



HAPPY Newsletter

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Interview with Aaditya Pradhan from Norbuling Rigter college:
Exploring new horizons: The Power and Potential of Qualitative Research

Photo story:
Our trip to Europe through camera lens

My personal experience of the trip:
From Canals to the Caves: My Qualitative Odyssey in Amsterdam and Ljubljana

Interview with Rinchen Dorji:
Beyond Theories: Experiencing Real-World Qualitative Research in Europe

HAPPY Project Milestones

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ON THE COVER PHOTO:

HAPPY team at visiting Škocjan caves during their visit to Slovenia

PREFACE

Is there a causal relationship between qualitative research and eating momos? It depends. Thinking back to the January visit of our colleagues from the Happy project to Amsterdam, I would have to say no. Their stay in Holland and their participation in the workshops at the VU campus were filled with information, new and exciting ways to do research, becoming acquainted with other Dutch Academics , French fries and much more but no momos. It was a busy and productive time, a smörgåsbord of information, at times reaching an overload. But just like a smörgåsbord there was a little something for everyone. I enjoyed seeing the Bhutanese members of HAPPY here. It was in Bhutan during our first trip, when we visited the four different colleges that I learnt there is a causal relationship between doing and talking about qualitative research and momos. Being able to savor the delicate taste of momos at nearly every break was most certainly a treat, one I am looking forward to repeat again in our upcoming trip to Bhutan. This time we will be providing workshops that will allow our colleagues to dive deeper into visual ethnography, people centered research or just have the time to think and write in a writing retreat. And I am sure that we can expect momos. So when in Bhutan, where there is qualitative research in the HAPPY program there are momos. And although it is funny for me to talk about causal relationships as a qualitative researcher who barely can count (well I am exaggerating a bit), I nonetheless, am not only looking forward to tasting momos again, but to being in Bhutan and having the possibility to continue learning about its rich culture from my Bhutanese colleagues and “learning by doing”.

Dr. Lorraine Nencel, Associate professor at the Department of Sociology at VU Amsterdam

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**Exploring New Horizons:
The Power and Potential of
Qualitative Research**

Interview with Aaditya Pradhan, NRC

Can you start with sharing your general experience of the advanced training on qualitative research methods (QRM)? What were your expectations coming into the training, and how did the actual experience align with those expectations?

The experience of the training absolutely met my expectations. What I expected was to explore and understand how qualitative research methods (QRM) are adopted in higher education in other parts of the world. Additionally, I was also eager to learn from other researchers and lecturers and get inspiration to apply the QRM methods and techniques at NRC.

Throughout the training, I discovered that there are several simple yet powerful tools we can employ to integrate QRM into our teaching and research practices.

For instance, utilising Facebook and Twitter data which was novel and intriguing concept that I found particularly interesting.

During the time spent in Ljubljana, we also explored the idea that qualitative research can extend beyond traditional methods and include for example observation of our surroundings. This insight has been incredibly valuable and has equipped me with a fresh perspective on conducting qualitative research.

I learned that there are very simple tools that we can use to include QRM in our teaching and research. For example, using Facebook and

twitter data, which was quite new and interesting for me. In Ljubljana, we learned qualitative research can also be conducted by observing and looking around, so we learned some very useful insights.

Throughout the training, various qualitative research methodologies and techniques were covered. Which specific methods or techniques did you find most valuable or applicable to your research interests?

During our visit to the Meertens Institute, we attended a lecture that focused on utilizing APIs for extracting social media data.

It was eye-opening to realize that platforms like Facebook and Twitter hold valuable qualitative data, which we often overlook.

In Ljubljana, we were also introduced to other software, including Orange, for analysing such data.

I attempted to implement this knowledge in our specific context, but I encountered challenges because I felt that I lacked sufficient 'practical' training in this particular field. As a result, I wasn't able to fully leverage the potential of these tools. However, this experience has made me recognise the importance of further learning and familiarizing myself with these technologies. By gaining more expertise and ownership of these tools, I believe we can effectively harness the power of social media data for our research.

