and feelings about one's individual position (Figure 3.1). It also considers cultural values and personal belief systems, including spiritual needs, ideologies, and religion. Similarly, a place in nature, which may be considered part of the **ecological** dimension, can be viewed and respected as a sacred natural site, which the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies as areas of land or water that have special spiritual significance to people and communities (Oviedo & Jeanrenaud, 2006). As tangible or intangible areas of historical and spiritual importance, sacred sites may be areas for pilgrimage and/or healing in a community, or places that provide

silence and tranquillity in nature (Andriotis, 2009; Chapter 4), which relate back to subjective and social-relational dimensions.

The **material** dimension highlights tangible and intangible aspects of built environment, including practical welfare, basic human needs, and physical resources and services. The **social-relational** dimension refers to social relations and access to public goods, and highlights the indelible role of culture through socio-cultural and human spheres. The **ecological** dimension is characterised by the biological and natural, unlike other material indicators. This ecological dimension also reflects the amount and value of environmental resources available and accounts for ecosystem services. This new dimension was added to the original social wellbeing triangle (cf., Figure 1.2 A and B) to spotlight the biophysical environment and ecosystem services, and to counterbalance the other three dimensions as informed by social wellbeing, *buen vivir* and SES perspectives.

To develop the specific dimensions of SEWB, I was guided by White's (2010) core descriptions of social, relational and material dimensions and her analysis of objective and subjective aspects for each dimension. Adjustments were made to White's original framework based on the earlier evaluation of similarities and complementarities between social wellbeing, *buen vivir* and SES perspectives<sup>10</sup>. The relational dimension was re-named 'socio-relational' to emphasise the collective nature of this dimension per *buen vivir* and SES perspectives. Elements of the new ecological dimension were largely informed by similar properties found in SES and *buen vivir* perspectives, featuring quality and quantity of biotic and abiotic resources available and ecosystem services (Figure 1.3).

The original subjective, relational and material dimensions were slightly reconfigured. For example, elements of spirituality and religion in the subjective dimension can also be found in the 'ecological dimension' box of Figure 1.3. It is critical to note that aspects of each dimension are not set in stone. They can be adjusted accordingly to scope of the research and the local context. Modifications are necessary because research involving social wellbeing, *buen vivir* and SES perspectives is contextual. As a heuristic, the SEWB framework is a guideline for exploring aspects of dimensions that are deemed valuable to explore, but the defining aspects will ultimately be determined through the research findings and data analysis.

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<sup>10</sup> Determining the key aspects for each dimension was a lengthy, challenging process. Having previous literature to guide me was extremely useful, but the key aspects of each dimension were re-worked numerous times over and cross-checked against the foundational literature as well as my findings to substantiate my rationale for creating this framework.

### 1.4.3 Summary

The SEWB framework signifies an effort to bridge a set of complex literatures to create a conceptual framework that contains certain parameters. The framework is non-elaborative but descriptive, using graphical and narrative methods. Each literature carries its own set of epistemologies and ontologies, which the earlier literature review indicates by tracing the origins of each literature. Each body of literature has a long history of empirical testing and rigour, yet they are interlinked through a series of complementarities. While the complementarities may address some of the gaps identified in the respective literature, it is possible that ontological and epistemological contradictions exist between the approaches. Further, the framework is flexible, and aspects within each dimension can be adjusted to meet research needs and account for context. The SEWB framework provides a lens that can be applied in ecotourism (as it is in this thesis), biodiversity conservation and other literature.

The bodies of scholarship and the SEWB framework discussed in this section are especially relevant for research in nations that choose to look beyond economic-based models for measuring ‘development’. They are particularly fitting for Bhutan for two reasons. Firstly, Bhutan established the GNH Index for measuring material and non-material indicators of social progress. The GNH philosophy is deeply embedded in policy decision-making process at all levels of government and project planning. Secondly, many indigenous minority groups live within the boundaries of Bhutanese PAs. For this reason, a framework that employs a social wellbeing perspective enriched by *buen vivir* and SES perspectives would be fitting for evaluating wellbeing, particularly at the grassroots level. Accordingly, the SEWB framework and empirical analysis of conservation literature may yield new insights for practice in PA governance and policy in developing areas.

## 1.5 Empirical Context

Bhutan was chosen as the broader context for this research project for several reasons. First, its geographical isolation, small population, and long-standing history of resistance to modernisation and the influence of foreign (especially Western) values have resulted in a well preserved natural environment and cultural heritage that are acutely vulnerable to human-induced impacts of tourism. This landlocked kingdom of more than 700,000 inhabitants (National Statistics Bureau [NSB], 2012), most of whom reside in the western region, is located in the southern hills of the Eastern Himalayan mountain range. English and Dzongkha and are the languages of educational instruction<sup>11</sup>, and the majority of the population live in

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<sup>11</sup> The third King of Bhutan invited Father Mackey, a Canadian Jesuit priest and pedagogue, to establish the modern, secular education system in the 1960s.

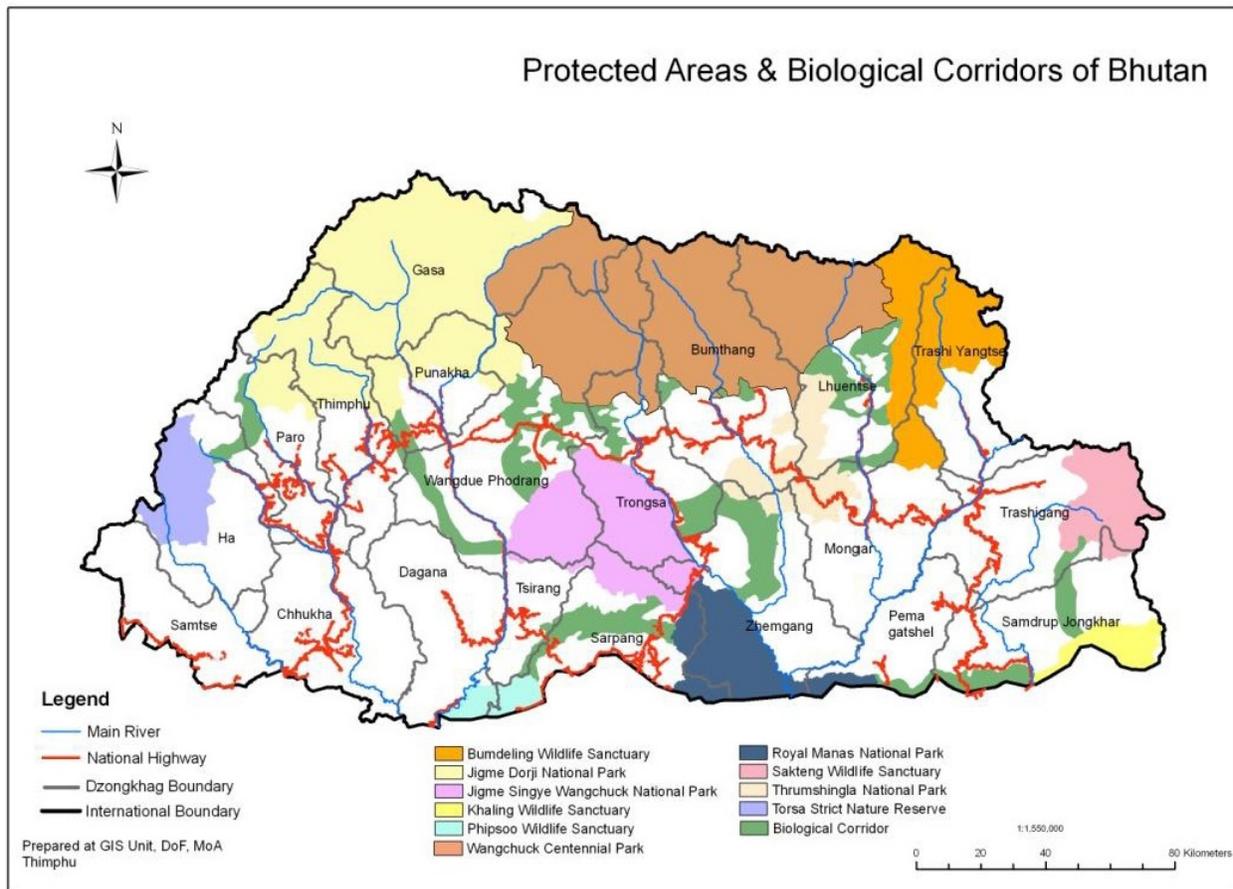
rural areas, engaged in subsistence farming. However, rural lifestyles are changing as Bhutanese villages and towns become increasingly modernised (Chapter 3).

Second, RGOB plays a protective role in society to stem the impacts of external influences. A controlled, class-based ‘high value, low impact’ tourism policy has been in place since the industry’s inception in 1974 (Brunet et al., 2001; Dorji, 2001; Gurung & Seeland, 2008). A daily tariff is used to alleviate negative impacts on environment and society by limiting the number of foreign tourists who can afford to visit while generating economic developments. In addition, there are laws and informal rules (see Chapters 4 and 5) which reinforce traditional values and systems, such as traditional style of clothing, architecture, and religious and cultural festivals (Brunet et al., 2001; Nyaupane & Timothy 2010; Rinzin et al., 2009).

Finally, Bhutan still faces many development challenges despite its emergence as a poster child for development in recent years. On the one hand, economic development has faltered, rural poverty is prevalent, youth unemployment is rising and gender inequalities exist in educational outcomes, employment and political engagement (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2014; NSB, 2013; Subba, 2015). On the other hand, Bhutan has had a peaceful transition to democracy and surpassed most of its eight Millennium Development Goals: healthcare and education are free, infant mortality has been halved between 2009 and 2012 and poverty has been reduced from 36.3% in 2000 to 12.0% in 2012 (Turner et al., 2011; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016;). As the national focus on economic development continues, it is anticipated that Bhutan will be considered for ‘graduation’ from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD] (2012) list of Least Developed Countries in 2018.

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS) was chosen as the empirical setting for this research because it is one of the first protected areas in Bhutan to officially establish ecotourism initiatives for the intended benefit and participation of local people, and because of the presence of a minority indigenous group whose culture and lifestyle draw visitors to the region. This decision was made in conjunction with my partner organisation, the Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division (NRED) of the Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MOAF). The intent of the research project was to generate knowledge that would be useful to local communities, NRED, DOFPS agencies and MOAF overall. Bhutan contains a PA network of five national parks, four wildlife sanctuaries and one strict nature reserve in addition to a series of connecting biological corridors (Figure 1.4). Almost 50,000 people live in PAs across Bhutan, many of whom eagerly anticipate new opportunities through ecotourism (Tshering, 2010).

**Figure 1.4 Map of Bhutanese protected areas and biological corridors**



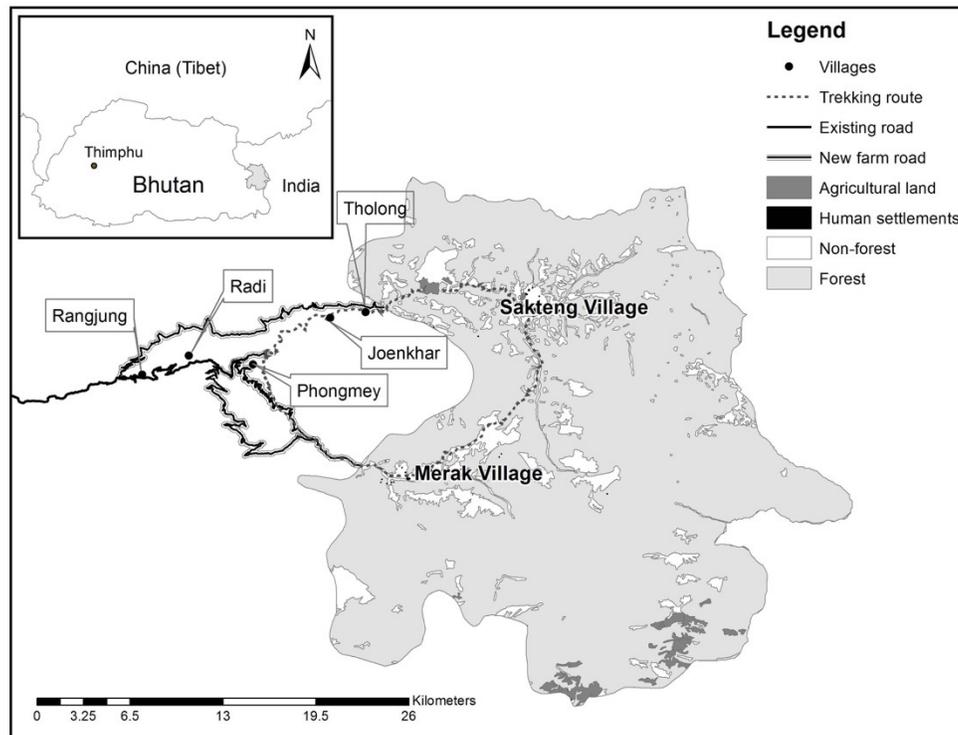
**Source: Department of Forest and Park Services (2011)**

As the most eastern PA in Bhutan near the Indian border, Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary straddles the districts of Trashingang and Samdrup Jongkhar. The Sanctuary spans 740.6 km<sup>2</sup> with an altitude range of 1,600–4,500 masl, encompasses three different ecosystems, and is connected to Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary by a biological corridor (NRED, 2012) (Figure 1.5). It is rich in biological and cultural diversity and home to many types of flora and fauna, including several endangered and charismatic species such as the snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) and red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) (NCD, 2004). Around 4,500 human inhabitants reside in SWS, many of whom are indigenous *Brokpa* (nomad or highlander) people living in the largest settlements of Merak, Sakteng, and Joenkhar<sup>12</sup> (NRED, 2012). The Brokpa have their own distinct language, dress, culture and traditions, and the majority continue to lead semi-pastoral lifestyles. The Sanctuary is the only PA in the world dedicated to preservation of the *migoi* (wild man) or

<sup>12</sup> The Bhutanese census does not record ethnicity, making it difficult to capture accurate data on ethnic groups and their settlement patterns.

Abominable Snowman, an embodiment of natural and supernatural beings, which is believed to abide the Himalayan region (Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). The site is further detailed in Chapters 3 to 5.

**Figure 1.5 Map of Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhutan**



**Source: Karst & Gyeltshen (2016) based on additional support/data from GIS Unit, DOFPS, RGOB and Topographical Survey Division, NLC, RGOB**

## 1.6 Organisation of Thesis

There are five remaining chapters in this six-chapter manuscript-based dissertation. Chapter 2 outlines the underlying assumptions and beliefs, methodology and methods employed in this thesis, while Chapters 3, 4 and 5 address the overall objectives of the research project and were prepared as individual manuscripts for three different academic journals. Chapters 3 and 4 hone in on socio-relational issues in the context of people, institutions, and conservation and development projects in PAs, while Chapter 5 broadens the focus by incorporating an integrative, multi-dimensional framework to examine the impact of ecotourism activities on the social-ecological sustainability of protected areas. The manuscript chapters (3 to 5) contribute a qualitative, case study design to explore ecotourism in the context of Bhutanese PAs, in an effort to contribute to knowledge on tourism and conservation in Bhutan.

The order of the chapters mirrors the order in which I tackled the research goal and objectives, and reflects how my understanding of the literature and findings developed in relation to the preliminary

framework I created before going to the field. In other words, the progression of papers reflects the iterative process of my research journey. The conceptual framework explained in Section 1.4 is elaborated in Chapter 5 to foreshadow the third research objective (to refine and apply an integrative framework of wellbeing to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in developing areas) as well as emphasise that the framework was developed *a priori* to meet this objective.

Chapters 3 and 5 will be published as co-authored articles with my doctoral advisor, Dr. Sanjay K. Nepal, and Chapter 4 was a sole-authorship publication. As a result of the stand-alone manuscript format, there is some repetition between the chapters in terms of literature and theoretical grounding, empirical context and methodology. Nevertheless, these overlaps signify how chapters build upon each other and chart the progression of thoughts around the impact of development activities on the wellbeing of human and nature in PAs. It should be noted that verb tenses in Chapters 3 and 5 reflect co-authorship (first person plural). This form was maintained in the interest of preserving the integrity of the manuscript format. All three manuscripts (Chapters 3 to 5) cite a recently published book chapter (Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016) that I have co-authored with Mr. Ngawang Gyeltshen, a colleague from NRED.

As stated in Section 1.2, each manuscript chapter builds on a key finding and suggested area of further research identified in the previous chapter. Chapter 3 examines the nexus of PA conservation, development and stakeholder relations (Objective 1). It probes into the current knowledge of ICDPs and PAs and its relevance to the Bhutanese context. The empirical analysis centres on the progress and outcomes of two development projects, CGI sheeting distribution and ecotourism development, within the context of modernisation and democratisation. It contributes empirical insights to research in conservation and development of terrestrial ecosystems through a case study in Asia. This manuscript will be submitted to *Environmental Management* in the near future.

Chapter 4 focuses on identifying and assessing indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development (Objective 2). It addresses the need for greater understanding of ideological and socio-cultural factors in PA communities that were identified in Chapter 3 by using three seminal features of *buen vivir*. This perspective offers a theoretical conceptualisation and methodological application of wellbeing that encompasses an indigenous cosmivision. The study contributes an empirical case from the Global South to the growing literature on local narratives and indigenous perceptions in ecotourism research by eliciting indigenous voices from remote mountain communities in Bhutan that are experiencing tourism development. This manuscript was recently published in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (Karst, 2016).

Chapter 5 refines and applies an integrative framework of wellbeing to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in developing areas (Objective 3). It expands the concept of social wellbeing by including *buen vivir* as discussed in Chapter 4 and interweaving these two concepts with SES theory. The resulting framework orients attention to sustainability concerns and presents a novel, multi-dimensional framework and empirical findings on wellbeing to ecotourism studies. The manuscript will be submitted soon to *Tourism Management*.

The concluding chapter summarises the study goals and objectives, significant findings and reflections on common themes, and original contributions to academe and practice. In addition, it outlines study limitations and areas of further research emanating from this study. In accordance with University of Waterloo guidelines, all references are presented at the end of the thesis, along with appendices containing supplementary information mentioned throughout the document.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

#### 2.1 Research Approach

Research ‘paradigms’ or ‘worldviews’ refer to the basic set of beliefs that guides actions (Creswell, 2009; Guba, 1990). This interpretive framework reflects the researcher’s beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality, truth and knowledge, and appropriate procedures for a study. There is an impressive array of paradigms and theoretical perspectives that provide philosophical foundations for research (cf., Aitken & Valentine, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002)<sup>13</sup>. The two worldviews that guide my research, (moderate) social constructivism and *buen vivir*, are explained in the first two sections, followed by reflections on my positionality as a researcher, including challenges encountered. The next section depicts the research design in terms of the chosen case study, followed by sections outlining the geographical, ecological, socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of the study area, and distinctions between Brokpas and the larger Bhutanese society. The chapter closes with a synopsis of the study participants, data collection and methods, and a summary section.

##### 2.1.1 Social constructivism

The social constructivist (or constructionist) approach assumes that humans actively construct all knowledge and truth (Creswell, 2009; Hay, 2010; Newing, 2011). From an ontological perspective, where ontology refers to the nature and relation of being and world beliefs, socially constructed truths are based on relativism: they are situated within a historical moment and social context, and multiple meanings can exist for the same data (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Within this approach, the distinction between ontology and epistemology (the nature, scope and limitations of knowledge, such as what is accepted as valid knowledge, how is it acquired, whether knowledge can be strictly objective, and to what extent existence can be understood) is blurred; there is no neutral, objective or static truth due to the subjectivity of personal interaction and interpretation (Aitken & Valentine, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). In this approach, researcher and participants are interlinked and co-produce knowledge. Yet knowledge is always contested, controversial and partial (Aitken & Valentine, 2006).

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<sup>13</sup> Scholars have noted the often inconsistent and even contradictory terminology applied to numerous theoretical perspectives and methodologies (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014).

‘Moderate’ or ‘contextual’ social constructivism offers an alternative to critiques of strict social constructivism<sup>14</sup> when contending with environmental problems and change because it upholds belief in the physicality of the natural world (Jones, 2002). The moderate view accepts an epistemological relativism (i.e., reality can never be truly known) and rejects ontological relativism (i.e., nature restricts human interpretations of the world), where all beliefs (e.g., scientific knowledge, environmental histories) are socially produced but not necessarily equally valid (Jones, 2002). This approach offers a helpful foundation for assessing environmental issues and allows room for synergistic use of methodologies from other perspectives, such as the analysis of power in post-structuralism (Escobar, 1996; Jones 2002).

Other critiques of the constructivist paradigm include the potential for research credibility and transferability to be compromised because multiple meanings may exist for the same data, depending on the observer (Golafshani, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Transferability makes it possible that data findings and lessons learned in one context can have meaning and usefulness in another. Such criticisms can be offset by deliberate attempts toward providing sufficient description, inclusion and transparency among participants, and through practicing reflexivity and debriefing with participants (Dowling, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Howitt & Stevens, 2011). Jones (2002) suggests that involving rival stakeholders in negotiating truths and outcomes in terms of ‘what exists’ and ‘what should exist’ becomes more valuable when a phenomenon is more socially constructed. This argument is particularly salient to the discourse on trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and anthropocentric development.

### **2.1.2 Buen vivir**

*Buen vivir* guides this research though it may not be found in the classic texts on research paradigms and approaches in the Anglophone literature. The *buen vivir* perspective offers an ecologically balanced, culturally sensitive and community-centric perspective found in indigenous knowledge, but as noted in Chapter 1, it is not restricted to indigenous positions. Loosely translated as ‘living well’ or collective wellbeing, *buen vivir* is related to similar expressions found in numerous indigenous societies across Latin America, which generally reflect fullness of one’s life within a society, in communion with other people and nature (Gudynas, 2011; Jiménez, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

The concept of *buen vivir* is deeply rooted in the context of community and less significance is placed on individual ownership and consumption. Inclusion of all people and nature (biotic and abiotic) and feelings of harmony are of pivotal importance (Jiménez, 2011). Some intellectuals have labelled *buen*

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<sup>14</sup> Jones (2002) notes that many authors (e.g., Milton, Demeritt, Symanski) in the ‘strict’ social constructivist camp deny the idea of an independent reality that can be modified by human actions as well as privileged knowledge claims, including those of scientists. This assumption is problematic for conducting research on environmental problems and change.

*vivir* as ‘biocentric’, ‘bioenvironmental’ or ‘ecocentric’ because it views humans and the world as organically integrated with the universe, and while humans and nature are inextricably linked the needs of ecosystems supersede human needs (Gudynas, 2011; Jiménez, 2011). These labels relate to radical, environmental positions of ecocentrism and deep ecology that reject the Western worldview focused on economic growth and human domination over nature (cf., Leopold, 1949; Naess, 1989). Because humans tend to assume the role as stewards of the Earth and its resources (cf., MEA, 2005; Walsh, 2011), adopting a human ontology would be useful to understand subjective perceptions in this thesis.

In the case of Bhutan, the *buen vivir* worldview complements attention to GNH. The concept of GNH, which is also the national development philosophy for Bhutan, places the individual at the centre of all development efforts and recognises that the individual has material, spiritual and emotional needs (Kezang & Whalley, 2004). Simultaneously, individuals are viewed within the context of strong social relations and respect for the natural environment, which reflect Buddhist values of care for all sentient beings and aspects of Bönism, the pre-Buddhist indigenous (animistic, shamanistic) religion of Tibet (Brooks, 2011; Ura, 2001). *Buen vivir* is discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **2.1.3 Researcher position**

The purpose of this section is to engage in reflexivity, which involves critical introspection and scrutiny of myself as a researcher (Hay, 2010). Positionality refers to the social, locational and ideological position of a researcher in relation to his or her research, or to the research participants (Hay, 2010). Qualitative data is interpreted through the filter one’s worldview, and factors such as the researcher’s status, gender, age and ethnicity may affect how and what study participants choose to disclose (Dowling, 2010; England, 1994; Kobayashi, 1994; MacKenzie, 2016). In this research, I locate myself as a non-indigenous, Canadian academic of mixed race heritage. I grew up in Canada, the child of immigrants from southeast Asia and Europe. Prior to entering the PhD programme, I had spent almost 11 years working and studying in five countries outside of Canada, not including periodic trips to visit relatives abroad since childhood. I am fortunate to have an ethnically diverse extended family, hailing from Australia, the Horn of Africa, south and southeast Asia, and eastern and western Europe, who have informed my worldview.

My personal and professional experiences have been useful for this research in several ways, particularly in the field. As a trained social worker and dialogue facilitator in civic engagement work, I was keenly aware that a researcher can be perceived as a patron, a client or a friend in the field due to peoples’ preconceived notions and experiences (Watson, 2011). I took measures to dispel perceived negative notions, minimise my ‘foreignness’ and honour local culture and way of life by wearing Bhutanese-style clothing, regularly eating traditional foods, visiting with families and participating in

local events and ceremonies (see Section 2.5.2). Although I never assumed to be fully integrated into Bhutanese society, I felt the measures I took were appreciated when several participants commented on how pleased they were to see me wearing Bhutanese dress, or during times when I was mistaken for a Bhutanese woman in public. In this way, awareness of my positionality as ‘the other’ and taking measures to honour local culture were helpful during my time in the field.

As a non-indigenous person, I do not presume to speak on behalf of others and I am very mindful that my ways of understanding are rooted in Western values, my personal experience as a woman and the academe, which have inevitably impacted this study to some degree. As a result, I kept a research log to track my conceptual journey throughout the research process to practice critical reflexivity (Dowling, 2010; England, 1994). Through the log, I was able to constantly and critically examine my role as a researcher, the social context of the research as well as regular interactions with local people and how they may have impacted the data.

Since social constructionism embodies the interpretive process, I acknowledge that the subjectivity of qualitative research makes complete neutrality in research impossible, and that researchers are innately entangled in the ethics, politics and power of research and knowledge creation (Aitken & Valentine, 2006; Dowling, 2010). Even though qualitative coding is an inherently subjective process (Saldaña 2009) and the research findings were interpreted by me, I made ample use of the first-person voice and verbatim quotes to bring forth the ‘voice’ of local and indigenous participants as much as possible when presenting study results.

The Brokpas I met were proud of their unique heritage and traditions, but also faced negative stereotypes. Numerous community participants in all three villages spoke with pride of the importance of Brokpa culture and keeping together as a community. All participants, even those whom I had previously seen wearing Western clothing, upheld tradition and dressed in Brokpa clothing when attending formal meetings, including the study focus groups and debriefing sessions. However, I spoke with several non-community stakeholders<sup>15</sup> who described Brokpa people in disparaging terms such as “backward” and “primitive” and “smelly like yaks”, or noted that some outsiders consider them to be “primitive nomads” or “dirty”. In the villages, several study participants admitted they felt embarrassed to have little or no formal education and some community members were self-conscious when I visited, such as the participant (SP1) who apologised profusely for having a communal outhouse instead of a “sanitary” Western toilet in her home. In such situations, I did my best to reassure participants that I was not there to

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<sup>15</sup> In this instance, I refer to formal conversations I had over the course of almost 11 months with non-community participants in the study and casual conversations with non-study participants, including two consultants for the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs who were on their second trip to Merak-Sakteng to research Brokpa performing arts.

judge them, but my intention could have been difficult to accept when they knew that I, the outsider researcher, was there to record their words and thoughts. Understandably, a study participant who is an ethnic minority from a remote place could have mixed feelings regarding identity and how to portray his or herself to others.

I recognise that I held a position of privilege and power as a foreign researcher. Long-term foreign (non-Indian) visitors and workers are not very common in Bhutan, and it is generally difficult to receive permission to conduct research. Although I was not the first foreign researcher in Merak-Sakteng<sup>16</sup>, to my knowledge I was the first foreign PhD student to undertake research in the region. Foreigners are often perceived as having considerable wealth and advantage. Focus group participants from Joenkhar were eager to hear of my plane travels and told me that I was lucky to be able to “see the world”. In addition, Bhutanese society is hierarchical in terms of social status, and the culture of respect and *tha damtshig* (see Chapter 4) is extended to educators. As a foreign guest and an academic, I was shown great deference and often addressed as “Madam” by many people I encountered and befriended, including those older than myself<sup>17</sup>. These experiences often evoked mixed emotions ranging from humility and discomfort to honour, which I recorded in my research log.

Given this position of privilege, I often wondered if research participants withheld or downplayed information to protect or portray a certain image of themselves or the situation. For example, Chapter 3 indicates that locals may tell half-truths and white lies to appease other people (e.g., RGOB officials), and such actions are not necessarily considered serious transgressions. Similarly, some community (and non-community) participants may have been selectively or entirely untruthful to me, which would present potential limitations to the trustworthiness of the data. Telling falsehoods is not infrequent in research due to factors such as the imposed or perceived authority of the researcher, respondent attempts to create a better image, or lack of anonymity (Gaiziuniene & Cibulskas, 2014; Randall, Coast, Compaore, & Antoine, 2013). I also speculated whether other cultural norms would cultivate honesty, such as the practice of respect for elders and guests that is inherent in *tha damtshig* (cf., Allison, 2004; Chapter 4; Whitecross, 2010). Ultimately, it is difficult to measure and manage dishonesty in research but specific steps were taken to ensure that this did not unduly effect the results (see Section 2.5).

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<sup>16</sup> According to study participants from NRED, SWS, TCB, two researchers from Australia were invited by SWS and visited in Spring 2013. They carried out a study to inform a draft ecotourism action plan for the PA.

<sup>17</sup> This particular convention was difficult for me to accept for two divergent reasons. On the one hand, I generally prefer not to use titles when addressing people because I grew up in Canada, where social etiquette is fairly casual. On the other hand, I was raised by immigrant parents who adhered to ‘Old World’ traditions. It is considered a sign of respect to address elders with formal titles (e.g., aunty, uncle, Mr/Ms.). Therefore, being called “Madam” by people (even friends) of all ages was a humbling and sometimes uncomfortable experience.

Research partners also impacted this study to a large extent. It was necessary to obtain the support of institutions who could provide a work visa and permission to conduct research, access to local communities, key stakeholders and resources (e.g., non-public documents), and funding for costly fieldwork expenses to conduct this research. To this end, partnering with NRED and SWS in Bhutan was invaluable because the Sanctuary fell under their jurisdiction and these institutions had established relationships with virtually all key stakeholders. Scholarships and funding through the University of Waterloo enabled me to travel to Bhutan, while endorsement from the University also lent a degree of prestige to the study.

At the same time, partnerships with prominent institutions introduce new power dynamics into the research process, which can raise some moral dilemmas in terms of research integrity and results. This is particularly notable if there are efforts to control methodological protocols, research findings or their dissemination, or if the researcher feels compelled to please other parties who are involved in the research (Dowling, 2010). I believe that research integrity was not compromised in this study because my funding largely came from independent donors. My Bhutanese partners were respectful of my role as an independent, visiting researcher and encouraged me to be critical in my analysis. However, institutional sponsorship may have impacted the ways in which participants viewed me and the study, and the responses they provided as a result of the existing power imbalances between SWS, NRED and community members (see Chapters 3 and 5). Although it is difficult to gauge the precise level of impact, power differentials can shape the content of participant self-representations when a researcher is dependent on external institutions to conduct research.

In light of the implications of social context on research, it is important to recognise the value of using specific practices to ensure rigour and trustworthiness (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Yin, 2009). For example, I formulated certain strategies in the early stages of the research process (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 2005), such as planned debriefing sessions with community participants and SWS staff, which I then carried out in the field (see Section 2.5). I also made a firm commitment to guard the anonymity of all research participants in the research design phase (see Section 2.5). Even though a vast majority of community and non-community participants I spoke with were not overly concerned about their anonymity<sup>18</sup>, I was thanked by participants on several occasions for taking efforts to ensure their privacy. In terms of methods and procedures, I used within-subject and cross-method triangulation and conducted informal and unstructured interviews and conversations during data collection. Participants were visibly more relaxed and tended to more converse more freely and

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<sup>18</sup> In the villages, it was not uncommon for additional family members, children and houseguests to join my conversations with the main household participant during semi-structured household interviews.

spontaneously compared to times when I used pen and paper or a recording device. As a result of these strategies, I was able to place more trust in the research findings (see Section 2.5.3).

## **2.2 Research Design**

In addition to the research approach, research designs are the plans and procedures that guide research decision-making (Creswell, 2009). This thesis adopted a qualitative research methodology given the exploratory and primarily inductive nature of the study, using a case study approach (Creswell, 2009; Hay, 2010; Yin, 2009). Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the importance that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem, focusing on individual meaning, studying how a culture-sharing group develops common patterns of behaviour over time (i.e., ethnography), and interpreting the complexity of a situation (Creswell, 2009; Newing, 2011). Constructivist researchers commonly rely on qualitative strategies (e.g., ethnography, case studies, grounded theory) and qualitative methods such as face-to-face interviews and participatory observation (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The following sections discuss the strategies of inquiry (types of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods designs that guide research design procedures) chosen for this research. I address why I used a specific approach, chose primarily qualitative data collection methods, and how the study was selected for this research.

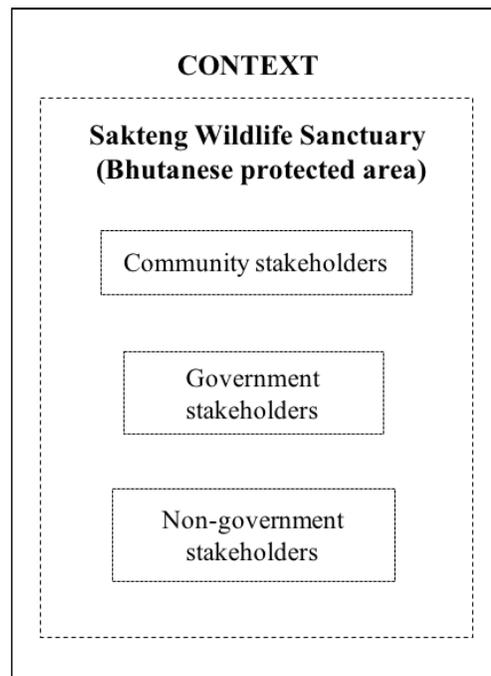
### **2.2.1 Case study approach**

The strategy of inquiry for this research was a case study (Creswell, 2009). A case study involves research of a specific and ‘bounded system’ (or case) within a distinctive context using a variety of methods to better understand a given phenomenon, object or condition (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Case studies are pertinent when the research addresses descriptive (what) or explanatory (how, why) questions to produce rich descriptions and insightful explanations of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context (Yin, 2009). My rationale for using a single, embedded case design (where a study contains more than one sub-unit of analysis) is due to this case (Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary) being: (1) unique, focusing on perceptions of community members from a small, ethnic minority group in Bhutan; and (2) revelatory, in that SWS is a remote PA that was once restricted to foreign tourists where very few researchers and independent (i.e., non-government or donor funded) social scientists have had the opportunity to investigate activities in this PA over two different periods of time.

Since this study is concerned with the perceptions of stakeholders with vested interest in ecotourism in SWS and, to a broader extent, PAs in Bhutan, the embedded units of study were stakeholders from three communities (villages) in SWS (Merak, Sakteng, Joenkhar), government, and non-government

organisations (Figure 2.1). Community stakeholders are identified throughout the thesis by their respective communities but are still considered part of the embedded unit of analysis rather than separate units for a comparative case study because of the strong similarities (e.g., geography, culture) between the majority of the villages. To explore the complexity of stakeholder relations, the analysis takes into consideration and reflects on the important differences and similarities of opinions across villages and the other units of analysis.

**Figure 2.1 Single-case study for Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary with embedded units of analysis, adapted from Yin (2009)**



Data collection consisted primarily of qualitative methods and was guided by a set of broad questions and themes that reinforced the development of the wellbeing framework that incorporated development and SES concepts. Some quantitative data were collected for demographic purposes. Elements of ethnographic and grounded theory approaches were included in this research. These strategies were not fully used because the timeline of the process was bounded, and the data were not devoid of researcher preconceptions and assumptions and then used to generate a theory or hypothesis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009). New issues and themes that were unbeknownst to me prior to fieldwork emerged through the data collection and analysis processes because of the overarching and open nature of questions and basic thematic categories. Collecting individual perspectives exposed broad patterns that supported a preliminary framework that was further developed in Chapter 5.

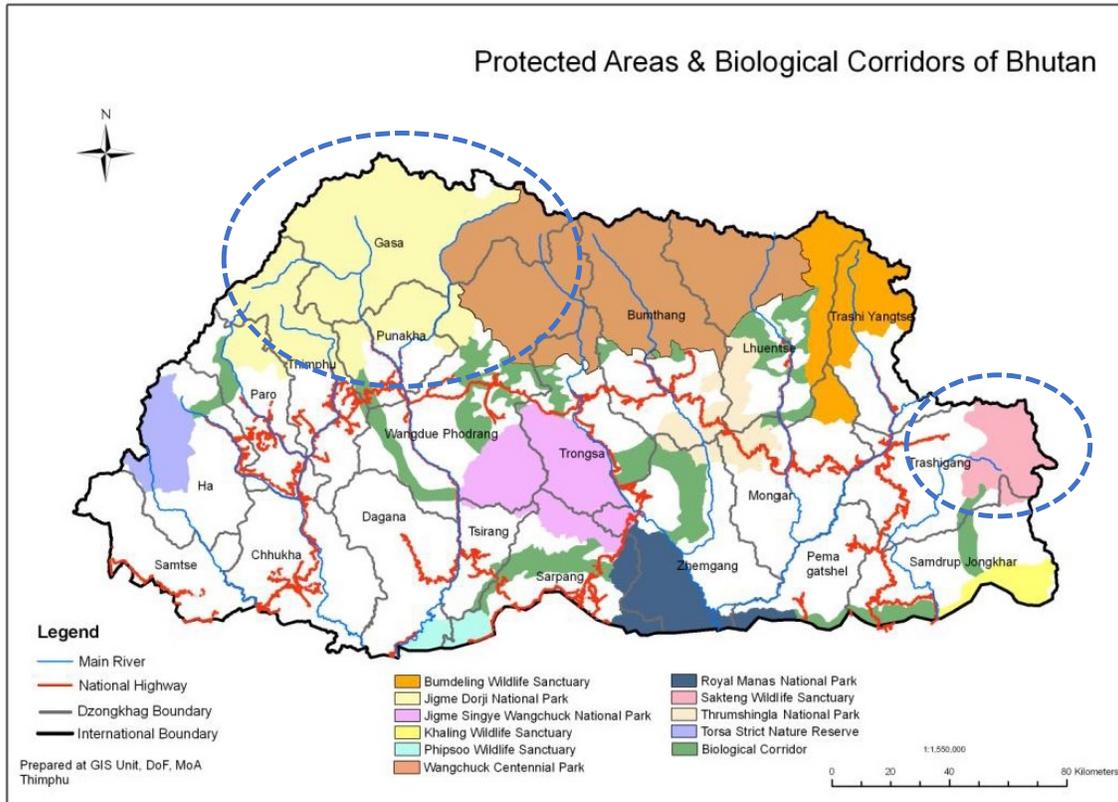
### **2.2.2 Selection of case study**

The case study was carefully chosen out of my interest in the affect of the booming tourism industry on the lives of local people in rural areas and their environment in the once-secluded kingdom of Bhutan. The advancement of GNH as an alternative model to economic development and measuring success is a unique feature of Bhutan, and presents an interesting basis for examining social-ecological sustainability in a changing society. Over a period of almost 2.5 years from 2010 to 2013, I cultivated a research support network consisting of academics and educators, professionals, and researchers and colleagues based in Australia, Bhutan, Canada, England, and the United States. I was introduced to Dr. Karma Tshering, Chief Forestry Officer at NRED, which is the focal representative of the Department of Forests and Park Services for all recreational and outdoor activities in Bhutan. The Division eventually became my partner organisation for this research project.

The site was chosen in conjunction with NRED. Preliminary case study sites and general research questions were discussed in a series of Skype and email conversations with Dr. Tshering, with the intention of developing a research project and generating knowledge that would be useful to local communities, NRED, DOFPS agencies and MOAF in general. Two protected areas were identified as potential case studies: Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, one of the (geographically) smallest and most recently created PAs, and Jigme Dorji National Park (JDNP), one of the oldest and largest parks in the country (Figure 2.2 below). As collaborators of this study, Dr. Tshering and colleagues at NRED also provided advice on protocols and culturally appropriate approaches for working with ethnic and local communities in the Bhutanese context (see Section 2.5). The protocols used in this research (see Appendix B) reflect standard practice in qualitative research and were suitable for the case study site.

The selection of case study and development of research questions followed the initial literature review and development of the initial conceptual framework. A provisional framework evolved out of the literature and document review I began in 2011 and my comprehensive examination process in 2012, but the framework and research questions underwent a concurrent process of ongoing exploration and refinement. A research proposal containing broad research questions, preliminary interview guides and data collection protocols was reviewed and approved by my thesis committee, NRED and checked against Tri-Council ethics policy at the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo, before commencing fieldwork in Bhutan in September 2013. The Sanctuary was finally chosen as the case study following a scoping trip to JDNP in September to October, 2013. Jigme Dorji National Park was not chosen for a case study because ecotourism activities had not yet been initiated with local communities.

**Figure 2.2 Map of protected areas in Bhutan, adapted from DOFPS (2011). The larger dashed ellipse indicates JDNP, the smaller is SWS**



## 2.3 Study Site

This section provides an overview of the three villages in the research site, drawing upon primary data from my fieldwork in Merak-Sakteng from October to November 2013 and in May 2014 and supported by secondary sources, including government reports and surveys. The following sections outline the geographical, ecological, socio-cultural, economic and political characteristics of the area, and describe the similarities, differences and interactions between the communities in this region. Specific aspects of the villages and SWS, such as the distinct culture and traditions of the Brokpa, are illustrated in greater detail in the manuscript chapters (Chapters 3, 4 and 5). The final section attempts to summarise key similarities and differences between Brokpa people and Bhutanese society.

### 2.3.1 The geography of Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary

The Sanctuary spans the remote eastern and southern districts of Trashigang and Samdrup Jongkhar in Bhutan near the Indian border. Founded in 2003, SWS covers 740.6 km<sup>2</sup>, encompasses alpine meadows, temperate and warm broadleaf forest ecosystems, and is connected to Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary by a

biological corridor (NRED, 2012) (see Figure 2.2 above). The Sanctuary houses 203 plant species within 10 major forest types spread across 21 forest communities such as the endemic blue and Bhutan pines (*Pinus wallichiana*, *Pinus bhutanica*) (Wildlife Institute of India, 2005; WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). It has the highest diversity of rhododendron (*Rhododendron L.*) species, 35 out of 46, in the country (Wangchuk, 2010). The national flower of Bhutan, the blue poppy (*Meconopsis grandis*), as well as primrose (*Primula spp.*) and gentian (*Gentiana spp.*) are widely found in its alpine pastures (NCD, 2004).

