

Jean Tismit (chair)

Presenters:

Karma Ura, Bhutan

Mary Jane Lamond, Nova Scotia

Rapporteur:

Laura Delaney

Presentation 1

Karma Ura, Bhutan

Mr. Urma did not prepare a presentation on the workshop theme due to time constraints. He instead gave an informational slide show about Bhutan. The following comments arouse from that presentation.

- Is modernization a cultural shift from mountains to the plains for people, and shift of animals from plains to mountains?
- Bhutan is culturally diverse. Because of poor communication between areas bordered by rivers, several languages have developed.
- Bhutan used to have a trans-human culture, with winter to summer seasonal vertical migration change. However, Bhutan is now noticing a trend toward permanent village-town migration.
- A typical way of greeting someone in Bhutan is “Are you coming from above or below?” because of the mountainous region.
- How to preserve culture?
 - Local knowledge is very important. This is the culture of ordinary people. These are the people who leave a small ecological footprint.
 - This local knowledge is best preserved by a decentralized government.
 - Cultures change because of media and freedom.
- The King of Bhutan would conduct country-wide village meetings. He would travel around the country visiting every village to discuss five year-plans with the villagers.
- Agriculture drives Bhutan.
- Bhutan exports fruit, ginger, potato.
- The Bhutanese utilize organic compost in farming.
- The transportation systems in Bhutan are “primitive” compared to those in western society. But the question is: do they need more?
- School can be 1-2 hours walking distance for children.
- The handicraft of smithery is almost wiped out.
- Bhutanese swords used to be very famous.
- Architecture is very labour intensive.
- Chilies and betel nut are common staples in everyday food.

Questions

- Will the opening of the country destroy the cultural preservation that has occurred in Bhutan?
 - Comments from Mr. Urma and the group:
 - Everything changes with the opening. But we are trying to slow down the changes. If we change abruptly, many problems will occur.
 - The country currently appears to be self sustaining. When you open up to modernization, you begin buying and selling, and this is a different mindset. The trade mindset is very different.
 - One of the reasons that Bhutan has preserved its culture is because it has not been conquered by a foreign power.

- The biggest problem is the change in the culture of feelings. When youth with interact with outside cultures through media such as television they are influenced by different faiths and beliefs. This is dividing the older age group from the youth.
 - Migration is taking place from villages to towns. We have urbanization, separating the indigenous people from the new people.
 - One of the dilemmas of modernization and “progress” is we get people migrating to get access to education. Our focus on education can force people out of their villages and into the city. We need to examine the relation between education and jobs, and how do we make it attractive for people to stay in the village?
 - We tend to frame change in terms of “before and after”. However, trade has always existed and change has always been happening. We need to be conscious of the directions that modernization can take. We can channel modernization in certain ways.
- Are the media controls in Bhutan being used to buy time to “Bhutanize” modern influences (e.g. television)?
 - Bhutan wants to slow down the speed of globalization. If we subscribe to decentralization, then diversity can still exist.
 - Why is Nepalese not being taught in Bhutanese schools alongside the other languages?
 - Nepal is its own culture and language group – it is not a minority. In total there are 18 language groups in Bhutan, the largest is the eastern block. The eastern language is not in the school curriculum, and neither is the second largest. In the case of Nepalese, it is not taught, but what is taught is one that is general and has universal appeal within Bhutan.