Overall, being aware of the existence

and capabilities of such software and APIs is incredibly valuable. It opens up new possibilities and avenues for qualitative research, making it a significant aspect to consider in our future endeavors.

Were there any challenges you faced during the training? How did you overcome these challenges?

The challenges I encountered during the training were not related to the program itself, but rather, they were due to my illness, which caused me to miss a few of the sessions. One specific area that I regret not having been able to attend more attentively includes the discourse analysis, which was facilitated by prof. dr. Sierk Ybema. Unfortunately, my illness hindered my ability to fully engage and comprehend the content during that part of the training.

Coming from a place where obtaining data is complex and requires significant effort, I can empathize with my students' struggles in the same regard. Data collection through surveys becomes especially challenging as people are reluctant to open up and participate. The lack of time and willingness to assist researchers poses a significant obstacle, and students often feel like their research efforts are not taken seriously. Whenever my students face this issue, I make it a point to mentor and guide them.



Aaditya Pradhan is the senior Lecturer and Research Coordinator at Norbuling Rigter College.

However, it remains a challenge to gain access and cooperation from potential data sources. Considering these challenges, learning to collect data from alternative sources, as I experienced during the training, has proven to be immensely valuable. The tools and techniques I learned during the training have opened up new possibilities for data collection, which can significantly enhance my research endeavors and support my students in their projects.

Although I come from a quantitative background, I found the exploration of QRM to be refreshing and enlightening. Despite the challenges I faced due to my illness, I very much enjoyed the learning experience and look forward to incorporating these valuable skills into my research and teaching practices.

How has your perspective on QRM changed after your involvement in the HAPPY project, and what specific aspects of QRM did you find more accessible and versatile than you initially thought?

Before my involvement in the HAPPY project, QRM seemed like a distant and challenging concept to me. I held the misconception that it involved extensive writing and numerous interviews. However, my perspective shifted entirely during the project, as I discovered that QRM is more accessible and versatile than I had imagined.

The HAPPY project exposed me to various QRM techniques that are not solely about writing or lengthy interviews.

I learned that understanding how rituals are conducted presently and historically, as well as gaining insights into people's perspectives, opens new doors to explore complex issues. This shift from solely relying on tables and numbers to embracing qualitative approaches has been transformative. Even something as simple as drawing a picture can be utilized to conduct qualitative research, and I am eager to explore these diverse techniques further. One exciting research venture that Kinley and I embarked upon during the first ToT was our study on Annual ritual research. We meticulously crafted the proposal during that session and successfully collected data. We even had the opportunity to present our findings during the subsequent ToT. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hindered our progress, and we were unable to complete the project as planned. Despite this setback, my newfound understanding and enthusiasm for QRM have motivated me to continue our research efforts once conditions permit.

What were some of the highlights of the training that enriched your learning experience and understanding of research methods?

The training provided an excellent opportunity to learn from other participants. Engaging with