Several endangered, endemic and vulnerable animal species thrive in SWS. Surveys<sup>19</sup> of the vegetation, birds and mammals of SWS, which were conducted in 2005 and updated in 2010, recorded 24 mammals and 147 types of birds (Wildlife Institute of India, 2005; WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). Several species are listed under the *Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan, 1995* and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora (CITES) (see Appendix A). Mammals found in SWS include the red panda<sup>20</sup> (*Ailurus fulgens*), snow leopard (*Unica unica*) and Himalayan goral (*Naemorhedus goral*) (IUCN, 2016). Commonly sighted avifauna include the Himalaya blood pheasant (*Ithaginis cruentus*), grey backed shrike (*Lanius tephronotus*), grey headed woodpecker (*Picus canus*), common hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), rufous vented tit (*Periparus rubidiventris*) and dark-breasted rosefinch (*Carpodacus nipalensis*) (NCD, 2004; Wangchuk, 2008). Caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), which can be found at very high altitude and must be collected by hand, are prized for their curative properties in traditional medicines in Tibet and China. The Sanctuary may be the only national park in the world dedicated to preserving the cryptid known to locals as the *migoi* (wild man) or yeti (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011).

Merak and Sakteng villages share more similarities in altitude and geography to each other in comparison to Joenkhar. Merak (3,496 masl) and Sakteng (2,942 masl) are situated in the sub-alpine plains of SWS, with the tree line in Merak slightly higher than Sakteng (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). Joenkhar (1,742 masl) is located at a lower altitude within the buffer zone of the park boundary in warm broadleaf forest. Additionally, SWS is the source of two important watersheds. *Nyerachu* (Nyera river) runs through Merak and *Gamrichu* (Gamri river) passes through Sakteng and Joenkhar (Dendup, 2004; WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011).

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<sup>19</sup> During my conversations with staff at NRED and SWS, participants stated that the 2005 surveys were completed within a short amount of time over select areas. The WWF Bhutan and SWS (2011) zoning document notes similar concerns, and anticipates that the number of species will increase in the next biodiversity survey.

<sup>20</sup> The red panda is a flagship species in SWS. According to WWF (2016), a flagship species is one that is “selected to act as an ambassador, icon or symbol for a defined habitat, issue, campaign or environmental cause”.

### 2.3.2 Brokpa society, identity and religion

The Sanctuary was established not only to protect the easterly temperate ecosystems of the nation but also the culture of local indigenous Brokpa residents. Brokpa settlements in Bhutan are found solely in the Merak-Sakteng region. Brokpas are an indigenous minority group with unique cultural identity and settlement patterns. They are a Tibeto-Burman people who migrated from Tibet (Box 2.1) and traditionally practice transhumance<sup>21</sup> (Pelgen, 2007). Most residents in two of the three villages (Merak, Sakteng) continue a semi-pastoralist<sup>22</sup> lifestyle, which residents in the Joenkhar area have abandoned in favour of permanent settlements and agricultural activities due to their temperate climate year-round. Traditional clothing is still habitually worn by many in all communities (Figure 2.3 A, B), although Joenkhar farmers will often wear Western clothes to do agricultural work because Brokpa clothing is expensive and less practical (Chapter 4). Settlements in Merak and in some places in Sakteng tend to be densely populated while homesteads in Joenkhar are generously spaced apart from one another. In all villages, multiple generations live together under the same roof.

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<sup>21</sup> Transhumance refers to the movement of people with their livestock between fixed summer and winter grazing lands.

<sup>22</sup> Many Bhutanese scientists, government agencies and the media tend to conflate nomadism, transhumance and pastoralism when discussing Brokpa people. In the strictest sense, nomadism refers to an irregular or non-fixed pattern of searching for pastures, unlike the fixed pastures of transhumance, and pastoralism refers to animal husbandry practices. Herders in Bhutan follow different types of grazing regimes but not strictly – seasonal timing is most common (Wangchuk, 2008). Some herders may seek new pastures in the field when existing lands are overgrazed. Therefore, I follow Bhutanese convention and use all three terms.

## Box 2.1 The Brokpa origin story

According to the *namthar* (biography), a despotic local ruler lived in Tshona, southern Tibet, likely during the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> century. His fort was situated at the base of a high mountain, which prevented the sunshine from reaching his quarters until late in the day. Eager for more sunlight, the tyrannical ruler commanded his serfs to level the summit. Forced to abandon their own work, his subjects toiled for years on the mountain peak to no avail.

One day a young woman of paranormal wisdom named Jomo Remati (later given the honorific title of Ama or Aum), who had been a nun in Ralung, Tibet, appeared to the dejected workers with a child on her back, telling them it would be easier to cut off the wet head of a man instead of the dry head of a mountain. Inspired by her words, the people of Tshona conspired to murder their ruler. They held a banquet in his honour, replete with a famous sword dance by young men from the region who, at the end of the evening, beheaded the drunken ruler. Following the assassination, Ama Jomo and her spiritual leader, Lama Jarepa, lead the serfs out of Tibet and across Arunachal Pradesh into present-day Bhutan with all their belongings, including their yak, sheep and holy scriptures.

After months of walking through snow-capped mountain, crystalline rivers and dense forest, they arrived at the foothill of an extremely high mountain pass. The stronger, able-bodied members of the group who managed to cross over the pass arrived at a plateau covered in shrubs, spruce and pine trees. In order to inhabit this land, they had to burn down the shrubs, hence the name *Methra* (fire burnt valley), which was later adjusted to Merak. Ama Jomo sent back those who were weaker and unable to make the journey across (e.g., older persons, young children, physically disabled) to settle in a valley that became known as *Sakteng* (plain of bamboos).

It is said that Ama Jomo disappeared into the heavens rather than experiencing death. She is believed to be the reincarnation of the fairy goddess Yeshe Khandu, and the mountain Jomo Kungkhar in Merak is her spiritual abode.

Source: Traditional. There are slight variations of this popular tale (cf., Dompnier, 2007; Pelgen, 2007; Wangchuck, 2006; Wangmo 1990).

**Figure 2.3 (A) Brokpa woman and her grandson wearing traditional dress. (B) Brokpa man wearing traditional clothing and modern gumboots**



Vajrayana Buddhism assimilated certain aspects of Bön<sup>23</sup> and local pre-Buddhist, autochthonous animist and shamanist beliefs (Brunet et al., 2001; Ura, 2001) and resulted in a two-tier hierarchy of deities and spiritual beings (Ura, 2001). Enlightened beings from the four higher spiritual realms who protect the *dharma* (the truth of the laws of nature, teachings of the Buddha) and their practitioners compose the first tier. The second tier consists of *dregs pa* (the haughty and wrathful ones) from the lower six spiritual realms, once hostile spirits and original owners of the land and waters who were tamed by Guru Rinpoche, converted to Buddhism and sworn to protect their habitat and people (Allison, 2015; Ura, 2001). The inclusion of these indigenous mundane deities who are connected to specific geography binds religious and spiritual practice to the landscape, such as Aum Jomo (see Box 2.1 above), who is worshipped on a regular basis (Figure 2.4). The ruins of ancient Bön monasteries can be found between Merak and Sakteng, and each village has built at least one house of worship. There are two *lhakhangs* (temples) in Merak, three in Sakteng and one in Joenkhar.

**Figure 2.4 Local Brokpas prepare for the autumn Jomo ceremony in Merak, October 2013**



Religious rites in Merak-Sakteng reflect the synthesis of Buddhist and non-Buddhist (Bön and animist) traditions. Across Bhutan and in the Merak-Sakteng region, various religious leaders are frequently consulted to carry out invocation rites. *Lamas* or *gomchens* (male priests or lay priests) perform

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<sup>23</sup> The word Bön here is used to describe the form of religion that is thought to have existed in Tibet before Buddhism was introduced and then co-existed with Buddhism to some degree despite periods of tension and conflict between their respective followers (Phuntsho, 2013; Samuel, 2013). It is also often and inaccurately used to define numerous pre-Buddhist practices across the Himalayas, which conflate Bön religion with local rituals and practices (Phuntsho, 2013; Samuel, 2013). Although Tibetologists and religious historians disagree over the origin, history and nature of Bönism, and its relation to Buddhism, contemporary Bön scholars recognise Bön as a distinct, parallel tradition to Buddhism (Samuel, 2013).

ritual offerings (e.g., fumigation, dough figures) based on invocation texts, while *phra mins* or *bon pos* (Bön practitioners) conduct Bön rituals<sup>24</sup> such as invoking deities to help cure the ailing, and female and male shamans (i.e., *pamos* or *jomos*, *pawos*) who follow the oral tradition are invited to perform rituals in times of need (e.g., sickness), such as going into a trance when possessed by the deity to prophesise and offer a cure, and conducting meat or blood sacrifice<sup>25</sup> (Pelgen, 2007; Schrempf, 2015; Ura, 2001). Traditional funerary practices, such as water and sky burials<sup>26</sup>, are performed in northern areas, particularly in Merak where cremation is forbidden due to the close proximity of Jomo Kungkhar (see Box 2.1, Chapter 4). In spite of the hierarchical order among them, ritual specialists tend to share cordial relations and their duties may extend if another practitioner is away (Pelgen, 2007). The flexibility of and co-operation between practitioners reinforce the fluidity between Buddhist for non-Buddhist practices.

While religion is a pervasive facet everyday life and religious practitioners are generally highly respected, attitudes and behaviours appear to be changing. Shamanist practices have been portrayed as ‘unhygienic’ and ‘dangerous’ in recent Bhutanese media, and have been challenged by more orthodox Buddhist specialists<sup>27</sup> (Schrempf, 2015). According to Ura (2001), the number of shaman practitioners in Bhutan is declining.

### 2.3.3 Livelihood activities and economic conditions

#### *Livelihood activities*

The primary vocation in higher altitude Merak and Sakteng is semi-pastoralism<sup>28</sup> and subsistence agriculture in lower altitude Joenkhar. Since land holdings in high altitude villages are small, around 30 decimals<sup>29</sup> or 0.12 ha, vegetables are grown in small kitchen gardens. Main types of vegetables grown in all three villages include root (e.g., potato, radish, carrots) and cruciferous (e.g., cauliflower, cabbage,

<sup>24</sup> Pommaret (2009) observes the dual religious identity of these practitioners, who are usually devout Buddhists. They become non-Buddhist practitioners when performing rituals dedicated to local deities. Yet, the rituals themselves usually contain Buddhist elements.

<sup>25</sup> The practice of animal sacrifice and serving meat at *pujas* has been mostly replaced by symbolic sacrifice, including animal effigies or vegetarian foods, due to pressure from Buddhist leaders and the national ban on animal slaughter. In Merak-Sakteng, I was often reminded that slaughtering animals is strictly forbidden. However, I was served grilled yak meat at one *puja* banquet I attended, and I noticed that local people consumed meat dishes.

<sup>26</sup> Water burials entail submerging the wrapped corpse under rocks in the river for several days, then chopping the remains into 108 pieces (based on Buddhist scriptures) and returning them to the river to feed the fish. Sky burials involve chopping the corpse into 108 pieces and leaving the remains in an open space far from the village to be consumed by vultures or other birds of prey. Both rites are based in the Buddhist belief that selfless acts (i.e., feeding animals) create merit and bring good fortune to the dead.

<sup>27</sup> Schrempf (2015) specifically refers to a Buddhist *lama* and *terdag* (spirit-medium who practices divination), both male, who have challenged the authority and status of (predominantly female) *jomos* in northeastern Bhutan. In my research, a few local participants, including a *gomchen* in Merak, hinted that there were people in the community who practiced harmful “black magic” and curses.

<sup>28</sup> Pastoralism is the practice of owning, breeding and caring for livestock.

<sup>29</sup> A decimal is a unit of area that is approximately equal to 0.004 ha. This unit became obsolete in India after conversion to the metric system but is still used in Bhutan and rural areas of northern India.

broccoli) vegetables, as well as leafy greens (e.g., spinach, lettuce). In 2013 and 2014, greenhouses were installed in Merak and Sakteng as part of an IFAD-funded agrotourism project to promote sustainable food for subsistence and to extend the harvesting season (P. Dorji, 2012). In doing so, harvesting in the fall would coincide with the tourism season (Table 2.1) and additional produce could be sold to tourists.

In Joenkhar, the warmer climate and larger land holdings allow farmers to grow a wider variety of produce and grains. Land holdings range from 50 decimals (0.2 ha) to 1.6 ha (P. Dorji, 2012). Maize is the staple crop, followed by wheat, barley and millet. Contrary to their pastoralist counterparts, a wider variety of vegetables and fruits are grown in Joenkhar, including chili, pumpkin, cucumber, tree tomatoes, wild strawberry, passion fruit and tree tomato, which is also used to make red dye for Brokpa *chupas* (woollen tunics). Men use bulls to plough the land, and women generally spend more time weeding, harvesting and guarding the fields. Leaf litter is collected to use as green manure in the fields (Dendup, 2004) (see Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1 Calendar of climate and main livelihood activities in relation to ideal tourism periods in Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar villages**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Climate 		← snow* →					← monsoon sporadic rain →				← snow* →	
Agricultural activities 		← collecting leaf litter** →		← sowing →				← harvesting →				
Livestock activities* 	← drukkorr →			← migration to highlands →				← migration to lowlands →			← drukkorr →	
Tourism 				← →					← →			

\* Merak and Sakteng only

\*\*Joenkhar only

Sources: Dendup, 2004; Dorji, P. (2012); Fieldwork 2013-14

Some households also collect wild plants and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for personal consumption throughout the year. Plants collected in Merak and Sakteng include Himalayan pear, rhododendron and sandalwood for incense, and chirita for its medicinal properties. A few households in Merak and Sakteng travel to very high altitudes (e.g., Nachungla and Jomo Kunghkhar areas to collect

cordyceps to supplement their income. Common NTFPs in Joenkhar include fiddlehead (*nakey*), nettle (*damru, namseng*), mushroom (*shamu*) and other wild vegetables, along with seaweed from nearby rivers and streams. Less wealthy households may also barter NTFPs for money in neighbouring villages and *geogs* (block of villages). Permits to collect items for personal and commercial use are compulsory by national laws, but while fees tend to be generally low residents often do not apply for permits. Rangers at SWS reflected that this may be due to the amount of bureaucracy required, since it can take up to one month for DOFPS to issue the permit once an application form is filled out and submitted.

Livestock products are produced in all three villages. Communities in Joenkhar have larger poultry farms than their northern neighbours, and are able to supplement their income through the sale of eggs. Conversely, Joenkhar residents own fewer cattle and produce less milk. In Merak and Sakteng, a variety of livestock, such as yaks, *zos/zomos* (male and female yak-cattle crossbreeds) and sheep, migrate at different times. Yaks leave for southern pastures before *zos* and *zomos*, which return to northern pastures before yaks (Wangchuck, 2008). This practice varies from other pastoral areas in Bhutan, where only yaks are migrated (Wangchuck, 2008). Collecting fodder to compensate for insufficient grass during winter is another major livestock activity (see Table 2.1 above)<sup>30</sup>.

Pasturelands are owned by RGOB since the *tsamdros* (pasturelands) were nationalised through the *Land Act of Bhutan 2007* (RGOB, 2007). However, highlanders who are dependent on *tsamdros* for their livelihoods are allowed to retain their *tsamdros* rights and could sub-lease the pasture, provided that they do not abandon their place of domicile (RGOB, 2007). Unhappy with these changes and frustrated with the limited amount of grazing land, herders in Merak and Sakteng appealed vociferously to the government to reinstate earlier *tsamdros* rights of ownership through legal registration in 2014 (cf., Wangdi, 2014).

For high altitude Brokpas, migration to winter pastures consists of a unique *Brokpa* tradition and trading system called *drukkor* (grain journey, see Table 2.1). Families travel to southern villages (e.g., Radhi, Khaling) and few go across the Indian border to other ethnic Brokpa communities or their relatives (due to intermarriage) to sell or trade their goods (cf., Tsering, Bora, Ando, & Kosaka, 2010). During *drukkor*, highland Brokpa families will stay with a *nepo* (guest-host) household in the lowland (e.g., Radhi) and barter their livestock products (e.g., wool, leather, meat, cheese, butter, rope) for grains, vegetables and other agricultural goods. This relationship is based on reciprocity and trust, and evolves over the years as families eat, sleep and socialise together for several weeks each year (S. Wangchuk,

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<sup>30</sup> Table 2.1 does not attempt to chart all the livestock and agricultural activities, only major ones. The timing of activities depicted here is approximate since they are traditionally recorded according to the Bhutanese calendar, which is lunisolar.

2000). The migration journey between pastures can vary from one hour to a week, depending on the final destination.

The Sanctuary opened as a special destination for foreign visitors in 2010, with the intention of providing local people with a supplementary source of income (Tourism Council of Bhutan [TCB], 2009; TCB, 2012). The RGOB was cautious to embark on this project in its desire to protect the indigenous Brokpa, but local people had discussed potential tourism activities before the preliminary TCB survey. A few participants recalled that the idea gained traction once Jigme Tshultrim, a politician from their constituency (Radhi-Sakteng) who included tourism development in Merak-Sakteng in his campaign manifesto, was elected to the National Assembly in 2008.

The influx of government funds for tourism-related infrastructure development of campsites, guesthouses and other facilities led to a boom in local construction and new employment opportunities. Main tourist attractions include scenic alpine landscape and old growth forest along a trekking route and visits to Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar villages for the rare opportunity to experience Brokpa cultural heritage and pilgrimage sites. The Sanctuary is currently under consideration to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If it is inscribed, this recognition will likely garner more attention to SWS on a global scale.

### *Wealth categories*

Notions of wealth and a having good life in Merak-Sakteng can take various forms. When asked how to describe someone who is not doing well, focus group participants discussed lack of material wealth, such as not owning a horse (Sakteng) or any cattle or yaks, which meant one would have to porter or do manual labour such as road work (Merak). Another occupation that Sakteng focus group participants considered a sign of someone who is not prospering was having to “stay the mountains” to herd yaks. Other factors cited were: not having enough food to eat (Sakteng); lack of basic infrastructure, including a road to your village or health services (Joenkhar); or not having natural resources, such as trees to make furniture and houses (see Chapters 3 and 5).

As livestock ownership is considered a sign of wealth, most present-day inhabitants of Merak are considered more economically prosperous than their fellow Brokpas in Sakteng and Joenkhar. Interestingly, it is not uncommon for Brokpa people to validate their respective economic situation and stereotypes about their temperaments and actions through their origin story (see Box 2.1 above). For example, people of Merak are purportedly able to work harder than people of Sakteng because they descended from younger and healthier people. In general, Brokpas from Merak are considered to be more calculating, enterprising, aggressive and disobedient than other Brokpas in the region (see Chapters 3 and

5). While people of Merak are considered more financially affluent in general it is important to note that there are economically disadvantaged families and unemployment in all three communities. Multiple community and non-community participants remarked on the growing unequal distribution of wealth among households in general.

Brokpas typically inherit material wealth from their families<sup>31</sup> but some people have made their own wealth independently, such as opening new businesses as contractors when there were commissions to build the SWS campsites, or through portering in tourism and hosting tourists in their homes. A few community and non-community participants mentioned that there were people in the community who committed crimes such as robbing *Buddhist* monuments or poaching endangered animals (see Chapter 4) to acquire their initial wealth.

### **2.3.4 Natural resource use and challenges**

Similar to other remote areas in Bhutan, SWS communities are heavily dependent on their surrounding environment for food, fuel and shelter, which has resulted in negative human-wildlife interactions and impacts. Practices that reduce forest cover, such as over-consumption of grazing lands and wood products were wide-spread before SWS was established (see Chapter 3). The trend of increasing livestock continues and may lead to more over-grazing and double grazing, which will deteriorate soil quality, hinder forest regeneration, and impact wild herbivores and other animals reliant on the land. Likewise, landslides and erosion have been reported in SWS, and there are fears of future occurrences in the Dorbrok core zone, where the main walking trail that connects Merak and Sakteng is located (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011).

Additional techniques that are widely practiced and considered illegal by PA authorities include tree girdling<sup>32</sup> to expand the periphery of grazing lands, and lopping trees for fodder. There has been a reduction in the number of forest fires to convert pasture land and incidences of wild animal hunting and poaching due to increased public education and patrolling, but both practices still exist (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). Improper disposal of non-biodegradable garbage along trails, at rest sites and around the villages, along with illegal road construction are the most recent pressing concerns (see Chapter 3 and Section 2.3.5). Even legal farm roads that are approved by the *dzongkhag* and require environmental

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<sup>31</sup> Disputes over inheritance can be a source of great strife among families.

<sup>32</sup> Girdling, or ring-barking, involves removing a strip of bark from the circumference of a trunk or branch of a woody plant with the intention of eventually killing the plant.

assessments before construction destroy local habitats and may inadvertently encourage illegal extraction of trees and other natural resources.

Agricultural crop damage by wild animals, including Assamese macaque, wild boar, barking deer, porcupine and various birds, is rampant but primarily confined to Joenkhar, with few cases in Sakteng. Due to increased conservation efforts, there has been an increase in the predator population (e.g., wild dogs, bears, leopards), resulting in livestock depredation, particularly in Merak and Sakteng. Wild dogs and bears have been cited as key culprit species (Wangchuk, 2008). Rangers at SWS identified retaliatory killings of large predators as another cause of their decline.

Other human activities that have exacerbated pressure on forest resources include increased human population through the establishment of government offices in 2003, the construction of more modern-style housing in recent decades and the development of roads. Increasing amounts of timber are used because these houses demand more wood than traditional Brokpa houses, which only have one window and are single storey (Figure 2.5 A). A traditional Brokpa home is a one storey edifice of wood and stone with a single window and a bamboo tile roof. In recent years, there has been a growing trend among families with increased wealth to build more western-style Bhutanese homes (i.e., ornately painted two-storey with multiple windows) to accommodate their big families (Figure 2.5 B).

**Figure 2.5 (A) Traditional one-storey Brokpa houses in Merak. Some have bamboo shingle roofs and others have shiny CGI sheeting. (B) Traditional western Bhutanese style houses in Joenkhar**



With external support, local communities have taken measures to intensify their use of natural resources. Government (Bhutanese and foreign) subsidised or sponsored cooking stoves, solar lighting and electricity have minimised reliance on the forest for domestic consumption (Dendup, 2004). In addition, a programme to distribute subsidised corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheet (see Figure 2.5 A) was

implemented in two stages to supply substitute roofing materials to SWS residents to reduce heavy reliance on bamboo tile roofs and transhumant practices, which have negatively impacted local flora and fauna (see Chapter 3).

### 2.3.5 Socio-political organization and local governance

The Sanctuary lies between Trashigang and Samdrup Jonkhar districts but falls under the jurisdiction of the Trashigang *dzongda* (district administrator), unlike other Bhutanese PAs that straddle more than one district. Local leadership structures in the region have undergone some transformation in the last two decades. Merak and Sakteng shared a common *gup* (village leader) and council based in Sakteng *geog* until 1992, when administration was divided into two *geogs* with their own *tshogdes* (councils)<sup>33</sup> to reduce tension and disputes in the area. Prior to democracy and the establishment of the national Constitution in 2008, potential candidates were presented to the public and appointed by *dzongkag* administration. Under each *gup* is a *mangiap* or *mangmee* (assistant village head), and a set of *tshogpas* (community leaders/*chiwog* representatives) and *chipoens* (messengers) for each *chiwog* (village or cluster of small villages) (Table 2.2). Since Joenkhar is quite remote, there is a *chiwog tshogpa* responsible for the cluster of villages (i.e., Joenkhar, Murbi and Tholong) in this area. Sakteng remains the seat of the *dzongkhag* (sub-district government), which is overseen by the *dzongda*. Current *gups*, *mangiaps*, *tshogpas* and *chiwog tsogpa* serve multi-year terms and are publicly elected. The post of *chipoen* is served by a representative from each household on a mandatory one-year, rotational basis<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> The *geog tshogde* system is typical of local governance structures in Bhutan.

<sup>34</sup> *Chipoens* act as community liaisons between *gups*, *tshogpas* and the community members. In the past they used to transmit messages from local leaders to villages and households on foot. They play an important role in organising community activities, including tourism (see Chapter 3).

**Table 2.2 Units of governance and number of representatives in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary**

<b>Dzongkhag</b>	Trashigang		
<b>Dungkhag</b>	Sakteng		
<b>Community</b>	Merak	Sakteng	Joenkhar
<b>Geog</b>	Merak	Sakteng	
<b>Chiwogs by geog</b>	Gengu Khatey (Upper Merak) Khamey (Lower Merak) Khelephu Khashateng	Sakteng Pusa-Tengma Joenkhar-Murbi Borongmong-Borongste Thraktri	
<b>Gup</b>	1	1	
<b>Mangiap</b>	1	1	
<b>Chiwog Tshogpa</b>	n/a	n/a	1
<b>Tshogpa</b>	5	5	
<b>Chipoen</b>	3	8	

Multiple community groups in all three communities mirror a vibrant socio-economic and political life. Almost all participants interviewed said they made financial or in-kind contributions to one or more voluntary organisations and committees (Table 2.3). Some of these groups have been sponsored by RGOB and foreign donors. The non-exhaustive list of co-operatives and groups is based on the chief groups that community participants cited, and reflects the capacity of the community to organise.

**Table 2.3 Sample types of community groups in operation by village**

Village	Type of group
Merak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• incense production group</li> <li>• <i>mani tsogpa</i> – retirement fund for older people</li> <li>• public welfare group/mutual aid society for people who need money in times of need (e.g., paying hospital bills or burial expenses)</li> <li>• community singing group</li> <li>• <i>chirata</i> collection group for the sale of medicinal rhizomes</li> <li>• <i>chemang – gomchen</i> group</li> <li>• <i>lanor tshogpa</i>– high altitude animal collective for the production and sale of yak and cattle goods, including fermented cheese</li> <li>• horse porter group (tourism)</li> <li>• campsite management committee (tourism)</li> </ul>
Sakteng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>lanor tshogpa</i></li> <li>• agriculture group</li> <li>• campsite management committee</li> <li>• porter committee (tourism)</li> </ul>
Joenkhar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• poultry co-operative for production and sale of eggs (in progress)</li> <li>• dairy collective for Jersey cow products (in progress)</li> <li>• Yumzang Semthung Community Forest</li> <li>• porter/pony committee (tourism)</li> <li>• tourism <i>tshogpa</i> group for coordination of tourism activities and managing campsite</li> </ul>

Source: Fieldwork, 2013–2014

### 2.3.6 Key infrastructure and public services

Infrastructure development in SWS remains a high priority issue, particularly road accessibility and transportation. There is no road connectivity in the area and virtually all community participants interviewed expressed hope that the situation would change in the near future (see Chapter 5). The closest motorable roads are one day’s walk to Merak or Joenkhar and two days to reach Sakteng. In response to local demand, the *dzongkhag* is currently building two new farm roads to connect Merak and Sakteng to the main roads and towns. Extreme weather conditions (e.g., floods) and lack of funds have periodically halted farm road construction. In 2014, a group of frustrated villagers from Merak illegally bulldozed a 2 km gravel road extension from the official SWS trail entrance at Phrugshingmang toward Merak (Chapter 3, Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). The construction took place one evening when SWS rangers were not in the PA. The offenders were found and fined, but all SWS officials and some non-community participants from government agencies believed illegal construction could happen again in the future.

Public services and facilities are modest in Merak-Sakteng. There are three basic health units (BHUs) and schools in each village. Merak and Sakteng each have lower secondary (up to Class 8) schools and

Merak and Joenkhar have a primary school (up to Class 6). There are early childhood care and development centres for children between the age of three and five years in Merak and Sakteng to foster a smooth transition to primary school education. Education levels and basic literacy rates are generally low. School attendance in Merak and Sakteng can be fairly low since parents often remove children from class to help with herding activities. In contrast, educators in Joenkhar observed high class attendance because parents wanted their children to become educated and co-operated well with the school. There is one Royal Bhutan Police outpost in Sakteng. In terms of technology, mobile communication services have been available in the area since 2010, and cellular phones and social media applications (e.g., Facebook) are widespread. Few households own televisions and computer ownership is rare.

### **2.3.7 Brokpas and Bhutanese values**

Despite some marked differences in geography and livelihood activities between Joenkhar and the other two villages, there are many similarities that bind the three villages. The Brokpa are one indigenous group in a nation comprised of various ethnicities, primarily the Ngalop (also known as Drukpa), Sharchop and Lhotshampa. Smaller indigenous groups include the Bumthaps, Layaps, Doyas and Monpas. Brokpas have a shared legendary ancestry that revolves around ancient protector goddess who is situated in Jomo Kungkhar. Their history is recorded in a written religious biography in addition to oral tradition. Their origin story (see Box 2.1) is powerful on two levels. In one way, it reinforces certain stereotypes within the communities, yet in another it cements Brokpa cultural identity and sets their group apart from non-Brokpa populations in Bhutan.

Brokpa values are contextualised in place and in Ama Jomo. Similar to other indigenous concepts of *buen vivir*, it cannot be appropriated elsewhere, but this way of viewing the world provides a compelling frame of reference for examining human-nature dimensions and social-ecological wellbeing. For the most part, it appears that traditional Brokpa values are inextricably tied to a Buddhist (and arguably Bhutanese) worldview that is infused with non-Buddhist, indigenous elements, which are tolerated and even supported by local religious practitioners. It is also important to note that although modernity has had great impact on people living in Thimphu, Bumthang and other rapidly urbanising areas, residents in Brokpa communities largely practice traditional lifestyles.

## 2.4 Study Participants

### 2.4.1 Sample populations and procedures

An overview of the **population samples** is recapped here and elaborated accordingly in Chapters 3 to 5. This study examined the perceptions of local and indigenous community, government and non-government stakeholders with knowledge, exposure to or interest in ecotourism activities in SWS. I drew upon three sample sets in the respective chapters for interviews:

- 1) Local (including indigenous) community stakeholders (Chapters 3 and 5);
- 2) Indigenous-only community stakeholders, a sub-set from the local community stakeholders sample (Chapter 4); and
- 3) Non-community stakeholders, from government and non-government sectors (Chapter 4).

A total of 140 adults (age 18-75) participated in this research through a series of interviews (unstructured and semi-structured) and focus groups. Of the 68 households that participated in semi-structured interviews, the vast majority (63 households) identified as indigenous Brokpa. Community participants were largely semi-pastoralists or farmers (89%) and most residents held one or more jobs concurrently, such as construction work or performing cultural dances to earn additional income. Some participants worked primarily in a trade (e.g., commerce) or skilled labour (e.g., weaving, hat making), while others (10%) held elected positions in local government administration. All community participants identified as Buddhist.

Non-community participants came from government and non-government sectors. All participants were English speakers from various government agencies and non-governmental agencies in Table 2.4. Most (72%) government and non-government participants were senior or executive level, 24% were technical or mid-career level (5–15 years' work experience) and only 4% were entry level, having five or fewer years of experience.

**Table 2.4 Description of non-community participants**

<b>Non-community participants</b>	<b>Number of individual interviews (n=50)</b>
<i>Bhutanese government and affiliates</i>	
District, sub-district government ( <i>dzongkhag, dungkhag</i> )	3
Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary	6
Tourism Council of Bhutan	5
Ministry of Agriculture and Forest departments (Wildlife Conservation Division; Department of Forest and Park Services; Nature, Recreation and Ecotourism Division)	7
Other government agencies/bodies (e.g., monitoring, planning, policy, Parliament)	6
<i>Non-Bhutanese government and civil society organisations (CSOs)</i>	
Private sector (tour operators, independent guides, consultants)	8
Local CSOs	9
Foreign CSOs and government agencies	5
Academia	1

**Source: Fieldwork, 2013–2014**

For **sampling procedures**, several types of non-probability sampling were utilised in accordance with specific research methods. Non-community participants for informal and unstructured interviews were selected using convenience and purposive sampling techniques. Casual discussions were held in public locations, including local shops, cafés, walking trails and offices.

Among local and indigenous community stakeholders, adult heads of households were selected using a combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling strategies (Cameron, 2010, Newing, 2011), with assistance from SWS park staff, local community leaders and local field assistants. These sampling approaches were used to capture a wide but inclusive range of local decision-makers and stakeholders living in the six largest *chiwogs* near the main trekking route and development activities during the fall and spring non-migratory periods. A minimum 10% of total households per *geog* were interviewed from the *chiwogs* closest to the trekking route (Table 2.5) to provide a representative sample size from each area because *geog* populations varied considerably. Every effort was made to secure participation from local leaders, weavers and milliners, trained local guides and cooks, porters, campsite managers and tourism *tshogpas* to hear from people most vested in and knowledgeable about ecotourism development in each *chiwog*.

**Table 2.5 Breakdown of households interviewed**

<b>Community participants by <i>geog</i><sup>1</sup> and <i>chiwog</i><sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Frequency of households by <i>geog</i></b>	<b>Number of household interviews (n=68)</b>
<i>Merak geog</i> (301 households)	10%	
Gengu		6
Khatey (Upper Merak)		15
Khamey (Lower Merak)		9
Kelephu		0
Khashateng		0
<i>Sakteng geog</i> (401 households)	13%	
Sakteng		18
Pusa–Tengma		5
Joenkhar–Murbi		15
Borongmong–Borongste		0
Thraktri		0

1. *Geog* (village block) 2. *Chiwog* (village sub-block)

**Source: Fieldwork, 2013–2014**

For non-community stakeholders, I employed purposive and snowball sampling strategies (Cameron, 2010; Newing, 2011). Non-community participants were interviewed from government, civil society organisations (domestic and foreign) and the private sector (see Table 2.4). Colleagues from NRED offered suggestions and sent letters of introduction to potential interviewees to create the initial pool of participants. After the chain referrals, all non-community participants were asked to refer one or two individuals or organisations that were actively involved in supporting or knowledgeable of ecotourism activities in Bhutanese PAs (Newing, 2011).

#### **2.4.2 Defining ‘community’**

Given the situated, contextual nature of this research, the concept of community is based on definitions found in the Bhutanese language (see Glossary of Dzongkha Terms). In general, there are several terms for the word ‘community’, each with slightly different meaning. For example, ‘*medhay*’ can mean ‘community’ or ‘society’ (pers. comm. Tara Limbu, 2016). Yet the term for a village or elected leader or representative, *tshogpa*, can refer to community, a village committee or a group of no less than three people formed in a certain geographic locality for some purpose (pers. comm. Sharap Wangchuk, 2016). The meaning of the word changes according its use and delivery (i.e., through syntax and intonation). Additionally, the word *chiwog* refers to a small village but can also infer community when there is a

cluster of small villages. Therefore, major settlements or villages such as Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar are also considered communities. The fluidity and plurality of this concept in the Bhutanese context mirrors how the term has been debated and polarised in Western literature, ranging from romantic ideals of unity to imposing levels of hierarchy and conflict (see Box 2.2). This thesis applies community in the sense of a geographic, administrative unit (e.g., *chiwogs*) and main settlements or villages in the Merak-Sakteng region.

### **Box 2.2 Dimensions of community identity**

Numerous approaches to defining community reflect the intricate and contested nature of its meaning. It may refer to a locality as well as a network of relationships (Salazar, 2012), or a site of violence, political struggle or multiple hierarchies (Amit & Rapport, 2002; Brosius, Tsing & Zerner, 2005; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). In tourism literature, Urry (1995) suggests concepts of community as: (1) a specific topographical location; (2) a particular local social system; (3) a feeling of *communitas* (togetherness); and 4) an ideology that often hides underlying power relations. In contrast, Getz and Timor (2005) cite community as being both hosts and other groups and actors involved in tourism, with the caveat that host destinations do not automatically reach an equal (or higher) position relative to other actors or groups in the planning processes. The notion of community is also conceived as intrinsically good and is rarely challenged (Kumar, 2005). In other words, no one wants to claim they are ‘against’ community.

Many of the definitions above view community in a generic sense, as territorially fixed, small, homogeneous and even harmonious. However, many social scientists concede that communities are not uniform realms (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; DeFilippis & Saegert, 2008; Sennett, 2008). Community remains a critical consideration in research because it functions as a vital space for shaping individual political and ideological understandings of the world (DeFilippis & Saegert, 2008).

## **2.5 Data Collection**

This section outlines the multiple data collection methods that were employed across the entire study. Literature and document review began in 2011, prior to my departure for Bhutan in August 2013. The bulk of data was collected in Bhutan from September 2013 to June 2014, utilising methods that were accessible to a wide audience (i.e., literate and illiterate participants): participant observation; interviews (informal, unstructured, semi-structured); focus groups; and participatory debriefing sessions. Most non-community interviews were held from September 2013 until April 2014, when I was based in Thimphu. I visited Brokpa communities in SWS from October to November 2013 and in May 2014.

Variations in migration patterns, and restrictions in financial resources, time and location determined my length of stay in SWS and choice of population sampling strategies. For example, changes in climate can adjust seasonal trends. Therefore, despite careful collaboration and planning with SWS park staff familiar with the migration patterns of semi-pastoral Brokpas, I was unable to interview many residents in Merak and Sakteng during the Fall 2013 period because most families had migrated South by October, earlier than usual. Furthermore, the Sanctuary is located in a restricted area for non-Bhutanese citizens but I obtained special travel permits from the Bhutanese Department of Immigration to collect data over two separate time periods. I was granted this degree of access to conduct my field research through the support

of staff at NRED, my partner organisation, and staff at SWS. The TCB also provided the assistance of their representative in Trashigang for this study during the Merak portion of my Fall 2013 visit.

Participation in the study was voluntary and photographs of participants were taken with verbal consent. Based on recommendations by officials at NRED and SWS staff, all focus group participants were given a small stipend for their participation because the two sessions were held on the same day, therefore requiring a full day of participation. Three community participants in Merak were paid for semi-structured interviews as an incentive to participate in Fall 2013. At this time there were few people in the villages since several families had already migrated South for the winter. The decision to expedite data collection was made to avoid potential travel permit violation and becoming snowbound.

### **2.5.1 Field assistants and translation**

Field assistants played a pivotal role during in-country data collection, given the significant linguistic challenges I faced as a foreign researcher with limited knowledge of local languages in Bhutan<sup>35</sup>. Research assistants who provide translation and interpretation play a powerful role in the research process. They can negotiate access for the researcher, give valuable insight into local livelihoods, alter responses to protect local or other interests and even bias explanations of local culture for certain research outcomes, which may lead to greater social status and power within their communities (Caretta, 2014; MacKenzie, 2016; Newing, 2011). This was evident in my experience: my field assistants worked as translators, brokered meetings with local officials, and often supported me in navigating the cultural meanings behind comments made and behaviours I observed. Virtually all interviews, focus groups, debriefing sessions and many discussions were led by myself and at least one field assistant, and conducted in one or more of the following four languages: Brokpake, Dzongkha, Sharchopkha, and English.

My partner institutions, NRED and SWS, helped me find appropriate field assistants. I met with Mr. Sonam Tobgay, the Chief Forestry Officer responsible for all field offices at SWS, Mr. Kezang Jigme, Focal Person for Ecotourism Nature Recreation Section at SWS, and the head of each respective ranger office to discuss my translation concerns and plans to train staff in advance of all participant interviews, focus groups and meetings. All assistants were trained according to interview guides that were created before my arrival in Bhutan, and they were asked to strictly observe the data privacy protocol.

Based on referrals by SWS staff in Phongmey and at ranger offices, seven field assistants were trained in the data collection protocol and procedures, and compensated for translation services: Ms. Dorji Chezom, Merak Lower Secondary School), Mr. Dorji Phuntsho and Mr. Tenzin Cheda (SWS Merak

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<sup>35</sup> George van Driem (2001) has recorded 19 languages spoken in Bhutan and Phuntsho (2013) notes that 25 languages have been listed in the 16<sup>th</sup> edition of *Ethnologue*, the comprehensive catalogue of all the known living languages in the world.

range), Mr. Sangay (TCB, Trashigang office) and Mr. Kelzang Namgay (local tour guide) in Merak; Ms. Mindu Dema (local tour guide) and Mr. Jambay Dhendrup (SWS Sakteng range) in Sakteng; and Ms. Dorji Chezom in Joenkhar. Three field assistants were ethnic Brokpa from the study sites (Dorji Chezom, Joenkhar; Mindu Dema, Sakteng; and Kelzang Namgay, Merak), and Jambay Dhendrup lived and worked in the villages Merak and Sakteng for a total of four years.

Local field assistants who had English translation experience and were not government (e.g., NRED, SWS, TCB) staff were used whenever available to reduce potential participant response bias and discomfort (Newing, 2011, Watson, 2011). Hiring preference was given to assistants who were community members, had some education training and a decent command of the English language, and ideally to trained local tour guides. In the end, the choice of field assistant was frequently based on availability, since many of the trained local tour guides were no longer living and working in the region. The field assistant and I always emphasised research privacy and confidentiality of the project to each participant to help reduce potential uneasiness or fears of pro-park bias.

I developed a cross-language strategy within my research design (cf., MacKenzie, 2016) to maximise direct translation and ensure translation quality. Aside from having NRED and park staff involved in the construction of interview questions, other techniques included: learning and using key words and phrases in Brokpa and Dzongkha directly with participants (Watson, 2011); repeating exact words and phrases back to the participant for verification; asking for specific meanings of idioms used; rephrasing and repeating the same question from a different angle; and recording exact words or phrases phonetically in the foreign language and later consulting with other local park staff or NRED colleagues for clarification.

### **2.5.2 Methods**

Comprehensive **literature review and document analysis** were critical methods employed in each research objective, and are particularly relevant for qualitative case studies (Bowen, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Literature reviews entail critical and systematic review of academic publications with a well-defined focus to share the results of other studies so that the researcher may fill in the gaps in literature, extend earlier studies and create a basis for establishing the importance of the study and a yardstick for comparison of results (Newing, 2011; Yin, 2009). Articles and book chapters on topics related to the key study themes and research in Bhutan were reviewed and compiled into a reference list and database along with memos summarising the major element of each article (Creswell, 2009).

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or assessing documents and requires interpretation to elicit implications, gain understanding, and cultivate empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Some literature review and document analysis took place prior to arrival in Bhutan in 2013

using the university library catalogue, Internet and electronic databases and search engines (Google Alerts, Google Scholar, Web of Science), and government documents I received from NRED colleagues. Ongoing document review in the field and upon return from Bhutan included a closer evaluation of applicable secondary data (i.e., public documents, management plans, newspaper articles) obtained in-country and from Bhutanese colleagues that could not be accessed remotely (Bowen, 2009).

Grey literature was reviewed, specifically policies, technical and project reports, maps and statistics, from study participants at the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), NRED, TCB, National Environment Commission (NEC) and UNDP. Relevant graduate theses and key websites were also reviewed. A total of 25 policy and planning documents and reports were reviewed and recorded in a spreadsheet (Appendix C). A media log was also created to track pertinent articles from the largest English-language Bhutanese newspapers (*Kuensel*, *Bhutan Observer*, *Bhutan Today*) (Appendix C).

