General Assembly 2016
This year’s General Assembly took place at ETH Zurich on March 12. After the formal meeting, Prof Dr György Hetényi presented the topic “Mountains and Earthquakes – fieldwork and results of two geophysics projects in Bhutan” (see report below, p. 11) and Prof Dr Simon Löw introduced the topic “Landslide Hazards in the High Himalaya of Bhutan: A new ETH research project”.

Three new SSB Board members were unanimously elected at the assembly. We are expressing a very warm welcome to them and are looking forward to a fruitful cooperation.

Regula Hanimann serves as Senior HR Partner at Swiss Reinsurance Company. She holds a Master of Arts in Public Affairs. In her spare times she does a lot of hiking and jogging. She loves culture and exploring foreign countries and people. Regarding her motivation to join the Board she said: “I would like to dedicate some of my spare-time to the Society by supporting and advancing meaningful projects such as supporting schools in remote areas of Bhutan. I truly believe that this kind of contribution in partnership with our sister organisation in Bhutan is most impactful and efficient with least overhead costs. Through several school visits I was able to witness myself the value of such small scale projects to the teachers, the students and first and foremost to the parents.”

Lukas Rast serves part-time as Assistant to the President at the Federal Administrative Court (FAC) and is responsible for the coordination of the Legal Sector Project at FAC in collaboration with Bhutan. He is pursuing a Master in Law at the University of Zurich.

Recently he was promoted to captain in the Language Specialists Company of the Swiss Army. Lukas Rast writes: “My current occupation has led me to meet many Bhutanese nationals, many of whom I have grown very fond of. They are all in my age, building the future for Bhutan. Maintaining these friendships for me and for others is my main motivation to join the SSB”.

Dieter Zürcher is consultant and partner of KEK-CDC Consultants. From 2003 – 2007 he was lecturer at NADEL/ETH Zurich. He has an M.A. in Geography. By working in the SSB Board he would like to strengthen and enrich the cooperation between individuals and institutions from Switzerland and Bhutan. Dieter Zürcher is motivated to join the SSB Board, because his stay in Bhutan as HELVETAS coordinator (1999-02) was a biographical highlight for him and the path of Bhutan in a globalized world has always interested and fascinated him. He still has regular contact with people from Bhutan and the small country seems an interesting and stable success model in a turbulent world to him.

Chief Guest H.E. Ambassador Kinga Singye, Tandin Dorji (Bhutan Mission Geneva), Bhutanese students and SSB Board members at the General Assembly:
Annual SSB Excursion
On May 28, after the very interesting presentations by Carlo Galmarini and Andreas Galmarini (two Swiss engineers) on „Reconstruction of Wangdue Dzong“ (see report below, p. 10) and „Construction of the Elephant-House“ at the Zurich Zoo, SSB members and guests visited the Elephant-House in the Zoo:

Up-coming Events
Improving the fire safety in Bhutan
Presentation by Lars Mülli, Friday, September 23, 2016, 19.30 at Songtser House, Zurich
Lecture in German: „Verbessern der Brandsicherheit in Bhutan“: Im Rahmen eines durch den Lotteriefonds des Kantons Zürich finanzierten Projektes werden zur Verbesserung der Brandsicherheit in Bhutan durch Spezialisten der GVZ eine einfache Brandschutzgesetzgebung ausgearbeitet und die Ausbildung der Feuerwehrleute in Bhutan systematisiert und verbessert.

Pre-Announcement: Bhutan Film Days
January 27th – 29th 2017 in Zurich
We are happy to inform you that SSB together with other partners are planning to show films from Bhutan by Bhutanese film directors from Friday, January 27, until Sunday, January 29, 2017 at the Völkerkundemuseum in Zürich. A side programme with interviews and discussions will take place as well. Details will follow in late fall 2016. Please save the date.

Graduation at International School Schaffhausen
Congratulations to the two graduates from Bhutan, Dorjee Tso and Kuendrak Tobgyal after studying for two years in Switzerland. All the best for your future!

Invitation of the SSB Board to Geneva by the new Ambassador of Bhutan in Switzerland, H.E. Kinga Singye,
By E. Werner Külling, Member of the Board
The former Ambassador of Bhutan in Switzerland and Head of the Permanent Mission at the UN, United Nations in Geneva, H.E. Daw Penjo, has been succeeded in February 2016 by the former Director General for Bilateral Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Dasho Kinga Singye. In the meantime he has presented his letters of credence to the President of the Swiss Federal Council in Berne.
He was eager to continue and strengthen the existing very good ties and relations with the Society Switzerland Bhutan and therefore invited the Board at the beginning of his tenure – on the weather-wise beautiful Sunday, June 5, 2016 – to his Residence in Chambesy near Geneva, where his Embassy Staff offered an excellent lunch with well selected Bhutanese food in the beautiful garden.
Discussions were held regarding the role of the SSB and its partner organisation in Bhutan, the BSS, Bhutan Switzerland Society, about common relations, possibilities and needs of deve-
opment projects and joint ventures. The SSB Board appreciated this first nice and friendly contact very much. Thank you very much, Mr Ambassador and Embassy Staff!