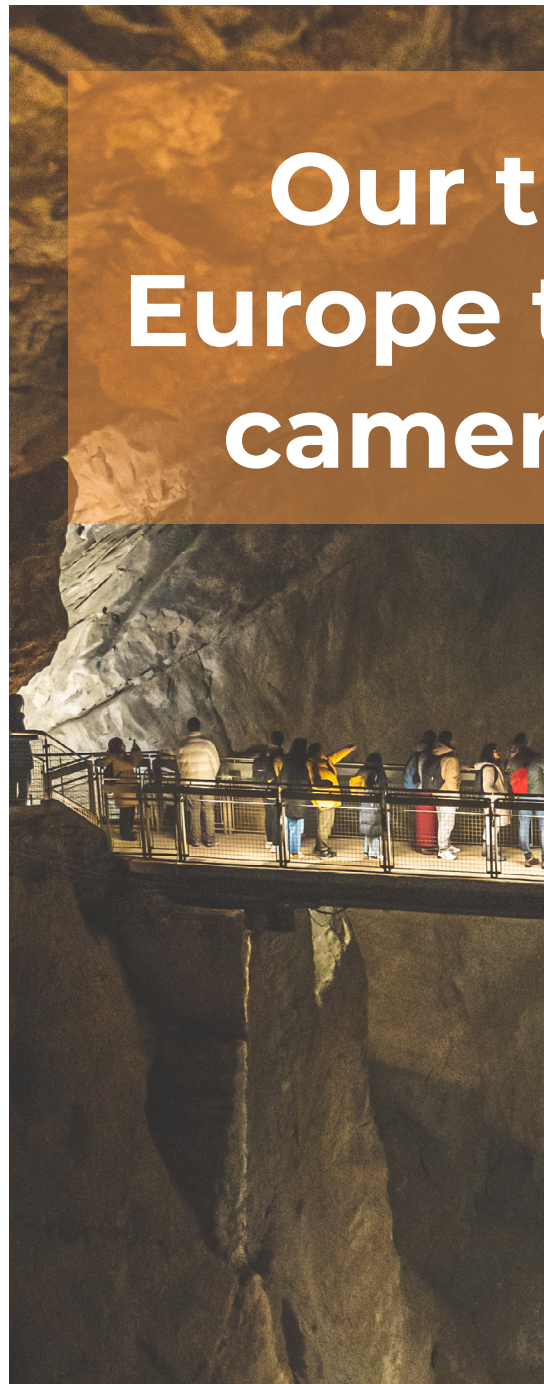
others enriched my understanding of various subjects, thanks to the valuable contributions made by some participants. One individual who left a significant impact on me was Mr. Dendup, the dean of Sherubtse college, whose profound knowledge about research inspired me to learn more. He provided valuable guidance on conducting interviews, which has enhanced my understanding of this research aspect. Kinley from RTC showed me how to develop a well-written proposal and deliver an effective presentation.

Learning from experts at both VU Amsterdam and the University of Ljubljana was a fascinating experience.

During our time in Ljubljana, Rajko took us on a silent walk, which proved to be a unique and enlightening way of experiencing and gathering data through sounds, observations, and feelings.

It was truly eye-opening and added another dimension to our understanding of research methods. In Amsterdam, the activity of telling a story using origami was both fun and engaging and it left a lasting impression on me. Now, I am highly motivated to share what I have learned with my students.

written by Mekky Zaidi





trip to
through
a lens



From canals to the caves: My Qualitative Odyssey in Amsterdam & Ljubljana

In January 2023, I embarked on an enriching journey to Europe, joining 17 other enthusiastic learners from different colleges in Bhutan. Our expedition took us to two vibrant cities, Amsterdam and Ljubljana. This trip was more than just a sightseeing adventure; it was an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the culture, engage with the locals, and gather qualitative data that would contribute to a better understanding of people, behavior, and cultures.

In the first week of the trip we were in Amsterdam. As we landed in Amsterdam, the city's beauty mesmerized me despite the gloomy winter weather. The picturesque canals, decorated with charming houses and whimsical bridges, provided a photographer's paradise. Besides exploring the city, our main purpose was to attend an advanced Training of Trainers program on Qualitative Research Methods (QRM) at the esteemed Vrije Universiteit. The program

covered various aspects of qualitative research, academic writing, research project development, and student supervision, led by experienced moderators and renowned scholars. The visit to Amsterdam's renowned museums, the Van Gogh Museum and the Anne Frank Museum, further deepened my appreciation for the city's artistic and historical legacies. The experience of witnessing these masterpieces and understanding the human spirit's resilience in history was profound.

In the second week, we explored Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, which immediately won me over with its fairy-tale-like setting and pedestrian-friendly streets. The blend of old-world elegance and modern vibrancy made this city magical. Our qualitative research training in Ljubljana took us on numerous site visits, including a guided tour to the mesmerizing Škocjan Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This awe-inspiring experience of witnessing nature's wonders left a lasting impact on me.



Importance of Qualitative Data and Experiential Learning:

The journey through Amsterdam and Ljubljana offered a unique opportunity to learn about qualitative research and engage in experiential learning, which significantly contributed to the success of the aim of the HAPPY project. Here are a few points I would like to highlight from our trip to the Netherlands and Slovenia:

1. Observing Local Culture:

During our visit to Amsterdam and Ljubljana, we had the privilege of immersing ourselves in the local culture. By observing in glimpses the daily lives, traditions, and customs of the Dutch and Slovenian people, we gained a deeper understanding of their values, beliefs, and societal norms. This qualitative data helped us appreciate the cultural context in which the HAPPY project operates, enabling us to design initiatives that are culturally sensitive and relevant to the target population.