I engaged in a mix of **participant observation** activities with local populations and key informants to become familiar with Bhutanese and Brokpa cultures and environs, and to build trust between community members and the researcher (Howitt & Stevens, 2010; Puri, 2011; Watson, 2011). Activities included:

- observing people-park interactions;
- watching and sometimes participating in natural resource harvesting practices (e.g., herding yak and cattle, clearing and watering the fields, milking cows, picking forest mushrooms);
- attending numerous cultural and religious events (e.g., household and community *pujas* (prayer rituals, ritual gatherings); national, regional and municipal *tshechus* (religious festivals); and
- partaking in tourist cultural programmes (e.g., traditional singing and dancing, offering *ara* or local spirits), meals and community meetings.

Participant observation is dependent on host community authorisation, and provides perspective on how each community functions, their worldviews, and how they view each other (Howitt & Stevens, 2010; Puri, 2011). To this end, two specific measures were taken to minimise the intrusiveness of cross-cultural research while honouring cultural norms around giving and receiving (Gibbs, 2001; Newing, 2011). First, the researcher always wore *kira* (Bhutanese national dress) while living with remote communities, visiting public offices, schools and attending official functions in major cities. Second, financial donations, gratuities or gifts were given in certain circumstances to show appreciation, in keeping with social conventions. Local hosts who provided tea, *ara* and/or snacks received small tips, money was donated at *pujas*, and culturally valued gifts, such as food (e.g., biscuits, tea, soft drinks), butter lamps and local incense, were brought to temples and visits with religious leaders.

All **interviews** were conducted either at participants' homes, place of work (e.g., office, shop, field) or a public venue (e.g., café). Notes were taken after informal and unstructured interviews and during semi-structured community interviews. Notes and digital audio recordings using the iPhone Voice Memos application were taken during semi-structured non-community interviews with permission from respondents, and recordings were transcribed into text documents following interviews.

Numerous **informal interviews** and 20 **unstructured interviews** were conducted alongside participant observation. Open-ended questions were loosely predicated on the key research themes and evolved over the course of the discussion based on participant responses (Dunn, 2010). Informal and unstructured interviews enabled people to become familiar with the researcher and her or his work, and allowed the investigator to keep up-to-date on new information or issues that the population consider important and helped identify a few informants for semi-structured interviews (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Newing, 2011). Moreover, informal interviews often provide useful background information and context for a study because participants are often more open to sharing information in a relaxed atmosphere, particularly on sensitive topics such as social conflicts or illegal activities (Newing, 2011). Unstructured interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over one or two hours in length.

Pre-arranged, **semi-structured interviews** were held concurrent to informal interviews with a range of participants from different levels and sectors. As previously mentioned, research participants were categorised as: (1) community stakeholders (i.e., households of local leaders and people living and working in the communities) and (2) non-community stakeholders (i.e., government and non-government representatives). The field assistants and I conducted all semi-structured interviews in person using pre-arranged interview protocols (Appendix B). I was the lead facilitator for all but 7 (community-level) interviews in Merak. Those interviews were conducted by field assistants in the interest of saving time toward the end of data collection. On average, semi-structured interviews lasted one to two hours.

Methods and questions in this study were informed by handbooks and toolkits that were designed by development researchers (Wellbeing in Developing Countries research group, UK) and sociologists [Psychosocial Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Interventions (PADHI) project, Sri Lanka] and tested in previous wellbeing studies that were conducted in fishing communities in developing countries (cf., Coulthard, et al., 2015; PADHI, 2009). Pilot interview guides for community were finalised after two rounds of testing with NRED and SWS colleagues. For household interviews, interview guides contained closed and primarily open-ended questions organised into five key areas: (1) demographic information of respondents; (2) meanings of wellbeing (material/physical, including natural, resources); (3) relational wellbeing; (4) subjective wellbeing; and (5) ecotourism. The fourth section on subjective wellbeing also included a personal narrative/life history question. Closed questions were comprised of

closed checklists (e.g., yes/no, longer lists) and ranking exercises (Newing, 2011). These guides were oriented around the four dimensions of the SEWB model to encourage respondents to identify future variables and values. Household interviews complemented and helped contextualise focus group findings, since interviews were developed around several broad themes but remained flexible to accommodate interest and specialised knowledge of interviewees while gathering historical information (Creswell, 2009; Newing, 2011).

A total of five household participants in Joenkhar were interviewed twice, both individually and in a focus group. Every attempt was made to have five new focus group participants in each village but most Joenkhar residents were engaged in field labour and not available to participate in the study. However, responses emerging from group dynamics rendered new discoveries and reinforced previous findings from household interviews, thereby achieving within-subject and cross-method triangulation (Newing, 2011, Yin, 2009).

For non-community interviews, guides (Appendix B) posed open-ended questions that were divided into four main parts based on the overarching research objectives: (1) ecotourism definition, perception and state of progress in PAs; (2) stakeholder power and influence; (3) local decision making and participation; and (4) efficacy of existing policies. Non-community interviews were conducted until saturation was reached and little important new information or understandings were imminent (Bryman, 2004; Newing 2011).

Building on unstructured interview responses, local **focus groups** targeted community members actively engaged or interested in tourism development. Facilitated group interviews can supplement quantitative research by cultivating contrasting views, encouraging reflection, garnering the reasoning behind views expressed, and corroborating on interview findings, particularly when there are divergent results, and can also shed light on new and related topics that were not addressed in earlier interviews (Cameron, 2010; Newing, 2011).

Two focus group sessions were conducted by the researcher and local field assistants on different topics (Appendix B) with the same five participants per community in October and November 2013 in park office meeting rooms, totalling six focus groups of 15 participants in three communities (Table 2.6). The same set of five participants per community focus group was used because of time and participant availability restrictions. Convenience and purposive sampling strategies were used to recruit participants and only elected *tshogpas*, not senior local leaders, were included to avoid unequal power dynamics with the group and because community leaders and members felt *tshogpas* were able to clearly articulate

community values and needs. Notes were taken during focus groups by the researcher and reviewed with translators after each session. Each half-day session roughly spanned two and a half to three hours long.

**Table 2.6 Breakdown of focus group participants by *geog* and *chiwog***

Community participants by <i>geog</i> <sup>1</sup> and <i>chiwog</i> <sup>2</sup>	Number of household interviews (n=68)	Number of focus group participants (n=15)
<i>Merak geog</i> (301 households)		
Gengu	6	} 5
Khatey (Upper Merak)	15	
Khamey (Lower Merak)	9	
Kelephu	0	
Khashateng	0	
<i>Sakteng geog</i> (401 households)		
Sakteng	18	} 5
Pusa–Tengma	5	
Joenkhar–Murbi	15	5
Borongmong–Borongste	0	
Thraktri	0	

1. *Geog* (village block) 2. *Chiwog* (village sub-block)

**Source: Fieldwork, 2013–2014**

The focus group interview guide (Appendix B) consisted of open-ended questions and utilised participatory techniques common to participatory rural appraisals (Newing, 2011). Methods used to generate, organise and prioritise ideas involved brainstorming, pile sorts, ranking and rating exercises. Spatial methods of participatory (community) mapping and walks stimulated discussion and amassed further insight on significant communal resources, and to plot emergent patterns and trends in attitudes and behaviours in resource management (Kendon, 2010, Puri, 2011; Newing, 2011). For example, community maps charted landscape features, such as ecotones<sup>36</sup>, local knowledge on the distribution of rare and endangered wildlife featured in ecotourism treks, and access to tangible (natural and built) resources, including forest plants harvested for personal (e.g., medicinal) or commercial use. After each focus group session, maps were photographed and in November 2013 and May 2014 ground truthing walks with park rangers and local tour guides or field assistants were conducted (i.e., walking and using a map to validate participatory maps) in all three main villages (Puri, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Ecotones in this document refer to the natural or human-made boundary or transitional zone between two adjacent communities or areas.

In May and June 2014, the researcher conducted a series of four **debriefing sessions** with former participants and community members in Sakteng and Joenkhar, park staff at SWS headquarters and one Joenkhar ranger, and NRED staff. Debriefing sessions are important for sharing and verifying initial interview and focus group results and their interpretation with participants, inviting feedback and encouraging collaboration with local and indigenous participants, and collecting additional data as needed (Gibbs, 2001; Howitt & Stevens, 2011). All study participants were invited to attend the meetings.

Community debriefing sessions were held at the local park office or community building where tea and snacks were provided. In each session, the researcher re-introduced the research project, presented preliminary results and facilitated a question and answer period with attendees, which elicited thoughtful inquiries and responses. Time restraints and a prolonged data collection period in Merak due to change in seasonal migration patterns during the first round of data collection in Fall 2013 precluded debriefing sessions in those settlements.

Fifteen people attended the Sakteng session, including community leaders, study participants and non-participants who were interested or involved in tourism activities. In Joenkhar, around 50 people attended. Attendance constituted most of the community and several study participants. The high attendance in Joenkhar was due to a community forestry meeting following the debriefing session. Six SWS staff attended the debriefing session at SWS head office in Phongmey, half of whom participated in the study. Notes were taken during de-briefing sessions and reviewed with translators (for community meetings) after each session. In June 2014, I held a final debriefing session with 12 NRED staff at the NRED office in Thimphu. All sessions were around one to one and a half hours in duration.

### **2.5.3 Rigour, trustworthiness and quality**

Specific steps were taken to ensure rigour and credibility in this study. Golafshani (2003) asserts that qualitative researchers, like their quantitative counterparts, need to demonstrate that their studies are credible, where credibility depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. Rigour refers to establishing trustworthiness or dependability of one's work and confidence in the findings (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Golafshani, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Trustworthiness entails the validity of the research, which is related to research quality and generalisability (or transferability) of the results (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2002). Careful documentation of the research, practising reflexivity and triangulation were three strategies used to achieve research rigour, trustworthiness and quality.

Each stage of the research was carefully documented in order to report work that is open to full scrutiny by the interpretive community (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Fielding, 1999). Raw data from interviews and focus groups were collected and recorded in a database of notes and spreadsheets, and used

to report on the case study in each of the three main chapters (Chapters 3 to 5) (Yin, 2009). Field assistants helped transcribe interview notes into English and, in most cases, verified transcribed texts. Field notes and thematic tables were collated into Word documents and Excel spreadsheets and organised by major themes and categories (i.e., dimensions of wellbeing). Interview and focus group data were collected according to the interview protocols for each population sample (community and non-community). Systematic record-keeping is necessary to assure that the work and analyses can be checked.

Reflexivity was practiced primarily at personal and inter-personal levels. Self-reflexivity refers to the reflection of the hidden assumptions that may underpin the research (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Nicholls, 2009), while relational-reflexivity involves an evaluation of interpersonal encounters and the researcher's ability to collaborate with others (Nagar, 2003; Nicholls, 2009). Reflexivity as social critique is used to contend with issues of power imbalance between researcher and participant, where the researcher openly acknowledges tensions arising from different social positions, such as class, gender and race (Finlay, 2002). These steps were undertaken throughout the research process as described in Section 2.1.3.

Triangulation, defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, p. 126), is used to eliminate bias and increase the truthfulness of the researcher on some social phenomenon (Denzin, 1978; Golafshani, 2003). Social constructivism values multiple or diverse constructions of reality, therefore multiple methods of searching and gathering data are necessary to acquire credible multiple and diverse realities (Crotty, 1998; Golafshani, 2003; Johnson, 1997). Hence, triangulation of investigator(s), method and data to record the construction of reality is appropriate and compatible with the social constructivist paradigm.

In this study, data sources, different evaluators and research methods were cross-checked between different sources, viz. within-subject, between-subject and using cross-method triangulation (Newing, 2011, Patton, 2002). Within-subject triangulation occurs when the interviewer checks the question more than once with the same person, between-subject triangulation refers to posing the same question to several different people, and cross-method triangulation involves using different methods to answer the same question (Patton, 2002). These methods were used throughout the interview process and critical feedback was elicited from community members and participants during the four debriefing sessions (see Section 2.5). Having a greater number of different sources and methods allowed me to capture multiple, credible and diverse realities of study participants.

#### 2.5.4 Data analysis

Qualitative (textual, non-numerical, unstructured) and quantitative (numeric, structured) data were collected, and a largely qualitative analysis was applied to all types of data to lend more depth to the rich insights derived from participant comments and reactions (Basit, 2003; Creswell, 2009; Newing, 2011). The data gathered was carefully analysed by hand with the primary purpose of noting common themes and patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Patton, 2002). Spatial data (e.g., maps) were examined by hand (visually) to compare and confirm data, validate categories and emerging themes in the data (Puri, 2011).

All data were coded manually without the use of an electronic data analysis software package such as NVivo. However, an open-source mind mapping application (FreeMind) was used to organise and illustrate key themes and codes in Chapter 3. The decision to limit use of software packages was deliberate for three reasons. First, data analysis began while the researcher was in SWS and had not yet purchased NVivo, which would have required regular Internet access and consistent electricity, neither of which were reliable in the Merak-Sakteng region. Second, many software packages such as NVivo are proprietary, not inexpensive, require annual subscription for continual access to inputted data and files, and it was not felt that this would provide proportionate value to the study. Finally, computer software does not eliminate the need to deliberate, generate and eliminate and reassign codes to explain a phenomenon under review (Basit, 2003).

A thematic analysis was adopted to analyse data from transcripts and field notes. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) of importance within the data to describe a phenomenon, and it is compatible with the constructivist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Codes are understood to be words or phrases that label sections of data and a set of codes can take many forms, such as a list of themes, indicators and qualifications that are causally related (Boyatzis, 1998; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Themes are the patterns that emerge from codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which are grouped according to overarching categories.

In Chapter 3, I used thematic analysis with a more inductive approach to interpret various aspects of the main research question. An *a priori* framework was not used and results were data-driven, including latent interpretation of codes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes and codes identified by community stakeholders were compared iteratively against new themes and codes generated from non-community stakeholder interviews by means of constant comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Non-community participant responses were deconstructed into 82 open codes that were merged with community participant responses and subsequently narrowed down into five overarching themes. The themes, codes and sub-codes were mapped in the FreeMind application and used to structure the

Discussion section of the manuscript. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these codes introduced new insights and illuminated novel themes that I had not previously anticipated.

For Chapters 4 and 5, I adopted a thematic analysis approach that incorporated inductive and deductive approaches to coding (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). In the template analytic technique, *a priori* categories are used to structure initial coding and theme development (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The *a priori* categories were initially developed out of established concepts in the literature. The seminal features of *buen vivir*, which provided a broad set of three *a priori* categories (human-human relationships, human-nature relationships, culture and spirituality) that were used to map key questions for study participants, organise codes and create categories under the domains (themes). In Chapter 5, I derived *a priori* categories from the four main dimensions of social-ecological wellbeing (subjective, socio-relational, ecological, material). These dimensions were adapted from White's (2009, 2010) earlier work and the original three dimensions (social, relational, material) of social wellbeing, and include new insights from *buen vivir* and SES perspectives. The codes and key categories were inductively driven through my reading of the data (Boyatzis, 1998).

Some qualitative data from household interviews and focus groups were quantified to be able to recognise general patterns, compare similarities and differences in perceptions, and identify outlying responses (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). This process involved creating qualitative codes and then counting the number of times they occurred in the text data (Creswell, 2009). Generated codes were then compared against the themes and codes that emerged from household responses around knowledge of and involvement in ecotourism activities.

The analysis process was iterative and generally followed the guidelines detailed in Braun and Clarke (2006). The first step was to transcribe field notes and audio recordings, then read and re-read the transcripts, and note initial ideas. Quantitative data and some qualitative data (e.g., ranked) were calculated into numeric frequencies by item in order to summarise this data. Once the transcripts were reviewed, initial codes were systematically generated across the entire data set and collated by relevance. I then sought out themes by gathering collated codes into related, potential categories, bearing in mind the *a priori* themes. Next, all potential categories were reviewed and checked against the coded extracts (from step 1) and the entire data set (step 2). Ongoing analysis was undertaken to define and name themes in keeping with the general, pre-defined categories. This consisted of two to three rounds of analysis to refine the particulars of each theme and the overall story of the analysis. Clear names were provided for each theme, and themes were organised according to their relevant *a priori* category. This method was useful for interpreting a large data set.

The narrative style and broad use of terms such as ‘participants’ were used to protect the anonymity of all community participants per my research ethics obligations. This approach was based on Farrelly (2011) so that study respondents, who came from tight-knit communities, were able to openly discuss their personal thoughts, relationships and histories. Broad descriptors (e.g., many participants, the majority of participants) were used to protect participant identity, and commonly represent prevalence in thematic and other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additional descriptors (e.g., village of origin, participant codes) were provided where possible to offer more context.

## **2.6 Summary**

The methodology chapter presented an overview of the research approach and design, a description of the study site, and details on data collection, methods and data analysis. Social constructivism and *buen vivir* approaches guided the study and complemented attention to alternative indices of societal progress and wellbeing (e.g., GNH) and the social wellbeing approach in the context of Bhutan. The researcher position and efforts undertaken to conduct fieldwork with indigenous and local people during fieldwork were described. The research design consisted of a single embedded case study approach to provide rich insights, while steps taken to select the case study site were also included. The chapter also outlined the study site, sample populations and procedures, and a discussion on definitions of community in the Bhutanese context.

Several data collection methods were employed in the research, including interviews, focus groups and participatory debriefing sessions. Selection of field assistants and the importance of translation support were reviewed prior to a detailed description of the research methods and study participants. Consideration to research rigour, trustworthiness and quality were incorporated in the research design. The chapter concluded with a summary of the data analysis techniques used, specifically generic coding, thematic analysis and constant comparison analysis. The following chapter examines protected area conservation, development and stakeholder relations in Bhutan.

## Chapter 3

### Conservation, development and stakeholder relations in Bhutanese protected area management

#### 3.1 Chapter Summary

Conservation and development initiatives have been widely promoted in protected areas (PAs) in developing countries despite ongoing challenges inherent in their capacity to protect biodiversity and alleviate poverty. Bhutan contains a vast network of PAs and biological corridors that is becoming increasingly affected by the rapid expansion of integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) and other development activities. In this paper, we empirically investigate the types of challenges PA stakeholders face in the midst of modernisation and democratisation, and how these challenges might impact stakeholder relations in the case of a remote PA in Asia. We used interviews, focus groups, document analysis, participant observation and debriefing sessions to explore the gap between expectations and delivery of two projects—corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) sheet distribution and ecotourism development—and provide insights through issues of local capacity, indigenous culture and mismatched priorities. Perceived impacts indicated flaws in project design, strong local cultural norms yet weak local ownership, issues of trust and accountability, tensions between modernisation and traditional lifestyles, and prospective trade-offs. Suggestions to cultivate stronger projects and PA management for societies in times of transition include increasing local participation and co-operation, having strong internal leadership, adopting realistic timelines and flexible approaches for collaborative partnerships, conducting further research, and openly discussing and negotiating trade-offs and hard choices.

#### 3.2 Introduction

Protected areas around the world are expanding in size and number, adopting new functions that increasingly challenge their original design as focal points for conservation and environmental protection (Gray, Gruby & Campbell, 2014; Watson, Dudley, Segan & Hockings, 2014). Integrated conservation and development projects such as community-based wildlife management, ecotourism and extractive reserves aim to safeguard biodiversity and alleviate poverty, and are incentive-based programmes (Spiteri & Nepal, 2008a). However, ICDPs have been widely contested for having numerous social, economic, environmental and political impacts as well as for falling short of their full potential (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Blaikie, 2006; Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Kiss, 2004). In Bhutan, where 51% of the total area falls under a network of PAs and biological corridors (RGOB, 2014), infrastructure development and ICDPs have expanded rapidly. Closed off from the rest of the world until the 1960s, Bhutan formally transitioned

from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy in the first democratic elections in 2007 and 2008 (Turner, Chuki, & Tshering, 2011). This shift and increased exposure to global forces (e.g., commerce, technology, media) have, to some extent, permeated every level of society, including indigenous communities living within PA boundaries, where traditional lifestyles are largely observed.

In this paper, we address three research questions that are difficult to answer but germane in the context of nations undergoing modernisation and democratisation: (1) What types of challenges do stakeholders face?; (2) How do these challenges impact stakeholder relations, including indigenous groups, in PA management?; and (3) What are the local capacity and participation challenges facing semi-pastoralist stakeholders? Throughout this paper we use democratisation to describe the transition of a society to a political regime that espouses a free and fair electoral process, the active participation of its citizens in civic and political life, and the equitable application of law to all citizens and protection of human rights. Modernisation broadly refers to the process of changing from a ‘traditional’, rural, agrarian society to a ‘modern’ one that adopts new technologies, information and practices. These elaborations reflect our interpretations of the terms as opposed to proposing distinct definitions. To explore the above questions, we focus on the gap between expectations and delivery among stakeholders at various levels, specifically local, government, non-government and the Bhutanese private sector, in one of the newest Bhutanese PAs.

### **3.2.1 Stakeholder relations and the disconnect between hope and reality**

There is a long history of incongruity between stakeholder anticipation and practical outcomes in the literature. Early conservation and PA management efforts can be traced back to the colonial era of elite game reserves for European expatriates and foreign visitors in Africa, which lead to the fortress conservation (also Yellowstone or ‘fences and fines’) approach (Adams, 2008; Roe, 2008; Wilshusen et al., 2002). In these classical conservation strategies, natural areas were fashioned into parks under state control and humans often forcibly evicted because their reliance on ecosystem resources to support population growth would directly or indirectly threaten wildlife (Adams, 2008; Brockington & Igoe, 2006; Kiss, 2004; Roe, 2008). Bottom-up approaches such as ICDPs, community-based conservation or community-based natural resource management were introduced during the late 1980s to reconcile PA management with local needs and objectives through the sustainable development agenda. By the early 1990s, ICDPs were heartily embraced by international development agencies with growing interest in ‘pro-poor’ economic growth and participatory processes (Mulder & Copolillo, 2005; Salafsky & Wollenberg, 2000; Wells & McShane, 2004).

In recent years, researchers have observed the ongoing disparity between the expectations of multiple stakeholders and deliverables in PA management and projects, particularly in developing countries. Rural communities are often unaware that they live near or in a PA, or they are unfamiliar with the purposes and approaches of the designated area, as evidenced in the case of Calakmul Biosphere Reserve in Mexico (Wilshusen et al., 2002). Similarly, Roth (2004) notes that Western conservation agendas and organisations influenced Thai forest regulation and the creation of people-free PAs, which oppose the traditional Buddhist concept of humans as an intrinsic part of nature. In response, northern villagers, who were reliant on forest and grazing lands for their livelihoods, allied with a non-governmental organisation and resisted the establishment of Mae Tho National Park. In Mbuoro National Park, previously evicted villagers re-occupied the land, expelled park staff, demolished infrastructure, and massacred wildlife to avoid re-gazettement<sup>37</sup> in Uganda (Hulme & Infield, 2001; West & Brockington, 2006). Even when projects involve community collaboration and the distribution of benefits is considered fair and successful, conservation incentives do not necessarily target the poorest, most vulnerable households, as in the case of trekking expeditions in the Annapurna Conservation Area of Nepal (Dahal, Nepal & Schuett, 2013; Spiteri & Nepal, 2008b).

Given that nearly all of the above cases reflect power imbalances between government authorities and people, it is important to consider political (i.e., policy and power, governance) alongside technical (i.e., management) aspects of PA conservation when examining stakeholder relationships. Governance refers to the interaction among processes, structures and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are made, and how stakeholders views are considered by decision-makers (Borrini-Feyerabend & Hill, 2015; Dearden, Bennett, & Johnson, 2005; Graham, Amos, & Plumptre, 2003).

Power in PAs can be applied at various levels by different actors and agencies in strategic ways that benefit or constrain people and nature. For example, Blaikie (2006) found that community-based development programmes have not provided socio-economic benefits to local people in Malawi due to slow decentralisation of forest policy and corruption of local institutions; in Botswana, foreign-owned private safari companies prosper from hunting tourism while ethnic groups such as the Koi San have been marginalised. Lacey and Ilcan (2015) argue that tourism for development, which has been promoted by international organisations for poverty reduction, has commoditised and exploited the people, culture, flora and fauna in Namibian conservancies. In essence, the conservancy programmes themselves are

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<sup>37</sup> Gazettement refers to the designation of a PA by relevant State-imposed legislation.

extensions of colonial rule. These examples of injustice compel us to consider the influences and risks of power, neoliberalism and hegemonic forces of core-periphery<sup>38</sup> relations at the local level.

Calls for greater local participation, good governance<sup>39</sup> and consideration of trade-offs are growing (cf., Garnett, Sayer & du Toit, 2007; Hayes & Ostrom, 2005; Lockwood, 2010; Miller, Minter & Malan, 2011). Local participation is a narrower concept and essential component of governance in the conservation and development literature (Brechin et al., 2002). In light of the extensive people-park conflicts and ongoing local dependence on natural resources for subsistence, developing countries embraced a more decentralised approach in the 1970s due to the push for more inclusive practices and research techniques by international donor agencies (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Kapoor, 2002; Wells & McShane, 2004). Yet caution must be exercised because participation does not necessarily entail equity among stakeholders (Agrawal & Gupta, 2005; Dahal et al., 2013). Furthermore, McShane et al. (2011) argue that the ‘win-win’ paradigm of positive conservation and development outcomes, which is marketable to donors because it addresses moral imperatives, is elusive. Therefore, trade-offs and hard choices must be openly discussed and explicitly made between varying interests and priorities, short- and long-term timelines between nature conservation and economic benefits as well as spatial scale and costs (Brown, 2004; McShane et al., 2011). We acknowledge the need to address these issues, particularly when thinking about places in a state of social and political transition.

While the literature places emphasis on the significance of bottom-up practices in enlisting local support for conservation efforts, it is rather mute on the broader influences of modernisation and political reforms on stakeholder relations in developing country ICDPs, particularly in Asia. Studies in related perspectives such as environmental politics and participation in biodiversity conservation have generally focused on developed nations in central and eastern Europe over the last 20 years (Carmin, 2003; Niedzialkowski et al., 2012; Wells & Williams, 1998). Research in developing regions tend to engage with either modernisation or democratisation but not both (cf., Brockington, 2007; Fischer & Chhatre, 2013; Sunam et al., 2015).

Similar to Thailand and other nations, global conservation activities (e.g., International Convention on Biological Diversity) and bodies (e.g., International Union for Conservation of Nature) have influenced the definition and expansion of PAs in Bhutan, and the development of ICDPs such as ecotourism have

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<sup>38</sup> Core and periphery areas have geographic, economic, socio-cultural and political traits. Compared to peripheries, cores (e.g., urban centres, ‘developed’ countries) tend to develop in areas with favourable conditions and qualities (e.g., abundant resources, superior transportation, good access to markets).

<sup>39</sup> ‘Good governance’ can have several meanings. As used here, it refers to six intertwined principles encapsulated in the GNH pillar of good governance: accountability, transparency, participation, equity and inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness, and rule of law (Rosenberg, 2009). We realise that these principles are normative statements about how governing stakeholders should exercise their authorities.

ushered tourists to formerly restricted areas and indigenous groups (Buergin, 2003; Zimmerer, Galt & Buck, 2004). While such technologies and opportunities provide greater frequency and ease of communication and knowledge mobilisation, they are altering culture and tradition in Bhutan (Brunet et al., 2001; Rinzin et al., 2009). How these developments are shaping ICDPs, local populations and stakeholder relations in Bhutanese PA management efforts remains unclear.

It is important to examine the challenges facing ICDP stakeholders through the perceptions of local communities and park authorities so that PA management processes can be adapted and outcomes improved. Our case study focuses on a park situated in the eastern corner of Bhutan. Following an overview of the study site and methods, this paper proceeds with findings and discussion of two recent conservation and development projects (i.e., the distribution of CGI sheets and ecotourism development) that have been implemented in three indigenous communities. We close with some recommendations on steps that can be taken to ameliorate gaps in stakeholder expectations and outcomes. Our intent is to contribute additional empirical insights to the literature since ICDPs and other incentive-based programmes involving issues of design, implementation and management have yet to be successfully addressed (Terborgh 1999; Spiteri & Nepal, 2006).

### **3.3 Methods**

#### **3.3.1 Study area**

*National context: A nation in transition*

Bhutan, as one of the youngest democracies in the world, has consciously developed policies that embrace greater civic participation and emphasise social and natural wellbeing. Kings of the early Wangchuck dynasty managed to resist colonisation and the influence of foreign (especially Western) values on its small population given the historical and geographical isolation of the kingdom. Modernisation and efforts toward democracy began in the 1950s under the third *Druk Gyalpo* (Dragon King) Jigme Dorji Wangchuck with numerous political and social reforms such as the creation of the national legislature and the Royal Advisory Council, the abolishment of slavery and feudalism, and re-organisation of the judicial system (Turner et al., 2011; Ura & Kinga, 2004; T. Wangchuk, 2000). By the 1970s, the fourth *Druk Gyalpo* introduced the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which perceives development as a personal, spiritual, material and communal process, unlike the Western focus on secular, commoditised growth (Brunet, Bauer, De Lacey & Tshering, 2001). The notion has evolved into a development paradigm for all policymaking in Bhutan that is based on the four pillars of sustainable and equitable development, environmental conservation, cultural preservation and good governance (Burns, 2011; Rinzin, Vermeulen, & Glasbergen, 2007).

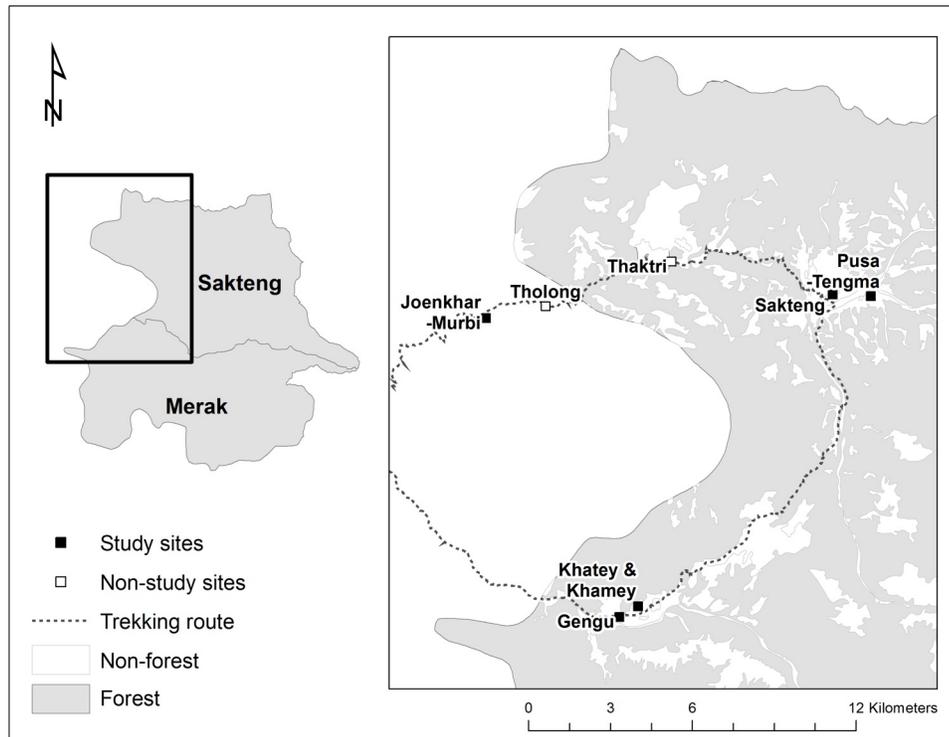
Decentralisation of administration and finances began in 2002 in order to promote self-organisation and participation at local, sub-district and district levels. For example, the hereditary administrative hierarchy was replaced with elected officials who were granted considerable financial powers (Ura & Kinga, 2004). These powers were strengthened through the Local Government Acts of 2007 and 2009, creating local *dzongkhag* (district administration) governments known as *dzongkhag tshogdus* (district councils), which consist of elected officials from *geogs* (administrative or village blocks) within the *dzongkhag* (RGOB 2007, 2009). Change in the political system to a parliamentary democracy was considered a crucial step toward enhancing the pillar of good governance nationally, while the creation of local government bodies was supportive of GNH development.

In addition to democratic reforms, globalisation has brought advances in technology and trade and increased exposure to Western lifestyles to this nation of over 700,000 residents. Mass media has proliferated since the ban on television and the Internet was lifted in 1999 (Brunet et al., 2001; Raptan, 2001). The introduction of mobile cellular service in 2003 replaced telegraph and less common landline systems across the country, and social media (e.g., blogs, Facebook) are popular among all generations. The tourism industry, formed in 1974 under government auspices, was privatised in 1991 with the intent of spreading economic benefits more widely (Rinzin et al., 2007).

#### *Local and regional context: Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary*

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS) was launched in 2003 by a joint venture between Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) and WWF Bhutan, and formally opened for operation in 2006 (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011, see Figure 3.1). The Sanctuary spans an area of 740.6 km<sup>2</sup> and represents a diverse Himalayan terrestrial ecosystem interspersed with alpine meadows, temperate and warm broadleaf forest. Thirty-five out of 46 species of rhododendron, the highest concentration in the nation, flourish within its boundaries. Other florae found in the alpine pasture include 203 tree and plant species, the blue poppy (*Meconopsis grandis*), primula (*Primulaceae*) and gentiana (*Gentianaceae*) (NCD, 2004; Wildlife Institute of India, 2005). The park houses 147 bird and 24 mammal species (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). Common avifaunae include the Himalayan blood pheasant (*Ithaginis cruentus*), grey-headed woodpecker (*Picus canus*) and common hoopoe (*Upupa epops*); typical faunae comprise of several endemic, endangered and vulnerable species such as the red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*), Himalayan black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) and Himalayan musk deer (*Moschus chrysogaster*); and the caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) used in traditional medicines. Moreover, SWS is the only national park in the world dedicated to preserving the *migoi* (wild man) or Abominable Snowman, which is believed to inhabit the Himalayan region (Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016).

**Figure 3.1 Map of study sites by *chiwog* within Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary**



**Source: Prepared by author based on additional data from GIS Unit, DOFPS, RGOB and Topographical Survey Division, NLC, RGOB**

In addition to its biodiversity, the Sanctuary is rich in cultural diversity. Its highlands are home to a semi-pastoral tribe known as the *Brokpa* (nomad or highlander), who mostly reside in the settlements of Merak and Sakteng within park boundaries, and Joenkhar in the buffer zone. Roughly 90% of Merak and Sakteng inhabitants are pastoralists and livestock rearing (e.g., yak, cattle, horses) contributes to 83% of total household income in the region (Wangchuk, 2008). Transhumant livelihoods in the highlands are supplemented through kitchen gardens, while lower altitude communities (e.g., Joenkhar) engage in subsistence and small-scale agriculture. Sale or barter of yak and cow butter and fermented cheese, non-timber forest products and casual labour are additional income-generating activities in all villages (Dorjee, 2012). In 2008, Joenkhar area residents established Yumzang Semthung Community Forest, where community members control access to timber and firewood. Traditional trading relationships with *nepo* (guest-host) households in lowland communities are still practised during the winter migration period, although the monetary system is prevalent given increased road access to nearby towns and cities. Over 4,500 people live in the Sanctuary and no other semi-pastoral Brokpa settlements exist outside of the Merak-Sakteng region in Bhutan.

The park was established to protect the cultural heritage of the Brokpa and the easternmost temperate ecosystems of Bhutan that harbour some endemic and highly endangered species (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011; Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). However, achieving conservation of natural resources and Brokpa livelihood goals has been a challenge and sometimes at odds. Forests and alpine grasslands are important sources of fuel, fodder and building material. Prior to the creation of SWS, over-consumption of wood products, overgrazing and deliberate forest fires had led to degraded forests and meadows, loss of soil condition, increased landslides as well as inadequate forest regeneration along the Gamri watershed (Wangchuk, Rai, Thinlay, & Nima, 2009), which the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests (MOAF) has addressed through an intense reforestation initiative. Conversely, conservation efforts have contributed to increasing human-wildlife conflict. Monkeys, wild pigs and other species have damaged crops in Joenkhari and to a lesser degree in Sakteng, while the rate of livestock depredation cases has risen due to the increased predator population such as wild dog, bear and leopard.

The impacts of conservation efforts are felt deeply in Merak and Sakteng, two of the poorest *geogs* in the district with poverty rates as high as 58% and 40%, respectively (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). Introducing ecotourism to SWS, where settlements are connected only by ancient foot trails, was part of the government plan to expand tourism attractions and supplement income-generation opportunities for local communities (TCB, 2009; TCB, 2012). A complimentary activity to ecotourism has been a donor-funded agro-tourism pilot project intended to produce local vegetables through greenhouses for subsistence and the tourism market (P. Dorji, 2012).

### **3.3.2 Data collection and analysis**

Our study employed a qualitative, multiple methods approach based on participatory rural appraisal and ethnographic techniques. Specifically, interviews, focus groups, document analysis, participant observation and debriefing sessions with community and park staff were deployed in order to build a comprehensive approach to investigate all possible factors influencing participant perceptions and feelings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2009; Newing, 2011). Furthermore, multiple methods were used to triangulate findings and increase credibility (Bradshaw & Stratford, 2010; Golafshani, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews with 68 community (household level) and 50 non-community participants, 20 unstructured interviews with non-community participants and six focus groups with 15 community members were conducted by the primary author and seven trained field assistants using an interview guide from October 2013 to May 2014 (Table 3.1). Semi-structured interviews of closed and open-ended questions and open-ended unstructured interviews were held at participants' homes, offices or public locales such as cafés and shops, while focus groups took place in community buildings and park

office meeting rooms. Two focus group sessions were conducted on different topics with the same set of five participants per community due to time and participant availability limitations. The following codes are used to identify participant quotes in this paper: MP, SP, JP for community participants from Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar; NCP for non-community participants; and UI for unstructured interview participants.

Bearing in mind the transient lifestyle of semi-pastoralist Brokpas, the selection of adult heads of households was based on a combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling strategies to capture a wide but inclusive range of local stakeholders living in the six largest *chiwogs* (sub-block of villages) near the main trekking route and development activities (e.g., guest house, shops, temples) during non-migratory periods. In few cases, household participants were interviewed twice, both individually and in a focus group since many Joenkhar residents were engaged in field labour or travelling and not available to participate in the study. However, responses that emerged from group dynamics rendered new discoveries and reinforced previous findings from household interviews.

**Table 3.1 Breakdown and description of the research sample**

<b>Community participants by geog<sup>1</sup> and chiwog<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Number of household interviews (n=68)</b>	<b>Number of focus group participants (n=15)</b>
<i>Merak geog (301 households)</i>		
Gengu	6	} 5
Khatey (Upper Merak)	15	
Khamey (Lower Merak)	9	
Kelephu	0	
Khashateng	0	
<i>Sakteng geog (401 households)</i>		
Sakteng	18	} 5
Pusa–Tengma	5	
Joenkhar–Murbi	15	5
Borongmong–Borongste	0	
Thraktri	0	

1. *Geog* (village block) 2. *Chiwog* (village sub-block)

<b>Non-community participants</b>	<b>Number of individual interviews (n=50)</b>
<i>Bhutanese government and affiliates</i>	
District, sub-district government ( <i>dzongkhag, dungkhag</i> )	3
Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary	6
Tourism Council of Bhutan	5
Ministry of Agriculture and Forest departments (Wildlife Conservation Division; Department of Forest and Park Services; Nature, Recreation and Ecotourism Division)	7
Other government agencies/bodies (e.g., monitoring, planning, policy, Parliament)	6
<i>Non-Bhutanese government and civil society organisations (CSOs)</i>	
Private sector (tour operators, independent guides, consultants)	8
Local CSOs	9
Foreign CSOs and government agencies	5
Academia	1

**Source: Fieldwork, 2013–2014**

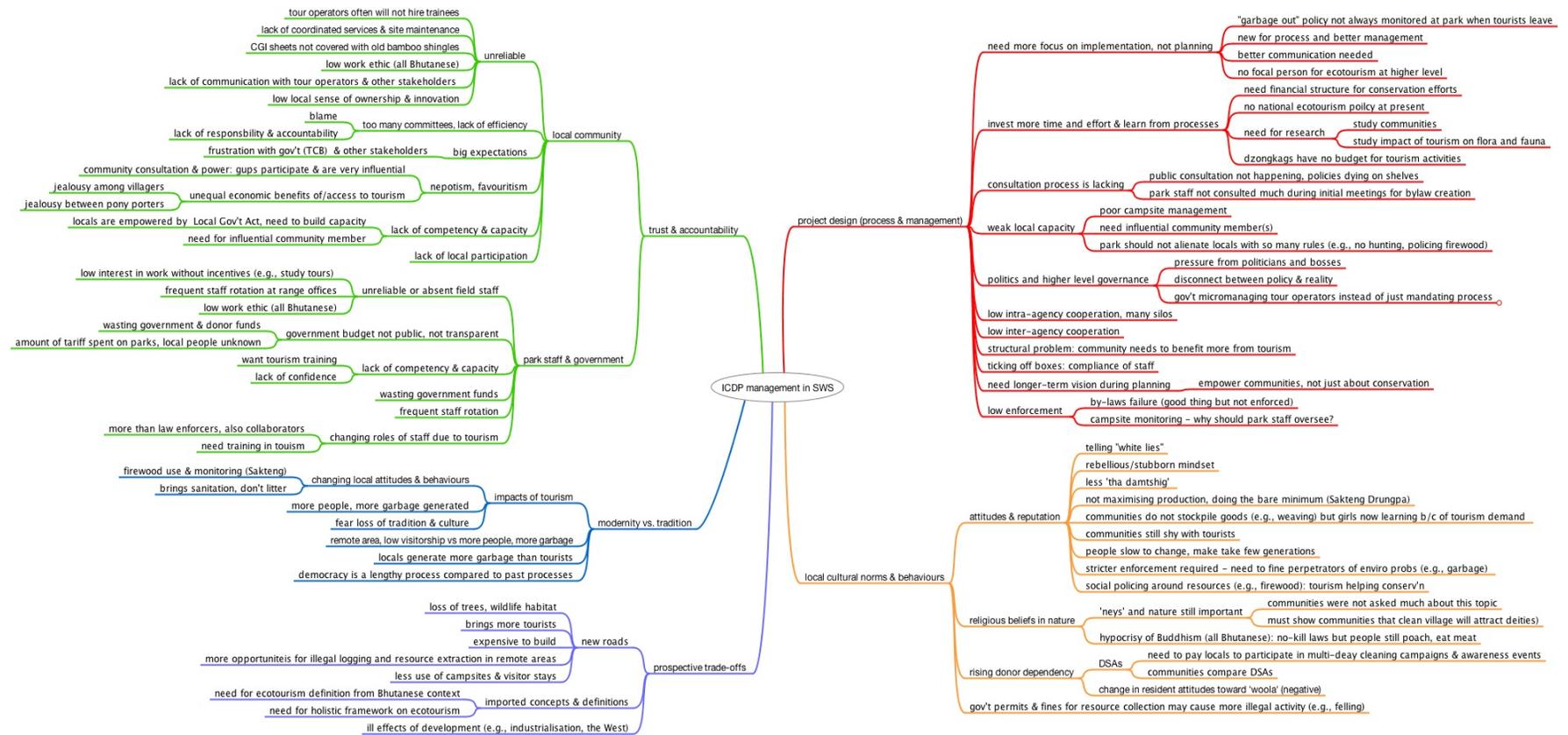
Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select non-community participants and served to complement and contextualise interview and focus group findings (Cameron, 2010). Focus groups were conducted using participatory techniques to generate, organise and prioritise ideas,

suggestions and items in a list such as brainstorming, pile sorts and ranking. All participants were asked open-ended questions around four broad themes: (1) perception of ecotourism activities and progress; (2) stakeholder power and influence; (3) local decision-making and participation in development initiatives; and (4) efficacy of existing programmes and policies.