Ambassador Kinga Singye, born in 1961, from Trashigang District, married with two children, studied at Punjab University in India (B.A.) and graduated in International Relations (M.A.) from Tufts University in Boston USA. He is a career diplomat and working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the beginning of his training in 1984 in different functions and assignments. He served in Thimphu as the Dy. Director of the Policy and Planning Division, and later as the Head of the Departments of Bilateral and Multi-
lateral Affairs. From 2000 – 2003 he was the Executive Director of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation. Back to Diplomacy, he worked in different important positions in the Bhutan Embassy in New Delhi, as well as the Dy. Representative of the Permanent Mission of Bhutan at the United Nations in New York. It has to be mentioned that for his new delegation as Ambassador to Switzerland and the UN Permanent Mission in Geneva he brings a lot of knowledge and experience, since, from 1996-99, he already served as the First Secretary in the Bhutan Embassy at the lake of Geneva. The SSB welcomes you back in Switzerland, and wishes good luck in your new tenure!

Bhutan at the Film Festival Locarno August 3 -13, 2016
Unique opportunity to see films of emerging filmmakers from Bhutan
By Marianne Pletscher,

At least three young promising filmmakers from Bhutan are invited to the Locarno film festival this year, and several of their films will be screened. In collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) the „Open Doors“ section of the festival aims at assisting filmmakers from countries in the South, where independent filmmaking is vulnerable.

From Bhutan the following persons are expected:

**Director Jigme Lhendhup.** He has already directed three shorts films, and he will benefit in the so-called „lab“ from a tailor-made programme designed to embrace the international market specificities and opportunities by meeting colleagues from Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal, and exchanging ideas with international producers and other festival guests.

**Director Tashi Gyeltshen** and his Producer Kinley Tshering. Both are invited to the „hub“ section, a dynamic platform where they can share their projects with other filmmakers from South Asia. The project teams will be introduced to European and international professionals bearing potentials for coproduction, international funding and distribution. On the last day, a professional jury is granting support to a few winner projects, the biggest award being the Open Doors prize amounting to 50,000 CHF.

Tashi Gyeltshen directed three short films so far. „The red door“ was shown at the Winterthur Short Film Festival in autumn 2015, a very interesting, poetic film. At the moment he is raising money for his new film “The Red Phallus”.

(please contact SSB if you like to contribute)

A number of films from South Asia will be screened at the festival. Dates and places are not known yet. We will inform you later on our website: www.mariannepletscher.ch.

The whole „Open Doors“ programme with further information on filmmakers and films can be found on: www.pardolive.ch/pardo/more/open-doors.

New SSB Members
By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

10 persons joined the Society Switzerland Bhutan since December. We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

- Christina Furrer, Unterschächen
- Djordje Grujic, Zürich
- George van Driem, Bern
- Jean-Francois Bouvier, Vernier-Genève
- Kul Prasad „Krishna“ Shiwakoti, Bern
- Lukas Müller, Baar
- Lukas Rast, Zürich
- Marianne Cavin, Lausanne
- Nadia Ticozzi, Basel
- Reto Strässle, Niederhelfenschwil
A Farewell to a Grand Old Lady of the Zurich Elephant Group

By Dr Robert Zingg, Senior Curator Zoo Zurich

On May 3rd the 49 years old female Asian elephant “Druk” had to be euthanized. Due to her weakness she repeatedly failed to get back on her own feet.

In 1968 Druk came to Zurich at the age of 15 months accompanied by the little younger Chhukha. These two young elephants were a gift by the King of Bhutan in recognition of the engagement of Fritz von Schulthess. The two elephants were brought to Calcutta and from there flown to Zurich, accompanied by the elephant keeper from Zoo Zurich, Ruedi Tanner. Due to health problems we already lost the female Chhukha ten years ago.

“Aunt” of ten young elephants

Even though Druk never gave birth herself, she took devotedly care of ten infant elephants. The first one was Ceyla-Himali, which was imported 1976 at the age of one year. Ceyla gave birth to six offspring, and always Druk took part in the rearing. This was also the case with the three offspring of female Indi, and for the last time, at the age of 47, when calf Omysha was born in 2014.

A marked personality

Druk had her own strong character. This was not only expressed by her big love for young elephants, but especially also when she was not willing to follow a command of her keepers, she always found “excuses” not to do something. In earlier years for example, when we walked the elephants around in their enclosure, she suddenly could lie down to stop the exercise. Druk was also a specialist for breaking strong branches. She knew very well in which place she had to put them on a wall to break them with her foreleg. She also was successful in destroying metal constructions, which were considered to be strong.

By the end of 2014 it became obvious that Druk had a problem with her eyesight. She was moved into a box in the background with direct access to an outside enclosure. Here she was able to orient herself blindly, and here she also had regularly social contacts with the other elephants.