2. Experiencing Dutch and Slovenian Culture:

Experiencing Dutch and Slovenian culture firsthand allowed us to connect with the local people on a personal level. Engaging in cultural activities, visiting museums, and exploring historical landmarks provided us with valuable insights into the collective identity and history of these nations.

3. Interaction with the Local People:

Interacting with the locals and actively listening to their stories, learning, and observing the culture was a transformative experience. Through informal conversations and structured classes, we learned and experienced the cultures.

In conclusion, the European journey through Amsterdam and Ljubljana provided a valuable opportunity to learn about qualitative research and engage in experiential learning. The observations, experiences, and insights gained during this trip contributed significantly to the success of the HAPPY project. My European journey was filled with unforgettable moments and profound learning experiences. Each encounter and cultural immersion remains a cherished treasure in my heart. The knowledge acquired, coupled with qualitative data and experiential learning, enriched my trip and broadened my perspective of the world. As I bid farewell to Europe with a heart full of gratitude, I carry cherished memories and a deeper understanding of human behavior, cultures, and the power of qualitative research, which will remain with me forever.

Written by Tshering Lhamo Dukpa, Royal Thimphu College

Beyond Theories: Experiencing Real-World Qualitative Research in Europe

Interview with Rinchen Dorji, Sherubtse College

Can you share an overview of your experience during the advanced training on qualitative research methods? What were your expectations coming into the training, and how did the actual experience align with those expectations?

The training was truly exceptional, especially because it provided an opportunity for art and humanities to be involved in such programs, which is something I was grateful for.

Before the training, I had some knowledge about qualitative research methodologies (QRM), but the sessions in Amsterdam and Ljubljana took my understanding to a deeper level.

I gained valuable insights and a greater sense of confidence in utilising QRM in my research. With the knowledge and skills, I acquired from the training, I felt empowered to write a research proposal that solely focused on qualitative research methods. My colleagues, (whose support was invaluable) and I collaborated on the proposal. Additionally, we received valuable feedback from Dr. Lorraine Nencel and Esther den Hartog, which further enhanced our work.

As a result of our efforts, we applied for the annual college research grant to fund our project, which aims to analyze the role of Sherubtse College in building community vitality in the locality.

I am thrilled to share that our proposal was successful, and we are now able to carry out this research thanks to the skills and knowledge gained during the training in Amsterdam and Ljubljana.

Throughout the training, various qualitative research methodologies and techniques were covered. Which specific methods or techniques did you find most valuable or applicable to your research interests? How do you envision incorporating them into your future work?

In our case, all the research methods and techniques covered in the training were highly applicable, particularly because qualitative research methodologies (QRM) have a strong relevance in social sciences and humanities, which aligns well with my area of study.

Specifically, I find ethnography to be particularly valuable in my current research project. As I mentioned

earlier, we will be adopting ethnographic techniques to closely examine how Sherubtse College has actively contributed to community vitality. The immersive nature of ethnography allows us to gain in-depth insights into the college's impact on the community and understand the dynamics at play.

Were there any challenges you faced during the training, either related to understanding certain concepts or applying the methods in practical exercises? How did you overcome these challenges, and did the training adequately address your concerns?

As someone relatively new to the field of QRM, I initially found it challenging to grasp the theoretical aspects. I can confidently say that the training effectively addressed my concerns. Prior to the training, I lacked the confidence to write my research proposal, despite having the idea. However, one of the lectures on research proposal writing proved instrumental. Through insightful discussions on hypothetical cases and essential elements to include in a research proposal, I gained a newfound confidence. This enabled me to compose a significantly improved proposal, ultimately leading to the success of winning the grant.

The trainers' approach of using practical examples and guidance played a pivotal role in enhancing my understanding and competence in the domain of QRM. I am grateful for their support, which has undoubtedly accelerated my growth as a researcher in this field.