Presenter 2

Mary Jane Lamond, Nova Scotia

- She is a preserver of Gaelic culture, language and song.
- In the 9th and 10th Centuries, Irish monks were writing stories in the margins of their texts. Stories that may have come from folk culture. These stories are long and elaborate.
- The Gaels have a tradition of storytelling. Song is also a very important part of the culture, and there is tenacity to oral tradition.
- The language is the art form of Gaelic culture. Within Gaelic culture there is a lack of visual arts, but language is a very powerful art form.
- Beginning in the 1700s, the Gaels did not win their war against the British. People were forced out of Scotland by the tens of thousands. In the late 1700s people began to arrive in Nova Scotia. This was one of the most intense European migrations in history.
- The Gaels who arrived in Nova Scotia had a highly developed oral literature.
- This culture lasted for generations. Ms. Lamond’s grandparents were Gaelic speakers.
- Without the language, it is difficult or nearly impossible to access the Gaelic culture. This is a sophisticated and poetic culture. The language gives us insight on the Gaelic view of life.
- Some people will say that Nova Scotia is very Scottish, because of the visibility of a superficial Scottish culture. This is referred to as the “tartanizing” of Nova Scotia. In the 1950s and 60s Scottish culture was viewed as a valuable marketing device to attract tourists to the area. Much was invested in this type of marketing.

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- Unfortunately, almost no resources were put into the preservation of language. No Gaelic was offered in school. In fact, children were punished for speaking Gaelic in school. This created a lack of self esteem in communities and a devaluation of the Gaelic language amongst Gaelic communities.
- Young people were attracted to an easier way of life in the city.
- There has been a backlash in Nova Scotia against Scottish culture. Other ethnic groups such as the Black community have resented the domination of Scottish culture in Nova Scotia. However, the domination of Scottish visibility was not a product of the Gaelic community itself.
- What can we do to get people speaking Gaelic?
- Positive things have been happening recently. We now have a Gaelic culture officer employed by the Minister of Culture in Nova Scotia.
- A strategy was formed. A series of public meetings were organized in community halls. The group asked one person in each community to call individuals to get people out to the meetings.
- People have strong emotional attachments to Gaelic, even if they are not native speakers themselves. It may be a family attachment.
- The group asked people: “Where do you see Gaelic in 20 years, and why are you here?”
- The answers overwhelmingly reflected that in their heart of hearts, people felt something was missing in their communities.
- To the group’s advantage, Nova Scotia currently has a minister of culture who is very interested in the preservation of Gaelic.
- The group has published a strategy.
- The government is also offering a small grants project, of up to \$5000, for communities to have Gaelic activities.

Questions/Comments

- Gaelic culture is community-based. Gaelic language is an expression of community culture. It is not individually based, and is hard to commodify. Bearers of the Gaelic tradition are not individual stars. But there is value in preserving the community knowledge.
- To quote an elderly Gaelic speaker in Nova Scotia, on the way to promote the language: “We have to bring the little people and the big people together, the young and the old.” Sometimes it is as simple as visiting and sharing
- It is difficult to share culture these days because we come less and less together.
- There are goals in the strategy. The first goal is to increase the number of Gaelic speakers. The strategy also aims to address changes in communities, and address how the education system works.
- A new method of language sharing is known as “total physical immersion”. In this method children are immersed in a situation where a new language is directly spoken to them. This method was used in Hawaii with much success. It was possible to teach children to speak a new language in as little as 200 hours.
- In this method the focus is to gather people together in the home. Teaching language in the home is more effective than in school, because home is where your first language was taught to you by your family. This method also uses fluent speakers instead of teachers to share language.
- In Hawaii, they have gone from 200 speakers to 10,000 speakers in only 20 years.
- We have a few communities that are the stronghold of Mi’kmaw language in Nova Scotia. Communities still have native speakers. But within those communities, people felt that to be a competitive member of society they should speak English. The local culture also has to compete with media such as television.
- The group aims to have a Gaelic school in Nova Scotia.
- In France, until the revolution, there were at least 20 languages spoken in the country. After the revolution, people were punished for speaking other languages. There is also a movement in France to revive the other languages, such as Breton.
- Local languages hold indigenous knowledge about sustainable development.
- Language is a community-based art form.
- When we lose language we lose knowledge.
- When we lose cultural diversity it is a damaging as losing biodiversity.
- Language is a link to culture and without a culture’s language we do not truly understand its traditions.