The keepers gave the other elephants the possibility to say goodbye to the deceased Druk, as elephants do it also in the wild.

Indi, Omysha and Druk at the Elephant house

Indi and her two daughters Chandra and Omysha say goodbye
Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

Chief Justice of Bhutan visits Switzerland
by Lukas Rast, Member of the Board*

The incumbent chair of Bhutan’s highest court of review who is also the head of the Judiciary, H.E. Lyonpo Tshering Wangchuck, Chief Justice of Bhutan, visited Switzerland in April 2016 to study the Swiss direct democracy.

The Federal Administrative Court (FAC) organized the study visit as part of the institutional partnership between the FAC and the Royal Court of Justice of Bhutan (RCJ). Aimed at the enhancement of mutual understanding and the transfer of legal knowledge, ultimately leading to judicial development, this partnership has led to many contacts between representatives of the RCJ and the FAC in the past, as well as to contacts between delegates and members of the SSB (as last reported in the Newsletters of June 2015 and December 2015).

Only hours upon arrival at Zurich airport, the delegation was received by Marianne Frei, Rosemarie Frey and Werner Külling from the SSB Board, as well as Dr Rudolf Dannecker, Franz Gähwiler and Bernd Steinmann from HELVETAS at their headquarters in Zurich to talk about Civil Societies. In their presentations insights were given regarding the role of Civil Societies in Switzerland. Their potential to positively influence the community was shown as threefold: as the nursery of democratic self-awareness for citizens, as a tool for collective interest representation on the political stage, and as a means to efficiently organize and fund projects in development cooperation.

The session on Civil Societies in Zurich was the beginning of a series of lectures and visits, dedicated to delivering knowledge about the direct democratic systems in Switzerland. This included visits to state entities on all three levels of government, as well as visits to public institutions in private-public partnership. These visits allowed for the delegates to gain a very broad perspective of the Swiss public administration and its various ways of working together with its residents.

A special focus was laid on the procedures of the “Initiative” and the “Referendum”, the two key instruments of direct democracy in Switzerland. In step with actual practice, the delegation received actual voting ballots and were explained in detail the technical aspects of voting in Switzerland.

In order to fulfill the expectation that any foreigner has who visits Switzerland, which is to see cows somewhere at least once, the week was concluded with a cultural trip to Western Switzerland, visiting, among others, Berne, Fribourg, Gruyere, Neuchâtel, Lausanne and Geneva.

The field of study of this visit will be continued in Bhutan in June with a workshop on “Making Laws in a Country by Consent: the Swiss Political System between Cautionary Tale and Role Model”. It will also mark the end of the SDC-funded Legal Sector Project (LSP), as the project will phase out in June 2016 as a consequence of the SDC’s long-term regional strategy.

* Lukas Rast is Assistant to the President of the Federal Administrative Court of Switzerland (FAC) and responsible for the coordination of the Legal Sector Project (LSP) at the FAC.

For further questions, you may contact me via e-mail: lukas.rast@bhutan-switzerland.org
A very enthusiastic and successful Swiss training workshop of six Bhutanese firefighters during two weeks in Zürich

By E. Werner Külling, Member of the SSB-Board

The Kingdom of Bhutan was in the past always attacked by many natural disasters and calamities such as floods, earthquakes, forest fires and the burning down of villages and towns like it happened three times in Bumthang some years ago. And not to forget the big fire which destroyed the impressive big and old Dzong in Wangdue Phodrang. That’s why different measures and initiatives were taken to improve disaster relief organisations and construction regulations implemented by the Royal Government of Bhutan. The Department of Security of the Canton of Zürich under the leadership of its ministerial Head and „Bhutan-friend“ Mario Fehr supports such protection activities after having signed in July 2015 a respective Memorandum of Understanding involving the Cantonal Insurance Company for building as well as the Police Corps in both countries.

In March 2016, for a second time, a training course of two weeks for six Bhutanese firefighters was carried out in Zürich, very well prepared by the two instructors Moni Binz and Heinz Liebhart of the Building Insurance Company GVZ. The workshop has to be considered as a full success. The cooperation, the very friendly relations and exchange between the Bhutanese participants and the Swiss trainers were excellent. The Bhutanese received a certificate of attendance after having successfully completed the final test of the course.

Six motivated firefighters from Bhutan, eager to learn as much as possible from the two Swiss instructors.

An additional training for officers of Dzongs took place from June 19 – 25, 2016. Once more, the Swiss instructors liked to transfer their technical knowledge and enjoyed sharing professional experiences with the colleagues from Druk Yul.

One of the many training activities:
Fighting a fire in a town.

Another relevant training activity: Fighting a forest fire with basic equipment, together with Swiss firefighters in the mountains of Canton Uri.