The training consisted of training sessions both at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the University of Ljubljana. How did you experience the program and the alignment between the topics covered during the two weeks?

I very much liked the way the training was organised and designed in the two universities. In Amsterdam, the focus was on building a strong foundation of knowledge, while in Ljubljana, the emphasis shifted towards hands-on, experiential learning. The knowledge-focused aspects we initially learned in Amsterdam were further reinforced during our time in Ljubljana.

An illustrative example of this experiential learning occurred during a session where we explored various projects, including the Ozbič barbershop. This barbershop has a unique history dating back to WWII, and the presentation showcased their efforts to preserve its legacy while adapting to contemporary interests in the 21st century.

What made this session particularly impactful was the field visit to the actual barbershop in Ljubljana. Being there in person allowed us to truly immerse ourselves in the environment and feel the essence of what we had discussed in the classroom. It was an incredibly enriching opportunity to witness the real-world application of the concepts we had learned, making the training experience even more memorable and insightful.

What specific strategies or insights did you gain that you believe will

positively impact your future research projects?

I gained valuable insights that will significantly shape my future research endeavors. Specifically, I am keen on focusing on collaborative research, as I firmly believe that research becomes more comprehensive and impactful when it involves collaboration.

For instance, in my current project, I could conduct it individually from the comfort of my office, relying solely on desk studies. However, my intention is to engage as many stakeholders as possible. This includes faculty colleagues who have been actively involved in community work, students, and individuals from the communities affected by the activities organized by Sherubtse College. By involving diverse perspectives and expertise, I anticipate enriching the research outcomes and ensuring its relevance and significance. Moreover, I had the opportunity to teach research methodology 301, covering both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Having strengthened my knowledge and confidence in qualitative research methods through the training, I now feel much more assured in teaching QRM to my students. This semester, as I deliver the same module to third-year English students, I am excited to incorporate my newfound confidence in QRM instruction, complementing my existing expertise in quantitative research methods.

Collaboration and networking opportunities are often valuable aspects of training programs. Did you have the chance to interact with other participants during the training? How did these interactions contribute to your

learning experience?

One significant advantage of attending such trainings is the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Throughout the course of these projects, we have not only learned about each other's backgrounds but also explored the potential for future collaborations on research projects in Bhutan. Establishing a strong rapport with the facilitators has further facilitated this process, as I felt at ease seeking their feedback on my proposal.

The valuable interactions with both fellow participants and facilitators have been instrumental in enhancing the overall learning experience.

I want to thank the whole HAPPY project again to give this opportunity, humanities and social sciences are left behind, but through this project me and my colleagues we got to learn so much, and I am very grateful for this.

Written by Mekky Zaidi



Rinchen Dorji is an English Programme leader and lecturer in Department of Arts and Humanities at Sherubtse College.

Milestones & what is still to come

Milestones

January 2023

- Bhutanese HEI members from RTC, CLCS, Sherubtse and NRC undertook Advanced Training of Trainers (ToT) on Supervising Student Research in The Netherlands and Slovenia
- LMS content generation: Lecturer recording for LMS

April 2023

- QRM curriculum revisions underway at Bhutanese HEIs

May 2023

- Presentation of two HAPPY-inspired research papers by RTC at the National Conference on Higher Education in Bhutan, published in July

June 2023

- Draft LMS prepared

July 2023

- Start of Independent External Evaluation by Prof. Tanka Subba, former Vice Chancellor of Sikkim University (India) and Dr. Dorji Penjore, Royal Institute of Management (Bhutan)

Still to come

Finalisation of procurement - phase 2

A/V Multimedia Studio launch at RTC

Review of external evaluation and planning remaining HAPPY activities

Parallel Workshops at RTC, Thimphu on 'Research Writing', 'Visual Ethnography' and 'Designing & Implementing People-Centred Stakeholder Projects'

HAPPY Project Partners:



The Netherlands

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)

<https://www.vu.nl/en/>



Slovenia

Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana

<http://iri.uni-lj.si/en/domov-2/>



Bhutan

Sherubtse College

<https://www.sherubtse.edu.bt/>



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