Using the participant observation method, the primary author engaged in informal discussions, observed and recorded daily activities of community members and park staff, and partook in several *tshachus* (religious festivals) and events (Howitt & Stevens, 2010; Puri, 2011). Government policies, reports, newspapers and websites were analysed to gain deeper empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Toward the end of the field research period, the primary author conducted participatory debriefing sessions with former participants and community members in Sakteng and Joenkhar, and park staff at SWS headquarters, and staff at the Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division (NRED) in Thimphu. Sessions further involved participants in the research process, providing a forum for jointly deliberating the data with the group of intended beneficiaries, verifying initial interview and focus group results and interpretation, and collecting additional data as needed (Howitt & Stevens, 2010; Newing, 2011). In each session, the researcher re-introduced the research project, presented preliminary results and facilitated a question and answer period with attendees, which elicited thoughtful inquiries and responses. Time restraints and a prolonged data collection period in Merak precluded debriefing sessions there.

We used a thematic analysis approach to generate codes from the data collected in field interview notes and transcribed interview recordings (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995). Themes and codes identified by community stakeholders were reviewed iteratively against new themes and codes generated from non-community stakeholder interviews through constant comparison (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Responses from non-community participant interviews were deconstructed into 82 codes based on keywords and phrases, combined with responses from community participants, and narrowed down into general patterns. These patterns were then refined into five key themes and mapped in the FreeMind application (see Figure 3.2). These five themes provide the structure for analysis in the Discussion section.

Figure 3.2 Thematic map of ICDP management in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary



### **3.4 Findings**

Our results are presented in three sections to address the research questions on the types of ICDP stakeholder challenges, the impacts of these challenges on stakeholder relations (including indigenous groups), and the specific local capacity and participation challenges facing semi-pastoral communities. The first two sections outline the implementation of two recent projects in the three largest settlements at SWS to gain insight on project outcomes and their implications for community and non-community stakeholders. The final section describes study participants' views on specific aspects affecting current ICDP management, pointing to concerns of local capacity, indigenous culture and mismatched stakeholder priorities. The findings in these sections reveal shortfalls between expectations and delivery of development projects in PAs.

#### **3.4.1 CGI sheets and forest protection: Simple fix, complex problem**

Corrugated galvanised iron sheets were introduced as an alternative roofing material in a multi-pronged approach to combat unsustainable harvesting of timber in the Sanctuary's largest villages. Prior to modern forestry legislation in the 1960s and the heightened presence of park staff, Merak and Sakteng residents had more open access to natural resources within traditional indigenous institutions and unwritten customary laws. These practices were sustainable until the advent of modern development and greater exploitation of forest resources by the government and public (Penjore & Raptan, 2004). Earlier records show that 4,188 trees were harvested to build an annual average of eight new houses and repair 147, while an estimated 1,000 fir trees were harvested annually for wood shingles (Wangchuk, 2008). Before the installation of electricity in 2011, locals relied heavily on 'lops and tops' and dry firewood collection for heating and cooking, in addition to building construction, renovation and repairs. Since national forests fall under the purview of MOAF, park authorities viewed trees as being 'illegally' girdled to expand pastures and dry firewood collection, while the loss in the bamboo undergrowth of mixed conifer forests has triggered habitat fragmentation of the red panda (Dorjee, 2012).

The CGI sheets were distributed to the villages in two stages as part of a joint community-donor endeavour. In 2003–2004, SWS supplied 241 households in Sakteng with financial support from WWF Bhutan and the MacArthur Foundation. Communities contributed 30% of the cost and a significant drop in illegal felling was noted once the sheets were installed (WWF Bhutan, 2011). A larger roofing project was undertaken in 2011 with the influx of additional funding and was expanded to include 374 households in Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar. Since wooden shingles are replaced every three to five years, it was

anticipated that the 30-year lifespan of CGI sheets, combined with stricter rules and better monitoring, would save an anticipated 15,000 fir trees in addition to residents' time and labour (WWF Bhutan, 2011).

While most villagers were content with the longer-lasting CGI sheets, some members of the community and government staff were critical of the project. Although Joenkhar residents were grateful that they did not have to buy bamboo shingles from Merak anymore, they felt SWS staff were unfair when they initially distributed the CGI sheets. Focus group participants recalled that Sakteng residents received the CGI sheets first while most people in Joenkhar bought their own sheets. A few households purchased sheets on loan or were partially subsidised, whereas some households received entirely free sheets from the park office. One focus group participant claimed, "The park office is not necessary for our community" and another stated, "Park office should shift to Sakteng, where they all got CGI sheets."

During the first round of distribution, there was a spike in the rate of timber consumption. Households that had received sheets renovated their houses, which meant additional timber was extracted in the first year following the project, but overall timber usage decreased in following years (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). A former Sakteng resident explained that some villagers built new homes when they received the CGI sheets because they wanted a new house for a new roof, in order to extend the overall longevity of their homes.

Government stakeholders had mixed feelings about the CGI sheeting project. Some respondents were frustrated that communities had failed to uphold the memorandum of understanding (MOU) they signed with SWS, pledging to retain the appearance of traditional Brokpa houses by covering CGI roofs with a layer of wooden shingles. A senior RGOB official complained, "Now with CGI it looks like an army camp, [the] village has got no more attraction" (NCP7). In reference to replacing the wooden shingles, one SWS staff member stated,

We've had several meetings on this, including with the *dzongda* (district administrator), and now [community] say they can't do it. We provided CGI sheet, we can't take it back. Now they don't want to do it. They say this problem, that problem...they give us 101 problems. They say it's too expensive, the timbers are not there. Now I don't know what the department will do. (NCP16)

Although it was considered a "strong" project, a few RGOB officials expressed their misgivings about the CGI sheets due to heat conductivity and radiation, including a senior RGOB official who believed that the concentration of sheets would increase localised warming, melt snow and diminish the value of village scenery in winter.

Despite the implementation of the project, local demand for natural resources remains strong. The Sanctuary grants each household timber for building main houses once every 25 years; a supplemental allowance is given also for a cowshed or other smaller structures. A park official noted that virtually all Merak households had reached their timber quotas by May 2014, yet “when one person sees that another has he will want the same” (UI18). New houses are increasingly built in the larger, multi-storied style of western Bhutan instead of traditional one-storey homes of wood, stone and sand. One CSO director spoke of the social “stigma” that exists if a family does not have a two-storey house in Bhutanese villages. Merak rangers reported that illegal felling remains prevalent despite years of awareness raising, as one described: “When they’re caught they say, ‘We don’t understand your rules’. People are getting forms and take the permit, but they cut down unmarked trees...Or when park staff mark one tree, they will cut down two or three” (NCP10). To meet their material needs, many local residents in Merak broke the law and feigned ignorance of regulations when confronted by park staff.

### **3.4.2 The promise of ecotourism?**

After two years of strategic planning and preparations, completed at a cost of Nu 7 million (approx. 100,000 USD), the 6-day Merak-Sakteng trekking route was opened to the public in 2010. Ecotourism development had been recommended by the Park Conservation Management Plan and was supported by local administration and communities per a Tourism Council of Bhutan (2009) feasibility study. Funding received from government and foreign donors was allocated to hire local contractors to create five campsites, toilets, rest facilities and guesthouses along the trek. Partial subsidies were provided to renovate and convert select Merak and Sakteng households to homestays. The Sanctuary initiated the development of garbage pits and signage. Visitation was intended to occur only during the five and half months of peak tourism season (TCB, 2009).

The trek was designed with stops through all three villages and to account for carrying capacity concerns, including booked timings to avoid congestion at campsites. Two government-sponsored motorable (farm) roads, under construction at the time of writing, will directly connect Merak and Sakteng areas to main roads and town. All visitors pay a special visitation fee, which is collected by NRED and deposited with a CSO, the Bhutan Trust Fund for Conservation, for future re-investment in SWS.

The TCB also financed local capacity building and project governance. A small group of school drop-outs and youth were trained as local guides and assistant cooks who would remain in the villages to provide mandatory services to tour operators. Other community members would provide optional services, such as cultural programmes involving traditional singing and dancing. The Sanctuary created an executive governing body of seven key institutional stakeholders, including park and the *geog*

administration offices of Merak and Sakteng. Formal by-laws were enacted, articulating the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, list rates for mutually-agreed upon local services, and establishing a community development fund (CDF) to channel a certain percentage of tourism revenue back into the communities. Moreover, the by-laws instated three committees consisting of five to 15 members for Merak, and 7 members for Sakteng and Joenkhar each to manage the campsites, CDFs, and porter pony (i.e., horse contractors) systems.

Four years after the initiation of the project, research participants largely considered the ecotourism initiative “still in the early stages” or “not so successful”. Two of the five campsites, Damangjung and Mitserteng, were rarely used. Campsites were often unclean, many lacked running water while toilets, kitchen and rest stop amenities were broken or vandalised (e.g., stolen pipes, wooden table tops) (see Figure 3.3). Community and non-community stakeholders considered the locations poorly chosen, for instance, the site might have poor soil drainage or be far from a water source, and the design of camping site unsuitable. Raised sleeping platforms are filled with sand, which makes pitching tents difficult. As a result, many groups tend to either set up camp outside of the campgrounds, use the guesthouse or seek homestays. According to local *gups* (village leaders), only three homestays were operational in Merak and none in Sakteng. Furthermore, SWS suffered from low tourist volume. In Joenkhar, 55% of participants specifically wanted more tourists coming to SWS. One MOAF official commented on a lack of critical mass: “Locals need to see visitors are coming...at the end of the day it’s about economy of scale” (NCP35). For both groups of stakeholders, lack of well-planned facilities and tourist arrivals have contributed to poor project outcomes.

Community stakeholders were dissatisfied with the inequitable distribution of economic benefits and limited employment and training opportunities. All research participants acknowledged that non-local tour operators were the main beneficiaries and that very little money trickled down to the community level, mostly benefitting horse contractors who rented out ponies. Local guides and cooks trained by TCB were not being hired by tour operators. A few local participants reported that some tour guides would purchase Brokpa hats and clothing as gifts, only to re-sell them to tourists at inflated prices, or overcharge for *tshogchang* (group drinks) and other cultural performances. Many residents called for more job and skills training, including government support to set up their own hotels and handicraft shops. One local tour guide commenting on the fact that all but two local guides had left the region to become national guides or seek other prospects, said: “When it started, [TCB] promised benefits. But where are the benefits?” (MP20). A TCB employee acknowledged that “community expectations had grown so big” (NCP17), which was echoed by several other non-community stakeholders. One senior NRED employee commented, “We talk all about community but I don’t know how we’re justifying this when communities

aren't getting much of the benefits. We need to build a system that feeds back to community" (NCP6). This sentiment was reiterated among all participants, including tour operators.

**Figure 3.3 The state of campsites. (A) Waterlogged soil after rain at Mitserteng campsite near Sakteng. (B) Foreign tour group pitched their tents outside of the Merak guesthouse, not at the campsite. (C) Toilet without a tank, Merak. (D) Tent 'sheds' at Joenkhar site.**



Community stakeholders were dissatisfied with the inequitable distribution of economic benefits and limited employment and training opportunities. All research participants acknowledged that non-local tour operators were the main beneficiaries and that very little money trickled down to the community level, mostly benefitting horse contractors who rented out ponies. Local guides and cooks trained by TCB were not being hired by tour operators. A few local participants reported that some tour guides would purchase Brokpa hats and clothing as gifts, only to re-sell them to tourists at inflated prices, or overcharge for *tshogchang* (group drinks) and other cultural performances. Many residents called for more job and skills training, including government support to set up their own hotels and handicraft shops. One local tour guide commenting on the fact that all but two local guides had left the region to become national guides or seek other prospects, said: "When it started, [TCB] promised benefits. But where are the benefits?" (MP20). A TCB employee acknowledged that "community expectations had grown so big" (NCP17), which was echoed by several other non-community stakeholders. One senior NRED employee commented, "We talk all about community but I don't know how we're justifying this when communities aren't getting much of the benefits. We need to build a system that feeds back to community" (NCP6). This sentiment was reiterated among all participants, including tour operators.

Non-community stakeholders commonly cited poor service coordination and delivery, lack of co-operation and poor quality of work as common trials in ecotourism development. All tour operator participants said they were unable to rely on local people for consistent and professional services, and some expressed the additional costs and “risks” involved in selling tour packages to remote areas. One tour operator noted, “Locals were trained by TCB but started charging too high. Porter pony and yak fees increase every year, same with guide and cook fees” (NCP 40). Difficulties have ensued with porter pony management, such as disagreements about switching contractors between different jurisdictions and charging higher rates than those pre-established in the by-laws. Park staff from every ranger office and the district TCB delegate received numerous complaints from tour operators and local service providers. “Any problems they have, tour operators used to call me as early as 5 am”, recalled one SWS staff member (NCP13). Conversely, every *geog* leader noted that tour operators did not make advance arrangements for tourist groups in the past, however, recently this situation has improved.

Poor maintenance of moribund sites was partially attributed to lack of tourists, the far distance of some sites from main settlements, and menial compensation caretakers received. Some non-community participants pointed to the fact that *geogs* appointed non-elected *chipeons* (village messengers) to the campsite management committees in Merak and Sakteng, whereas the Joenkhar campsite was overseen by a group of four to seven locally-elected tourist *tshogpas* (representative). “*Chipoens* have a difficult job”, acknowledged one tour operator (NCP22). A few Sakteng participants called for the election of one *tshogpa* to solely oversee ecotourism operations and revenue collection.

Both community and non-community stakeholders were critical of decision-making and participation at the local level. A couple of Sakteng participants, including a former local leader, mentioned that community members were not being invited or involved in all tourism planning meetings. Yet one TCB official stated that communities normally sent the *gup* or *tshogpa* to public consultation meetings, underscoring that *gups* were “very influential in their communities” (NCP16). For some it was an issue of too many stakeholders, too many groups. A senior TCB representative said:

to have seven to eight [committees] for the same purpose, and sometimes conflict of interest in some cases, it’s not very implementable. What we do is that. It’s a very socialist thing, it’s a safe way to do things because if you involve everybody then there is no question of favouritism or whatever, which happens anyway actually. (NCP3)

Likewise, a few Merak residents said there were many community groups and co-operatives but many had difficulty working effectively together. The array of disparate views from community

and non-community stakeholders signifies the many challenges surrounding local level participation and decision-making.

### **3.4.3 Local capacity, culture and mismatched priorities**

Certain aspects of Brokpa culture, such as having a reputation for being tough, engaging in illegal activities and living a semi-pastoral lifestyle have presented unique challenges to ICDP and PA management. Brokpa people and particularly villagers from Merak were described as “wild minds” and “hard core people” by some civil servants. One TCB employee stated,

Sometimes we have to drag them and force them to do things. It’s very difficult to convince these people to do things. They are very uncivilised. They are very tough, speaking frankly.

Local people want donations and for government to give things and do things for them. They don’t want to take care or do things themselves. (NCP13)

In February 2014, a group of villagers illegally bulldozed a 2 km gravel road extension from the official SWS trail entrance at Phrugshingmang toward Merak, while SWS rangers were away. The transgressors were fined but those who were interviewed were pleased and unrepentant. One of the charged offenders stated that he would “do [illegal construction] again” (MP6). As one CSO official noted, “communities will take matters into their own hands” if they want something badly enough (NCP1).

Active participation of community members in local meetings was a point of contention among stakeholders. A couple of local participants recalled that all local people were invited to discuss the campsite and guesthouse but only those who were considered most knowledgeable or involved in tourism for instance, pony porters and local leaders, were invited to attend the by-law meeting. According to park authorities, all community members were invited to tourism development meetings. During a debriefing meeting, one SWS official stated, “Few stay in the village [and attend meetings], those who complain are the ones in the [cow herding] huts. How can they reach the meeting in time?” Several other SWS staff observed that residents would not attend public meetings unless lunch and/or daily subsistence allowance (DSA) were offered. A former community leader from Merak affirmed that coordinating annual *geog* meetings was not easy; *tshogpas* frequently had to call absent residents on their mobile phones to ask them to return to the village.

Communities were legally empowered within their jurisdiction but several government participants questioned their capacity to carry out local projects independently. The Local Government Act of 2007 grants elected *geog* officials full authority to make decisions on development projects and their budgets, and enforce public health and safety regulations (RGOB, 2007), yet communities have not developed

innovative tourism products or enterprise due to lack of education, capacity building and experience. For example, even two years after MOAF reportedly provided all the necessary materials they pledged, pilot homestay construction remains incomplete. One senior Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC) official asserted that although locals deliver projects they have proposed, government authorities tend to step in because they do not think communities can manage large-scale projects. He also noted that community members will not co-operate on central government projects that are imposed upon them: "...they'll never say 'No, we don't want your [RGOB] thing'... They don't want to make people in the centre unhappy. It's a small world here in Bhutan" (NCP25). An official from NRED stated that community planning could benefit from MOAF staff who had more training and exposure, "it is not easy for them to think outside the box, they need someone to guide them... I think the park people need to be little more involved to sit and engage with them" (NCP24). The reasons behind lack of community action to complete local projects are multi-faceted and complex.

Many non-community stakeholders perceived various RGOB agencies as not being fully engaged in ecotourism-related duties. For example, one senior TCB official felt that RGOB attempts to engage communities during preliminary surveys were ineffective, "Most of the time it's all about ticking [off boxes]. ...without actually looking at whether the outcome of the consultative process is a genuine one" (NCP17). Several staff reported they did not feel adequately trained in or familiar with ecotourism activities to effectively carry out this work. In addition to their regular obligations, park rangers now oversee facilitation and coordination of all tourism-related programmes in SWS. "It's like an extra burden for us," admitted one ranger (NCP11). Few non-RGOB staff mentioned the need for park employees to become "good facilitators" while some non-SWS participants commented on the "perks" that park staff enjoy from external funding, such as frequent travel outside of the park and Bhutan for training and study tours, in addition to the high turnover rate of park administrators.

Several community and non-community participants have noted increased competition and desire for short-term financial and material gains at the individual level. One park staff person described villagers as "greedy" and envious of each other, while a local participant lamented, "Modernisation has brought increased competition. People are money-minded now... Now, my village is like, if a man has a lot of money in his pocket, he's a Merak man. If no money, he's not." A few participants spoke of the change in attitude toward community service and the decline in the traditional practice of *goongda woola* (labour contribution), a system where households perform mandatory, unpaid community service. According to a former Sakteng resident, "Each household would work on old trails, but now new trails are built with government funds and people are paid to create the trails."

Numerous RGOB staff complained that locals were “spoiled” and “spoon fed” by external institutions. A senior TCB official blamed UNDP and foreign donors for introducing “DSA mentality” to Bhutan. In discussing the construction of tourist and public facilities, one SWS staff member noted the drastic rise in pony porter services, which were fixed in the by-laws at a maximum of 450 Nus [approx. 6.70 USD] per horse per day, saying, “If I’m not mistaken, for 50kg of cement to reach Sakteng [government or donors] are paying 1,000 Nus [approx. 15 USD] per horse. That’s why people are spoiled, actually” (NCP16). The influx of contemporary government support and foreign aid has drastically altered community expectations regarding income and employment.

At present, economic development is a high national priority, and related projects have demanded quick outcomes. One senior GNHC officer mentioned, “in [terms of] GNH pillars socio-economic is the weak one. Government, culture, environment pillars are very strong. We need self-reliance economically through hydropower and tourism” (NCP25). Managers from TCB and MOAF felt pressure from their ministers and the prime minister to produce tangible results. A few respondents reflected that during the monarchy, decision-making on infrastructure and development projects took longer and were more carefully thought out. A senior NRED official said he feared the “democratic process and 5-year promises” where politicians are focused on the present and make hasty decisions, “They tried to rush with Sakteng a bit...in some ways it is quite naïve that the authorities [thought] ‘let’s make the campsites’ and you think it is ready” (NCP24). For him, the SWS project lacked consultation on campsite design because RGOB wanted to capitalise on positive media abroad and cultivate tourism.

### **3.5 Discussion**

The events and outcomes of these two projects, in relation to socio-relational issues affecting ICDP management in SWS, reflect the mismatch between stakeholder expectations and delivery in the process of democratic reforms and transitioning from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ society. They provide insights in five overlapping areas: project design; local cultural norms and behaviours; trust and accountability; modernisation versus tradition; and prospective trade-offs. These insights enable us to better comprehend the distinct challenges of ICDP stakeholders, how these obstacles affect stakeholder relationships and exacerbate or alleviate local capacity and participation issues for semi-pastoral groups.

#### **3.5.1 Project design**

Our findings indicate the limitations of project design and other challenges facing ICDPs, which have been the topic of earlier studies (Brandon & Wells, 1992; Kiss, 2004). More time and resources were spent on planning rather than implementation and monitoring stages of project design (Wells & McShane,

2004). From the start of the ecotourism initiative, RGOB invested resources in TCB and park authorities who established a process for engaging local communities through surveys and meetings. However, these efforts were considered superficial, routine and cursory by those who conducted the surveys and meetings. In addition, staff involved in implementation were not necessarily experienced at facilitating group meetings, analysing responses or conducting social science research. Aside from a few periodic consultations with community members for preliminary surveys and by-law creation, communities were not involved in project design. Lack of community involvement is rampant in the literature (cf., Brandon & Wells, 1992; Dahal et al., 2013; Spiteri & Nepal, 2006). Moreover, hasty decisions were made during ecotourism project design and implementation due to a tight project timeline and pressure from supervisors and politicians, comparable to cases cited by Hughes and Flintan (2001).

Despite the existence of legal structures for decentralised local governance, communities are hampered by their lack of organisational ability and experience to independently carry out large-scale projects. Once facilities were in place the government handed over responsibility for implementation to community members, many of whom had never managed business operations and expected high economic returns despite the lack of tourists. As a result of this mismatch of expectations, many community members not only became disillusioned and lost respect for government stakeholders (e.g., TCB) who spoke of potential economic benefits, but they were also disempowered. Campsite management in Merak and Sakteng was seen as an added burden to *chipeons*, who serve in mandatory, non-remunerative posts on behalf of their households on a one-year rotational basis. In addition, complaints of too many and ineffective groups indicate intra-community conflict. Almudi and Berkes (2010) found a similar case among fisher communities in the Peixe Lagoon National Park, Brazil, where communities had clear goals but lacked organisation, leadership and the sense of community cohesion needed for collective action.

### **3.5.2 Local cultural norms and behaviours**

Although local capacity and ownership is weak and the two projects were introduced and primarily orchestrated by RGOB officials, it is clear that local residents are far from passive bystanders. On the one hand, actions of community members such as illegal road construction or lack of action, for instance not re-shingling CGI roofs, can be viewed as efforts to assert authority and achieve self-empowerment on the part of residents, even when many local people do not feel confident to openly criticise authority figures. On the other hand, social and cultural factors may underlie reluctance to fully co-operate with government agencies. Wangmo (1990) explains that half-truths or “white” lies told for the benefit of another are not considered unethical or sinful in Brokpa society. In other words, being insincere toward RGOB officials

in order to make them happy is not considered a grave offence. However, it is difficult to establish co-operative relationships without accountability and trust.

This finding highlights the importance of understanding the meaning of cultural norms, values and behaviours of communities in natural resource management. Certain norms may enable a group to maintain control and power over certain situations and encounters with other people, which may be the case for Brokpas and other ethnic groups. For example, the Kogi people of Colombia have actively distanced themselves and limited contact with the outside world for centuries (Restrepo-Campo & Turbay, 2015; Uribe, 1997). The use of silence and short phrases, ignoring the other and displaying indifference provide protective barriers against attempts to have further contact with strangers whom they distrust. This behaviour was observed by tourists who attempted to negotiate lower prices for coconut water with Kogi children in Tayrona National Park (Restrepo-Campo & Turbay, 2015). Such a relationship strategy may also be considered a coping mechanism for Kogi-outsider interactions in a tradition that obliges community members to remain marginalised.

The motivating factors behind individual and collective actions are less apparent in Merak-Sakteng. Local people may agree to government projects such as ecotourism even if they do not genuinely wish to collaborate because they: (1) stand to benefit; (2) want to appear respectful to authority figures; or (3) fear potential repercussions if they refuse high-ranking officials. Yet continual unwillingness to honour agreements or comply with procedures and expressed intent to repeat offenses suggests there is little fear of negative consequences from the far-flung central government. Wangchuk, Dhammasaccakarn and Tepsing (2013) note that some Brokpas apologise for mistakes by claiming their ignorance as forest dwellers who “don’t know anything” but when the transgression is committed by a non-community stakeholder, particularly a civil servant, they will turn to the law to hold that person accountable (p.151). These authors also claim that Brokpas are ‘innocent in nature’, do not like change and have a hard time accepting outsider views due to their isolated, homogenous society. However, we question whether alternate ideological, social or cultural factors play a role in shaping individual and collective action.

### **3.5.3 Trust and accountability concerns**

After analysing the interview data, it appears that a cycle of distrust and anxiety has emerged between stakeholders at local, regional and national levels. This finding is a common characteristic reported in the literature (Cinner, Fuentes & Randriamahazo, 2009; Dahlberg & Burlando, 2009; Roth, 2004). Community members had overly ambitious expectations of the projects and were disappointed with RGOB officials because they did not receive timely or profuse benefits. Given the poor levels of performance regarding management in ecotourism activities and the need for future planning and capacity

building, community aspirations for larger projects such as hotels are not feasible. Most tour operators have not provided many employment opportunities to local trainees in spite of beliefs that ecotourism should benefit local communities.

Staff from park, TCB and the *dzongkhag* deemed local people unreliable because they did not follow through on the MOU or commitments they made in exchange for the projects. Moreover, it seems that non-community stakeholders were angry because they were caught in a financial and professional dilemma and, in many cases, they felt they were not treated with respect by local stakeholders. Government ministers and senior officials naïvely believed that tourism activities would be functional upon project launch but there have been numerous challenges in effectively engaging and ensuring the accountability of a wide range of stakeholders (cf., Wilshusen et al., 2002, Wells & McShane, 2004). However, research indicates that democratisation of decision-making fosters local participation and can lead to better quality of natural resources (Hayes & Ostrom, 2005).

The cycle of distrust and under-performance has been exacerbated by the evolution of park staff and local government roles and interactions with the community. The onset of ecotourism projects has compelled park staff who have little direct experience in ecotourism and confidence to monitor progress. Rangers spoke of how they specialised in forestry, not tourism; they were trained to protect biodiversity, educate the public and act as enforcers of the law. Relations with community may be further hindered by a lack of meaningful positive interactions with residents due to the high staff turnover at ranger offices and frequent staff travel. These findings align with an increasing number of studies that illustrate the importance of trust, personal relationships and consistency in park-people engagement for effective PA management (Davenport, Leahy, Anderson & Jakes, 2007; Salafsky et al., 2001; Stern, 2008;). Several scholars argue for greater local participation and co-operation in project development and implementation to provide a sense of ownership (Brown, 2002; Spiteri & Nepal, 2008a). Adaptive co-management or community-based conservation are two approaches that aim to foster greater decentralisation of power over to communities and expand institutional arrangements to enhance local decision-making (Armitage, 2005; Berkes, 2004; Hughes & Flintan, 2001). However, more effective collaboration can only thrive when trust and clear communication is reciprocated and greater measures of accountability put in place between parties.

### **3.5.4 Modernisation vs. tradition**

The government push for economic development and democratic reforms appear to have set new trends, which has resulted in shifting local attitudes somewhat away from traditional norms and institutions. Dependency on central government and foreign donors for employment opportunities and subsidies has

become part of the local mindset. Since the onset of earlier well-funded projects and jobs in infrastructure development and ‘DSA mentality’, residents expect higher salaries while interest in performing *woola* has decreased. Even though customary *goongda woola* and *zhabto lemi* (labour tax) were abolished after the Local Government Act of 2009 came into effect (RGOB, 2009), *geogs* have been burdened with the additional costs of maintenance and renovation of public works. Therefore, the practice of labour contribution continues in rural areas despite public confusion and debate around the rules of execution and possible compensation (Dorji, 2015; GNHC, 2013b; Rosenberg, 2009).

The advent of democracy has allegedly introduced greater competition and appetite for material prosperity and appears to be gradually modifying social structures. Findings suggest that greater exposure to and desire for western Bhutanese-style housing has fuelled local demand for timber and more illegal logging is anticipated by rangers, particularly in Merak, where most residents have nearly used up their entire timber quotas for the next 25 years. P. Dorji (2012) states that democracy created partisan divisions and rifts in Brokpa settlements that have a strong tradition of social cohesion and community co-operation due to intermarriage and polyandry. In addition, aspects of traditional semi-pastoral way of life, which RGOB encourages, are incompatible with ‘modern’ notions of settled communities and locally based operations. Brokpas customarily spend six to seven months a year in the highlands or lowlands to provide their livestock with suitable grazing lands and fodder, which makes it difficult for participants to be *in situ* for community meetings, service provision and site maintenance. In contrast, the Sami people in northern Sweden, who were traditionally pastoral reindeer herders, have been forced to engage in other occupations such as tourism largely due to the high costs of modern reindeer herding operations for large-scale food production and the declining profitability of reindeer herding in recent decades (Leu & Müller, 2016; Müller & Pettersson 2001).

### **3.5.5 Prospective trade-offs**

With all of the above in mind, we must ask: what types of trade-offs can be anticipated in PA management in order to help counter high expectations with reality in conservation and development initiatives? In the case of SWS, greater economic gains will result in loss of environmental biodiversity and social-cultural outcomes, favouring social conservationism (cf., McShane et al., 2011; Miller, et al., 2011). As modernisation progresses, there is an increasing demand for infrastructure development at the regional level that overshadows other priorities at present, which is evident in the potentially adverse environmental impacts of road development and the CGI sheeting project. All park staff and some community members who were interviewed feared that the farm and illegal roads will not only make it

easier for locals and outsiders to access timber from lower areas illicitly, but also render the trekking trail to the villages useless and impede future tourism prospects.

Future prospects appear bleak, given previous studies that illustrate the growing influence and negative impacts of Western consumerism in Bhutanese society, including increased cars, pollution and higher rates of diabetes from changes in diet (Brunet et al., 2001; Brooks, 2013). Rapten (2001) argues that foreign television advertisements tempt Bhutanese viewers to engage in conspicuous consumption. We do not attempt to measure conspicuous consumption in Brokpa society, but see evidence of this pattern in the construction of elaborate new houses and finely decorated altars at homes and in temples. Furthermore, the expansion of institutions such as PAs into remote areas like Merak-Sakteng represent globalised, Western conservation ideals (cf., Lacey & Ilcan, 2015). Traditional communities and lifestyles may not be fully prepared for modern conservation practices, specifically if they are driven by a centralised approach.

Integrating trade-offs into conservation management and assessment could be a viable way forward (Dahlberg & Burlando, 2009; McShane et al., 2011). Stakeholders can learn from past mistakes to make adjustments and improve ICDP mechanisms. Significant trade-offs in terms of design may include the scale of projects and availability of resources (Brandon & Wells, 1992, McShane et al., 2011). In the case of SWS, this could involve contending with the limited amount of park supervision over ecotourism activities because the few staff stationed in park offices are frequently attending field duties or travelling. Also, recognising common interests between community and park stakeholders could help both groups work more closely to find opportunities where community can jointly contribute efforts or solutions, or even take the lead. The approach of compromise and negotiation has been successful in Colombia's Makaira National Park, where Wayúu people have given up some of their rights to self-determination and the Park has ceded some of its biological conservation ideals (Premauer & Berkes, 2015). We acknowledge that the process of discussing trade-offs and making hard choices for the successful PA outcomes may not only be difficult but inevitable.

### **3.6 Conclusions**

This paper contributes to the debate on PA stakeholder relations through the empirical case study of an Asian nation in the midst of modernisation and democratisation. Our findings confirm that stakeholders face similar challenges and frustrations to those identified in previous ICDP studies in developing countries, particularly in regard to project design limitations. In the case of SWS, multiple stakeholders hold varying interests and goals: conservationist values of park staff are pitted against the development and wellbeing agenda of community members and tour operators. Achieving a balance between these

opposing objectives (cf., Miller et al., 2011; Roe, 2008) seems unlikely in the near future given the current national emphasis on socio-economic development.

In terms of the second research question concerning the impact of challenges on stakeholder relations, we see that stakeholder expectations are often contradictory and relations among stakeholders can be quite strained due to limited trust. Aware of the potential trade-off between socio-economic growth at the expense of cultural heritage, RGOB is committed to preserving Brokpa customs and manner of living. Yet it appears that regional and national government agencies have inadvertently sent conflicting messages about development and conservation to local communities in myriad ways, such as politicians fulfilling election promises by commissioning the construction of farm roads only to have park authorities impose tight restrictions on traditional grazing and timber collection practices. Likewise, government departments encourage the development of ecotourism activities to diversify livelihoods options and help preserve Brokpa culture but a key feature of implementing this strategy requires living an increasingly non-pastoral lifestyle. Furthermore, Brokpa cultural norms and behaviour appear to hinder relations with non-Brokpa stakeholders, which suggests that more time is required to build relationships based on understanding and mutual trust.

Finally, study findings indicate that local capacity building and participation is lacking in Brokpa communities. The decentralised approach to local governance that is in place has yet to be fully realised because the central government instigates and remains heavily involved in most projects. The degree of patronage and protective attitude of some staff indicate that political reforms exist in policy but are not fully practised. At present, complete engagement of Merak and Sakteng community members in a government-run ICDP is highly improbable, given the unique cultural norms of Brokpa society, limited trust and disdain among stakeholders, and the top-down approach to ecotourism where tour operators and pony porters wield immense power. Despite the new democratic era of free speech, individualism and inclusive participation, some social behaviours may take decades to change, including the observance of traditional hierarchies and deference to authority figures in the community and government.

One question that arises out of the study is: what types of measures can be taken to cultivate stronger, more collaborative PA management for societies in transition? Increasing local participation and co-operation in project development and implementation could ensure more realistic outcomes, and empower community members, particularly when many ICDPs are externally motivated and initiated, making it difficult to design programmes that directly address local needs and costs. Studies on community-based tourism have identified strong leadership within the community in the form of a local ‘champion’ or legitimate leader as an important determinant for success (Kibicho, 2008; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen,

& Duangsaeng, 2014). However, finding such a leader to ensure the success of the project cannot always be guaranteed.

Since semi-pastoral culture presents its own unique challenges to conservation and development in SWS, adoption of longer, more realistic timelines and flexible governance approaches that embrace learning and reflection, partnership-building, and traditional Brokpa knowledge, culture and systems (e.g., adaptive co-management, community-based conservation) could foster greater decentralisation of power to local communities and expand institutional arrangements to enhance local decision-making. By supporting local and regional government officials who work closely with Brokpa communities and drawing more heavily upon their expertise, projects may be monitored and local expectations managed more effectively.

In terms of research trustworthiness in this study, we ponder the implications that Brokpa cultural norms may have had on the data we collected in addition to power imbalances due to institutional research partners. Research participants may tell falsehoods for reasons other than cultural norms, including the imposed authority of the researcher, participant attempts to create a better image, or lack of anonymity (Gaiziuniene & Cibulskas, 2014; Randall, Coast, Compaore, & Antoine, 2013). Self-representations may be shaped by power dynamics in the research process (Dowling, 2010). In this case, the primary researcher was sponsored by park authorities who controlled community access to natural resources and managed key development projects. To offset these challenges, we adopted specific measures to foster better co-operation and trust with participants, such as assuring participant anonymity and using data triangulation to verify the credibility of findings.

Our findings give rise to new lines of inquiry. Building on the issue of distrust and lack of co-operation among stakeholders, further research on power and decision-making in different stakeholder relations such as intra-community, community and private industry, and inter-agency government in SWS. For example, better understanding of how the MOU emerged in the CGI distribution project would be insightful for future ICDP development and decision-making in Bhutan and other developing countries. New research in these areas may even broaden the democratisation process “if it can identify local agendas or carry less powerful, or local knowledge to the policy arena” (Batterbury, Forsyth, & Thomson, 1997, p. 129). Another area that could provide greater insights for policy and planning in ICDPs would be deeper analysis of possible ideological and socio-cultural factors, for instance the influence of religion on motivation, thoughts and behaviour in Brokpa and other rural and/or indigenous communities involved in conservation and development efforts. This inquiry would be a starting point for exploring feasible and targeted interventions that are meaningful to local communities and their relationships to PAs.

In the end, concessions between conservation and development goals demand more explicit analysis and discussion of trade-offs and hard choices involved in proposed projects and strategies. Since development activities such as tourism are often catalysts for modernisation and globalisation, we must be mindful of potential core-periphery dichotomies. Avoiding issues of power at different levels of governance can have serious implications for local communities, as observed in numerous cases across sub-Saharan Africa. By overtly and periodically addressing and negotiating losses, costs, benefits, scale and temporal concerns, hard choices can be made and stakeholders can build trust and diminish unrealistic expectations and conflict. In view of the acute and intricate conservation and development issues in ICDPs and PA management, there may be value to thinking more broadly about wellbeing in societies in transition. Bhutan has an extensive system of protected areas that is unlikely to achieve its conservation and development potential without significant improvements to PA management and policy, and increased attention to local involvement in design and implementation of rural development initiatives.

## Chapter 4

### “This is a holy place of Ama Jomo”: Buen vivir, indigenous voices and ecotourism development in a protected area of Bhutan

#### 4.1 Chapter Summary

Common definitions of ecotourism address the need to benefit the wellbeing of local people; in reality, ecotourism is often supported or dominated by external agents. In such cases, local ideological, social and cultural values may be overlooked, thereby disenfranchising local and indigenous stakeholders. This paper examines indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing and how they relate to ecotourism practices in three Brokpa communities in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, the first protected area in Bhutan to become a special tourism destination. A range of methods was used, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participatory mapping, participant observation and literature review. Data analysis was couched in the context of *buen vivir* (living well), a concept of wellbeing with indigenous roots. Findings indicate that: (1) perceptions of ecotourism vary between community members and contrast with the official park definition; (2) wellbeing is conceived in diverse ways but corresponds to key features of *buen vivir*; (3) indigenous worldviews are pervasive and shape social values and spiritual beliefs in connection to nature; and (4) indigenous cosmologies and traditional values may be strengthened through their integration into modern policies and institutions. This research contributes more non-Western, distant voices to the literature, a concept and mode of analysis for wellbeing that embraces an indigenous ontology, and new empirical insights on wellbeing and ecotourism involving indigenous communities in protected areas.

#### 4.2 Introduction

Ecotourism is widely considered a tool for increasing the economic wellbeing of local communities while conserving natural resources (Fennell, 2001; Harris, 2009; Honey, 2008). One of the most prevalent definitions of ecotourism is: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES, 2015). The all-encompassing nature of this definition and its earlier adaptation (i.e., TIES, 1990) reflect the values of its origins in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century environmental movement (Guha, 1989; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Honey, 2008). Such views have been critiqued for compartmentalising humans and nature, and serving as Western constructs that promote the interests of the Global North (Cater, 2006; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Wall, 1997). Accordingly, there have been calls for more different, non-Western and distant voices in the literature (Cater, 2006; Prakash, 1994; Wearing & McDonald, 2002). These critiques challenge the discourse on what ecotourism entails to local people because ecotourism is often introduced, supported, or

dominated by external actors or agencies (Blackstock, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen & Duangsaeng, 2014). Local belief systems can have strategic implications for conservation-related policy and programmes, as academics and practitioners have argued that indigenous knowledge and beliefs in sacred places may encourage ecological integrity and promote sustainable development (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Verschuuren, Wild, McNeeley & Oviedo, 2010). This paper examines how local, indigenous understandings and definitions of ecotourism and wellbeing connect to ecotourism development in a Bhutanese wildlife sanctuary.

The link between the culture and spiritual beliefs of indigenous peoples and their natural environment has been explored extensively in various bodies of literature, from ecotourism (Fennell, 2008; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011; Zeppel, 2006) and pilgrimage tourism (Andriotis, 2009; Timothy & Olsen, 2006) to traditional ecological knowledge (Armitage, 2003; Berkes, 2012; Colding, & Folke, 2001) and sacred natural sites and landscapes (Bernbaum, 2006; Gadgil & Vartak 1976; Ormsby & Bhagwat, 2010; Verschuuren et al., 2010; Wild & McLeod, 2008). Ecotourism is part of the wider concept of sustainable tourism: conflicts and opportunities between sustainable tourism and indigenous peoples remain issues for research, discussion and contestation (Carr, Ruhanen, & Whitford, 2016). Sacred natural sites, which vary in scale and can be found around the world, may honour a deity, provide sanctuary for spirits, be a living expression of ancestors, or protect a holy, historic place (Dudley, Higgins-Zogib, & Mansourian, 2009; Oviedo & Jeanrenaud, 2007; Rutte, 2011). These sites may be situated in ecologically sensitive and strategic locations, and often supply a range of ecosystem services, such as providing medicinal plants, protecting water and soil, and sustaining culture as sites for important socio-cultural events and rituals (Colding & Folke, 2001; Dudley et al., 2010; MEA, 2005; Rutte, 2011).

The indigenous culture-spiritual-nature connection has also been realised as a philosophy across South America known as *buen vivir*, which complements the literature on sacred sites in nature. Roughly translated as ‘living well’ or ‘collective wellbeing’, *buen vivir* is closely related to expressions in many Andean and neighbouring cultures: *sumac kawsay* of the Kitchwa, Ecuador; *suma qamaña* of the Aymara, Bolivia; *küme mongen* of the Mapuche, Chile and Argentina; *ñande reko* of the Guarani, Paraguay and *shiir waras* of the Ashuar, Ecuador and Peru (Jiménez, 2011). These terms reflect fullness of one’s life within a society, and unity with other people and nature (Gudynas, 2011; Jiménez, 2011; Walsh, 2010). Aspects of this concept are reflected in other global philosophical traditions and worldviews, such as Aristotelian values of *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sirgy et al., 2006); the indigenous Fijian concept of *vanua*, which interrelates social, ecological and spiritual elements of life (Farrelly, 2011); and Buddhist principles of compassion and interconnectedness (Brooks, 2013; Wangmo & Valk, 2012).