Highlight of the workshop: A helicopter takes the group to an assumed „fire“ in the mountains. Advantages and limits of such an intervention were discussed.
News from BSS

Summary of the findings of the School evaluation on support to Kaktong & Tradijong Primary Schools, Zhemgang Dzongkhag
By Kinzang Tobgyal, Secretary General BSS

1. Background
The Society-Switzerland Bhutan (SSB) has been supporting remote schools in Zhemgang and Mongar Dzongkhags since 2010, and support has mainly been in the form of providing schools uniforms, shoes, equipment and kitchen garden development. Till date 6 schools have been supported. Information and reports from schools and beneficiaries reveals that support provided by SSB through Bhutan Switzerland Society (BSS) has benefited the students and parents in general, however, no separate assessment has been carried out since the support began in 2010. Therefore, this assessment was undertaken to provide an understanding of the benefits at the grass root level, issues and challenges related to the support and possible ways forward.

The study was jointly commissioned by SSB and BSS and was carried out by Mr Sonam Wangdi, Deputy Chief District Education Officer and Mr. Phub Gyeltshen, Administration Assistant, Panbang Dungkhag, Zhemgang Dzongkhag. The Ministry of Education was also closely involved in the development of the terms of reference for the assessment.

2. Objectives of the assessment
This study aims at reviewing the support provided thus far and find out benefits at the school level. The data collected will help SSB/BSS determine continuity of the support in wider range like promoting people to people contact, understanding the cooperation between Bhutan and Switzerland so as to sustain and further the close relations currently existing between the two countries.

3. Key findings from the assessment
i. Need and priority of intended individuals (parents & teachers)
Kaktong and Tradijong are relatively remote villages and developments are minimal. Parents do not go for commercial farming since they do not find market for the products resulting in low income and it is difficult to support their children financially at school.

Mr Kinga Penjor, Teacher In charge of Kaktong Primary School, has apprised that they have been receiving the support since 2013. Penjor says, “For three years, 2013-2015 BSS had played a parental role for the children. With the support in form of school uniforms, laptops, printer, vegetable seeds, water filters and cameras, the school had seen dramatic changes in all spheres of school activities. Indeed the support really eased the burden of the people in the community especially those who would have to struggle to meet the basic needs of their family.”

Penjor further says, “the children felt good and equal in their uniform, the parents need not have to toil hard to provide their children with uniform and the teachers can use the laptops, printer and cameras in their planning and delivery of lessons.” – “As teachers, we find it lively when we see our children in uniform without discrimination in their attire. Using ICT during the course of teaching helps them understand the lessons better and it helps us to teach more as well”, was echoed by Dendup Tshering. Similar experiences were also shared by the teachers and parents of Tradijong Primary School, which has received support since 2011.

The support program brought numerous constructive changes to the school and in the lives of students, teachers and parents.

ii. Water filters
The researcher found that all the students of these schools are direct beneficiaries of the support, and every child has benefited directly from the receipt of the uniform set. Water filters and vegetable seeds contribute towards good nutrition and health.
health. Laptops, printer and cameras directly help teachers in delivering effective lessons to the children. Dorji Tshering who is looked after by his maternal aunt feels blessed by the society’s support. He rejoices, “I am very happy to come to school in this new gho and shoes because I don’t have to wear my faded ones.” Similarly, Leki Yangzom who is in class four shares, “I feel myself beautiful in the new kira gifted to me by the society.”

ii. General economic status of the families
Parents said they would have to spend nearly Nu. 3000 on a child’s uniform annually. With this support, they can save this amount and use in buying some other essential items needed in the house for the family. Teacher Kinga Penjor puts: “The annual uniform expenditure, of course the larger portion of what individual family earns, can be channelled towards other priorities such as buying nutritious food”. School cook Dorji Kencho, whose daughter was a beneficiary of the support says: “Some parents are very poor and are not able to come up with even one ngultrum. They also have large families. We thank SSB for supporting our children with uniforms and other necessities”.

iii. Impact on the overall academic performance
When all children wear a same dress, it dispels disparity among the children and improves their self-esteem. It encourages children to go to school without hesitation. The school has observed rise in children’s attendance. This has contributed to enhance academic performance of the children. Water filters ensure clean and safe drinking water and reduce the risk of illness, vegetable seeds produce fresh and green vegetables and provide required diets, and electronic gadgets make teachers convenient in planning and delivering both curricular and co curricular activities besides exposing every child towards modern gadgets. All these too contribute towards improvement in overall academic performance. When students have everything in uniformity they don’t feel themselves discriminated from others.

IV. Suggested ways for sustainability of such support systems and way forward.
All parents that the researcher met say that they have nothing to comment on this except to show their deep gratitude for the support. They only wish that such support should continue in a school like theirs. They are extremely helpless and feel sorry for not being able to do anything in return to help strengthen this support. On the other hand, teachers have different opinions. Principals of both the schools think that the SSB/BSS should provide the school with money and authorize procurement of goods through a committee with proper and records for audit.

Recommendation and Conclusion
The education office Panbang, responsible for looking after all the 11 schools under Panbang Drungkhag Administration, strongly recommends the continuity of this generous support from the SSB/BSS. It is a significant testimony of close ties between the two societies. This support is also formally channelled through the Department of School Education under Ministry of Education. Beneficiary schools have expressed their deep gratitude for the great benefits they are bestowed with. They have enough reasons to qualify SSB/BSS as their true benefactor. Quality of education does not lie in the glory of buildings alone, but also in the glory of our teachers and learners. SSB and BSS has truly glorified them.
Lyonpo Dr Kinzang Dorji:
«Sustainable social and economic development at the grassroots level in Bhutan needs very active local Civil Society Organisations (CSO)»
By E. Werner Külling, Member of the Board

From September 8th – 15th, 2015, on invitation of the SSB Board, the President of our sister organisation in Bhutan, BSS, Lyonpo Dr Kinzang Dorji, paid an interesting visit to Switzerland. Discussions were held to foster a stronger future cooperation and to define common strategies between the two Societies. Furthermore, Lyonpo Kinzang gave an excellent speech about the role of Monarchy in Bhutan with a special focus on the reign of the 4th Druk Gyalpo, H.M. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who celebrated his 60th birthday on November 11th, 2015. The Chairman of BSS visited different regions of Switzerland where he met with many old friends of his longstanding cooperation with Helvetas. Furthermore, SSB organised him possibilities of an intensive and deep look into the roles, structures and activities of a number of Swiss Civil Society Organisations (Vereine) which very much fascinated him in view of their inputs and effects for democracy and development in the country. Back to Bhutan, Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji wrote a very interesting report about his visit which can be downloaded from the website of the SSB. (www.bhutan-switzerland.org)

The following is a short extract from the report:
«Bhutan and Switzerland: From development cooperation to people-to-people cooperation, and more?» By Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji

«What amazed me at first and impressed me most was their democratic structure at the grassroots level in the form of «Vereine », as they call it, which could be translated as associations or cooperatives or clubs, which also include CSOs. This culture is so pervasive in Switzerland that it has become a feature of modern Swiss life with almost every Swiss citizen being member of at least one if not more such ‘Vereine’. So, in the few places I visited recently, I have come across so many such associations covering such varied areas as hiking trails, wine growers, ropeways, singing, airsoft guns, church choir, shooting, gymnastics, women’s gymnastics, football, Bernese mountain dog, alpine pastures, association of mule museums, etc. In fact, in a village called Malans under Canton of Graubünden, there are more than 20 such groupings.

A minimum of three people are required to form such a ‘Verein’, an article of association is required to be put in place by the founding members; a president, a secretary and a treasurer are required to be elected from among the members to form the Board of Directors; an auditor is also required to be appointed; at least one annual general meeting of all the members is required to be held; and the Board should meet at least four times a year. But the most noteworthy features are that they seem to function more as self-help groups, and that they are run more or less by volunteers. While majority view shall prevail in reaching a decision, the minorities are free to articulate their views and try to change a decision. This, my Swiss friends told me, was the bedrock of their democracy. I was also told that formation of associations of workers of various trades had contributed tremendously to Swiss growth and prosperity.

Why should Bhutan for its social development not profit from the numerous models and experiences of Switzerland in this field, may be with a strong support of the Swiss partner organisation SSB?!»
Activities of SSB Members

Wangdue Phodrang Dzong Reconstruction Project – Aspects of cultural heritage and safety

By Andreas Galmarini, WaltGalmarini AG, Zürich and Nagtsho Dorji, Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites, Thimphu

Editor’s note: This is a short extract of the full text containing information on the history, the reconstruction project, the construction challenges and developments over the centuries, the actual situation on site, and many more pictures. Find the full text on www.bhutan-switzerland.org!

Wangdue Dzong was destroyed by fire on 26th June 2012. The Dzong was built in the 17th century by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal and is situated at a strategically important intersection of the country’s main east-west axes with an important north-south axis. The Dzong’s position on the end of a ridge between the two rivers Punatsangchu and Dangchu made it easy to defend and enabled a good view over the traffic on the axes. In the early days, the Dzongpon of Wangdue Phodrang was the powerful ruler, after the Dzongpons of Punakha and Thimphu.

The Reconstruction Project

Immediately after the shocking loss, the debris was searched and surviving cultural assets salvaged. The ruins were documented and assessed for their stability. Unfortunately, the heat of the fire caused the stones of the wall surfaces towards the court yards to crack such that vast parts of the ruins had to be levelled.

The Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites (DCHS) headed the documentation and the planning of the reconstruction. Financing was secured through generous funding and sponsoring from His Majesty the King, the Government of India, and several other organisations and private persons. In 2014, a Steering Committee was constituted and the reconstruction work started.

Situation on Site

At the time of writing, the Kuenray (corner tower) and the foundation of the Utse (central tower, dividing the administrative and monastic parts of the Dzong) were completed and works on site focus on the first court yard where the sourcing of good quality stones and of sufficient wood of good quality is a worry. There are up to 400 people working on site and in the carpentry workshop in Samtang.