Several key features of the *buen vivir* perspective encompass aspects of relationships, culture and spirituality. *Buen vivir* recognises nature as a subject and well-functioning ecosystems are paramount to economic and social objectives (Acosta, 2010). Relationships and reciprocity also matter in *buen vivir*, which addresses harmonious co-existence between human beings, and human service and care toward the environment (Deneulin, 2012). In this way, it is concerned with the human right to live in dignity (e.g., to have a good, meaningful livelihood) as well as the rights of nature. Furthermore, the material is not separate from cultural and spiritual dimensions of life (Villalba, 2013). The unseen realm sustains the material world, and a balanced sense of sacredness is required in daily life. *buen vivir* is contextual and non-homogenous (Deneulin, 2012; Gudynas, 2011). It provides space for different articulations of the meaning ‘to live well’ but specific ideas (e.g., *sumac kawsay*) cannot be transplanted to other locations. Finally, *buen vivir* is infused with idealism. Deneulin (2012) notes that its utopic dimension means that contradictions and tensions will always be present in *buen vivir*. These central characteristics can be distilled into three broad and measurable features: (1) human relationships; (2) human-nature relationships; and (3) culture and spirituality. This paper does not seek to systematically apply the entire *buen vivir* approach. Rather, it draws upon seminal features that have been simplified into ‘relationships’ and ‘culture and spirituality’ categories.

Wellbeing concepts, including *buen vivir*, have gained momentum in social and political arenas at the global and grassroots levels. Countries such as Bhutan, Canada, France and Thailand are developing and improving measurement tools and indices of wellbeing to track social progress (Brooks, 2013; Theerapappisit, 2003). As a practice, *buen vivir* has been fruitful as a social movement for indigenous and non-indigenous people. For instance, mutual respect for *Pachamama* (Mother Earth) and the sacredness of water has brought together indigenous communities, environmental groups, unions and the Catholic Church in a successful coalition to keep Chilean Patagonia free of dams (Latta, 2014). As an indigenous ontology, *buen vivir* is compatible with Buddhist emphasis on social and ecological integrity, spiritual over material growth, and moderation. Research on how indigenous perceptions of ecotourism relate to notions of wellbeing from a *buen vivir* perspective would contribute to the growing literature on local narratives and indigenous perceptions on ecotourism that includes cases from the Global South (cf., Farrelly, 2011; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Hutchins, 2007; Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2010; Manyara & Jones, 2007).

The concept of reciprocity is elaborated through *tha damtshig*, one of the most fundamental social values that pervades contemporary Bhutan (Kinga, 2001). Based on Buddhist teachings and referenced in most Bhutanese folktales, *tha damtshig* revolves around a sense of social responsibility and reciprocity as it seeks to establish and maintain social harmony and justice through love, honour and loyalty in

relationships with all people (Allison, 2004; Kinga, 2001; Whitecross, 2010). *Tha damtshig* contains a vast range of applications and meanings (e.g., generosity, honesty, filial piety), depending on the context for which it is used. More recently, it has been tied to notions of state loyalty and political allegiance (Phuntsho, 2004). Allison (2004) notes that *tha damtshig* may lead to potential abuses of power (e.g., nepotism, corruption) if people are motivated by socio-political obligations and considerations over personal integrity and virtue. Discussion and awareness of this complex concept are critical to the success and sustainability of any development project in Bhutan.

This paper begins with an outline of the research context, focusing on three indigenous *Brokpa* (nomad, highlander) communities currently engaged in ecotourism development in a protected area (PA) in eastern Bhutan. The methods used are briefly described, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation. Study results examine local perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development among indigenous people, couched in terms of the three main features of *buen vivir*, namely human relationships, human-nature relationships, culture and spirituality. The discussion offers four areas of insight for developing ecotourism with indigenous stakeholders, highlighting how challenges in practice present opportunities for future policy and planning of development projects in protected areas. In closure, this paper reflects on lessons learned for PAs and conservation and development projects, and contributes new directions for future research in wellbeing.

## 4.3 Study Location

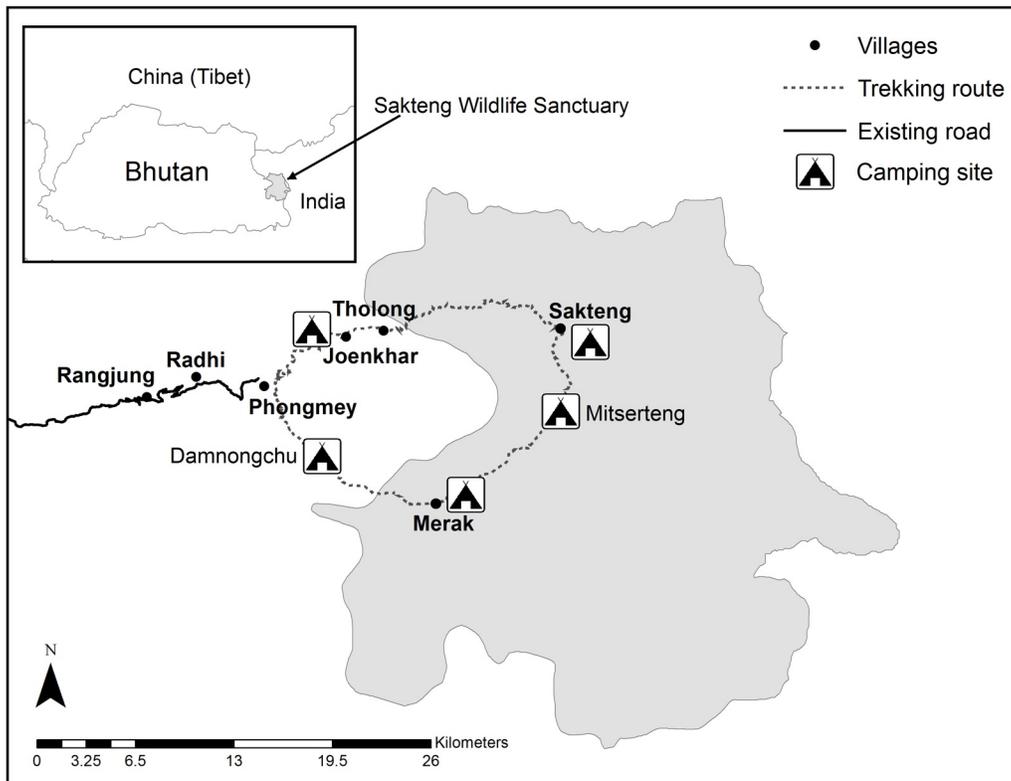
### 4.3.1 Brokpa society

The Brokpa are a Himalayan tribe and ethnic minority group in Bhutan. They inhabit remote mountain villages and surrounding hamlets in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS), one of the newest and smallest Bhutanese PAs. According to the religious biography *Jomo's Namthar*, Brokpas are the descendants of Tibetan immigrants who fled a tyrannical king and slave labour between A.D. 627–649 (Wangmo, 1990). Ama (or Aum) Jomo<sup>40</sup>, the young woman who led the exodus to Bhutan, is considered the local protector goddess whose spiritual abode is a mountain towering over the valley of Merak and Sakteng (Pommaret, 2004; Wangmo, 1990). The total human population of Sakteng and Merak *geogs* (administrative blocks) is 4,557 residents (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011), consisting of 702 households. This study focuses on the largest settlements in Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar (Figure 4.1).

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<sup>40</sup> *Ama* (mother) or *Aum* (lady) are honorific titles the Brokpa people have bestowed upon Jomo.

**Figure 4.1 Villages along the Merak-Sakteng Trek in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary**



**Source: Prepared by author based on additional data from GIS Unit, DOFPS, RGOB and Topographical Survey Division, NLC, RGOB**

Brokpa culture and tradition has remained relatively intact as a result of limited external influence over the years. Brokpa is spoken locally and traditional clothing is still commonly worn in the villages. Female attire includes a long white or red tunic-style dress (*shingkha*), red jacket (*todung*) with colourful woven animal or geometric designs, and a thick black woollen apron (*otey*). Men don animal hide vests (*paksa*) over long-sleeved red or brown woollen tunics (*chupa*) and the progressively less common *kanggo* (deerskin half-pant) and leather chaps (*phishoop*). Both genders commonly wear turquoise stone earrings fastened by thread through the earlobes in addition to a black felted yak wool hat (*shamo*), which has five long, twisted tufts that radiate out like spider legs and function as rainspouts.

Lifestyle and customs of the Brokpa differ greatly from mainstream Bhutanese society. Brokpas traditionally practice transhumance, a tradition that carries on in Merak and Sakteng but not Joenkhar, where inhabitants are sedentary agriculturalists. Maize and potato are staple crops and some have small herds of cattle. For highlanders, the movement of livestock such as yaks and cattle from high altitude to lower in winter and return in spring for suitable grazing pastures is attributed to temporal factors and spatial distribution of different livestock breeds (Dorjee, 2012). Houses in all villages are customarily

made of stone and wood. Sakteng is the seat of the sub-district administration and other government offices, including a police outpost. There is a basic health unit in Joenkhar and outreach clinics in the other two villages. Mobile communication service has existed in the area since 2010 and electricity since 2011.

Marriage customs include the increasingly rare practice of fraternal polyandry and sororal polygyny<sup>41</sup>; preference is given to whichever type of marriage will produce greater economic gain (Wangmo, 1990). This custom prevents the division of family property and ensures that farm work is shared. For example, one husband takes care of the herds while the other trades butter, cheese and meat for grains and vegetables with neighbours in southern villages and across the Indian border. These traditional bartering practices are ceding to the modern money economy as a result of increased road access to villages and towns outside of Merak-Sakteng.

Religion plays a prominent role in the daily life of all Bhutanese citizens. Buddhism is practiced in all Brokpa communities with elements and rituals related to Bön, an ancient animist-shamanist religion (Brooks, 2011; Pelgen, 2007). Picturesque temples, monasteries and historic sites grace SWS, and locals hold various festivals with traditional song and *chams* (masked dances) throughout the year. Brokpas are famed for their customary rites of hospitality, such as *tshogchang* (group drinks), and offering *ara* (local wine or spirits) or *suja* (butter tea) to visitors (L. Dorji, 2012).

#### **4.3.2 Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary and ecotourism development**

The Sanctuary was established in 2003 following a revision of the national PA system in 1993. It protects the easternmost temperate ecosystems, which harbour endemic and endangered species, including the red panda (*Ailurus fulgens*) (IUCN, 2016). Occupying 740.6 km<sup>2</sup> with an altitude range of 1600-4500 masl, SWS represents a diverse Himalayan terrestrial ecosystem of mixed coniferous forest, alpine scrub and screes, and 203 tree species, including chir pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) and the highest diversity of rhododendron species in the country (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). It also houses a wide range of faunal diversity: 18 species of mammals, 147 species of birds, and according to locals, the yeti or Abominable Snowman (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011).

The Sanctuary has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a tentative site since 2012 (UNESCO, 2016). The nearest motorable roads are one day's walk to Merak or Joenkhar and two days to Sakteng, but the district is currently building new roads to connect Merak and Sakteng to main roads. The

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<sup>41</sup> Fraternal polyandry refers to the marriage of one woman to brothers from the same family, whereas sororal polygyny occurs when several sisters share one husband.

Bhutanese government had strict visitor restrictions in the past to protect biological diversity and Brokpa culture, and was hesitant to open SWS to tourism.

Tourism began in 2010, following deliberation and planning by several government bodies. The Merak-Sakteng Trek is a 6-day tour designed to take visitors along an ancient and operative walking trail that connects the main settlements (see Figure 4.1 above). A visitation fee, the first of its kind for any PA in Bhutan, is charged to maintain the exclusivity of the area and generate funds for the park. Community members were invited to attend early stage planning meetings with representatives from Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB), SWS and Trashigang district administration. Funding for construction of campsites and other project amenities came from TCB, and SWS staff built garbage pits and created signage.

In tandem with community members and other stakeholders, SWS staff co-facilitated the creation of by-laws that outlined the rules and responsibilities of key stakeholders and management committees, collection for and usage of the community development fund (CDF), rates and responsibilities for local products and services (e.g., local guides), coordination between local service providers, and a list of key contacts for services (Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). The CDF allows a certain percentage of the profits from campsite or other tourism activities stipulated in the by-laws to be collected and used for facility maintenance and community development. Joenkhar is the only village to have a system of ‘tourist *tshogpas* (coordinators)’, elected community members who make decisions and coordinate tourism services.

The government invested in capacity-building and other resources to develop ecotourism in SWS. The TCB subsidised a select number of households in Merak and Sakteng to build toilet facilities in their homes in order to operate as homestays, and held a training programme for a set of youth and school dropouts to gain skills as local guides and cooks who would then provide mandatory services to tour groups. A few homestays in Merak were in operation as of Spring 2014. The Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division (NRED) of the Department of Forest and Park Services (DOFPS) published guidelines for ecotourism planning and management for the Bhutanese PA network, and copies of the guidelines were circulated to all park ranger offices from 2012 through 2013. Partially due to its remote location, the number of foreign visitors has remained relatively low: 147 visitors in 2014 and 85 in 2015 (pers. comm. Sonam Penjor, May 11, 2016).

#### **4.4 Methods**

This study adopted a case study and involved close collaboration with stakeholders. A literature review and document analysis were conducted prior to data collection in Merak-Sakteng to provide insights into where and how the term ‘ecotourism’ was used and interpreted in academic texts, reports, government

policies and documents (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During Fall 2013 and Spring 2014, 63 semi-structured household interviews and six focus groups consisting of 15 participants total between the ages of 23 and 67 were held, in addition to participant observation and informal discussions with community leaders and members. All community participants identified as ethnic Brokpa and Buddhist.

In addition to attending several household *pujas* (prayer ritual/ceremony), the author participated in three religious community events: a *Jomo sekha* (autumn) ceremony in Merak, which had been witnessed by only one other foreign visitor in the past; the annual school *rindu* (ritual for good health in the community); and a spring *chokhor* (procession) in Sakteng. Data from field notes were used to elicit key themes and codes (e.g., definitions of wellbeing), compare different perceptions and scenarios between communities, and capture the complexity of local perspectives (Creswell, 2009; Newing, 2011; Yin, 2009).

To prevent power imbalances, elected government officials only participated in interviews, with the exception of local *tshogpas*. These elected delegates also joined focus groups because community leaders and members felt they would represent the views and values of the community well. The author kept a research log to track her conceptual journey through the research process and to practice critical reflexivity as a non-indigenous researcher (England, 1994; Dowling, 2010).

A qualitative case study design that would provide deeper understanding of stakeholder perceptions and influences was employed to complement existing ecotourism research in Bhutan, which frequently concentrates on quantitative approaches and analysis (cf., Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Rinzin, Vermeulen, & Glasbergen, 2007). Participant selection was based on a mix of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling strategies (Newing, 2011) to include local stakeholders located near the main trekking route between non-migratory periods and to counterbalance transitory lifestyles.

Household interviews and focus groups were conducted with field assistants in one or more language (Brokpake, Dzongkha, Sharchopkha, English) and notes were transcribed into English. Each interview lasted c. 60 to 90 minutes, and focus group sessions ran two to three hours. All semi-structured questions were designed with local stakeholder input to procure insights on themes corresponding to key features of *buen vivir* (Table 4.1). Open-ended questions applied brainstorming, pile sorting and ranking to create and organise ideas and suggestions (Puri, 2011). Participatory mapping was used to stimulate discussion, verify household interview responses, and assess tangible natural and built resources (Newing, 2011; Puri, 2011). Focus group participants itemised and decided upon main themes, which were compared with household interview data and analysed to identify similar and opposing perspectives related to *buen vivir* features.

**Table 4.1 Seminal features of *buen vivir* and key questions posed to study participants**

Features	Key questions
Human relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean for you to live well and be happy?</li> <li>• What does the word ‘ecotourism’ mean to you?</li> <li>• What types of ecotourism activities take place locally?</li> <li>• What are the 3 most important relationship levels (e.g., household, institutions) that impact your life and work? Of these 3, select which ones most influence your livelihood decisions, with 1 being the most important. Please explain.</li> <li>• In this village, how are decisions made about who participates in ecotourism activities?</li> <li>• What is important for living well together in this community?</li> <li>• Which rules (formal/informal) help create/reduce wellbeing in this community, and how? For each rule listed, what is the general degree of compliance?</li> <li>• What social changes have occurred since ecotourism initiatives first began?</li> <li>• Who benefits most/least from ecotourism activities? Why?</li> <li>• Does ecotourism contribute to your wellbeing?</li> </ul>
Human-nature relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What natural resources do you need to live well and be happy? Why?</li> <li>• Identify and describe any natural resources that have spiritual or historical value for you/your community.</li> <li>• What are some things that constrain your access to ecological resources?</li> <li>• What ecological changes have occurred since ecotourism initiatives first began?</li> </ul>
Culture and spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your religious affiliation?</li> <li>• Are/were there any religious beliefs, rituals and/or cultural traditions concerning the environment at present/in the past? If so, describe.</li> <li>• Identify and describe any man-made resources that have spiritual or historical value for you/your community.</li> </ul>

## 4.5 Results

Following the main research objective to examine local perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing, the results are presented in three parts: (1) local perceptions of ecotourism; (2) local perceptions of wellbeing; and (3) broader socio-cultural influences, which participants identified in relation to ecotourism and wellbeing. Each section emphasises the relevance of the results to one or more of the key features of *buen vivir* (human relationships, human-nature relationships, and culture and spirituality) apropos the questions in Table 4.1.

### 4.5.1 Local perceptions of ecotourism

Overall, ecotourism held different meanings for different people and reflected the importance of inter-human relations and some human-nature interactions, but some participants were unable to explain what ecotourism meant to them. For example, a participant from Joenkhar stated that ecotourism was “to see

our culture and tradition, and to take photos of animals and plants here”. Another from Sakteng said, “Tourists come to see the culture of Merak-Sakteng, they see sacred places, how community is staying good and our rituals”. This particular comment draws attention to the perceived importance of culture and spiritual realms for ecotourism activities. However, almost a quarter of all interviewees in Sakteng and Merak said they were “unsure” or had “no idea” of what ecotourism meant, and nearly half of all Sakteng interviewees could not distinguish between ecotourism and general tourism. Even those who were able to articulate the concept in their own words had doubts. One Sakteng interviewee said, “I think ecotourism is the interchange of nature and people from other countries, foreigners visiting particular places and nature, sharing information about nature, their place...I’m not entirely sure.” All Joenkhar participants were able to confidently define the term.

There was consensus on types of local ecotourism activities offered, predominantly around culture. Locals would provide ‘cultural programmes’, consisting of traditional folk songs and dances, *tshogchang*, and ritual masked dances like the *yak cham* (yak dance) or the ancient dance-drama *Achey Lham* (Sister/Lady Goddess) performed during the annual folk festival. Selling handmade items such as *chupa*, *kanggo*, or *fatchung* and *raka* (types of bags) were listed as common activities in addition to camping or staying in guesthouses and portering. Some Joenkhar participants referenced ecotourism activities in terms of “community conserving the environment” or “not cutting down trees as much anymore”, and a few Sakteng participants believed ecotourism meant “coming to visit the beauty of nature” and to “show types of trees”. Several Sakteng participants likened ecotourism to “pilgrimages”, as one stated, “Tourists gain more knowledge from coming here, they do pilgrimage to places – holy places”. In this view, local traditions and religious practices provided a strong foundation for ecotourism activities and what they constitute, enhancing human (locals and tourists)-nature bonds.

The most common understanding of ecotourism reported by more than half of all Merak and Joenkhar households was that tourists come to visit a place, which would bring economic benefit to the community. Tourists buy handmade items and sometimes make donations at local schools and temples. In the words of one Merak man, “Tourists are rich men, they come and spend lots of money”. A Joenkhar farmer stated, “Through ecotourism, we can conserve the environment, preserve our culture and tradition and *lhakhangs* [temples] – also get money through *tshogchang*”. Most respondents repeatedly emphasised that economic gain “should be evenly distributed”. Participants from all three communities mentioned that TCB officials explained ecotourism to villagers during the early planning stages in terms of economic benefits to community, yet many TCB-trained cooks and guides had difficulty finding employment. One Merak participant claimed, “[Ecotourism] means nothing for me. When it started, they promised benefits. But where are the benefits?” Another person from Merak said he thought ecotourism was “helpful and

harmful – harmful because I received training but there’s no work now.” Ecotourism fostered discord in human relations while nature was seen as a commodity through which tourism could be used to harness its economic value.

The park guidelines and official NRED (DOFPS) definition of ecotourism specifically refer to human and human-nature relationships and the importance of preserving cultural heritage, but do not fully address spirituality or religion. The NRED guidelines for ecotourism were designed around Bhutan’s vision for tourism and development strategy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is framed through the four pillars of sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, environmental conservation, preservation and promotion of culture, and good governance (NRED, 2012). Further informed by the ‘official’ definition from TIES (1990, 2015), the guidelines define ecotourism in the Bhutanese context as:

High value low impact travel that supports the protection of cultural and natural heritage; provides positive and enriching experiences for visitors and hosts; assures tangible benefits to local people; and contributes to the pillars of Gross National Happiness. (NRED, 2012: 15)

For DOFPS, key elements to consider for successful ecotourism in Bhutan encompass high revenue generation, quality and authenticity of experience and services (high value), and less negative socio-cultural and environmental impacts (low impact); protection for cultural and natural heritage; tangible socio-economic benefits to local people, community participation and empowerment through capacity building; educational and valuable experiences for visitors and hosts; and contribution to GNH goals.

#### **4.5.2 Local perceptions of wellbeing**

When asked what they needed to ‘live well and be happy’, participants across all villages highly valued good relationships and peace, money and income, and good health in their lives. Merak and Sakteng participants most frequently mentioned the need to cultivate close relationships and spend time with friends, community and particularly family members. A Joenkhar man claimed, “If I can’t keep good relationships with my family, how can I get food? We all have to work and co-operate, work and share.” Another Merak participant stated: “I need my family to be happy, then local community. If I’m good to them, then automatically they will treat me very well and I will be happy”.

Several participants from Sakteng and Merak acknowledged that peaceful relations and collaboration were not constant in their communities. According to one Sakteng participant:

[People in Merak-Sakteng] sometimes quarrel and have disagreements and don't get along together much. Most of the public are peaceful and get along, but it's usually one or two individuals who instigate problems. They can talk well and will gossip to others, then fighting will start.

This thought was reinforced by a respondent in Merak, who bemoaned that her fellow citizens “don't show respect to elders and [know] how to keep *tha damtshig* with government. They quarrel with staff.” These responses point to the importance of maintaining positive relations with family and community help to ensure a satisfactory material and subjective (e.g., harmonious) existence. Reliance on family and community members and co-operation are necessary on a daily basis, from gathering firewood and herding livestock to providing labour for building homes.

Corresponding to the need of good relations for a good life was the desire for having “no sickness or misery”. When asked which levels of relationships were necessary to achieve wellbeing, participants from all villages discussed the importance having religious leaders present. A Joenkhar resident said, “If someone in the family is sick, I go directly to religious leaders for help so the *lama* (priest) does *pujas* for [her or him].” People donated regularly for *pujas* and *tshechus* (religious festivals) to receive blessings to help with their work, family, community and daily life. Every family hires *gomchens* (lay priests) and monks to perform *lo chu*, an annual *puja* for overall household blessings. Efforts to worship and celebrate together were considered extremely important, as one Merak man explained, “Water that comes from one source will come down to others through the same passage. For community to live well together the main thing is religion. When we perform a *puja* we all sit together and eat together.” Individual wellbeing (e.g., health) is reinforced by local culture and the spiritual, which can enhance community (human) relationships.

Material resources, such as money, income and built resources, were also high priority needs for achieving wellbeing in all villages, particularly Joenkhar. One farmer stated: “If there is money, I can manage everything.” Good facilities and services, specifically a road and electricity, were considered critical for communal wellbeing. One woman clarified why she wanted a road for Joenkhar, “It's not easy to sell vegetables to tourists because road is not nearby. A road is also better for getting things we need. By selling vegetables we'll make money and live peacefully.” A weaver from Sakteng commented:

In the past, the community had a hard life. We had to carry things on our backs from Trashigang and India. We earned less money then, but things are better now. I am praying things will continue to get better and be peaceful.

Therefore, having more material resources can positively impact human relations and generate peace in families and the community.

Human relationships were strained when ecotourism development did not result in widespread financial gains. Common occupations in all three villages were pastoralism or farming (92%) but most residents held two or more jobs concurrently, such as construction or performing cultural dances. Other primary occupations involved a trade (e.g., commerce) or skilled labour (e.g., weaving, hat making), and 10% of participants held elected positions in local government. When asked if ecotourism contributed to their wellbeing, nearly all participants reiterated that economic benefits were not shared equitably. Horse contractors, porters with animals and tour operators from big cities were regarded as being the greatest beneficiaries of ecotourism. Respondents noted that those in the community who had the most horses were the “same people who sell things to tourists”. On the question of who benefits most from ecotourism and how decisions are made about participation and management, one retired man from Merak said, “Porters make all the money, but others in the community don’t make any money or benefit. Porters make all the decisions.” At the time of research, the village CDF accounts did not have enough savings to pay for campsite maintenance or charitable works.

Many participants in every community mentioned reliance on place and ecological resources for their wellbeing and ecotourism development. Fodder for animals, edible plants, and trees, plants, and flowers for incense and medicinal purposes could be found in the surrounding forests. Some animals were illegally hunted to make folk remedies or Brokpa clothing and bags (e.g., *paksa*, *raka*), including the near threatened Himalayan goral (*Naemorhedus goral*) (IUCN, 2016). A few participants in Merak and Joenkhar acknowledged that having a good environment was important for attracting tourists, as one Merak participant noted, “Ecotourism requires good improvement for environment – people come to see nature and need to have good scenery”. Indigenous lifestyles that require dependence on their environment to subsist represent strong human-nature relationships for humans, but over-reliance or negligence could weaken ecosystem health.

#### **4.5.3 Broader socio-cultural influences**

In general, sacred sites in nature were symbolic of the direct connection between all three main features of *buen vivir*. All focus group participants described the presence of *neys*, holy places in nature that hold spiritual significance as the dwelling places of local deities (Allison, 2004). *Neys* can take many forms, ranging from mountains, lakes or trees to cliffs, rocks and bushes, and were easily identified and known to most villagers. Sacred sites are occupied by different types of deities and immortal beings. A *nepo* (protector/owner of the land) or *yulha* (village deity) may be considered a guardian or caretaker, whereas a

“harmful” deity could be a *dud* (demon), an unappeased *yulha* or a disrupted *nepo*. *Phodrang* (deity citadels or palaces) such as mountain peaks or sacred groves, are areas of restricted access and activity because deities desire solitude (Allison, 2004).

In describing which formal or informal rules created or reduced community wellbeing, all focus group participants noted geographical constraints around *neys* and *phodrang*, and consequences for transgressions. Prohibitions at the sites include cooking garlic, pork or eggs, producing human waste, and bathing in sacred waters. Once disturbed, the angered deity will transmit disease or illness to the offender, other people or animals in the community, or send severe weather that can damage livestock and crops. For people of Merak, corpses cannot be cremated because the polluted air would offend Ama Jomo, and they were not permitted to cut down trees or “do dirty things” near Jomo Kungkhar, her mountain abode, otherwise there will be “storms and heavy rains”. Likewise, Sakteng locals are not allowed to cut trees in the mountains surrounding Lake Tsorong Gomba out of respect for *yulha* Ama Jomo. In Joenkhar, locals reported that they do not cut trees or extract stone or sand from the peak of Yumzang Mountain (Figure 4.2), where the land god Yumzang Mo lives.

**Figure 4.2 Community map from Joenkhar focus group. The dashed circle represents Yumzang Mountain *phodrang***



Strong bonds between people, their ecosystems and religion were evident in discussions of the transhumant lifestyle of Brokpas. Personal and cultural identity was closely tied to sense of place, as one Merak interviewee described seasonal migration:

Older men and women will stay in Merak because they can't walk very well. Younger people will migrate down to Khaling, to Shetimey with their yaks. Some make cheese and milk, some care for food, while others transport food...people work together and co-operate.

Another Merak participant declared, "We are all people of Merak. This village was given to us by Aum Jomo, we have to stay here. This is a holy place of Aum Jomo. We are strong, holy people."

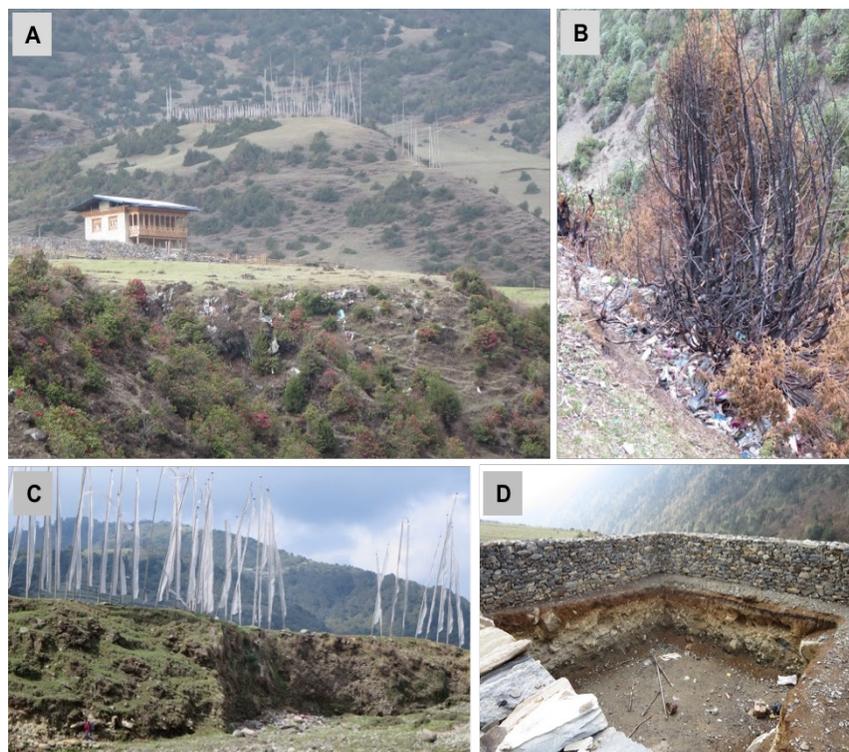
Community *pujas* were very important for mediating relations between humans and their environment. Villagers frequently show reverence for Ama Jomo and seek her blessings through numerous oblations, propitiation ceremonies and ritual invocations, some on a daily basis, others less often. One of the larger ceremonies, the *mangurin* (community *puja*), culminates with a *chokhor* (procession) of Buddhist scriptures carried on the backs and heads of devotees through each village settlement and is held annually to safeguard the wellbeing of animals and humans. Various rituals are performed at *rindus* while the *rinpoche* (reincarnated high priest) and monks chant blessings to protect the community from illness. The Jomo ceremony, where community members burn juniper branches and offer food and *ara* to Ama Jomo every spring and autumn, must be conducted at a precise time and location to receive her protection.

Consequences for not abiding by socio-religious norms are severe and will likely affect other people. If some residents do not attend or perform the ritual as expected, harm or disease may befall some individuals or animals. In response to the question of specific consequences, one Sakteng participant said he witnessed a boy who once became "full of rashes, like fire burns" and described how one man's skin "turned black" one year. Cases of a village youth or adult unexpectedly "running away", getting lost in the mountains and permanently disappearing from family and friends were mentioned by several participants in Merak and Sakteng.

Findings indicate increased access to modern commodities and conveniences, and changes in behaviour of some residents. The environment and sacred natural sites, despite their importance to communal wellbeing given their strong connection to religion and society for most participants as mentioned above, were not exempt from desecration. The influx of imported packaged goods and non-

biodegradable waste in recent years has resulted in a growing waste disposal problem in remote villages<sup>42</sup>. In Merak, IFAD funded the establishment of a stone-lined garbage dump at the edge of the village, which was almost completed in Spring 2014. However, smaller garbage disposal pits that had been created earlier by SWS staff along the trail and in the villages were not used as frequently as dumping waste over hillsides or creating informal, locally-made pits, some of which were located near sacred (human made) structures or riverbanks<sup>43</sup>. In addition, it appeared that some local villagers were burning garbage around *neys* (Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3 Examples of human impact at sacred natural sites and structures in Merak-Sakteng region. (A) Litter thrown off a mountainside in Sakteng village. (B) Charred garbage by a bush, one of many *neys* in Merak. (C) Garbage burned in a pit beneath prayer flags close to Gamri River, Sakteng. (D) The new garbage dump, Merak.**



Another indication of the changing significance of local culture and spirituality in the community was the increased pilferage of sacred structures associated with sacred natural sites, which was partially

<sup>42</sup> During site visits, items such as candy wrappers, empty potato chip and snack bags, Maggi instant noodle packages and plastic bottles were found discarded along the main walking trails but mostly in villages. Most imported packaged goods came from India. Glass bottles were often carried to town by porters who would trade them for money.

<sup>43</sup> All SWS and school staff emphasised that park authorities, *geogs* and school administrators held several public events (e.g., film screenings, plays) and mass ‘cleaning campaigns’ annually to educate the public to encourage individual responsibility, promote waste management goals and control littering. One Sakteng educator noted that individual people had become complacent about littering and expected the school to hold mass cleanings every year.

accredited to modernisation. Some Merak participants reported that most *chortens* and *mani* walls (Buddhist monuments) in the villages were considered “fake” and “no longer authentic” because they have been looted for the religious relics and treasures they once stored. Robbing holy sites that were built to bless the community was considered “very sinful” by all participants since “the whole community will suffer”. Some interviewees attributed these subversive actions to recent shifts in mentality and behaviour, as one participant stated, “Modernisation has brought increased competition. People are money-minded now. My Merak is now a modern Merak. I’m very sad to be here now”.

## **4.6 Discussion**

This section offers four areas of insights for developing ecotourism with indigenous stakeholders. Challenges in current practice are highlighted in light of the opportunities they present for future policy and planning of PA development projects.

### **4.6.1 Moving beyond the people–park divide: The need to find common ground**

Ecotourism is not a term that is well and widely understood, nor confidently described at the community level in Merak-Sakteng even though the outcomes of its activities greatly impact social and ecological dimensions of wellbeing. Several participants were not able to comment on the term itself; rather, it was easier to clearly articulate what ecotourism activities should resemble and whom they should benefit. Difficulty in defining ecotourism could infer lack of formal education or confidence, or limited participation in ecotourism development. For most participants, ecotourism should translate into economic gain for the community. Unequal distribution of benefits and lack of employment opportunities have fuelled resentment in communities where vast income disparity is not customary. The widening gulf of household incomes has weakened human relationships in the community toward TCB and government agencies, who were blamed for raising expectations on the economic benefits of ecotourism. The result of intra-community conflict due to disparities in income and opportunities for greater material and subjective gain is consistent with findings from Chapter 3.

A disconnect exists between DOFPS guiding principles for ecotourism and real-world ecotourism practice. The NRED ecotourism guidelines are uniquely Bhutanese, involving class-based ‘high value, low impact’ tourism that contributes to GNH goals and corresponds to the Buddhist philosophy of achieving a ‘Middle Path’ of development and sufficiency (Brooks, 2013; NRED, 2012; Theerapappisit, 2003; Wangmo & Valk, 2012). The guidelines also embrace a pro-poor tourism approach by including tangible benefits to communities and bottom-up participation (Harrison, 2008; Novelli & Hellwig, 2011; Scheyvens, 2007). However, providing socio-economic benefits and empowering communities have yet to

be realised in a satisfactory way. In Merak-Sakteng, material wellbeing increased for few community members, echoing earlier research on unequal stakeholder access to economic and political resources among Mayan peoples in the Palenque rainforest, Mexico (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). Communities in SWS were not aware of the NRED definition of ecotourism, nor were some park staff, even though NRED staff distributed copies of the guidelines to all PA ranger offices. The Sanctuary would benefit greatly from a park-wide concept to help bridge the divide between official and local understandings and expectations of ecotourism, because meanings build up to definitions, which are the basis of policy making (Fennell, 2001).

#### **4.6.2 Meanings of wellbeing: Beyond the *buen vivir* perspective?**

Study results show that local people conceived of wellbeing in diverse ways, but these views clearly align with the main features of *buen vivir*. Through its indigenous ontology, the impacts of ecotourism are considered through human relationships, human-nature relationships, and culture and spirituality. It highlights where greater attention needs to be placed in order to achieve more holistic outcomes. *Buen vivir* draws attention to reciprocity and responsibility in relationships, which can be embraced in ecotourism practice with indigenous communities. In SWS, many tour operators did not employ local guides who can share their knowledge of indigenous cosmology and customs. In Russia, indigenous Altai guides ask tourists to join them in observing traditional practices and dispelling negative, ‘polluting’ inward thoughts and emotions before entering the sacred valley in Uch Enmek Indigenous Nature Park (Dobson & Mamyev, 2010). In a study of sacred forests in India and Ghana, Ormsby (2012) found that local guides should be hired to preserve sacred sites, minimise negative impacts and increase local income. This practice may also reinforce traditional values among indigenous people, and impart traditional knowledge and consciousness of the environment to tourists.

Although *buen vivir* is a useful perspective for unpacking wellbeing in the indigenous worldview context, it de-emphasises personal aspects of the human experience, including thoughts and emotions. *Buen vivir* focuses on the inseparability of human-nature relations because nature encompasses human life. Therefore, humans must relate to nature as a subject, and all socio-economic goals are secondary to the ability of ecosystems to operate well (Acosta, 2010; Deneulin, 2012). This view follows ecocentric thinking, which some scholars note as being intrinsic to the cosmovision of most indigenous and traditional peoples (Harmon & Putney, 2003).

The *buen vivir* analysis that uses the three main features in this paper provides insights on socio-relational and ecological dimensions. However, complementary research in the region shows the growing friction between community and park stakeholders over inequitable distribution of ecological and built

resources, such as roofing materials, and local people who feel powerless against wealthier horse contractors and tour operators who tend to reap the most benefits from ecotourism (Chapter 3; Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). The complexities of resource management and ecotourism development require analysis on additional fronts, suggesting the need for an approach that captures material, subjective, socio-relational and ecological dimensions.

#### **4.6.3 Cosmological relationship to place: Implications for ecotourism**

The evidence presented here demonstrates the power of indigenous cosmology, which should be considered when implementing ecotourism with indigenous communities. Brokpas feel a strong connection with the land precisely because it was handed down by a guardian deity and ancestors. People rely heavily on local animals and nature for their livelihoods, and the tradition of seasonal migration forms the basis for all aspects of semi-pastoral Brokpa life (Wangmo, 1990). Maintenance of cultural traditions is crucial to the attractiveness of indigenous ecotourism destinations. However, traditions must be advertised and interpreted to visitors in a sensitive and balanced manner to prevent representing indigenous groups without context or as being frozen in time, as in the case of the Ovahimbas of Namibia, where primarily women were depicted as ‘exotic’ and ‘primitive’ in tourism brochures (Saarinen, 2011).

Natural sacred sites and indigenous worldviews are critical factors to incorporate in the planning and development processes to support greater sustainability in ecotourism practice. Even as attitudes appear to be changing, devotion to deities and fear of ritual pollution are still manifest through a calendar of invocations and propitiation ceremonies across Bhutan because the actions of an individual can impact others, and deities are seen as mediating relations between humans and natural resources (Allison, 2004; Pommaret, 2004, Ura, 2001). This approach has been successful in the sacred grove at Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary, an example of shifting customary beliefs and how ecotourism helped reclaim traditional conservation practices in Ghana (Ormsby & Edelman, 2010).

In this vein, governance and management approaches that embody an indigenous cosmology may help address environmental issues arising from tourism or other development activities (e.g., garbage disposal) more effectively. Brooks (2011) argues that the top-down process of instilling environmentalism in Bhutan includes Buddhist principles and may contribute to sustainable development. This process can be extended to the tourism sector and expanded to include tourism development policy and programmes that embrace indigenous worldviews and values.

#### 4.6.4 Times of change: Challenges and opportunities

Research findings suggest that the increasing shift away from traditional norms in light of growing exposure to external sources are having some adverse and potentially long-term implications on individual and communal wellbeing in ecotourism development. Ecotourism development in Merak-Sakteng has not been entirely negative, and development projects in SWS have rendered positive impacts on humans and environment, including the introduction of metal roofing materials that replaced less durable bamboo tiles (Chapter 3; Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). Yet indigenous traditions and values are dissipating, and it appears that some individuals are increasingly concerned about economic values over spiritual or communal aspects of wellbeing. The increasing desire for and importance of material needs to achieve wellbeing among Brokpas may be partially attributed to greater exposure to Western society and international demand for antiquities (Whitecross, 2000).

Some studies have found that urbanisation of rural societies (Pretty et al., 2009) and Westernisation of public services and belief systems (Ura, 2001) have eroded biological and cultural diversity. Burning garbage around *neys* and robbing monuments in SWS not only mark the decline of *tha damtshig* but can degrade the environment and related sacred sites to the point where they are unattractive to visitors. In addition, the weakened traditional system of internalised moral and social values appears to be further undermined, replaced by relatively externalised legislative and administrative controls, such as fines and imprisonment (Ura, 2001; Whitecross, 2000).

How can indigenous cosmology and values be preserved or revived to increase wellbeing and ensure sustainable ecotourism development, in spite of modernisation? At national and regional levels, one approach would be to formally integrate traditional moral and social values into policies and institutions (e.g., guidelines), which are modern systems and strategies for raising and strengthening consciousness and outcomes. This approach has been adopted in Ecuador and Bolivia, where local concepts of *buen vivir* have been translated into normative principles and incorporated into their constitutions (Acosta, 2010; Vanhulst & Beling, 2013; Walsh, 2010). By codifying the rights of nature in 2008, Ecuador granted nature and *buen vivir* legal gravitas, which has subsequently been applied in struggles to protect natural resources and indigenous rights as in the once lauded but now abandoned proposal against oil drilling in Yasuní National Park (Deneulin, 2012; Vallejo et al., 2015). Similarly, ecotourism policy and programmes could employ guidelines that are explicitly sensitive to indigenous worldviews and oriented toward sustainable projects.

At the local level, participation in ecotourism could be fostered through flexible governance arrangements (e.g., formal and informal rules, institutions) to combat the erosion of indigenous cosmology

and values. The potential of sustainable tourism activities involving, if not initiated by, local community to provide economic opportunities and teach indigenous culture and values can be found in recent cases from South Australia (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009) and eastern Canada (Lynch et al., 2010). In the Canadian sub-arctic, Holmes, Grimwood, King, and the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation (2016) describe how Indigenous people created a code of visitor conduct. In Merak-Sakteng, community members intend to create additional specialised walking tours focusing on sacred natural sites and semi-pastoral lifestyle. New tours may comprise of visits to special *neys* beyond village boundaries, and travel with a Brokpa family during the seasonal migration period to partake in traditional activities such as livestock herding and collecting firewood.