Dzong right after the fire on 26th June 2012

Site in January 2015

Site with completed Kuenray in June 2016.
Mountains and Earthquakes – Fieldwork and results of two geophysics projects in Bhutan

By Prof Dr G. Hetényi – Summary of the presentation given at the SSB General Assembly (12.03.2016) in Zürich

The Himalayas are not only home of the highest mountains on Earth but also home of some of the largest earthquakes. Historical and geological records in Nepal document that during these earthquakes some regions were completely devastated, and more than half of the local population could have died. In Bhutan we know of one such historical earthquake, in 1713, reported by one person in a monastery document. And, as probably more widely known, in 1897 the great Shillong plateau earthquake has also strongly shaken Bhutan.

The modern era of studying earthquakes started about 40 years ago, when a sufficient number of recording instruments was operating around the Earth to establish catalogues, i.e. lists of earthquake locations, times and magnitudes. These catalogues show that in the past 40 years there have been more earthquakes in Nepal than in Bhutan. But is this really the case? Bhutan does not have recording instruments, could it be that we simply missed to detect smaller earthquakes during all this time? And on the long term, could there have been other major catastrophes, without any surviving note? How does Nepal and Bhutan compare in terms of geodynamics?

It is with these and similar questions that two teams of scientists, at ETH Zürich and at the University of Montpellier, have started various research projects in 2010. Over the years, the teams have spent significant amount of time in Bhutan doing fieldwork with the help of the Department of Geology and Mines in Thimphu.

The total amount of person-kilometres driven for these projects on Bhutanese roads is enough to go around the Earth several times! We were lucky to have been granted permission to enter Bhutan and to work there in a very flexible way, and we were also lucky that our projects have been funded over so many years. Thanks to all supporting funds and agencies! (See also the presentation of the project GANSSER in the SSB Newsletter June 2013, p. 11-13, www.bhutan-switzerland.org/images/pdf/newsletter_june-13.pdf).

For members and sympathetic friends of SSB it is needless to explain how interesting Bhutan is; still, our own fieldwork experience merits a few thoughts. We ate so much ema datsi that we could develop an empirical Chilliness Intensity Scale (see table below). We seem to be the first people who have driven from Zhemgang to Gelephu and back on the same day. We laughed a lot on funny road-side warning signs in Eastern Bhutan, such as “After whisky driving is risky”. Without speaking a word of Dzongkha, we could enjoy a radio emission where people called to sing a song of their village, and by that share their culture with others despite the distance. And we were delighted to get so much help from the Bhutanese.

During our fieldwork, we have carried out two types of geophysical measurements. In the gravity project, we have used an incredibly sensitive spring to detect tiny changes in the Earth’s attraction. In fact this attraction depends on the type (density) and amount (thickness) of different rocks underground. In the seismology project we have operated devices that “listen” vibrations caused by earthquakes, including small ones, which are not felt by humans. From this we could construct a catalogue for the area of Bhutan for years 2013-2014. It is a great improvement, as stations around the Earth have detected only 5 events in the region during this time, but our network has detected about 3000!

The distribution of earthquakes on a map shows that Bhutan actually has fewer earthquakes than Nepal. There is activity in the area of Mongar, where the 2009 earthquake took place, and also near the western and eastern border. Especially in the West: from Sikkim through Samtse and to the Shillong Plateau, earthquake activity occurs along a roughly 200 km long zone. This narrow and straight line of earthquakes is a discovery; we estimate that a magnitude 7 earthquake could take place on this fault. For the area of Bhutan, our catalogue suggests a potentially felt earthquake roughly once a week. This is about 15-20 times higher activity than that of Switzerland.

The gravity project results show that Nepal and Bhutan have different underground structures. In Nepal the India plate goes under the Himalayas following a smooth descent and at a not so steep angle. In Bhutan, the down-going plate bends sharply and dips at a higher angle. It is very likely that this difference is also reflected in topography: a low-lying central Indian region against the elevated Shillong Plateau. This plateau is most likely active as part of the stresses accumulating in the Himalayas is transferred there along the above mentioned fault discovered by our project.

This, in principle, could lower the earthquake hazard in the Bhutan Himalayas and could be...
good news for Bhutan. However, geological observations and trenches that have been dug along the southern border of Bhutan show that two major (possibly magnitude 8) earthquakes have occurred there in the past 1000 years. Simply, unlike in Nepal, there is no surviving historical record of these events.

Conclusions: although Bhutan seems to be geodynamically different from the rest of the Himalayas, large earthquakes are still possible at any time! We will certainly learn more about this topic, once there is a permanent seismological network operated in Bhutan. In the meanwhile: be prepared, if possible stay in small wooden or reinforced houses, and think ahead of what you would do if the ground starts moving under your feet or bed.

Figure: Instrumentally recorded earthquakes in the Himalaya-Tibet region before our project started. The red line shows the fault discovered by our project.

Chilliness intensity scale (empirical*)
1 – Prepared for tourists
2 – Nice level of chilliness
3 – Westerners start to have tears
4 – Adding onion does not change the feeling
5 – Westerners do not feel any difference beyond this level
6 – Bhutanese start to say it’s spicy
7 – Bhutanese say it’s quite spicy
8 – Bhutanese eat this only once a year
9 – Bhutanese start to have tears
10 – the yeti starts to have tears
*based on observations by György Hetényi and Théo Berthet
Archery in Bhutan – Update

By Georg Mattli, Zurich*
Photos by Nici Jost

Early Morning at the Olympic archery ground in Thimphu – the rising Bhutanese sun adds hard shadows and increases the contrast to the scenario – and the national archery team keeps to their tight training plan since hours.

The team is consisting of the most talented young archers from all over the country, they are professional athletes. Their work not only includes a repetition of hundreds of arrows daily, but also endurance, strength and mental training.

The hard work is bearing fruits. At the 2016 South Asian Games, which were held in India in February, Bhutan collected one silver and four bronze medals.

Since 1984, Bhutanese archers have competed at every edition of the Olympic Games. The team has historically been awarded Tripartite Places (wildcards), however the qualification through the open quota tournaments isn’t far off. It will be a challenge, since the current archers have been training for no more than two or three years and have less international experience than most.

On the third stage of the Archery World Cup in 2016 (Antalya, Turkey), where they are competing the world best athletes, there is the chance for them to collect the last Rio 2016 quota places. Good luck and all in the gold!

Bhutanese archery tradition dates back to 600 BC and it is the only country in the world where archery is the national sport. Therefore it is quite ironic, that every school has a basketball or volleyball court, but no target-archery field and there are no target-archery clubs in the country.

In order to kickstart the creation of these clubs, with the main interest of promoting the Recurve Bow ahead of Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, in 2016 Bhutan’s Archery Federation will start a grassroots program to introduce archery in schools. This archery program will start in Trashigang, where they opened a second office. Olympian Sherab Zam, supported by three other coaches, will manage the office.

It is still morning yet at the Olympic archery ground, but the day seems to becoming a really successful one…

* Georg Mattli is an archer himself and co-founder of TEN-Archery - a partnership venture between Bhutan and Switzerland - that develops high quality archery equipment: www.ten-archery.com
Meeting Point

Interview
By Otto Stern (OSt)

This interview – given on May 24, 2016 – presents
Atilla Atasoy (23), Bachelor in Linguistics, on an aspect of Dzongkha

This is an interview with somebody who never has set foot in Bhutan, but yet has a very special access to Bhutan through the Dzongkha language. Atilla Atasoy, member of the Swiss Study Foundation and holder of the Suyana-Foundation Scholarship, is a Bachelor student of Linguistics at Bern University. He studies and works in the Institute of Language Sciences, with Prof Dr George van Driem (specialist in Himalayan Languages) occupying the chair in Historical Linguistics. Atilla just finished his Bachelor’s thesis titled “Towards a description of the autolalic future in Dzongkha - An interview-based qualitative study.”

OSt: Who are you, and where are you from?
Atilla: My parents originate from Turkey, but I grew up in Wattwil, St.Gallen; I did my Matura (high-school diploma) centred on Physics and Applied Mathematics – because, originally, I wanted to become a nuclear physicist – but I quickly realized that I was not top in Maths. I’ve always been interested in languages, because I grew up bilingual, Turkish, at home only, and (Swiss) German. My fascination for languages started when learning French at school; it was so much easier for me as a bilingual! So in 2013, I came to study Linguistics at Bern University and wrote my thesis on Dzongkha in the spring semester 2016.

I’m fascinated by Dzongkha because – similar to Latin in Europe for centuries – the written form is classical Tibetan, Chokê, but the spoken varieties are quite different and distant from it, like e.g. early French from Latin. Similarly, in Europe, the writing was in Latin for many centuries, but the spoken varieties developed further and further away from it, until the writing in different languages, as e.g. Italian, Spanish and French, was standardized. The written form of Dzongkha is not yet at this point, but efforts to modernise it, i.e. to bring it closer to the spoken variety, is on its way. Spoken Dzongkha then, although being the official language, is not yet studied in all details, and the possibility to contribute a little detail, in my case the so called “autolalic future”, was a real challenge and a great opportunity to me.

In order to do so, I planned to conduct interviews with speakers of Dzongkha as part of the field work for my thesis, and with the generous help of Marianne Frei, President of SSB, and Mr. Karma Tshering of Gaselô, former News speaker for the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), I found very interesting interview partners, some of them here in Switzerland, others on internet as chat partners. I had planned to interview one or two persons and, thanks to Marianne, I was overwhelmed with eight interview partners, plus those on chat. It was the first time in my life I spoke to people I didn’t know at all in a faraway country, and I quickly recognized how proud they were of their national language. They were also very amazed that somebody in Switzerland was interested in their language. All this gives a Bachelor’s student the feeling of doing something useful in his work!