Community-driven initiatives may not only teach tourists about indigenous culture and principles but foster pride and reinstate the value of historical and religious treasures to community members, particularly younger generations. But efficacy relies on communities having a certain degree of decision-making power through institutional support and capacity building (Kiss, 2004; Okazaki, 2008; Scheyvens, 1999). Culturally-appropriate, community-based methods of communication are equally compelling measures to be taken to avert negative outcomes, as in the case of Boumā National Heritage Park, where community members combined Western entrepreneurship with traditional Fijian values and processes to reduce conflict in ecotourism initiatives that were initially based on 'European' democratic systems (Farrelly, 2011), or commodification of indigenous culture and re-interpretation of local meanings to meet consumer desires, as experienced by Kitchwa communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon (Hutchins, 2007).

## **4.7 Conclusions**

This paper draws attention to the value and implications of definitions, their meanings and the broader influence of socio-cultural factors on wellbeing and ecotourism development involving indigenous people in Bhutan. It presents empirical insights on ecotourism and wellbeing from marginalised people in a marginalised place to contribute additional disparate and non-Western voices to ecotourism scholarship (Cater, 2006; Prakash, 1994; Wearing & McDonald, 2002). This study also adds to the growing literature on local narratives and indigenous perceptions on ecotourism.

Framed in the context of the *buen vivir* discourse, this study points to the need for local people and PA authorities to find a common, park-wide understanding of ecotourism to more effectively balance expectations and manage outcomes. This might be accomplished in SWS by openly examining the currently under-utilised park guidelines on ecotourism with local communities, since the guidelines clearly reflect Bhutanese values and vision for conservation and development in PAs. Findings also show that wellbeing is understood in disparate ways but correspond to key *buen vivir* features. Depending on the

context, this perspective can offer a culturally appropriate mode of analysis for development projects, implying the need for more empirical investigations in other countries and communities that embrace wellbeing from the indigenous *buen vivir* discourse. However, the *buen vivir* perspective minimises attention to personal components of the human experience, including thoughts, feelings and motivations. Further research to this analysis could explore an approach that incorporates subjective and material dimensions of wellbeing in addition to social, relational and ecological dimensions.

Remote communities living in PAs face complex challenges with the onset of development projects such as ecotourism. A decrease in the transfer of eco-cultural knowledge and shift in local knowledge bases, including the loss of a deep connection to ecology and sense of inviolability, can have profound impacts on natural and human habitat (Ura, 2001; Verschuuren et al., 2010). Despite the mounting challenges of ecotourism development in Bhutan and its impact on local communities, the landscape of Merak-Sakteng is still regarded as a holy place and requires careful attention. As in the case of the Brokpa, indigenous cosmologies may play an influential role in shaping social values and spiritual beliefs of a given society. Therefore, it is prudent to include natural sacred sites and indigenous worldviews during ecotourism planning and implementation to ensure more just and sustainable wellbeing outcomes for humans and ecosystems. Likewise, indigenous worldviews and traditional values may be strengthened through integration into modern policies and institutions, and institutional support for local participation and empowerment in ecotourism activities. Incorporating measures and observances that are sensitive to indigenous cosmologies and values have the potential to enhance successful ecotourism development outcomes in PAs and elsewhere.

## Chapter 5

### Ecotourism and social-ecological wellbeing in Bhutan

#### 5.1 Chapter Summary

This paper develops an integrative, multi-dimensional framework of wellbeing for ecotourism research by drawing upon related wellbeing perspectives from the development studies and social-ecological systems literature. We operationalised this framework in semi-pastoral and settled mountain communities of a wildlife sanctuary-*cum*-ecotourism destination in eastern Bhutan. A series of qualitative methods, including 68 household interviews and six focus groups, were used to assess subjective, socio-relational, material and ecological dimensions of wellbeing in reference to ecotourism and conservation-development debates. Research findings suggest the critical importance and complexities of social-relational aspects of life for wellbeing; the significance of power relations between stakeholders in mediating sense of wellbeing; and the constant trade-offs that correspond to issues of justice and control wellbeing dimensions, particularly in terms of natural resources. Our study highlights the need for more research on gender, power and governance in fragile and protected areas undertaking ecotourism development, specifically in terrestrial ecosystems. Assessments informed by an integrative wellbeing approach can foster dialogue on trade-offs and decision-making in ecotourism and other development projects in ecologically sensitive areas.

#### 5.2 Introduction

Ecotourism has been a highly contested concept and strategy for decades yet is frequently adopted in developing countries because it is often considered a pro-poor, sustainable pathway for local communities to improve their livelihoods (Campbell, Gray, & Meletis, 2008; Kiss, 2004; Tallis et al., 2008). The proliferation of this strategy to remote and protected areas (PAs) is important given the trend that anthropogenic activities and reliance on natural resources are drastically degrading ecosystems globally; current processes are having an uneven, detrimental impact on poor people; and ecosystem decline is anticipated to worsen and further impact marginalised people without drastic changes to policy, institutions and practice (MEA, 2005). The concept of wellbeing<sup>44</sup>, which has gained popularity in the environmental sustainability discourse in recent years (Brooks, 2013; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009),

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<sup>44</sup> Wellbeing has a long history in diverse disciplines and fields of study, such as social psychology and development economics. Its earliest roots can be traced back to ancient Buddhist and Greek philosophical traditions, which contemplate hedonic and eudaimonic perceptions of happiness and 'living well' (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010).

offers a lens for reorienting our understanding of social development and progress beyond conventional measures of economic output and success (Coulthard, Johnson & McGregor, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014; White & Ellison, 2007).

Different perspectives of wellbeing have emerged among social science scholars, notably in development studies and social-ecological systems (SEs). Social wellbeing is one approach that offers a strong focus on subjective (psychological) and relational dimensions in addition to material resources (White & Ellison, 2007, p.158-9). *Buen vivir* (living well) and SES perspectives both embrace multiple worldviews and shine light on ecological and collective dimensions of wellbeing (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010). Social and ecological features of ecosystem dynamics and complex systems-based theory are often overlooked in ecotourism literature and more commonly addressed in interdisciplinary science journals with respect to ecosystem services and direct payments for conservation (Ferraro, 2001; Wunder, 2007) or biodiversity conservation and ecosystem functions (Gössling, 1999; Kiss, 2004; Tallis et al., 2008).

In this paper, we develop a social-ecological conception of wellbeing that allows us to further explore the relationships between subjective, socio-relational, ecological and material dimensions of ecotourism development (cf., Chapter 3, Chapter 4). We begin by reviewing current notions of wellbeing in the (eco)tourism literature. We then draw and expand on concepts of social wellbeing and *buen vivir* as they are situated in development studies and complemented by SES thinking to develop our framework. In this paper, the term ‘conceptual framework’ (also ‘framework’) is defined as a graphic or narrative description of the key factors, constructs or variables to be studied and the presumed relationships between them (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The framework is applied to three indigenous communities located in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, Bhutan to assess the ways in which ecotourism development enhances and constrains social-ecological wellbeing in a remote PA.

### **5.2.1 Current approaches to wellbeing in (eco)tourism**

Quality of life, subjective wellbeing, and community wellbeing are three current approaches that relate to social wellbeing in the tourism literature. Originating from social psychology in the 1970s, quality of life and subjective wellbeing employ social indicators and subjective interpretations of experience to understand what makes people happy beyond objective, material circumstances in relation to tourism (Liburd, Benckendorff, & Carlsen, 2012; Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2016). In recent studies, mutual conceptualisations of community wellbeing use different forms of capital (e.g., social, economic) as analytical tools to explore how tourism development impacts various types of capital available to destination communities (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Macbeth, Carson, & Northcote, 2004). Buzinde,

Kalavar and Melubo (2014) adopt a less Western, more collective sense of community wellbeing to examine indigenous perceptions and tourism influences on the sense of wellbeing among the Maasai of Tanzania. Overall, subjective analyses in tourism research have proliferated in recent years, reflecting a shift toward non-economic measures of individual satisfaction of livelihood. Policy priorities increasingly recognise the ability of tourism to facilitate and support poverty reduction, conservation of cultural heritage and natural resources, and community regeneration (Uysal et al., 2016). All of the above approaches are focused on ameliorating the wellbeing of humans, denoting their anthropocentric nature.

Two development concepts are directly related to social wellbeing: sustainable livelihoods and capabilities approaches (Chapter 1). Amartya Sen's capabilities approach (CA) focuses on individual freedom to achieve wellbeing or 'agency', where freedom refers to individual 'capabilities' (Sen, 1985, 1993), and social arrangements should aim to expand one's capabilities and agency<sup>45</sup> to achieve *telos* (living well) (Deneulin & McGregor, 2005; Sen, 1985). Kontogeorgopolos (2005) notes that values enshrined in CA have established the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of community-based ecotourism. Although few tourism studies have discussed Sen's theoretical foundations (e.g., Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2008; Croes, 2012) and the approach has been critiqued for its weakness in dealing with a more social perspective on human agency (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010; Robeyns, 2005), however CA laid the groundwork for other approaches, including sustainable livelihoods.

The sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA) has featured prominently in tourism research since the rise of the sustainable development movement (cf., Mbaiwa & Stronza, 2010; Tao & Wall, 2009). Initially proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) Advisory Panel in 1987 (Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002), SLA was subsequently refined and adopted by a wide range of institutions and funding agencies. Building on the concept of capabilities and assets, it considers the links between five 'capitals' or 'assets'—natural, financial, human, physical and social—and people's ability to cope and recover from stresses and shocks, for instance, social, economic, political, environmental, without undermining natural resources (Chambers & Conway, 1991; DFID, 1999). Among the many strengths of this approach are its flexibility, attention to appreciation for human development above financial growth, and empowering qualities (DFID, 1999; Scoones, 1998; Tao & Wall, 2009). However, attention to environmental concerns has held less sway in the literature in recent years compared to the debates of the 1990s (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005). Given that CA and SLA focus heavily on wellbeing concerns of humans and less on environment and sustainability, wellbeing may be a useful lens for this analysis. The following section briefly reviews relevant perspectives in the development and social-

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<sup>45</sup>Sen's approach has been furthered through the incorporation of eudaimonic perspectives of virtue, political distribution and 'human flourishing' (Nussbaum 2000; Robeyns, 2005).

ecological systems literature and discusses how they can be integrated to generate a socially and ecologically-oriented approach to wellbeing.

### **5.3 A Social-Ecological Wellbeing Framework for Ecotourism**

#### **5.3.1 Social wellbeing**

The social wellbeing approach provides the foundation for the social-ecological framework. McGregor (2007) defines social wellbeing as: “a state of being with others, which arises where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one’s goals, and where one can enjoy a satisfactory quality of life” (p.2). It features interdependent linkages among material, relational and subjective dimensions of wellbeing, which emerge through peoples’ circumstances (the objective) and their perceptions (the subjective) (Coulthard et al., 2011; Gough & McGregor, 2007). The subjective aspect denotes how values and culture beget material welfare (material) and standards of living (relational) (White, 2009). Wellbeing consists of what people have, what they can do, and how they think or feel about what they have and can do (McGregor, 2007).

Social wellbeing has strong subjective and relational dimensions that reflect economic development and social psychological perspectives, and acknowledge wellbeing as both an outcome and a process (Armitage et al., 2012; Gough, McGregor & Camfield, 2007). The cognitive aspect of wellbeing addresses the importance of how people view their relationships and lives, including aspirations for change. For example, Coulthard et al. (2011) has found that fishing is a ‘way of life’ and source of pride in fishing communities. Social wellbeing also focuses on ‘living well together’, where the importance of relationships and socially-generated meanings are explored in the inter-subjective space of human relationships (Deneulin & McGregor 2010). This understanding of wellbeing challenges Western ideologies of individualism and moves toward a ‘human ontology’ that recognises people as unique and whole persons with a biological, psychological and emotional constitution (Bevan, 2007).

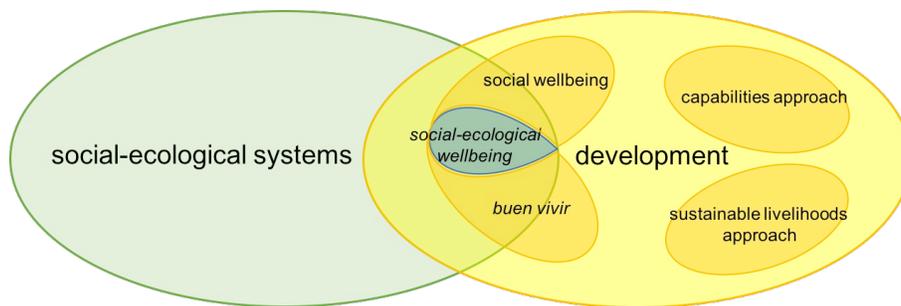
Inter-personal relationships are basic attributes of personhood: they serve as a principal mechanism through which people pursue their livelihood strategies (Devine, 2005) and cushion the effects of insecurity in their lives (Wood, 2007). Evidence from fishery (Abunge, Coulthard, & Daw, 2013; Britton & Coulthard, 2013; Coulthard et al., 2011; Weeratunge et al., 2014) and forestry (Kusel, 2001; Kusel & Adler, 2003; Pullin et al., 2013) demonstrate that wellbeing shifts analysis away from exclusive attention on the individual to include communities in rural areas who are dependent on their surrounding ecosystems for survival. Such an analysis is fitting for ecotourism, which may engage local and indigenous communities that have interdependent livelihood practices or adhere to traditional systems and

institutions. Although issues of scale are not explicitly addressed in social wellbeing, the impact of material, relational, and subjective aspects and processes on individual and group behaviours draw attention to the inherent trade-offs in achieving wellbeing at different levels (Armitage et al., 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2011; McShane et al., 2011). The proceeding section outlines complementary perspectives which address two limitations of the social wellbeing approach.

### 5.3.2 Integrating perspectives

From our point of view, the **social wellbeing** perspective can be enhanced through the addition of **buen vivir** and **social-ecological systems** (SES) thinking (Figure 5.1) because human wellbeing is directly linked to use of natural resources and changes in ecosystems functions. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA, 2005) highlights how steady gains in human wellbeing have been accompanied by a decline in most ecosystems worldwide. Continual regression of the Earth’s carrying capacity and deterioration of critical locations such as the Himalaya region have drastic implications (Rands et al., 2010; Raudsepp-Hearne et al., 2010; Wackernagel et al., 2002), not only for climate change mitigation and loss of biodiversity on a global scale, but for poor, local communities who depend upon fragile environments for their livelihoods, places of spiritual and religious value, and their overall wellbeing (MEA, 2005). Hence, we envision a framework that is mindful of this reality and may contribute to ongoing discussions on wellbeing in the ecotourism literature.

**Figure 5.1 Integrating social-ecological systems and development perspectives**



#### *Buen vivir and social-ecological systems*

In Latin America, the concept of **buen vivir** is an alternative to models of development that entail judgment and control over life and nature (Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010). Roughly translated as ‘living well’ or ‘collective wellbeing’, *buen vivir* has been informed by Western critiques of capitalism through feminist and environmental thinking as well as indigenous belief systems across South America such as those of the Aymara and Mapuche (Gudynas, 2011). This approach emphasises the importance of fullness

of one's life within a society, existing in harmony with other people and nature (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Similar notions of wellbeing can be found in non-indigenous cultures and traditions around the world (cf., Berkes, 2012; Chapter 4; Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2014; Walsh, Dobson & Douglas, 2013).

*Buen vivir* is centred on the inseparability of human-nature relations and all socio-economic goals are secondary to the ability of ecosystems to operate well (Acosta, 2010; Gudynas & Acosta, 2011; Deneulin, 2012). This view follows an ecocentric rationale, which some scholars have noted is intrinsic to the cosmivision of most indigenous and traditional peoples (Harmon & Putney, 2003). It also recognises the interconnectedness between material and spiritual realms and how people are embedded in the Earth, underscoring relationships of service and reciprocity (Chapter 4; Gudynas, 2011; Walsh, 2010). *Buen vivir* concentrates on collective relationships and our impacts on the Earth and one another, which can minimise the human tendency to adopt a dominant view of nature and consider humans as the custodians of the Earth and all its resources (cf., MEA, 2005; Walsh, 2011).

**Social-ecological systems** link human and natural systems through ecological knowledge, governance arrangements, and ecosystem services<sup>46</sup> (Berkes, Colding, & Folke 2003; Glaser, 2006). Historically rooted in ecology, the SES perspective has converged with diverse social science perspectives over time (Patterson et al., 2016) and is based on complex adaptive systems theory as it emerged along resilience thinking (Berkes, Folke, & Colding, 2000; Fabinyi, Evans, & Foale, 2014). This perspective bridges the social and biophysical sciences, and seeks to understand human action and engagement with nature over time by examining behaviours that can reinforce or modify subsequent behaviour in positive and negative feedback loops (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Berkes, Folke, & Colding, 2000; Olsson, Folke, & Berkes, 2004).

Learning, sharing knowledge and acceptance of multiple perspectives are central components of SES thinking, which tends to focus on organised social (collective) units. In this view, management processes and policies can be improved when they incorporate flexibility and opportunities for learning from experience, sharing knowledge and making alterations over time (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Ostrom, 2007; Tàbara & Chabay, 2013). Similarly, it is optimal to use multiple perspectives to better understand complex SESs (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003). For example, traditional knowledge systems in indigenous societies have been examined in the context of natural resources areas such as community-

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<sup>46</sup> The MEA (2005) defines ecosystem services as the benefits that humans obtain from ecosystems, which are categorised in four groups: *provisioning*, *regulating*, *cultural services* that directly affect people, and *supporting services* necessary for maintaining the other services. These services affect five interlinked components of human wellbeing: *security*, *basic material needs*, *health*, *good social relations*, and *freedom of choice and action*, which encompasses all components.

based conservation in Brazil, Canada and other countries (Almudi & Berkes, 2010; Berkes, 2007; Berkes, 2010). Since SES is closely linked to work on common-pool resources and collective governance (cf., McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014; Ostrom, 2005), it tends to place emphasis on organised social units (e.g., agencies, committees, communities) and institutions rather than human agency, local and global politics and cultural context (Agrawal, 2005; Crane, 2010; Fabinyi et al., 2014).

Some scholars argue that cultural contexts can define and shape the experience of wellbeing (Camfield, Choudhury, & Devine., 2009; Uchida, Norasakkunit, & Shinobu, 2004). An approach that fosters contextualisation allows researchers to adapt to the societies they work with and can be used to mobilise social action and change. For example, scholars conducting social wellbeing research in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand developed a set of locally defined characteristics—self-esteem, reaffirmation of cultural identities, health—that most respondents considered fundamental for their wellbeing (Camfield, Choudhury, & Devine, 2009; Coulthard et al., 2011). This approach has been an effective tool to mobilising environmental actions. For instance, *buen vivir* has been instrumental in the struggle to prevent oil excavation at Yasuní National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest (Deneulin, 2012; Martin, 2011).

#### *Similarities and complementarities between perspectives*

There are areas of similarities and differences among the three theoretical perspectives which can be described in terms of their ideologies (i.e., anthropocentric, biocentric), power, basic units of analysis, and sustainability. First, there are differences in terms of where each perspective stands on the anthropocentric-biocentric continuum. Social wellbeing has been critiqued for its focus on human dynamics over ecological sustainability, which may indicate anthropocentric interests and a singular focus on wellbeing may hide or ignore ecological decline (e.g., deforestation) or feedbacks (e.g., nearing biophysical thresholds or tipping points) (Armitage et al., 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014). White (2009) contends that ‘enabling conditions’ of the external ‘enabling environment’ permit the experience of wellbeing. She defines ‘enabling environment’ as the biophysical environment combined with infrastructure, amenities, services, and institutions. In this view, ‘enabling environment’ appears to disregard the disabling aspect of physical environments. Additionally, ecosystems are not clearly distinguished from other ‘enabling environments’, nor is the biophysical component fully articulated. In contrast, *buen vivir* and SES perspective take a largely biocentric view, with humans as embedded in or linked with nature (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Jiménez, 2011, Gudynas, 2011). The interdependency between social and ecological systems understands that ensuring the maintenance of life support systems such as the biological processes necessary for life on Earth, is critical for survival of humans and nature.

Second, attention to **power** is another area of complementarity between the perspectives. Social wellbeing and SES have been criticised for their vague engagement with power (Armitage et al. 2012; Cote & Nightingale, 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014). Power<sup>47</sup> is a complex and contested area of study (Haugaard & Clegg, 2009; Lukes, 2005) and is defined in this paper as an ‘immanent force’ that is relational, practised and situated in space (Allen, 2003). Allen’s (2003) perspective is distinct from resources or means of power as it realises that power can be both *power to* and *power over* (Haugaard, 2013). White (2010) argues that power in social wellbeing is implicit and the centrality of the relational dimension re-positions the importance of social structure and power relations. Although we recognise the importance of power and make specific reference to power relations between stakeholders, this paper does not provide a full analysis of the concept of power.

Power relations are implicit between wellbeing dimensions and mediate access to wellbeing, and are important among stakeholders as they explicitly relate to governance of ecosystems, resource use and potential overexploitation. *Buen vivir* clearly focuses on relationships, economic and social structures, and the changing distribution of power (Deneulin, 2012), and directly supports self-determination and self-empowerment of nature and humans. The governments of Ecuador and Bolivia have incorporated *buen vivir* into their constitutions, thus codifying the ‘Rights of Nature’ (Gudynas, 2011, Gudynas & Acosta, 2011). The Ecuadorian constitution defends the irrefutable rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish, provides the public with the authority to protect and petition on behalf of ecosystems, and compels the government to take remedial action if violations occur.

Thirdly, the **basic unit of analysis** is another key area of complementarity among the perspectives. *Buen vivir* and SES underscore the view of the collective perspective rather than human agency or politics (local and global) (Agrawal, 2005; Deneulin, 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014; Latta, 2014). However, social wellbeing makes it possible to bridge these perspectives through its focus on individual *and* collective units. Social wellbeing also takes into account dimensions of social heterogeneity, which offer space for different articulations of what it means ‘to live well’ in different communities, as demonstrated among fishers around the world (Coulthard et al., 2011). In turn, *buen vivir* and SES accept multiple belief systems, and can therefore support the inclusion of subjective analyses because individual conceptions of wellbeing and beliefs regarding how to pursue wellbeing are major drivers of behaviour and decision-making (Chapin et al., 2009; Coulthard et al., 2011; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999). From a governance and policy perspective, the combination of social wellbeing and *buen vivir* approaches may

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<sup>47</sup> Discourses on power link to theories of participation (Arnstein, 1969; Okazaki, 2008) and empowerment (Cole, 2007; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Scheyvens, 1999) that are commonly found sustainable and community-based tourism studies.

bring new insights on societal impacts on different governing regimes and highlight successes and failures in public policy.

Lastly, there is variation in the focus on **sustainability** among the perspectives. Recent efforts have been made to connect wellbeing and sustainable development (e.g., Kjell, 2011; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014). Rauschmeyer, Ohmann and Fruehmann (2012) focus on needs-based sustainable development policies but acknowledge that some of their concepts leave room for further elaboration. Many ethical arguments of *buen vivir* can be found in older sustainability debates, such as the 1987 Brundtland Report, which states that priority should be given to wellbeing of the poor, and development should meet the needs of present and future generations (Hardy et al., 2002; WCED 1987). Complex systems theory recognises sustainability as a dynamic process that requires adaptive capacity for societies to contend with change, or creating systems where people can learn from experience and make alterations over time (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003). The addition of *buen vivir* and SES can strengthen social wellbeing to develop a hybrid wellbeing framework that re-orient attention to sustainability concerns.

### **5.3.3 The pyramid of social-ecological wellbeing**

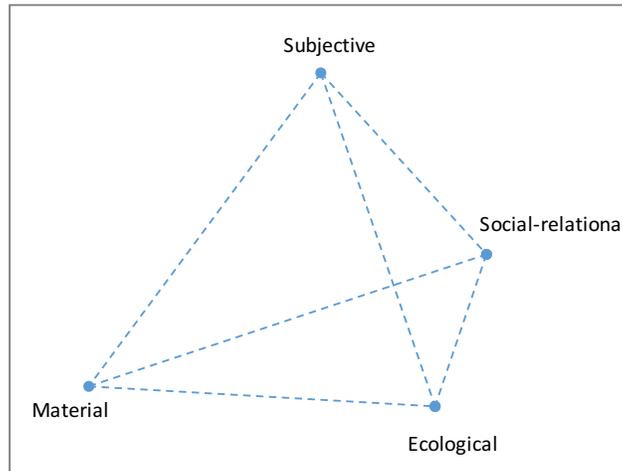
The original three dimensions of social wellbeing (subjective, relational, material) were expanded into four slightly different dimensions (subjective, social-relational, material and ecological) to create the social-ecological wellbeing (SEWB) pyramid (Figure 5.2). The subjective dimension forms the apex of the triangular pyramid and is positioned above the other three because it is the lens through which material, social-relational, and ecological dimensions are interpreted. The subjective specifically engages with locus of control, or the extent to which an individual believes that she/he can control what happens to her/him<sup>48</sup>.

In the SEWB pyramid, the dashed lines represent the interplay and interdependence between the dimensions, and recognise the dynamic power relations between stakeholders that facilitate the degree of wellbeing experienced in a given context or situation, such as ecotourism development. Power in this model is an inherent force that can be given to and wielded over people (Allen, 2003; Haugaard, 2013). It resides not only in personal relationships but through institutions, organisations and other arrangements. Rather than adopting a power-based analysis, this study explores wellbeing from development (*buen vivir*, social wellbeing) and SES perspectives.

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<sup>48</sup> Internal locus of control relates to the CA/SLA concept of agency; the individual is in control and responsible for her/his own outcomes. External locus of control refers to external forces (e.g., luck, timing) which determine a given situation.

**Figure 5.2 Pyramid of social-ecological wellbeing, adapted from White (2010) with inclusion of the ecological dimension**



The four interlinked dimensions contain objective and subjective aspects (Table 5.1 below), and the key dimensions described here overlap with many seminal features of *buen vivir* discussed in Chapter 4. The **subjective** dimension addresses the psychological and emotional side of human life, embracing individual perceptions of and feelings about one’s own position (Table 5.1). It also considers cultural values and personal belief systems, including the spiritual, ideological, and religious faith. Subsequently, a place in nature, which is technically part of the ecological dimension, may be viewed and respected as a sacred natural site, which the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classifies as areas of land or water that have special spiritual significance to people and communities (Oviedo & Jeanrenaud, 2006), relating back to subjective and social-relational dimensions. Benefits of sacred places can be tangible or intangible areas of historical and spiritual importance for pilgrimage and/or healing, as well as places that offer silence and tranquillity in nature (Andriotis, 2009; Chapter 4).

The **material** dimension focuses on tangible and intangible aspects of built environment, including practical welfare, basic human needs, and physical resources and services. The **social-relational** dimension is comprised of social relations and access to public goods, and emphasises the significance of culture by through socio-cultural and human spheres. This dimension may include how a person is perceived and subjectified (e.g., poor, local) under the gaze of another (e.g., donor agency, tourist) (cf., Cheong & Miller, 2000; Saarinen, 2011), or become subjectified by an organisation or programme that was intended to support their cause, as in the case of local people, landscapes and wildlife that have been commoditised through ‘tourism as development’ ‘conservancy schemes or Millennium Development Goals

projects in Namibia and Botswana (Duffy & Moore, 2010; Lacey & Ilcan, 2015)<sup>49</sup>. To better incorporate human-nature relations, ecosystem services and sustainability, the biophysical environment in all its forms is placed in the **ecological** dimension, thereby distinguishing all that is ecological and natural from other material indicators. This ecological dimension also considers the quantity and quality of environmental resources available and accounts for ecosystem services (cf., Jiménez, 2011; MEA, 2005).

It is important to note that aspects of each dimension are not fixed. They are interchangeable and can be adjusted accordingly to the local context and research scope (see Figure 1.3). Adjustments are essential given the highly contextual nature of research involving social wellbeing, *buen vivir* and SES perspectives. The SEWB framework functions as an heuristic guideline for exploring aspects of the dimensions that are considered interesting and valuable to explore. However, key aspects are ultimately determined by the research findings and data analysis. In this study, specific indicators were explored (see Table 5.1, right column). In the following sections, we use the SEWB framework to explore how ecotourism affects community members through the four dimensions of wellbeing within the context of an ecotourism initiative in a secluded PA in Bhutan.

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<sup>49</sup> These examples of people and nature placed in neoliberal agendas that are promoted by donor agencies and governments for the purpose of poverty alleviation point to the pervasiveness of power and politics; those who are ‘subjectified’ may show resistance or counter-act.

**Table 5.1 Key SEWB dimensions, aspects and indicators assessed**

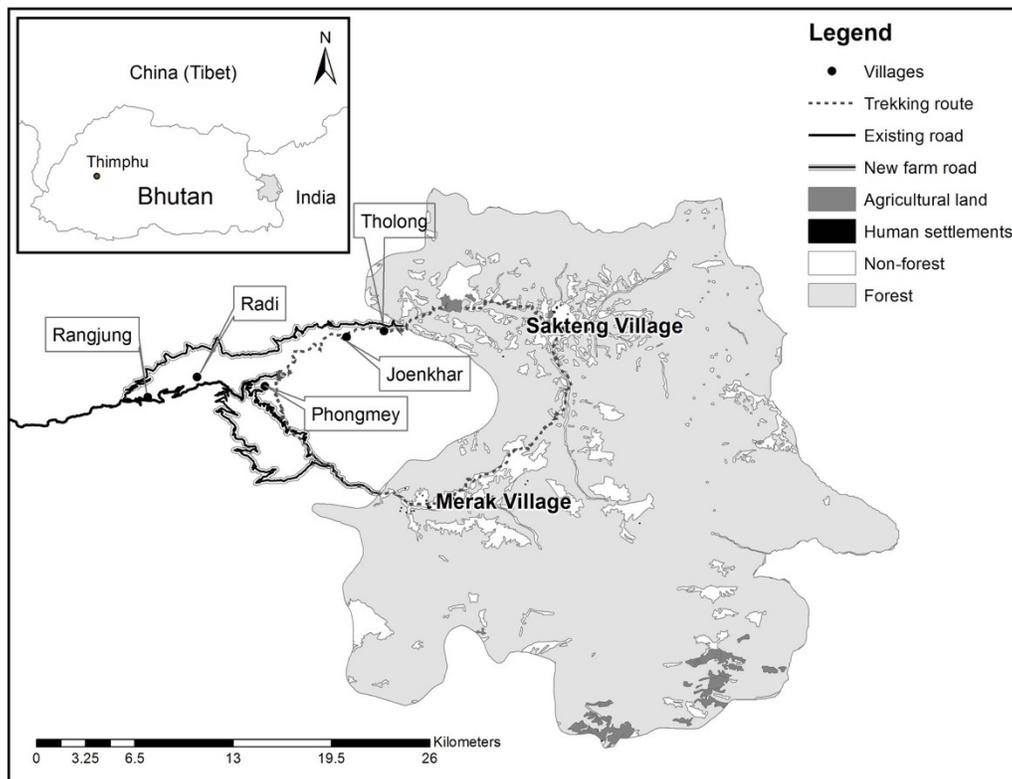
Dimension	Description and range of key aspects		SEWB indicators assessed
Subjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological and one’s emotional constitution (e.g., capabilities, attitudes toward life, personal relationships)</li> <li>• Perception of and feelings about one’s (material, social, human) position (e.g., skills, household structure, physical health)</li> <li>• Cultural values, ideologies and beliefs</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education level, ethnicity, religion</li> <li>• Household composition</li> <li>• Perceptions of the meaning of wellbeing, ecotourism</li> <li>• Individual agency and sense of influence in ecotourism activities/development</li> <li>• Religious, spiritual beliefs or cultural traditions (past/present) that have or still impact use and management of ecological resources</li> </ul>
	<i>Objective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Household structure and composition</li> <li>○ Education, information, skills</li> <li>○ Physical health and (dis)ability</li> <li>○ Relations of love care</li> </ul>	<i>Subjective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Satisfaction with levels of health, education, skills, information</li> <li>○ Personality, concept of self</li> <li>○ Sense of competence, capability and breadth of influence</li> <li>○ Trust and confidence</li> <li>○ Spirituality, religion, worldviews</li> </ul>	
Socio-relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social (micro- and macro-level) relations, access to public goods</li> <li>• Consists of socio-cultural (e.g., social, cultural and political identities) and human spheres (e.g., networks of support and obligation, perceptions of respect, discrimination and safety)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal/professional relationships that help one achieve wellbeing</li> <li>• Key relationship levels (e.g., household, peers) and their influence on individual livelihood decisions and activities</li> <li>• Perceptions of networks of support</li> <li>• Factors that determine who participates in ecotourism activities</li> <li>• Aspirations for and factors that foster ‘living well together’ in community</li> <li>• Rules (formal/informal) that create/reduce wellbeing in the community, degree of compliance</li> <li>• Social changes over time since (or prior to) ecotourism activities</li> </ul>
	<i>Objective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Social, cultural, and political identities</li> <li>○ Relations to the state (e.g., welfare, law, politics)</li> <li>○ Access to services and amenities</li> <li>○ Networks of support and obligation</li> </ul>	<i>Subjective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concept of other people, institutions</li> <li>○ Satisfaction with access to services</li> <li>○ Perceptions of respect, discrimination, and safety</li> <li>○ Evaluation of (given or received) support</li> </ul>	
Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical welfare and standards of living (e.g., income, wealth)</li> <li>• Basic human needs (e.g., shelter, food)</li> <li>• Human-made physical resources and services (e.g., buildings, infrastructure, goods)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupation(s)</li> <li>• Physical and built resources required to live well</li> <li>• Satisfaction with infrastructure and people that provide access to built resources</li> <li>• Perceived constraints to resource access</li> <li>• People who (economically) benefit most/least from ecotourism activities</li> <li>• Feelings about current livelihood activities and occupation(s)</li> <li>• Feelings about children’s future livelihood activities</li> </ul>
	<i>Objective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Income, wealth and assets</li> <li>○ Employment and livelihood activities</li> <li>○ Consumption levels</li> </ul>	<i>Subjective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Satisfaction with income and wealth</li> <li>○ Evaluation of one’s standard of living compared to the past or with others’</li> <li>○ Evaluation of present vs. past standard of living</li> </ul>	
Ecological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantity and quality of environmental resources available, biotic (e.g., plants, animal) and abiotic (e.g., soil, water)</li> <li>• Ecosystem services</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific flora, fauna and/or environment required to live well</li> <li>• Sites or natural resources of spiritual or historical value</li> <li>• Perception on quality and quantity of ecological resources</li> <li>• Satisfaction with people and services that provide access to required ecological resources</li> <li>• Perceived constraints in accessing ecological resources</li> <li>• Environmental and ecosystem changes over time since/prior to ecotourism activities</li> </ul>
	<i>Objective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Types of ecosystem resources available (using past-present comparison)</li> <li>○ Value and usage of ecosystem resources (e.g., medicinal)</li> <li>○ Quantity of ecosystem resources</li> <li>○ Ecosystem changes</li> </ul>	<i>Subjective aspects</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Spiritual and historical value of ecosystems</li> <li>○ Quality of resources available (past vs. present)</li> <li>○ Case of access to current resources</li> </ul>	

Source: Adapted in part from White (2010), with additions from *buen vivir* and SES perspectives

## 5.4 Case Study Context

Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary (SWS), situated in eastern Bhutan, was established in 2003 by the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB) in collaboration with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Bhutan (DOFPS, 2016). Spanning 740.6 km<sup>2</sup> with an altitude range of 1,600-4,500 masl, it covers diverse terrestrial ecosystems of alpine meadows, temperate and warm broadleaf forests, shares a border with India, and is connected to Khaling Wildlife Sanctuary by a southern biological corridor (NRED, 2012). The Sanctuary harbours multiple species of trees and birds, internationally threatened and endangered animals, and may be the only place on Earth dedicated to preserving the habitat of the *migoi* (yeti) (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011). This 'biodiversity hotspot' is overseen by park staff based in Phongmey and at forest ranger offices in the communities of Merak, Sakteng and Joenkhar (Figure 5.3). In addition, the Sanctuary is home to approximately 4,500 people, including indigenous *Brokpas* (highlanders) (Jadin, Meyfroid, & Lambin, 2016; NRED, 2012; Wangchuk 2007).

**Figure 5.3 Map of Bhutan, Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary and trekking route**



**Source: Karst & Gyeltshen (2016) based on additional support/data from GIS Unit, DOFPS, RGOB and Topographical Survey Division, NLC, RGOB**

In Merak and Sakteng, locals lead semi-pastoral transhumance lifestyles which require large areas of land to graze animals. This lifestyle contrasts that of Brokpa settlements in lower altitude Joenkhar where they engage in subsistence farming. A lack of road connectivity has left villages largely isolated from large scale, mainstream commercial activity. Families barter yak and cow products such as meat, butter, and cheese with southern neighbours. However, these people travel to Trashigang town to sell their goods more frequently. Two government-sponsored farm roads currently under construction will directly connect Merak and Sakteng settlements to main roads and towns nearby. Impatient for the farm road to materialise, a group of villagers illegally built a 2 km gravel road, extending from the official SWS trail entrance at Phrugshingmang to Merak in February 2014.

Previously closed to foreign tourists in RGOB's earlier effort to safeguard the region, SWS is one of the newest PAs and the only one in the country to collect a visitation fee to date. In 2010, the Sanctuary officially opened as a special destination through an ecotourism initiative focused on community development, which complements the national Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy that is centred on material and non-material indicators of social progress. Brokpa culture and tradition are relatively intact: locals speak Brokpake language and traditional clothing is still commonly worn, such as long tunic-style dresses, embroidered jackets and animal hide vests. Buddhism is widely and exclusively practiced in all villages with some elements of animist and ancient Bön rituals. Furthermore, religious festivals are held in the many religious and historic sites across the Sanctuary throughout the year (see Chapter 4). Brokpas are also known for their customary rites of hospitality. In a country considered by the United Nations to be 'least developed', the sustainable tourism initiative aims to integrate conservation and development activities, provide local residents with an alternate means of income, and protect their unique cultural and natural heritage (UN Conference on Trade and Development, 2012; NRED, 2012).

The creation of the park changed natural resource usage and management patterns in every settlement. Prior to the launch of SWS in 2003 and increased park staff presence, local communities enjoyed unlimited access to natural resources, which resulted in unsustainable harvesting and considerable forest degradation. The Land Act of 2007 changed traditional *tsamdrol* (grazing land) and *sokshing* (woodlot leased for leaf litter production and collection) rights, reverting ownership of those lands from individual families or communities to the government (Chapter 3, RGOB, 2007). A participatory land use zoning exercise was conducted in SWS and subsequent regulations released in 2011, which allowed sustainable use of natural resources in multiple-use zones surrounding the core zones, including a community forest in Joenkhar and tourism activities (e.g., low-impact trails) in overlapping recreational zones (WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011).

The Merak-Sakteng trekking route is a circular trail that follows traditional commuter routes linking the three main communities in the *geogs* (administrative block or group of village settlements) of Merak and Sakteng (Figure 5.3). It was originally designed as a 6-day trek and involved local community participation during the planning phase. Five campsites with flush toilets and basic kitchens dot the trail, and guesthouses are located in the main villages. The Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) planned and financed campsite and guesthouse construction, basic trail maintenance and training for local cooks and tour guides. Some households in Merak and Sakteng were granted partial government funding to build additional facilities to convert their homes into tourist homestays, although only a few in Merak are presently in operation. A multi-stakeholder process to develop a set of by-laws for governing the initiative, including rates for tourist services, was coordinated by SWS park staff in conjunction with key stakeholders, including community members, government and non-government entities.

At present, tourism in this region is a fraction of what was anticipated. According to the latest statistics, the total amount of foreign tourist arrivals, not including regional travellers from India, was 133,480 in 2014 (TCB, 2014). Although the number of foreign tourist arrivals to SWS is small and has fluctuated since inception (see Table 5.2), the Sanctuary continues to lure tourists with the promise of adventure and an unparalleled cultural and environmental experience.

**Table 5.2 Foreign tourist arrivals in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary, 2010–2014**

Year	Total arrivals (per person)
2010	92
2011	172
2012	118
2013	132
2014	147

**Source: Nature Recreation and Ecotourism Division (2015)**

## 5.5 Methods and Data Analysis

The study adopts a qualitative, multiple case study design to assess wellbeing in three communities undergoing ecotourism development using the SEWB framework. Whereas most sustainable tourism studies of Bhutan focus primarily on quantitative methods of data collection (e.g., Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Rinzin, Vermeulen, & Glasbergen, 2007), we employ a qualitative approach. Household interviews and focus groups were conducted to elicit a holistic understanding of wellbeing through personal and collective experiences, and to unpack the complexities of specific issues through novel, rich perspectives (Creswell, 2003).

Field data were collected by the first author from October to November 2013 and May 2014, totaling 68 semi-structured household interviews and six focus groups. Each of the two half-day focus group sessions consisted of five community members per village for a total of 15 focus group participants. Most participants (89%) engaged in livestock rearing or farming and held more than one occupation (e.g., commerce, portering, weaving), and 15% were currently elected officers or representatives in their local government or had held similar positions in the past. Although government representatives were included in household interviews, only local *tshogpas* (coordinators) were included in focus groups to avoid unequal power dynamics with the group and because community leaders and members felt *tshogpas* could clearly articulate community values and needs. Of the 68 participants interviewed, 26% were female and 74% male, ranging between the age of 23 and 67 years old.

The first author and field assistants (e.g., local tour guides, park staff) conducted all interviews and focus groups while a TCB colleague provided additional translation and research assistance in Merak during the Fall 2013 period. All interviews were held in one or more of the following four languages: Brokpake, Dzongkha, Sharchopkha, and English. Interviews were 60 to 90 minutes on average while focus group sessions lasted two to three hours. All notes were transcribed in English by the primary author with assistance from local translators in the field. A combination of purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling techniques were used for participant selection in order to survey a broad but inclusive range of households and service providers located near the epicentre of tourism activities, such as the trekking route<sup>50</sup>.

Household and focus groups interviews contained a range of closed and open-ended questions designed to elicit insights on the four dimensions of the wellbeing pyramid, as well as local understandings of decision-making involving communities in ecotourism (see Table 5.1 above). Focus groups used open-ended questions and participatory techniques to generate, organise and prioritise ideas, suggestions and items in a list such as brainstorming, pile sorts and ranking (Puri, 2011). Likewise, spatial methods such as participatory mapping were employed to assess tangible natural and built resources, stimulate discussion and verify household interview responses (Kendon, 2010; Puri, 2011). Through these tools, participants listed and determined key indicators and themes within each SEWB dimension, which helped derive insights on emergent patterns and trends in attitudes and behaviours in natural resource management (Newing, 2011). Protocol questions and methods in this study were informed by guides and toolkits that were created by wellbeing researchers and tested in developing countries (cf., Coulthard et al.,

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<sup>50</sup> This approach was necessary for two reasons: (1) to ensure inclusivity of all current and potential local stakeholders, as well as general community members with some interest in and/or knowledge of tourism activities, and (2) to guarantee a representative number of participants, given the transient nature of the population.

2015; PADHI, 2009). Participant quotes are identified by community: Merak participant (MP), Sakteng participant (SP) and Joenkhar (JP).

We adopted a thematic analysis approach that incorporated inductive and deductive approaches to coding to analyse the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). *A priori* categories were used to structure initial coding and theme development (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The *a priori* categories were developed from the key social-ecological wellbeing dimensions (subjective, socio-relational, ecological, material), which were informed by the dimensions of social wellbeing (social, relational, material), White's (2009, 2010) earlier work, and *buen vivir* and SES perspectives. Codes and key categories, which were derived inductively through my reading of the data (Boyatzis, 1998), are presented in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3 List of themes, categories and codes for social-ecological wellbeing attributed by community participants**

**(A) Merak**

Theme/Domain	Categories	Codes
Subjective	Good health and no misery (self & others)	No sickness or death No suffering
	Personal capability/development	Education (self) Intelligence Self-contentment Self-reliance Freedom Sense of agency, help from institutions ( <i>gup</i> , <i>geog</i> )
	Religion	Practice religion Meditation Prayers
Socio-relational	Good community relations	Having good neighbours Community, more social gatherings Co-operative, happy family and/or parents Following community rules No fighting, co-operation among villagers GNH Practicing <i>tsa-wa-sum</i>
	Cultural preservation	No modernisation
Material	Money	(Enough) money Lower taxes Employment
	Physical (built) resources	Good infrastructure (health clinics, road to Merak, electricity)
Ecological	Natural resources	Forest, trees, bamboo, non-timber forest products
		(Enough) grazing land or property registered in own name Animals (domesticated, wild) Water Green, preserved landscape/scenery
	Food security	(Enough) food Accessible food
	Geographical location	Place (to live and work in one place)

**(B) Sakteng**

Theme/Domain	Categories	Codes
Subjective	Good health (self & others)	No disease or sickness in life No drunkenness or alcoholism
	Personal capability/development	Cleanliness Education and good life for children Employment (herding) Sense of agency, help from institutions (TCB, <i>gup, geog</i> )
	Sense of peace	Peace of life or mind
	Religion	Practice religion, prayers Meditation
Socio-relational	Good community relations	Happy parents Having family with/near you Practicing <i>tša-wa-sum</i> No fighting
Material	Money	Money Having many belongings Clothing (traditional, clean)
	Physical (built) resources	Good transportation (horses) Good facilities (electricity, water) Lodging
	Geographical location	Space in Sakteng (less crowded than other villages)
Ecological	Natural resources	Forest, stones Land Biodiversity (different plants, animals, birds) and good/stable environment (no litter, no floods, tree coverage, clean/no litter) nearby
	Food security	(Enough) food
	Geographical location	Living in Sakteng

**(C) Joenkhar**

Theme/Domain	Categories	Codes
Subjective	Good health (self & others)	No sickness
	Personal capability/development	Education (children) Education (self) Having less desire/being content (Middle Path) Sense of agency, help from institutions ( <i>chiwog tshogpa, tourist tshogpa, geog</i> , RNR livestock or SWS office)
Socio-relational	Good community relations	Co-operation among villagers Having children/family
Material	Money and material wealth	Having enough/more money Household items (pots, gas stove, fridge) Clothing (including traditional) Car Future employment for children
	Physical (built) resources	House Road Household appliances (pots, gas stove, fridge)
Ecological	Natural resources	Forest and trees Plants (maize and vegetables, paddy) Animals (cattle, oxen)
	Food security	(Enough) food Access to gardens and crops

The subsequent section unpacks the indicators or aspects that were used and summarised by dimension in Table 5.1 above. The four dimensions are used to frame a discussion on articulations of wellbeing and perceptions of the overall influence of ecotourism on social-ecological wellbeing.

**5.6 Findings**

**5.6.1 Subjective wellbeing**

What does it mean to ‘live well and be happy’ for Brokpa people? According to most Merak participants, having good community relationships were priorities that equalled the need for good health and “no misery”. Good community relationships meant “not quarrelling”, fostering understanding, co-operation, and generally helping one other. As one Merak man stated, “A society that is peaceful and harmonious – this is GNH” (MP16). Money and “standing on our own feet” was a third priority, which was linked to concerns about sufficient food and past financial hardships.

For the majority of Sakteng residents, good health and having (enough) money were considered twin essentials for their individual sense of wellbeing. For a couple of participants, good health meant not drinking *ara* (local spirits) and no alcoholism in the family. Other residents cited having “peace in life”, good relations with family and community, as well as living in Sakteng as very important. One Sakteng

woman believed that practicing *tsa-wa-sum*, respect and loyalty for King, country (government) and people, was key to wellbeing. In Joenkhar, most participants considered having enough money their highest priority, frequently stating that “we can get everything with money”. This was followed by the need for good health for self and family members, then having a house and their family with them.

All participants held fairly strong cultural and religious beliefs which were connected to nature. Buddhist principles of non-violence and compassion to all sentient beings were apparent in the national and regional practice of non-slaughter, although it was not always desirable in reality. While Joenkhar focus group participants believed that all community members follow laws prohibiting the killing or harming of animals, they admitted that not everyone wanted to follow this rule because human-wildlife conflict negatively impacted their farming practices. Several participants described how the landscape of SWS abounded with *neys* (holy places in nature that are imbued with spiritual significance or are the dwelling place of divine beings) and local practices regarding respect for the environment. For example, focus group participants stated that Sakteng residents were not allowed to cut trees or “do dirty things” (e.g., burn garbage, eat meat) in the nearby mountains around Lake Tsorong Gomba out of respect for the goddess Aum Jomo.

A sense of personal capability and scope of influence in ecotourism activities was mixed among participants. All villagers felt empowered to approach responsible individuals to incite change but very few said they would instigate change themselves. The *gup* (block headman) and *geog* administration were overwhelmingly viewed as the greatest agents of change in Merak and Sakteng. Locals knew which governing officials they could contact to voice concerns or request a solution, and they often chose to directly approach the *gup* or *geog* administration and higher authorities, depending on the nature of the problem. When asked why, one woman from Merak stated,

Whether people are satisfied or not, people always go to the *geog*. But even if they want to present to the *dungkhag* (sub-district) it's intimidating to speak to officials. These yak herders are less educated and will forget when they're put on the spot in front of powerful people. They get scared. (MP26)

Many Sakteng locals reported they would alternately turn to the TCB official for help. Joenkhar participants felt the park office could best mobilise change, followed by the entire community. As the only village with elected tourist *tshogpas* managing the campground and coordinating tourism service providers, several Joenkhar participants felt tourist *tshogpas* were as responsible as their locally elected leader.

### 5.6.2 Social-relational wellbeing

Since inter-personal relationships are integral to wellbeing, this study asked: what kinds of personal and professional relationships help to achieve a sense of wellbeing? Household-level relationships were considered most important to the vast majority of participants in every village. Participants indicated that they first turned to family members for help and advice on important livelihood decisions because as one Joenkhar woman explained, “Whatever we do, we eat out of one pot with our family” (JP8). Having close personal networks and family relations were very important for bringing money into the household, with the understanding that, “if people are close then automatically money will come”, according to one Merak resident (MP22). Participants repeatedly warned that good relations should begin at home. In the words of one Merak man: “if the relationship between family and relatives is not strong, society will not look good” (MP29).

Good relationships with peers (e.g., friends, neighbours) followed by institutions (e.g., park office, health department, formal laws) were ranked second and third most important among Merak and Sakteng residents, compared to the need for good relations with the wider community (e.g., shop owners, other villagers, community and religious leaders) and then institutions for those in Joenkhar. To live well together, having good relations with everyone was considered most important in all villages. Yet participants stated that this is not always the case in the villages. One Merak participant reflected:

There are a lot of groups here. They get [a] budget from government and get money, but don't do anything with this money. With tourism, people initially wanted tourists to come, yet so few work with tourists. They know how to make the group, but they don't know how to work the group. (MP20)

Another Merak resident claimed: “People in Merak don't know how to co-operate. Maybe it's because they're uneducated. They don't show respect to elders.” (MP27)

One third of all Merak participants, some from Joenkhar and one from Sakteng, felt that good or better infrastructure and facilities (e.g., road, health care, water) were tantamount to living well together. The importance of planning for tomorrow, having strategies and like minds among community members was raised by several Sakteng participants. A few residents in each village identified religious observances (e.g., offering butter lamps in temple, meditation) as vital for long life of the community and wellbeing.

Participants expressed concern over certain socio-cultural changes in the last decade and feared the demise of Brokpa identity due to modernisation and ecotourism. Participants frequently cited change of local dress in Merak and Sakteng and frowned upon tour guides who eschewed the official dress code in the by-laws by wearing trekking gear instead of Bhutanese clothing in the villages. They noted that

younger generations attended schools farther away, traditional weaving had decreased and use of Brokpa language was declining.

Some locals felt that tourists and some external tour guides unknowingly influenced local habits and particularly youth through smoking, sporting Western clothing and hairstyles, and displaying “different” and radical behaviour, such as hugging or kissing in public. Conversely, other residents viewed tourism as an impetus for safeguarding Brokpa culture and wellbeing, since tourists often request performances of traditional *chams* (dances) and entertainment. One participant felt strongly that *tshochu* (religious festival) dances should only be performed during appropriate occasions, rather than staging inauthentic masked dances for tourists.

### 5.6.3 Material wellbeing

Despite some commonalities, human-made resources and services needed to live well and be happy differed across the villages. The importance of monetary economy over traditional bartering was most evident in Merak, where most residents considered income or money as the most essential material resource. Sakteng respondents felt that clothes were most important for physical wellbeing, particularly “clean” and “nice Brokpa clothing” made of yak and sheep wool. People in Joenkhar, who reported not having enough money to manage household expenditure compared to the other villages, primarily wanted household items (e.g., refrigerators, pots, gas stoves).

All participants greatly valued land for farming, building housing and pastureland purposes. Good public facilities (e.g., road, health care) were frequently raised in all villages as necessary for fostering communal wellbeing. Participants argued that road accessibility would reduce transportation hardships, help keep the community together, and even preserve local values and customs. One woman from Merak affirmed: “We are uneducated people and if we go elsewhere we have to dress and speak differently. If we can stay together in our community, it’s much easier for us” (MP25).

When asked to reflect on current livelihood activities and hopes for the next generation, residents in Joenkhar had very strong opinions against their own professions compared to other villages. Most village households engaged in traditional livelihood activities and all participants held more than one supplementary job, such as making cheese or *ara*, weaving, singing, or dancing. When asked about the future employment of their children, most parents in Merak and Sakteng preferred professional or vocational jobs (e.g., civil servant, monk). All Joenkhar residents stressed the importance of education, and most hoped their children would have non-traditional jobs. Herding, fieldwork, and shop keeping were almost unanimously cited as a second or last resort livelihood options, as one Joenkhar farmer explained: “I have no education and am suffering with a lot with work. I don’t want my children to suffer”

(JP5). Some participants were sad that they couldn't interact with tourists because they were illiterate or unable to speak English. Few participants said they took pride in traditional livelihood activities or described herding or farming as decent employment. This was echoed by some participants in Sakteng, including one weaver who said, "I don't want my children to be left in the villages. I want them to get good jobs" (SP17).

Does ecotourism contribute to material wellbeing in SWS? Participants in all three villages lamented the uneven distribution of economic benefits. Although they acknowledged that ecotourism had helped increase living standards (e.g., toilet construction), most said only a handful of people benefitted from tourism activities, such as pony porters, followed by tour operators from Thimphu and Paro. Merak residents felt only "rich people" (i.e., those who own horses, yak or cattle or have some education) can sell their products or services and afford to engage in other income-generating activities. They were also able to generate further money-making opportunities, as one woman in Merak claimed about one horse contractor who "has all the tourists stay at his house so he receives all the benefits" (MP23).

In Sakteng and Joenkhar, campsite caretakers were considered beneficiaries because they received income through campsite charges. Joenkhar pony porters and cultural performers were also considered key beneficiaries. Some residents were seeking out new ventures to tap into new tourism market. One Merak man was developing a guidebook on local culture and religious artefacts, while another spoke of plans to create a "museum-cum-shop" for local clothing and handicrafts. All villages were hopeful that community development funds, which were established as a mechanism to direct a portion of the campsite revenue back to the village, would become available for communal use in the future.

#### **5.6.4 Ecological wellbeing**

The forest was the highest-ranking natural resource for wellbeing in all three communities, followed by abiotic resources, particularly stone, land, fresh water and clean air. Locals identified heavy reliance upon trees and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as firewood to stoke customary wood-burning stoves for cooking, boiling water and heating the house on a daily basis. Forests provided fodder for cattle, horses, yak and *zos* (yak-cow hybrids), while inhabitants often foraged for wild mushrooms, ferns and other edibles. Certain trees, plants, and flowers were regularly collected for incense and medicine. Some animal species were also sought out for their medicinal value, such as the lucrative Chinese caterpillar (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*). After abiotic resources, a well-preserved landscape and scenery that was not polluted was considered quite important. Several residents in Merak and Sakteng explicitly credited the forestry office for protecting and rehabilitating forests that were previously depleted due to the earlier open access period.

Findings on reliance and satisfaction regarding access to required natural resources varied between villages. Merak and Sakteng residents reported heavy reliance on park staff for access to forest resources, whereas Joenkhar inhabitants depended on the community forest collective, *geog* and officers from the Ministry of Agriculture. Timber, stone, and other construction materials are required building supplies, while NTFPs supplement subsistence agriculture efforts.

Considerable dissatisfaction and concern were expressed over the availability of natural resources in two of the three villages. Using a 6-point scale from ‘very satisfied’ to ‘very worried’, several Merak participants described having less available grazing land and wood compared to the past, which left them ‘not so satisfied’ and ‘worried’ about current and future access to natural resources. Echoing common concern for lack of grazing land, one Merak participant whose husband herded cattle said, “Maybe one day the grazing land will become dense forest. Then the cows can’t graze and will die” (MP25). Joenkhar residents were mostly split between being ‘satisfied’ and ‘not so satisfied’. Dissatisfaction arose around the long wait for delivery of a specific service or good, such as completion of road construction or distribution of paddy seedlings. Although most Sakteng participants reported being generally ‘satisfied’ with their access to the natural resources they need, several respondents stated they were ‘worried’ because of the potential impact of their own actions and natural disasters, noting that cypress trees are continually felled for incense-making, land may be washed away by rivers, and yaks and cattle can be attacked by wild dogs and bears.

Reports of illegal hunting or extraction of resources by SWS rangers did not corroborate with responses from communities, with the exception of participants from Sakteng. Focus groups in Merak and Joenkhar denied that illegal activities (as defined by park authorities) took place in the villages but four Merak participants mentioned that some or “5 to 10%” of villagers did illegal or unsustainable things, such as poaching the Himalayan black bear, a vulnerable species (IUCN, 2016), for its highly prized gall bladder or barking deer for their pelt, meat and organs. According to one Merak participant, the crimes were perpetuated by a few households who were wealthy and wielded influence in the community through donations to community groups. A *geog* official in Merak affirmed that she has seen cases of people felling extra trees and “maybe more than 20-30 cases of [all types of] illegal activities” (JP27). Sakteng focus group participants admitted that a few people cut down additional trees but medicinal roots and plants, including the critically endangered Himalayan gentian (IUCN, 2016), were collected for personal usage only. Rangers in all villages reported many incidences of illegal activities, particularly illegal felling, in Merak, and a fairly low number of cases (estimated 5 to 10%) in Sakteng and Joenkhar.

Increase of waste was identified as the greatest type of social-ecological change in relation to ecotourism and other development activities. Many local participants claimed that the amount of non-

biodegradable solid waste along public trails in the villages had grown despite the instalment of public garbage pits by park staff, who held public meetings and cleaning campaigns with officials from the district administration and local schools to raise local awareness. Some Joenkhar participants reported that tour operators, guides, porters, and cooks leave garbage behind or do not place their garbage in designated pits. A few participants expressed concern that a rise in tourist numbers could negatively impact the environment if they bring more plastic goods but this was seen as manageable at present because there was “only a little bit of littering” (JP5). Other participants criticised local people who did not dispose of their garbage properly.

The following section discussed the four main findings identified, namely the key dimensions of wellbeing, trade-offs between wellbeing dimensions, locus of control, and bottom-up insights for top-down governance.

## **5.7 Discussion**

Through the SEWB framework, we were able to identify **key dimensions of wellbeing for Brokpa** people and explore how they relate to other dimensions. For one, personal and social ties with family, community and institutions (the social-relational) appear to have played a critical role within and across each dimension. In Merak and Sakteng communities, social-relational wellbeing appeared to surpass material wellbeing. Positive relations with healthy, co-operative people rivalled the importance of money because people depend heavily on one another, particularly during harsh winters and migratory periods. Therefore, having good relationships with other people enables one to survive in times of need and crisis (Camfield, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2009; Chapter 4; Karst, 2016). Settled Joenkhar residents who have less material wealth compared to Brokpas in neighbouring villages might desire ‘luxury’ items such as refrigerators because prolonged food preservation means more food security, less work and increased time with family. On the surface, it appears as though materialistic desire is a driving motivator for increased wealth but material gains can lead to a better quality of life. This finding corresponds with research in multiple developing countries including India, Ethiopia and Vietnam: even in cases where people struggle to survive and prosper, there is more to their lives than livelihood concerns, and quality of interactions and relationships matter as much as quality of assets for one’s wellbeing (Camfield, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2009; Coulthard et al., 2011; McGregor, 2007).

In turn, cultural values and socio-cultural identities (subjective and socio-relational dimensions) inherently influenced perceptions of wellbeing. The desire for social accord and harmony at personal and communal levels was linked to the national philosophy of GNH and social customs that politically reinforce Bhutanese identity through behaviour and dress. Several generations of Brokpa families tend to

live under one roof, and relationships among family, community and strangers are fostered through social conventions, particularly *tha damtshig* (commitment of loyalty, respect and consideration for others in society) that decree respect and care for elders and other people (Whitecross, 2010) and general hospitality (e.g., offering *ara*) to visitors. The Bhutanese concept of *tha damtshig* is related to *driglam namzha* (rules or system of ordered, cultured behaviour), the official code of etiquette (Allison, 2004). This code seeks to inculcate respectful behaviour and dress, and extends to cultural assets, such as the style of architecture. Unlike *driglam namzha*, *tha damtshig* is framed by religion (Buddhism) and is used more often in Bhutan in a social context compared to other Himalayan nations (Phuntsho, 2004; Whitecross, 2010).

Social norms and systems can have great impact across all wellbeing dimensions. When *driglam namzha* was re-emphasised as a key feature of Bhutanese cultural identity in the 1989 royal edict<sup>51</sup>, it acquired new political significance that has had far-reaching impacts on wellbeing. *Driglam namzha* has been critiqued as a mechanism of state control, exemplified through a highly controlled tourism policy (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010) and the promotion of northern over southern (*Lhotshampa* or ethnic Nepali) Bhutanese culture (Hutt, 2003; Whitecross, 2010). These tight social constraints can have ramifications for social-ecological wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development. In Merak-Sakteng, the preference for western over eastern Bhutanese houses has had cultural and environmental ramifications (Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Karst & Gyeltshen, 2016). Likewise, all local and national tourism service providers are bound by regulation to wear their traditional dress when working with tourists, which could result in strained social-relational relationships when local people notice that external tour guides do not follow the rules. As a system of surveillance at the local level, *driglam namzha* can support social order but may be abused by system users to propagate conflict or reinforce existing grievances with other households.

There appears to be a **constant trade-off between wellbeing dimensions relative to issues of equity, mainly in terms of the ecological dimension**. Material and social-relational wellbeing appeared to increase while ecological wellbeing decreased dramatically when individuals desired large amounts of natural resources or acted unsustainability. Alternately, social-relational wellbeing seemed to decrease at the community level when people prioritised their own subjective and material wellbeing, whether it was to save time, for ease of transaction, or for financial profit. The growing issue of disposable waste, although not a direct result of tourism, is exacerbated partially by tour operators who do not enforce proper clean up at sites. This finding points to the incongruity that individual right or desire to achieve

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<sup>51</sup> According to Allison (2004), the edict was a deliberate effort to preserve Bhutanese culture from the 'invasion' of Western cultural influences and modernisation at the time.

subjective wellbeing can gravely impact the wellbeing of another being or entity (White, 2009, 2010), which raises the issue of social and environmental justice in relation to trade-offs.

The findings of this research suggest that ecological wellbeing was enhanced in part through legal and religious belief systems that protect forest and natural resources from over-extraction, but a number of participants felt that the many formal government rules negatively impacted their subjective wellbeing because these individuals were unable to access natural resources and services as they desired. Some illegal activities could be overlooked by the community or cannot be prevented because they are conducted or supported by politically powerful people, as in the case of illegal charcoal production in coastal Cambodian villages (Marschke & Berkes, 2006). The fact that residents may resort to illegal felling to build larger wooden houses in the fashionable western Bhutanese style rather than constructing traditional Brokpa houses of stone and mud also indicates people's desire to modernise their material surroundings (see Chapter 3), which can lead to overexploitation of natural resources and a 'tragedy of the commons' (Basurto & Ostrom, 2009; Hardin, 1968). Monitoring these new trends and changes in consumption patterns over time would require more explicit analysis and discussion of power, trade-offs and hard choices between conservation and development opportunities (Armitage et al., 2012; McShane et al., 2011; Miller, et al., 2011).

We found that **locus of control appears to be a considerable dynamic** that impacts social-relational and ecological wellbeing and distributional justice. Analysis of the different dimensions and particularly subjective wellbeing indicated that many local people felt they did not have command over the assets, resources or people in their domain. This feeling applied specifically to natural resources. The loss of agency or sense of power may have drastic effects on one's personal sense of wellbeing. For example, some local people were exasperated with regional officials over the arrested development of the farm roads, hence the illegal road extension. The general outcome of portering infers that subjective and material wellbeing improved for a few pony porters and external tour operators. However, tensions arose among community members who felt a sense of disproportionate gain from tourism, which harmed their relations with pony porters and tour operators, and suggests a decrease in social-relational wellbeing. Similar to the case of asymmetric relationships that tend to occur because powerful middlemen control pricing and distribution in the 'fish chain' (Jentoft, 2013; Kooiman et al., 2005), it can be argued that ecotourism in the region has produced 'winners', such as tour operators and pony porters, and 'losers', or those without livestock, money or capacity.

The case of the illegal road near Merak is an interesting paradox in wellbeing. From subjective and material wellbeing standpoints, having a road to the village saved residents time and effort, since they no longer had to carry heavy loads or the sick and dying to the nearest town on their backs for extended

periods. Several people also believed it would increase social-relational wellbeing by keeping elders and youth together year-round and reduce the burdens of migration. These beliefs reflect the social values and commitment to family and the community that are inherent in *tha damtshig* (Allison, 2004; Chapter 4; Whitecross, 2010). However, breaking the law lowered social-relational wellbeing of communities with institutions because park management was not able to protect the park from the illicit construction. Moreover, blatant disregard shown to park authority in this case indicates a fairly strong connection between subjective wellbeing, social-relational wellbeing and ecological conditions.

Increasing one's subjective wellbeing and sense of agency highlights interesting inconsistencies between a possible struggle for power and community action. On the one hand, the illegal road could be seen as a case where residents took steps toward self-empowerment and acted upon their convictions. On the other hand, it could be viewed as an (unconscious) reaction to historical injustices, a counter-act of self-imposed territorialism borne out of the desire for unlimited access to resources and lingering frustrations over the Land Act of 2007. Drastic reactions are not uncommon, as seen in the case of Mburo National Park in Uganda, where evicted villagers re-occupied land and killed wildlife to avoid PA re-designation (Hulme & Infield, 2001; West & Brockington, 2006). Alternatively, a similar display of agency and willingness to take risks is being applied in the ecotourism sector with more positive prospective outcomes, as some residents revealed new entrepreneurial plans to create a museum and shops. To date, the SWS case illustrates the conversation-development dilemma and the fact that a true 'win-win' scenario is highly unlikely (Campbell et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2011).

These findings offer **bottom-up insights for top-down governance**. Specifically, it invites us to consider how scholars and practitioners might frame, address and include local perceptions of identity and agency in governance arrangements and policy. For some Sakteng residents, subjective wellbeing was tied to sense of place and having a clean, healthy environment. With this in mind, how might these values be included in public policy? In Ecuador, the constitution specifically defends the inalienable 'Rights of Nature': the public has the right to protect the Earth and petition the state on behalf of ecosystems, and the state is compelled to take remedial action if violations occur (Deneulin, 2012; Guydnas, 2011). Increased self-determination and effective policies require the development of approaches that engage with different tourism stakeholders while ensuring that local and indigenous people from marginalised communities have the necessary information and tools to make informed decisions.

Subjective wellbeing of local and indigenous people, particularly in terms of identity and spiritual beliefs of sacred places in nature, can be strengthened when traditional and spiritual rituals are respected and integrated into ecotourism development (cf., Dobson & Mamyev, 2010). The present guidelines for ecotourism in Merak-Sakteng, which do not clearly reflect local or indigenous values (Chapter 4; Karst,

2016), could benefit in this regard. Recently, the Denesoline people of northern Canada have created an indigenised visitor code of conduct for two PAs in their territories (Holmes, Grimwood, King, & the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, 2016), which identifies ways in which visitors can respect and share in the protection of natural resources. Fisheries research confirms that fishing communities have a strong sense of pride and identity as fisherfolk, yet the different wellbeing aspirations and strategies adopted to attain these goals can lead to conflicts over potential management regimes (Coulthard et al., 2011; Weeratunge et al., 2014). These findings indicate how different institutional and governance arrangements, such as an interactive or collaborative governance approach, can be used to re-interpret policies to resolve wellbeing conflicts (Coulthard et al., 2011; Olsson et al., 2004).

## **5.8 Conclusions**

In this study, we developed an integrative approach to wellbeing for analysing ecotourism development with a view to orient attention to sustainability concerns. The framework was empirically applied to three indigenous communities in a remote protected area of Bhutan. Despite similarities and differences in perceptions of wellbeing found among community members, social-relational aspects of life tended to overshadow material needs and desires for many Brokpas because who you know and the types of relationships you cultivate are equally, if not more, important than what you have. Although peace and harmony in society were highly valued by all community participants, tensions between residents, park staff and other government agencies and external actors revealed a more complex reality.

Our findings infer a strong connection between subjective and social-relational wellbeing and ecological conditions. Although locals felt connected their natural environment, they were not consistently mindful of sustainable usage, consumption and impact, which appears to have resulted in a 'tragedy of the commons' for forest resources to some extent. Virtually all participants, even those who believed that healthy ecosystems were critical to their wellbeing, desired increased or unrestricted access to forests and grazing land, or a direct road to villages. The growing waste disposal problem and potential increase in tourist arrivals also point to challenges in policy and governance. Moreover, the construction of the illegal road and blatant disregard for park authority by some community members imply a strong link between subjective wellbeing, social-relational wellbeing and decline in ecological conditions. Careful and explicit discussion of trade-offs may enable stakeholders to negotiate and make choices that better reflect short and long-term goals and needs for nature conservation and livelihood security.

This study identifies two potential areas of research. First, this research did not account for broader power dynamics across gender and age. Although it is commonly believed that Bhutan does not have significant gender equality issues, women tend to underperform in education and employment, and a high

incidence and tolerance of domestic violence has been reported in recent years (ADB, 2014). Future research using the SEWB approach might focus on women's roles in ecotourism development, particularly in weaving co-operatives and handicraft stores, which may generate benefits, inequities or imbalances around access to resources, agency, and social-relational wellbeing, as in the case of women in Vietnam (Tran & Walter, 2014) and Thailand (Ishii, 2012). Second, potential ontological and epistemological framings among the components of the SEWB framework were not explored in this paper. For instance, there may be inconsistencies between the different ontological framings of *buen vivir* and SES, which adopts a systems-based approach (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Patterson et al., 2016). This suggests the need for further investigation of potential philosophical contradictions of the framework elements.

This paper illustrated common conflicts between resource management policy and praxis, and offered an overview of social-ecological sustainability of ecotourism activities in an environmentally fragile, rural area. We did not engage in a systematic review of power or subjectivity in the context of ecotourism, nor did we delve into specific governance arrangements, successes or failures of ecotourism management or policy implications through a wellbeing perspective at different scales. These unexamined topics suggest areas for further investigation in the literature on terrestrial systems and in developing contexts. Additional empirical applications of the SEWB framework in different PAs and other countries would contribute greater insights from an integrated approach to wellbeing in theory and practice, and encourage discussion on trade-offs and decision-making in ecotourism and other conservation and development projects in fragile areas.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

This chapter reviews and synthesises the main research findings outlined in the previous five chapters, and summarises the overall research contributions. Following a review of the research purpose and objectives, and key findings and implications, this chapter clarifies the major academic and practical contributions of the research, including insights for PA governance with local and indigenous peoples. The chapter culminates with a discussion of the study limitations, opportunities for future research and final remarks.

#### 6.1 Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this doctoral research was to explore the impacts of ecotourism on the wellbeing of human societies and nature in remote PAs, and the connections between community-level ecotourism and other development initiatives to broader PA policies and practices. In order to address this overarching research goal, a wildlife sanctuary in eastern Bhutan was examined through a wellbeing lens to offer empirical insights to PA governance in Bhutan and other developing areas. This PA was one of the first in Bhutan to officially establish ecotourism initiatives for the intended benefit and participation of local and indigenous people.

This research had three specific objectives:

- 1) to critically examine stakeholder relations in PA conservation;
- 2) to identify and assess indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing in relation to ecotourism development; and
- 3) to refine and apply an integrative framework of wellbeing to empirically investigate the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in developing areas.

The SEWB framework outlined in Chapter 1 and further elaborated in Chapter 5 was developed in an effort to bridge several complex literatures with differing ontologies. A definition of ‘conceptual framework’ was included to explain the parameters of its development and use in this thesis. Each literature carries its own set of epistemologies and ontologies, indicated in its description of origin within the literature review. The SEWB framework builds on existing theories and concepts that have a lengthy history of empirical application and rigour. The concepts were linked together through a series of similarities and complementarities, and their attention to issues of sustainability. The SEWB framework offers a flexible lens that can be adjusted and applied beyond the literature I engaged in for this thesis dissertation.

## 6.2 Key Findings

### 6.2.1 Main research findings

Research findings were presented in three separate but interconnected manuscripts. Chapter 3 addressed the first research objective and set the stage for the research, introducing the conservation challenges for stakeholders through the broader context of modernisation and democratisation in the case study of a remote PA. Chapter 4 built on the need for deeper analysis of socio-cultural influences and values in PA communities that were identified in Chapter 3 through use of an indigenous wellbeing (*buen vivir*) perspective to fulfil the second research objective. Chapter 5 addressed the third research objective by refining and operationalising an integrative framework of wellbeing to examine the ways in which ecotourism enhances or constrains social-ecological sustainability in PA ecotourism development. It expanded the concept of social wellbeing by elaborating on *buen vivir* (Chapter 4) and combining social wellbeing and *buen vivir* with the SES perspective. This section summarises the major findings from each manuscript.

Chapter 3 presented an empirical analysis of stakeholder relations in a wildlife sanctuary within the larger context of democratic reform and modernisation in Bhutan, focusing on the progress and outcomes of two development projects, CGI sheeting distribution and ecotourism development. The research imparted five key findings. First, less attention to implementation and planning stages of project design and pressure from higher authorities resulted in poor execution and quality of work, hasty decision-making and unmet goals. These results are frequently reported in previous studies on conservation and development projects (Kiss, 2004; Wells & McShane, 2004). Second, cultural norms were factors that strongly influenced (in)action among indigenous community members, while local sense of ownership and commitment to development projects was weak. Brokpa cultural norms and behaviour appear to impede relations with non-Brokpa stakeholders, which suggests a need for more time and effort by all stakeholders to build better relationships of understanding and trust. Third, trust and accountability were mutual concerns among community and park staff. In turn, lack of trust bred the common cycle of distrust, under-performance and less desirable project outcomes (Dahlberg & Burlando, 2009; Roth, 2004). Unsurprisingly, there is a great lack of local capacity building and participation in local communities. Fourth, the progression from traditional to more modern lifestyles has placed additional pressure on indigenous communities and park staff and has contributed to mismatched expectations between stakeholders. Fifth, we anticipate that prospective trade-offs will become an increasingly important part of project planning and decision-making as modernisation progresses to counter high expectations with reality (McShane et al., 2011).

These findings suggest that challenges and frustrations around project expectation and delivery between stakeholders in times of social and political change are similar to stakeholders in non-transitional times. However, indigenous communities, particularly semi-pastoral groups such as the Brokpa, face their own specific socio-cultural challenges that could benefit from adjustments in approaches in communication, participation, and project and PA management. A task of this nature is not easy by any means if local cultural norms and lack of trust among in stakeholders are prevalent.

Building on the need for greater understanding of ideological and socio-cultural factors in PA communities identified in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 presented local, indigenous perceptions of ecotourism and wellbeing as they related to PA practice with attention to the role of socio-cultural factors in ecotourism development. The indigenous wellbeing perspective, *buen vivir* (Gudynas, 2011; Deneulin, 2012), was used for analysis to identify four key insights. First, perceptions of ecotourism varied among community members and contrasted with the official park definition. Most local people found it difficult to define what ecotourism meant to them and they were not familiar with the existing park guidelines, indicating a disconnect between the government vision for ecotourism and real-world practice. Next, wellbeing was conceived in diverse ways but corresponded to key features of *buen vivir*, demonstrating the impacts of ecotourism through human relationships, human-nature relationships, and culture and spirituality. Furthermore, indigenous worldviews which connect social values and beliefs to nature were pervasive in local communities. As such, linkages between sacred places in nature and alternative worldviews are important factors to consider and incorporate in the planning and development processes of ecotourism to encourage greater sustainability in practice.

Chapter 4 highlights that indigenous cosmologies and traditional values, namely sacred sites in nature, may also be heightened and safeguarded through their incorporation into modern-day policies and institutions. This may include integrating customary moral and social values in institutional guidelines and legal precepts. These findings emphasise the significance of indigenous cosmologies, socio-cultural values and spiritual beliefs around nature to ecotourism development and local PA governance (Brooks, 2013; Ura, 2001; Whitecross, 2010) despite encroaching modernisation and democratisation in Bhutan. Findings also indicate the role that indigenous worldviews and traditional values might still play in modern society and institutions to support sustainable outcomes.

Chapter 5 presented an integrative wellbeing framework for ecotourism scholarship that evolved out approaches in development studies (Coulthard et al., 2011; Jiménez, 2011; White, 2010) and SES literature (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Glaser, 2006). The dimensions of the framework are interchangeable and intricately linked. The SEWB framework was employed to assess subjective, socio-relational, material and ecological dimensions of wellbeing in the context of PA ecotourism development.

This chapter engaged further with the features of *buen vivir* that were discussed in Chapter 4, which were used to create a holistic framework.

Three major findings were presented in Chapter 5. First, it suggested the importance and complexities of social-relational aspects of life for wellbeing among semi-pastoral mountain people in Merak-Sakteng, a finding that is similar to studies in the fisheries literature (Coulthard et al., 2011; Weeratunge et al., 2014). Overall, social-relational aspects of life tended to outrank material needs and desires because relationships chiefly determined quality of life for people living in tight-knit communities. Second, there appears to be a strong connection between subjective and social-relational wellbeing and deteriorating ecological conditions. Although local people felt connected to their natural environment, locals often did not act sustainably nor were they particularly mindful about sustainable practices. This finding suggests that policy and governance could be re-examined to abate further ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Basurto & Ostrom, 2009; Hardin, 1968) for forest resources. Lastly, it suggests the significance of power relations between stakeholders in negotiating sense of wellbeing and that wellbeing dimensions involve constant trade-offs in relation to concerns of justice and authority, particularly when dealing with natural resources (Jentoft, 2013; Kooiman et al., 2005).

### **6.2.2 Reflections**

A common thread throughout all three manuscripts was the overarching effect of modernisation, foreign (Western) culture and urban lifestyles. Inferences to the impacts of modernisation and foreign influences made in Chapter 3 appeared in Chapter 4 and resurfaced in Chapter 5. The findings in Chapter 4 point to an apparent ideological shift in Brokpa society from traditional indigenous cosmology to a more modern, secular and materialistic worldview. The rise of social and environmental problems, such as burning garbage around sacred natural sites and robbing sacred monuments, appear to be symptomatic of the breakdown in moral values and *tha damtshig*. It can be argued that implicit, internalised systems are gradually being replaced by externalised controls that are explicit, formal and distinctly foreign (Allison, 2004; Ura, 2001). However external, democratic controls may not be entirely effective in a society that still retains many aspects of its semi-pastoral lifestyle and traditions, as evident in the illegal activities undertaken by Merak residents in Chapter 5. The three manuscript chapters demonstrate a PA and a nation at a crossroads between tradition and modernity.

Power was another theme that arose in each manuscript. Chapter 3 offered insights on struggles of power through the tensions between community and non-community (park staff) stakeholders as a result of mismatched delivery and expectations in development projects. In Chapter 4, the lack of capacity and organisation at the community level suggested power imbalances at the intra-community level as well as

between community and external authority figures, which has had mixed outcomes, varying from external patronage (e.g., high compensation for work related to donor-funded projects) to internal resistance (e.g., illegal road construction). The resulting framework in Chapter 5 recognised the importance of stakeholder (including power) relations in mediating wellbeing dimensions. Issues of access, distribution and equity connect concerns of subjective aspects of self-determination and self-empowerment (Deneulin, 2012; White, 2010) back to policy and governance in terms of natural resource management and distribution (Bojer, 2006; Jentoft, 2013). These findings imply that greater attention to power dynamics across wellbeing dimensions would be valuable in exploring issues of governance, and social and environmental justice in future research.

When I reflect on the outcomes of this research and the three research objectives, social and cultural values repeatedly come to the fore. This finding is similar to cases that have been highlighted in the literature from the Global North and South (cf., Colding & Folke, 2001; Gavin et al., 2015; Tengö et al., 2007) and indicates the intricate layers and challenges that are involved in devising park management plans and policies. The goal of achieving successful conservation and development projects in PAs relies heavily on the strength of relationships between internal and external stakeholders in PAs. Stakeholder relationships can become extremely complicated and strained, and cultural context adds an extra dimension to the challenge. To improve the sustainability outcomes of ecotourism development and actively engage indigenous people in remote areas, policies and practices will need to incorporate local worldviews and socio-cultural values in a direct and dedicated manner that may require more time and effort than current project timelines allow.

## **6.3 Contributions**

### **6.3.1 Academic contributions**

This research contributes to scholarship in ecotourism, conservation and development. The study also makes broad contributions to research in terrestrial (mountain) ecosystems and Bhutan. This section reviews the key theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of this thesis.

Theoretically, this research contributes an integrative framework of wellbeing that orients attention to sustainability concerns by uniting theoretical perspectives from development studies (social wellbeing, *buen vivir*) and social-ecological systems. The literature reviews in Chapters 1 and 5 found that current approaches to wellbeing in ecotourism studies (e.g., capability, sustainable livelihoods, quality of life, subjective wellbeing) provide limited insight on environmental sustainability and ecosystem conservation, which are topics more frequently published in non-tourism oriented journals (cf., Ferraro, 2001; Kiss,

2004; Wunder, 2007). This contribution bridges the gap through a multi-dimensional framework to analyse ecotourism development through ecological, social-relational, material and subjective domains.

The research offers a theoretical and methodological application of the *buen vivir* perspective to understand and analyse wellbeing (Chapter 4). The concept of *buen vivir* was introduced and seminal features of the approach were simplified into ‘relationships’ (intra-human, human-nature) and ‘culture and spirituality’ categories to study perceptions of wellbeing through relational, ecological, cultural and spiritual components that embrace an indigenous ontology (Deneulin, 2012; Villalba, 2013). This approach is novel to ecotourism literature and may be employed in other countries and contexts, where suitable.

This research contributes empirically to research in terrestrial ecosystems in the context of Bhutan. Oriented in the Himalayan mountains, this research provides much needed perspectives on wellbeing in forestry (cf., Kusel, 2001; Kusel et al., 2003) in comparison to the growing number of inquiries examining social wellbeing among fisherfolk in coastal and marine ecosystems and the implications for marine policy (Coulthard et al., 2011; Jentoft, 2013; Weeratunge et al., 2014). Through a case study on three largely indigenous communities in a remote Bhutanese PA, this research adds a combined social-ecological, geographical perspective to the emergent body of studies on Bhutan, since the limited amount of first-hand research on the Bhutanese Brokpa is largely anthropological in scope (cf., Wangmo, 1990; Young, 2015). It also contributes to the small body of research on the dynamic relationship between communities and PAs in Bhutan, a nation where there are multiple barriers to conducting empirical research (i.e., attaining a visa and permission to conduct research, travel restrictions) for non-Bhutanese researchers.

Finally, this research adds to broader debates around parks and conservation. Specifically, it raises some arguments against ‘fences and fines’ or fortress conservation (Adams, 2008; Brandon & Wells, 1992), indicating a need for more progressive social conservationism which supports participatory and collaborative governance approaches (cf., Coulthard et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2011; Tàbara & Chabay, 2013). A protectionist, restrictive model to conservation is likely not effective when considering local and indigenous communities near PA boundaries, particularly in a world that is increasingly international and ‘modern’. People and parks stand to benefit from greater inclusion and participation of local and indigenous stakeholders, rather than the largely top-down approach that prevails in Bhutan and many other nations.

### 6.3.2 Practical contributions

Research findings offer relevant insights for diverse stakeholders—community, indigenous groups, non-community—in Bhutan, and for resource managers and stakeholders engaged in ecotourism development and PA governance globally. This section reflects on potential applications of this research for community members, practitioners and other external stakeholders, and includes a set of recommended strategies for improvement in overlying areas of communication, participation and governance.

#### *Potential applications of the study*

The SEWB framework and case study in SWS may inform development projects and evaluations of wellbeing beyond the Merak-Sakteng region. The framework complements research on the Bhutanese GNH index and the case study offers valuable lessons to Bhutanese PAs that are currently starting to implement ecotourism development, such as Jigme Dorji National Park, where the semi-nomadic indigenous Layaps reside. More generally, insights on remote communities living within PA boundaries that encounter complex obstacles in development projects may be of particular interest to indigenous and remote area communities as well as decision-makers in other countries working on measurements and indices of wellbeing (Brooks, 2013; Theerapappisit, 2003; White, 2009). In the spirit of encouraging community-driven and independently-funded development projects such as ecotourism, which this study recognises as an imperfect but potential path toward preserving traditional knowledge and enhancing social-ecological sustainability, future grant proposals might consider the organisation and creation of inclusive, community-driven ventures that are mindful of participation and social-ecological wellbeing.

#### *Recommendations for practice*

Research findings recognise that **better communication and understanding** can be fostered between different stakeholder groups. Framing conversations on ecotourism challenges and opportunities from a wellbeing perspective invites diverse stakeholder groups to have honest dialogue about conceivable areas for improvement in a holistic and compassionate manner because the interests and vantage points of all stakeholders are laid bare, thereby cultivating greater trust and accountability (Davenport et al., 2007; Stern, 2008). Communication between indigenous Brokpa and park staff can be further enhanced when **greater recognition and value are placed on indigenous knowledge and systems in PA and tourism policy and management**. As discussed in Chapter 4, outcomes imply that indigenous outlooks, religion and informal rules may bolster sustainable behaviours and efforts, including ecotourism, in spite of modernisation. These findings not only assert that Merak-Sakteng is still regarded as a holy place, but support the indigenous cosmological view of the sacredness of nature, which in turn reinforces the ties that bind humans and ecology (Andriotis, 2009; Berkes, 2012; Rutte, 2011; Ura, 2001).

A strong and inclusive communications-based approach aligns with the promotion of an inclusive, uniform definition and vision for ecotourism that clearly reflects local and traditional values in the PA ecotourism guidelines. This step is important because definitions are the basis of policy making (Fennell, 2001). In the case of ecotourism in SWS and Bhutanese PAs, existing ecotourism definition and guidelines that were crafted by NRED could be used by government agencies (e.g., park management) to revisit development project priorities and hold clear dialogue among local and non-local stakeholders who are engaged in and supportive of PA ecotourism initiatives.

For SWS park management, government, donor agencies and other non-community stakeholders, certain measures may be adopted to cultivate stronger, more collaborative PA management for societies in transition. For one, nurturing **more local participation and co-operation in project development and implementation through flexible governance approaches** such as adaptive co-management or community-based conservation (Armitage, 2005; Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003) may ensure more realistic ICDP outcomes and empower community members, and consequently decrease dependence on government subsidies. Building capacity through a **learning process that allows community to have space to make mistakes and learn by experience** (Ostrom, 2007; Tàbara & Chabay, 2013) may build confidence in community stakeholders who are less advantaged (e.g., poor, less education, few skills). This measure may increase participation and accountability in development projects and therefore ‘level the playing field’, improve organisation and leadership among intra-community stakeholders (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014), and foster greater organisation.

Another recommendation is to devise **longer, realistic timelines and heighten monitoring**, which could foster sustainability learning, greater decentralisation of power over to communities and expansion of institutional arrangements to enhance sustainability learning feedback (Tàbara & Chabay, 2013) in local decision-making and collaboration with non-community stakeholders. The expansion of institutions such as PAs into remote areas like Merak-Sakteng represent globalised, Western conservation ideals (Lacey & Ilcan, 2015) extending into traditional places where existing social and economic systems, such as pastoral or nomadic lifestyles, may not be prepared for modern conservation practices, particularly if they are orchestrated through a centralised approach. Slower, cautious timelines for implementation and monitoring would be a preventative measure against hasty decisions that have long-term implications.

A final recommended measure is to provide **greater support to and rely on the expertise of local and regional government staff** who liaise with local and indigenous peoples on a regular basis. Local staff must feel empowered to voice their concerns and share constructive feedback with managers who are receptive to creating and implementing targeted interventions when necessary to foster greater

collaboration with local communities and improve park-people relations (Allendorf et al., 2012). In this way, projects may be monitored and local expectations managed more effectively.

## 6.4 Research Limitations

There were theoretical and methodological constraints to this study. The first theoretical limitation concerns the theme of power, which is an implicit rather than explicit component of the SEWB framework. However, the recurrence of power in the manuscript chapters and study findings show that power is primarily in the hands of government and external agents. Local people tend to react (or not) to situations where they feel power is being asserted over them in ways that are compatible with their culture (Chapters 3 and 5, Restrepo-Campo & Turbay, 2015; Uribe, 1997; Wangmo, 1990). Given the all-pervasive power of institutions such as park authorities and other structures or actors in PA management, the current SEWB framework appears to obfuscate or hide power. It would be strengthened through overt acknowledgement that power is a critical and inherent component of the model. Greater emphasis on power and participation in the SEWB framework and research analysis could advance the understanding of tourism impacts in developing areas.

The second theoretical limitation, which was identified in Chapters 1 and 5, is that potential ontological and epistemological contradictions among the components of the SEWB framework were not explored. For example, there may be inconsistencies between the different ontological framings of *buen vivir* or social wellbeing to that of SES, which adopts a systems-based approach (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2003; Patterson et al., 2016). The possibility that the ontological intentions of each element may have philosophical implications on knowledge creation merits further research.

In terms of methodological limitations, part of this research is grounded in the SEWB framework (Chapter 5), which evolved out of the social wellbeing approach, which has its own limitations. A common issue in operationalising social wellbeing has been the subjectivity of wellbeing, since understandings and perceptions captured in one moment may change over time (White, 2010). Although shifting reflections were captured to some degree in the course of this research (two visits over a six-month period), it is possible that a longer, longitudinal study would have garnered more detailed results as ecotourism development progressed. Repeated observations in the field at a later point in time were not possible due to funding and travel restraints.

Social wellbeing tends to use either qualitative or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and data (mixed methods) for monitoring and evaluation (Camfield, Choudhury, & Devine, 2009; White, 2009). In the SEWB approach, both types of data were collected but a qualitative analysis was largely employed. A mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis was not deemed

necessary here for two reasons. First, time and budget constraints prohibited a larger sample, which would have involved administration of face-to-face questionnaires in a predominantly illiterate, pastoral population at the community level. Second, a case study approach was employed, for which a qualitative analysis was well suited to address the research question and objectives (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Another methodological limitation is the ability to generalise study findings beyond the immediate case study. This issue of transferability is a concern in case study research, but unlike statistical generalisations common to survey research, case studies rely on analytical generalisations, where study results relate to a broader theory (Hay, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009). In this research, the case study of SWS exemplifies how the SEWB framework was applied in a remote PA to reveal local and non-local understandings of social-ecological wellbeing that support sustainable projects and decision-making in resource management and policy. The SEWB framework is a replicable model for application in other developing area contexts.

A final barrier was my role as an outside researcher. Although English was widely spoken among Bhutanese with some English education I made effort to learn certain words and expressions in Brokpa and Dzongkha (both Sino-Tibetan languages) and Sharchopkha (also known as Tshangla, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in eastern Bhutan). These languages are not easy to learn in a short period of time. Naturally, there were some limits to gaining trust, understanding spoken language and non-verbal cues, and cultural expressions. Under the circumstances, I relied heavily upon field assistants for translation and interpretation assistance. Another aspect of this barrier was the possibility that some participants may have thought that I had perceived bias due to my affiliation with NRED and SWS park management or may have felt intimidated (or other emotions) by my institutional partners, who manage the natural resources and all major development projects in the Sanctuary (see Chapter 2). However, during every interview I and my field assistants assured potential participants that I was an independent researcher who was committed to ensuring their privacy (as requested) and confidentiality of the data.

## **6.5 Opportunities for Future Research**

Findings emanating from this thesis indicate three potential research priorities in areas that extend beyond the scope of this study. First, in relation to findings of distrust and lack of co-operation among stakeholders in Chapter 3, further research could include an exploration of governance and decision-making in intra-community stakeholder relations, and the intricate dynamics of inter-agency government relationships. Such research, using the SEWB framework, would strengthen the framework, could benefit future ICDP development and decision-making in PAs and developing countries, and may even support the democratisation process (Batterbury et al., 1997). Additionally, more research is needed on general

development programs in the context of political and democratic reforms, with full recognition that local expectations may far exceed what is feasible to accomplish.

Second, Chapter 3 notes that very few studies (cf., Kusel 2001; Kusel & Adler, 2003; Pullin et al., 2013) have adopted a wellbeing lens to examine terrestrial ecosystems and Chapter 4 alludes to other countries in the Global North and South that are developing measures and indices of wellbeing similar to GNH in Bhutan (Brooks, 2013; Theerapappisit, 2003; White, 2009). This presents a significant opportunity to apply the wellbeing framework to other terrestrial cases in protected and developing areas.

Third, the theoretical limitation of the SEWB framework as identified in Section 6.4 highlights power dynamics as a research priority. Chapter 5 specifically identified the need for further research on the complexity of power issues. More attention to power dynamics across gender and age in future ecotourism development would be useful as emerging micro-enterprises may generate benefits, inequities or imbalances around access to resources, agency, and social-relational wellbeing, as demonstrated in related regional studies (Ishii, 2012; Tran & Walter, 2014). In addition, Chapter 5 did not engage in a systematic review of power or subjectivity in the context of tourism, or power relations and wellbeing in specific governance (institutional) arrangements regarding the successes or challenges of ecotourism management or policy. These suggest areas of further research using a social-ecological perspective that brings overt attention to participation, equity and social justice to examine power relationships at different scales. This may not only strengthen the SEWB framework but contribute richer insights into governance and social justice concerns to literature on terrestrial systems in developing contexts.

## **6.6 Final Remarks**

Humans have benefitted from nature, including fragile environments, since time immemorial. We all rely on ecosystem services to survive, some of us more acutely than others. Protected areas are socially constructed land and seascapes predominantly designed to conserve nature and wildlife first, before human needs. While I appreciate conservationist values and remain cautious of ecotourism developments in remote and ecologically vulnerable areas, the expansion of development activities is an inevitable global reality. In hiking and camping trips to PAs in Canada, Cuba and elsewhere in recent years, I have personally seen examples, albeit few, of carefully orchestrated and managed ecotourism projects that have effectively realised both human development and nature conservation goals. There are no simple resolutions for conservation-development challenges and dilemmas, but we can learn from experience and adjust our course of action accordingly. To date, Bhutan has largely maintained its strong commitment to conserve its natural resources and cultural heritage through progressive policies and programmes over the past decade. The intention to develop ecotourism in Bhutanese PAs presents a tremendous opportunity to build on this conservation legacy and attain more social-ecological sustainability.

In this research, the study of ecotourism among indigenous communities in a remote Bhutanese PA illustrated strong connections between the subjective, social-relational, ecological and material wellbeing of people and nature through the refinement of an integrative framework. The three dissertation manuscripts contribute primarily to ecotourism and conservation research and practice, and more broadly to scholarship in terrestrial ecosystems and Bhutanese studies. This thesis offers empirical insights on stakeholder relations in the context of a nation in Asia undergoing modernisation and democratisation, and advocates further inclusion of local and indigenous perceptions, worldviews and participation in ecotourism development and PA governance to achieve more sustainable and successful outcomes in developing areas.

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## Appendix A

### List of Mammals and avifauna in Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary included in CITES and the *Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan, 1995* (Schedule 1)

Source: WWF Bhutan & SWS (2011)

Sl.No.	Scientific Name	Common Name	Class
1	<i>Ailurus fulgens</i>	Red Panda	Appendix I of CITES
2	<i>Capricornis/Naemorbedus sumatraensis</i>	Himalayan Serow	
3	<i>Cuon alpinus</i>	Wild Dog	
4	<i>Naemorbedus goral</i>	Goral	
5	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Common Leopard	
6	<i>Presbytis pileata/ Trachypithecus pileatus</i>	Capped Langur	
7	<i>Ursus/ Selenarctos tibetanus</i>	Himalayan Black Bear	
8	<i>Bos grunniens</i>	Yak	
1	<i>Moschus chrysogaster</i>	Himalayan Musk Deer	Appendix I/II of CITES
1	<i>Felis chaus</i>	Jungle Cat	Appendix II of CITES
2	<i>Macaca assamensis</i>	Assamese Macaque	
1	<i>Martes flavigula</i>	Yellow Throated Martin	Appendix III of CITES
1	<i>Moschus chrysogaster</i>	Musk Deer	FNCAB 1995, Schedule-I
2	<i>Lophophorus impejenuis</i>	Monal Pheasant	
3	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Common Leopard	
4	<i>Ursus/ Selenarctos tibetanus</i>	Himalayan Black Bear	
5	<i>Ailurus fulgens</i>	Red Panda	
6	<i>Capricornis/Naemorbedus sumatraensis</i>	Serow	

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocols**

- (1) Unstructured Interviews
- (2) Semi-Structured Interviews (Community/Household)
- (3) Semi-Structured Interviews (Non-Community)
- (4) Focus Group #1: Wellbeing, Ecotourism & Local Engagement
- (5) Focus Group #2: Linkages between Wellbeing and Nature Conservation

## B1. Protocol for Unstructured Interviews

Principal Investigator: Heidi Karst

Supervisor: Dr. Sanjay Nepal

Expected length of interview: Varies, approx. 30 mins–1 hr (TBD)

**Purpose:** To use open-ended questions in a conversation to: a) gain a broad sense of local perceptions on primary research themes and orientate self to the community; b) identify new and relevant themes; c) help finalise questions for semi-structured interviews and focus groups; and d) pinpoint potential participants for semi-structured interviews.

**Prospective Interviewees:** Community or non-community members at large.

### INTRODUCTION/CONSENT

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know I am a PhD student from Canada who is conducting research on ecotourism activities involving people and communities who live in parks in Bhutan. This study is being done in collaboration with NRED. As a resident of this community, you've been invited to participate in this interview to share your thoughts and opinions on ecotourism. Tourism development can be an important way to provide jobs and economic opportunities for locals, as well as protect the environment, but it can also cause problems. I'd like to talk to you about different aspects of ecotourism, and how ecotourism does or doesn't help people and nature in your community. Results from this study will be shared with NRED and other organisations, in the hope of helping people and wildlife in other parks and sanctuaries in Bhutan.

Your decision to do this interview is completely voluntary, and there are no known risks involved. If you choose not to participate or want to stop at any time, you will not be penalised by either myself or NRED. Our discussion should take (amount of time) If you have any questions, concerns, or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact NRED field contact. After the interview is done, I may be in touch with you again to see if you are interested in participating in a future interview or focus group.

*Confirm desire to remain anonymous or otherwise:*

All responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified as a participant in research reports and publications unless you agree to be cited by name or by your organisation. The data collected, with no personal identifiers, will be kept for 5 years on a secured computer.

*Review consent process:*

By freely agreeing to this interview, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing me or NRED from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your participation confirms the following:

- You have (listened to) the information about the study being conducted by Heidi Karst of the Department of Geography at the University of Waterloo.
- You have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to your questions, and any additional details requested.
- You are aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in research reports or future publications, and all quotations will be anonymous, unless permission is otherwise given.
- You are aware that you may withdraw from the study without any penalty at any time by advising the researcher of this decision.
- This project has been reviewed and approved MOAF and a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee.

- You know that you may contact NRED field contact if you have any comments or concerns about participating in this study.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained? Are you willing to participate in this interview? (Verbal consent)

Do I have your permission to use quotations from this interview? If so, do you prefer to be cited by name, by organisation, or anonymously? (Verbal consent)

Time:

Location:

Characteristics of participant:

**N.B. Questions listed in the table below are only intended as examples. Precise themes and questions to be confirmed, based on: a) results of unstructured interviews, and b) feedback from NRED colleagues.**

Themes	Sample Questions
Interviewee background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic information: name, gender, job/role</li> </ul>
Wellbeing and poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does it mean for you to live well and be happy?</li> <li>• What material and physical resources do you need to live well and be happy?</li> <li>• What does it mean to be “poor”, in your opinion?</li> </ul>
Community and social relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does community look like to you?</li> <li>• Do you think community is important? Why/why not?</li> </ul>
Ecotourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think are the most important issues related to ecotourism in your village/town?</li> <li>• Identify and describe any natural and/or man-made resources that have spiritual or historical value for you/your community.</li> </ul>
Power, local decision-making and participation in ecotourism and conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of ecotourism activities take place locally?</li> <li>• Who do you think are the people directly involved (e.g., managers, provides services) in ecotourism?</li> </ul>
Any additional items?	

**\* END OF QUESTION-ASKING PHASE \***

### CLOSING

Invite interviewee to ask questions. Clarify any factual errors expressed by participant during the interview.

Thank interviewee for her/his time.

## **B2. Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews (Community/Household)**

Principal investigator: Heidi Karst

Supervisor: Dr. Sanjay Nepal

Expected length of interview: 1 hr

**Purpose:** To gather information about local perceptions on a) concepts of wellbeing (objective subjective, relational) and ecotourism; b) levels of community participation viz. other stakeholders in ecotourism initiatives; c) knowledge of local governance measures and supports; and d) impact of local development activities and conservation in protected areas. To elicit domains domains/factors/aspects which are considered important for wellbeing.

**Prospective interviewees:** Community members engaged or interested in ecotourism development in their local area.

### **INTRO/CONSENT**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, I am a PhD student from Canada who is conducting research on ecotourism activities in collaboration with NRED. As a resident of this community, you've been invited to share your thoughts and opinions on ecotourism. Tourism development can be an important way to provides jobs and economic opportunities for locals, as well as protect the environment, but it can also cause problems. I'd like to talk to you about different aspects of ecotourism, and how ecotourism does or does not help people and nature in your community. Results from this study will be shared with NRED and other organisations, in the hope of helping people and wildlife in other parks and sanctuaries in Bhutan.

Your consent to do this interview is completely voluntary, and there are no known risks involved. If you choose not to participate or want to stop at any time, just tell the interviewer. You will not be penalised by either myself or NRED. This research project has been reviewed and approved by MOAF and a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Our discussion should take approximately 1 hr. If you have any questions, concerns, or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact (name - e.g. Mr. Dorji, Sr. Forester), or Dr. Karma Tshering, CFO, NRED (*Heidi can provide contact information*). After this interview is done, I may be in touch with you again to see if you are interested in participating in a future focus group meeting.

*Confirm desire to remain anonymous or otherwise:*

All responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified as a participant in research reports and publications unless you agree to be cited by name or your organisation. The data collected, with no personal identifiers, will be kept for 5 years on a secured computer.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained?

*Review consent process:*

By freely agreeing to this interview, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing me or NRED from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your participation confirms that you understand all the conditions mentioned above, and have had the opportunity to ask questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to your questions, and any additional details requested.

Are you willing to participate in the interview? (Verbal consent)

Do I have your permission to use quotations from the interview? If so, do you prefer to be cited by name, by organisation, or anonymously? (Verbal consent)

Time & date:

Location (village name & place of interview, e.g. home, café, etc.):

Name/characteristics of participant:

Participant # :

**A. Respondent Information**

1. Age:
2. Sex: M or F
3. Marital status:
  - a. Unmarried
  - b. Married
  - c. Living together
  - d. Widowed
  - e. Separated
  - f. Other (specify)
4. Educational level
  1. No schooling (illiterate)
  2. No schooling (literate)
  3. Primary (Grade 1-6)
  4. Lower secondary (Grade 7-8)
  5. Middle secondary (Grade 9-10)
  6. Higher secondary (Grade 11-12)
  7. College (diploma)
  8. Master's or PhD (specify)
  9. Vocational training
5. Activity/Employment
  - a. Employer
  - b. Self employed
  - c. Salaried worker
  - d. Wage worker (per piece)
  - e. Monthly/weekly/daily wage (specify)
  - f. Ad hoc
  - g. Unpaid family worker (agriculture)
  - h. Trade
  - i. Manufacturing
  - j. Unemployed (either seeking or not seeking employment, pls specify)
  - k. Engaged in household work
  - l. Student
  - m. Retired
  - n. Other (specify e.g. physical or mental disability)
6. Ethnicity: a) Ngalop b) Brokpa c) Sharchop d) Lhotshampa e) Mixed (specify) f) Other (specify)
7. Religion: a) Buddhist b) Mon c) Mixed (specify) d) Other (specify)
8. Household Composition
  - a. List members of household, their gender, and their relation to respondent (e.g., mother, in-law, etc.). Include list of ages of children, and whether all people in household live in house at present.
9. Economic Condition
  - a. What is your average monthly household income? (average monthly salary)
  - b. How much do you spend each month on: (Can prompt for other items)
    - i. Food
    - ii. Transport
    - iii. Rent
    - iv. Education
    - v. Health care
    - vi. Utilities (e.g. electricity)
    - vii. Membership dues (e.g., for an association, etc.)
    - viii. Loan repayments
    - ix. Other (e.g., religious, entertainment, etc.)

**B. Meanings of Wellbeing: Material/Physical (including Natural) Resources**

1. In general, what does it mean for you to live well and be happy? (Get list of all domains/factors/aspects the person thinks are important for his/her wellbeing)
2. You mentioned some aspects that impact your wellbeing (state examples given above). I am going to ask you more specific questions about these, starting with resources. What material and physical resources do you need to live well and be happy?
3. What natural resources (e.g., plants, animals, environment) do you need to live well and be happy? Why?
4. At this point in your life, how satisfied are you with the access you have to the resources (man-made material and natural) that you need? [Read from options listed below]
  - a. Very satisfied
  - b. Satisfied
  - c. No problems
  - d. Not so satisfied
  - e. Worried
  - f. Very worried
5. Which people, and what services, institutions, and infrastructure are required for you to access the resources that you need? (name 2-3 things, if possible)
6. How satisfied are you with the people, services, institutions, and infrastructure that exist now to help you access the resources that you need? [Read from list of options below]
  - a. Very satisfied
  - b. Satisfied
  - c. No problems
  - d. Not so satisfied
  - e. Worried
  - f. Very worried
7. What are some things that constrain your access to resources?

**C. Relational Wellbeing**

This section assesses which relationships with people are important to achieve wellbeing, specifically focusing on how relationships influence livelihood activities, and how satisfied people are with those relationships. The term “relationship” is purposefully broad: it can include relationships with family, community, market contacts, government personnel – any person whom the interviewee deems as having a significant influence over their livelihood behavior and general wellbeing.

1. **What are the 3 most important relationships you have that impact your life and work/profession?**  
[Prompt: These can be people who might affect how you do your work, where you work. They can be +ve or –ve relationships. For each example, ask why they are important!]

Give respondent 2-3 minutes to think, and repeat question if necessary. Note any immediate responses.

If no response given, show **Fig. 1 of “Relational Landscape” (end of document)** and ask whether there are other relationships that are important to their lives as yak herders/farmers/etc. Start with the respondent’s family in the centre and move outwards to include all other degrees of relationship. For each criteria, list the relationships mentioned and why they are important.

2. **Out of all these relationships, can you select the top 3 most important ones that influence your livelihood (e.g., yak herding, farming, portering, etc.) decisions, with 1 being the most important?**  
[Show/read the list back to the person, so they can choose]

3. **Out of these 3 relationships you have mentioned, which one would you most like to change? Why? How would you change it?**

**D. Subjective Wellbeing – Quality of Life**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself: what are some things (good or bad) that have happened to you in your life? Which have been most significant or have had a big impact on your life today?

[Probe: Ask about childhood, adolescence, adulthood until now, if they are comfortable – ask for 1-2 examples maximum]

2. Do you have worries about the future? If so, what are they?

3. What are your hopes for the future?

4. Do you think these hopes will become reality one day? Why or why not?

5. Do you want your children to go into your profession (e.g., yak herding/farming /portering/etc.)? Why or why not?

6. Living well together – what is important for living well together in this community?

**E. Ecotourism**

1. What does “ecotourism” look like to you? (What does the word mean to you?)

2. What types of ecotourism activities take place locally?

3. In this village, how are decisions made about who participates in ecotourism activities? Who determines how money and/or other benefits are distributed? Why?

4. In your opinion, who should be responsible for ecotourism development in this village/town? Why?

5. How satisfied are you with the level of influence you have in ecotourism development now? Why?

6. What kinds of resources (e.g., institutions, people, funding) exist to support local participation in ecotourism development at present?

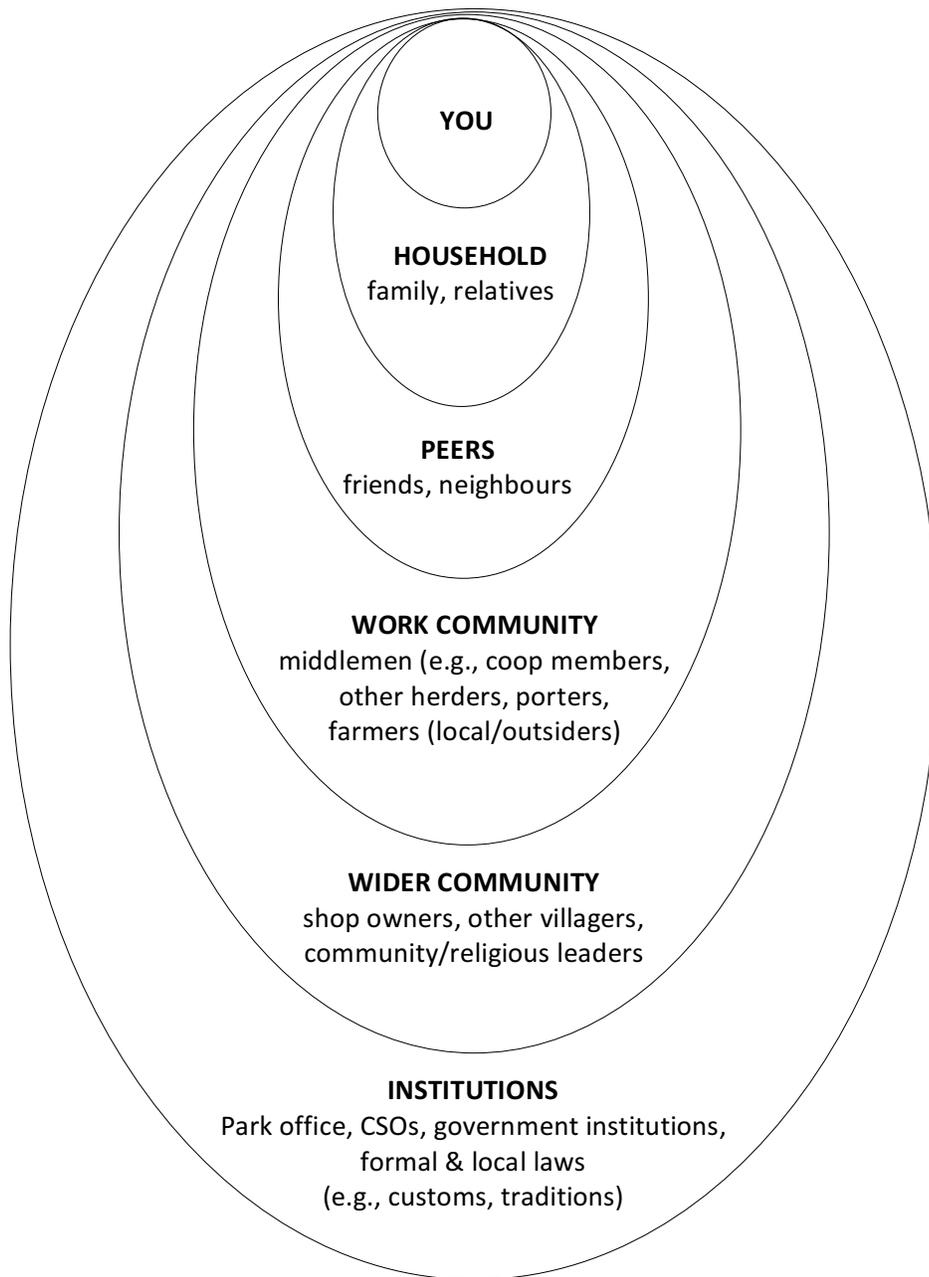
7. If you are unhappy with ecotourism development or conservation issues, what could be done to create change?

8. Any additional items or things you want me to know?

**CLOSING**

Invite participant to ask questions. Clarify any factual errors or confusion expressed by participant during interview. Thank participant for his/her time. Remind that information will be kept confidential and general findings will be shared with relevant agencies in hopes of benefitting the community, and that Heidi will try, funding pending, to return in the spring to share findings in person with all participants and the community.

**Figure. 1 Relational landscape**



### **B3. Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews (Non-Community)**

Principal investigator: Heidi Karst

Supervisor: Dr. Sanjay Nepal

Expected length of interview: 1-1.5 hrs

**Purpose:** To gather information on key government stakeholders in ecotourism to assess their understanding, levels of influence, and impact on development activities and conservation in protected areas.

**Prospective interviewees:** Various government personnel with vested interest, knowledge, and experience in ecotourism development in protected areas (e.g., park staff; representatives from government bodies NRED, MOAF, TCB).

#### **INTRO/CONSENT**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, I am a PhD student from Canada who is conducting research on ecotourism activities in collaboration with NRED. As a resident of this community, you've been invited to share your thoughts and opinions on ecotourism. Tourism development can be an important way to provides jobs and economic opportunities for locals, as well as protect the environment, but it can also cause problems. I'd like to talk to you about different aspects of ecotourism, and how ecotourism does or does not help people and nature in your community. Results from this study will be shared with NRED and other organisations, in the hope of helping people and wildlife in other parks and sanctuaries in Bhutan.

Your consent to do this interview is completely voluntary, and there are no known risks involved. If you choose not to participate or want to stop at any time, just tell the interviewer. You will not be penalised by either myself or NRED. This research project has been reviewed and approved by MOAF and a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Our discussion should take approximately 1-1.5 hrs. If you have any questions, concerns, or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact **Dr. Karma Tshering, CFO, NRED** (*Heidi will provide contact information*).

*Confirm desire to remain anonymous or otherwise:*

All responses will be kept confidential. You will not be identified as a participant in research reports and publications unless you agree to be cited by name or your organisation. The data collected, with no personal identifiers, will be kept for 5 years on a secured computer.

Do you have any questions about what I have just explained?

*Review consent process:*

By freely agreeing to this interview, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing me or NRED from their legal and professional responsibilities. Your participation confirms that you understand all the conditions mentioned above, and have had the opportunity to ask questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to your questions, and any additional details requested.

Are you willing to participate in the interview? (Verbal consent)

Do I have your permission to use quotations from the interview? If so, do you prefer to be cited by name, by organisation, or anonymously? (Verbal consent)

Although I will be taking notes, I may tape this session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Do I have your permission to record our discussion? (Verbal consent)

[Turn audio recorder on if permission granted]

Time & date:

Location (village name & place of interview, e.g. home, café, etc.):

Name/characteristics of participant:

Participant # :

Themes	Questions
Interviewee background information	1) Name, gender, position & organisation, length of time at organisation 2) How familiar are you with ecotourism activities in Bhutan? [if applicable]
Ecotourism definition, perception, state of progress in PAs	3) How do you define "ecotourism", in your own words? 4) What is your opinion of ecotourism? Why? 5) Do you think ecotourism is helping (or can help) further local economic development and conservation objectives in Bhutan? Why/why not? 6) In general, how much progress has been made with ecotourism in PAs? 7) What have been [this] PA's greatest strengths in ecotourism? Any existing challenges or areas for improvement?
Stakeholder power and influence	8) In your opinion, who are the main stakeholders (supply or demand side) in ecotourism in Bhutanese PAs? 9) Which stakeholder(s) (local and non-local) have the most influence in ecotourism development and implementation? In conservation initiatives? 10) Who (or what groups) do you consider responsible for ecotourism initiatives in PAs at present? Why? 11) Who should be responsible for ecotourism initiatives? Why? 12) Has your agency been involved in or supported local ecotourism activities? If so, what types of initiatives and for how long? What have been the outcomes so far?
Local decision-making/participation	13) Regarding ecotourism activities, how are decisions made about who participates? To what degree are community members involved? 14) Are there consultative processes that encourage local public engagement in the ecotourism process? If so, what has been the result so far? 15) What additional measures could be taken to increase local involvement?
Efficacy of existing policies	16) How effective do you think ecotourism policies and programmes have been at the local level? National level? 17) What changes in policies or programmes can be done to improve policy implementation at the local level?

## CLOSING

## B4. Protocol for Focus Group #1: Wellbeing, Ecotourism & Local Engagement

Principal investigator: Heidi Karst

Supervisor: Dr. Sanjay Nepal

Expected length of focus group: 2-3 hrs

**Purpose:** To gather information on local perspectives on concepts of wellbeing and ecotourism, and local conceptions of participation in the ecotourism development and implementation process.

**Prospective interviewees:** Key community members engaged or interested in ecotourism development in their local area.

- 1) Introductions
  - Review purpose and topics of focus group
  - Go through Information/Consent process, record verbal consent
  - Record basic participant info (name, position, age, gender)
  
- 2) Defining wellbeing
  - a) Brainstorm meaning of wellbeing to generate a list of ideas [written on cards and recorded on poster paper].
    - In your life/profession as a (fill in blank), what do you need to live well in this remote, mountain area? Why?
    - In general, how would you describe someone who is doing well in this community?
    - In general, how would you describe a person who is not doing well?
  
  - b) Group ideas into key categories (indicators).
    - What key changes/trends/events have occurred in the last 10 years that have affected your ability to meet these criteria?
    - Is life getting better or worse for the group? Why?
  
  - c) Rank indicators in order of importance (top 3) for meeting livelihood needs, and then rate in order of ease of access (easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, impossible).

TEA BREAK

- 3) Defining ecotourism
  - a) Brainstorm meaning of ecotourism to generate a list of ideas/principles [written on cards and recorded on poster paper].
    - What does “ecotourism” mean to you?
    - What types of ecotourism activities occur here? What new initiatives would you like to see?
  
  - b) Group ideas into key categories (indicators) to shape definition.
    - How does ecotourism (local definition) contribute to wellbeing? How does it hinder?
  
- 4) Local decision-making and participation in ecotourism
  - Who (local or non-local) is involved in ecotourism activities in this village/geog?
  - What factors (e.g., people, institutions, rules) determine who participates in ecotourism activities here?
  - Who controls communal (geog) income generated from ecotourism? Who benefits the most? Least?

- Are there any programmes, activities, or funds available to support local engagement in ecotourism? If not, what would you like to see (what can be done)?
- If you are unhappy with progress in ecotourism development, what can be done to create change? (OR If someone has a complaint about ecotourism activities, what would you do/who would you go to in order to create change?)

**CLOSING**

Ask all: What I have heard you saying in our session was (summarise main points). Does this sound correct? Is there anything you would like me to add or amend?

Thank all participants for attending.

## B5. Protocol for Focus Group #2: Linkages between Wellbeing and Nature Conservation

Principal investigator: Heidi Karst

Supervisor: Dr. Sanjay Nepal

Expected length of focus group: 2-2.5 hrs

**Purpose:** To determine local perceptions on the linkage between social wellbeing and nature conservation in local ecotourism initiatives in protected areas.

**Prospective interviewees:** Key community members engaged or interested in ecotourism development in their local area.

- 1) Introductions
  - Review purpose and topics of focus group
  - Go through Information/Consent process, record verbal consent
  - Record basic participant info (name, position, age, gender)
  
- 2) Pinpoint key natural resources & their importance
  - a) Create a community map of the local environs and settlement(s), specifically identifying physical (natural and man-made) resources deemed important for wellbeing needs.
    - How does wildlife (flora and fauna) contribute to local livelihoods?
    - If we think about (village/geog) 10 years from now, how would it look for your group to be doing well (in order to meet your needs as a group)?
    - To have this (successful scenario) happen in the future, what needs to happen? What might prevent this future from happening?
    - What are some of the main rules that affect how you do your job (e.g., herd yaks, farm)? (Examples: formal government laws, informal/unwritten rules)?
    - Which rules help create wellbeing in this community? How? Which ones reduce wellbeing?
    - For each rule listed, what is the general degree of compliance in this community?
      - Everyone complies and follows this rule
      - A few people break this rule, but the majority comply
      - Only a few people follow this rule, but the majority break it
      - No one follows this rule
  
- 3) Local religion and cultural attitudes impacting resource management behaviour
  - What things did people do (e.g., follow religious beliefs, rituals, cultural traditions) to manage forest/land in the past? Describe.
  - What things do people normally do to manage forest/land today?
  
- 4) Ecosystem change due to ecotourism
  - What social and ecological changes have occurred locally since ecotourism initiatives first began?
  - How do you feel about these changes?
  - What can local residents do to improved environmental conditions? How can government (geog, dungkhag, dzongkhag, national) help improve conditions?
  
- 5) Ground truthing [do this on own/with a community member if not enough time with group]  
Conduct a brief transect walk to verify results of community map and document local knowledge on features of the landscape, natural resources, and land use.

### CLOSING

## Appendix C

### Document Analysis

- (1) Sample of Documents Analysed
- (2) Sample Media Log

## C1. Sample of Documents Analysed

Document	Source/Author, Year	Data Analysed / Content
Local Governments' Act of Bhutan, 2007	RGOB, 2007	Regulations for the implementation of decentralisation and devolution of power and authority to facilitate local participation in all 22 districts
Management Plan: Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary 2007-2012	NCD, MOAF & WWF Bhutan, 2007	Guidelines for developing investment plans for SWS based on biodiversity and socio-economic surveys, identifying issues and recommendations for future action
Tourism Development in Merak and Sakteng: Feasibility Report	TCB, 2009	Report on the current status and pending tourism developments in Merak-Sakteng region
Socio-economic Tourism Baseline Survey for Merak-Sakten	TCB, 2009	Results of a research study to understand migration patterns, local views on prospective tourism in their communities and current socio-economic situation
Bylaws for Executive Governing Body of Merak-Sakteng Community-based Ecotourism	MOAF, 2010	Regulations for ecotourism development involving glocal service providers, government agencies and civil society organisations
Participatory Zoning for Sakteng Wildlife Sanctuary	WWF Bhutan & SWS, 2011	Protected area zoning report for management of SWS, outlining process, implementation strategy and results, and future management strategies.
Bhutan Living Standards Survey 2012 Report	NSB, RGOB, 2012	Results of national household survey, measuring progress in terms of traditional (e.g., health, education, employment, income and expenditure, housing, access to public facilities and services, social capital) and non-traditional measures (e.g., self-rated poverty, happiness)
Tourism Strategy and Development Plans 2013-2018	TCB, 2012	Backgrounder on existing trends and future aspirations for the sector, including tourism vision and mission statements, plans for product development, marketing, communications and institutional development
Merak Sakteng Impact Assessment Report	TCB, 2012	Report on initial outcomes of community-based tourism development in Merak-Sakteng with recommendations for future
Ecotourism Development in the Protected Areas Network of	NRED, 2012	Overview of ecotourism and the Bhutanese context, the national protected area network

Bhutan: Guidelines for planning and management		and related legislation, status of tourism development in Bhutan and guidelines for ecotourism for specific stakeholder groups (e.g., tour operators, tour guides, campsite managers, etc.)
Eleventh Five-year Plan 2013–2018, Vol. 1 and 2	GNHC, 2013a	National economic development plans
Eleventh Five-year Plan, July 2013–2018, Trashigang Dzongkhag	Trashigang Dzongkhag, 2013	Outline of development agenda and strategies for Trashigang district
National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan	National Biodiversity Centre, MOAF, 2014	Review of policy and legal framework for biodiversity in Bhutan, current threats to biodiversity, issues and opportunities in biodiversity conservation and sustainable usage of resources, biodiversity strategies and action plan for Bhutan and implementation scheme
Bhutan Tourism Monitor 2013; 2014	TCB, 2014; 2015	Annual report on the state of the tourism industry

## C2. Sample Media Log

Date	Headline	Media Source	Content
September 27, 2011	Merak to produce incense using local ingredients	Bhutan Observer	Agriculture Ministry initiative supports incense manufacturing plant as alternative source of income for locals
October 24, 2011	Wooden shingles to go back to Merak and Sakteng	Bhutan Observer	Wooden shingles to replace corrugated galvanised iron sheet roves in two Trashigang villages
February 2, 2013	10th Plan 'poverty' target likely to be met, says bureau	Kuensel	Preliminary findings from 2012 Bhutan Living Standard Survey indicate income poverty reduced in 15% of population
April 15, 2013	Farm roads affect trekking routes	Kuensel	Tour operator and tourist complaints over farm roads in villages
May 5, 2013	DPT pitches for rural prosperity	Bhutan Today	A large segment of the national population live below basic survival threshold
May 23, 2013	There's gold in them hills	Kuensel	Protecting watersheds and biodiversity is vital for Bhutan's economy
July 17, 2013	Impacts of globalisation	Bhutan Observer	Advantages and disadvantages of globalisation in Bhutan
September 17, 2013	Forest fights pastureland	Kuensel	Conflict of interest between spreading community forests and <i>tsamdrol</i> (pasture) land
June 12, 2014	Highlander lack land to build houses	Kuensel	Herders in Merak-Sakteng with large families need more land
April 30, 2014	Low tourist numbers belie highlander hopes	Kuensel	Reason for drop of tourist arrivals in 2012 and 2013 unclear
June 2014	Sakteng farm road construction resumes	Kuensel	Rangjung-Thrakthri farm road to Sakteng has resumed with release of Nu 27 million grant

## Glossary

ara	local alcoholic beverage, fermented or distilled
Brokpa	nomad, highlander; indigenous people of Merak-Sakteng region
Brokpake	Brokpa language
Bön	form of religion that was practiced in pre-Buddhist Tibet
cham	religious masked dance performed during a tshechu
chipoen	village messenger
chiwog	village, suburb, also community (e.g., cluster of small villages)
chokhor	religious procession
chorten	Buddhist monument or shrine
chupa	red or brown woollen tunic worn by Brokpa men
drukkor	grain journey, where Brokpa families travel, trade and stay with neighbours in southern villages (see nepo)
dud	demon
duenchang	drinks to welcome a guest into one's home
driglam namzha	rules/system of ordered, cultured behaviour; official code of etiquette in Bhutan
Druk Gyalpo	Dragon King, King of Bhutan
dungkhag	sub-district government
dzongda	district administrator
Dzongkha	national language of Bhutan
dzongkhag	district government/administration
Dzongkhag Tshogdu	District Council
fatchung, raka	types of traditional bags
geog	block or group of villages
gomchen	lay priest (non-celibate)
goongda woola	labour contribution
gup	village leader
kanggo	half-pant (usually of deer skin) worn by Brokpa men
kira	Bhutanese national dress or skirt (for women)
lama	priest, teacher, great saint
Lhotshampa	minority ethnic Nepalese population
lhakhang	temple

lo chu	annual ritual for household blessings
mangurin	community ritual
mani wall	Buddhist monument; wall made of stones inscribed with Buddhist prayers
migoï	wild man, yeti, Abominable Snowman
nepo	protector or owner of the land. This term could refer to a guardian deity, or the guest-host trading relationship that spans generations between high altitude residents of Merak-Sakteng and their lowland neighbours (see drukkor)
ney	holy place in nature
otey	black woollen apron worn by Brokpa women
paksa	animal hide vest worn by Brokpa men
phishoop	leather chaps worn by Brokpa men
phodrang	deity citadel or palace
puja	prayer ritual, ritual gathering/ceremony
rindu	ritual for good health in the community
rinpoche	re-incarnated high priest
shamo	Brokpa hat made of felted yak wool (unisex)
shingkha	tunic-style traditional dress of Brokpa women
sokshing	woodlot leased for leaf litter production and collection
suja	butter tea
tha damtshig	boundary of sacred oath; commitment of obligation and love, honour and loyalty in all relationships
todung	red embroidered jacket worn by Brokpa women
tsa-wa-sum	respect and loyalty for King, country and people
tsamdro	grazing land
tshechu	(annual) religious festival
tshogpa	coordinator, (elected) leader or <i>chiwog</i> representative
tshogchang	group drinks
yulha	village deity
zhabto lemi	labour tax
zo, zomo	male/female yak-cow hybrid