OSt: And what is this autolalic future?
Atilla: To summarize, the form is “-geno” which is a suffix of the verb. Following the explanation of Prof van Driem, it expresses one’s own intention of doing something in the future and is only uttered to oneself. But I felt that this explanation could not be complete, and I wanted to find out what’s its real everyday use. Here is an example from my thesis:

Sentences with the autolalic future describe commands by the speaker towards the group he or she is in (“we”), or fixed plans towards oneself (“I”). In such sentences, the verb is marked with -geno. The following examples are commonly used sentences with the autolalic future:

D’i tama nga d’a phêgeno. “I will deal with that later.”
Ngace tama beskop tawa jogeno. “Later on we will go and watch a movie.”
To make statements with the autolalic future though, the speaker must be of equal or higher social rank than the people, who hear the sentence.

**OSt:** How did you get interested in doing this particular study?

**Atilla:** Before my studies at Bern University I had never heard a word of Dzongkha, and I also had no knowledge of Bhutan. My fascination for Dzongkha and other languages of the Himalayas results solely from the lectures of Prof Dr George van Driem, who is one of the most important researchers in Tibeto-Burman languages and he coined the alternative term “Transhimalayan Languages”. He knows the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) very well; he did research for the DDC, and his Grammar of Dzongkha was written on request of DDC.

Bhutan as a country is comparable in size to Switzerland, but with many less inhabitants (about 770'000) 19 indigenous languages are spoken on its territory! I thought Switzerland was unique with four official languages, so the much more complicated linguistic situation of Bhutan challenged my linguistic mind. In a course of Prof van Driem on the languages of the Himalayas and especially on Dzongkha, I got hooked on this topic.

I wrote my thesis in the first half of 2016, and on May 13 I handed it in. It is a qualitative study based on interviews to find out how Dzongkha speakers use the “autolalic future”. The interviews where pre-structured, but I left room for a free discussion on the question of use of this linguistic form; and I realised that the Bhutanese are very cautious in their judgments, especially on a topic of their national language!

**OSt:** Where did the interviews take place?

**Atilla:** Three interviews, with the participants of the Hotel Management Project in Scuol, I did at the HWZ University of Applied Sciences in Zürich; two students from the Judiciary Program at the University of St. Gallen, HSG, preferred to do the interviews over Skype; one person I met at her host family in Canton Aargau, one in Basel, and one in Bhutan over Facebook.

In addition I was in a chat on Facebook (in written conversation) with about 20 Dzongkha speakers in Bhutan. This group discussion was done in English. Unfortunately, after half a year of learning Dzongkha, I was not able to lead the interviews in Dzongkha yet. I do understand quite a few things, and I can also read it. I know the grammatical structure of the language too, but to speak Dzongkha I would need a stay in Bhutan!

**OSt:** And what do you know about Bhutan?

**Atilla:** Unfortunately I didn’t have a chance to go there yet, but I hope there will be a chance after my studies! I know Bhutan only from the linguistic point of view. I know the names of the Dzongkhags and certain places where my professor did particular studies. I also roughly know the history of Bhutan, mostly also from the linguistic point of view – e.g. that Dzongkha became officially the national language in 1961 – and I have an idea of some cultural aspects.

**OSt:** What surprised you most in dealing with Bhutan?

**Atilla:** The biggest surprise was the fact that many Bhutanese know four to five languages, and still think they know little! I had interview partners who know Dzongkha, Hindi, Nepali, and of course English and now are even learning German while studying in Switzerland! And, when asked about their languages, they mentioned all these, and – in typical Bhutanese understatement – they added, “I’m sorry, but that’s all I know”!

Another thing that astonished me much is that in 1999 only, Bhutan got open to new technologies, and today, just two decades later, everybody is on Facebook, everybody has a Smart Phone and many of them have a Tablet; they taught me that on Facebook you can communicate with a camera! Interview partners over 50 years old are always online with Skype and Facebook; internet speed seems to be better than in Australia, and so on. In this regard they caught up with the most technologically developed countries! But one of my interview partners stressed also the problematic side of this development: “We caught up fast but there are also negative side effects to this, we prefer to go our own pace.”

**OSt:** Do you have plans for future steps in Linguistics?
Atilla: There will be one big step coming up – unfortunately away from Bhutan and the Himalayas: I plan to do my Master’s in Clinical Linguistics. I got into a Master Program with stays in Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, the European Master in Clinical Linguistics. My dream was always Clinical Linguistics, i.e. Neurolinguistics or Psycholinguistics. It was only thanks to the interesting courses about the Himalayan languages by Prof van Driem that I got on the Bhutan track!

OSt: Thank you for this interesting interview!

And don’t forget!
Under the heading “Meeting Point” the SSB Newsletter regularly features interviews with Bhutanese and Swiss people working, studying and visiting in the respective host country. It will give insight in the experiences and activities of Bhutanese and Swiss people in contact.
Contributions to this rubric from members of SSB and BSS, as well as the circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome!