

Stronger together:

Time for social reconstruction.

A team of seven students from Aalto University in Finland have worked with five peers from the Asian Institute of Technology and Management [AITM] in Nepal, conducting fieldwork together in Dhungentar, Nepal, aiming to research the local communality. Arising several questions, an important one was about the relationship between how social cohesion could contribute to sustainable reconstruction after disasters.

The real life development challenge that brings to life the Nepali project 2019 takes place within the *SGT Studio* course held by the School of Engineering. In 2019, *PBL South Asia* collaboration was born and aims to bring students to explore diverse development issues in the Global South. PBL involves ten universities from six countries all the way from Europe to Asia, including Finland and Nepal, Bhutan, India, The Netherlands and Lithuania. The Nepali project is the first pilot case within the three years of PBL South Asia, funded by the *Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union* and coordinated locally by Aalto Global Impact.

The interest in social sustainability came up in early stages of the project development process and that a reason why the Nordic team focused many resources on the field research around this theme, carrying through both individual and group interviews, focus groups and workshops. Additionally, giving methods of observation a major role, photography came in not only for documentation but mainly as a tool for understanding Dhungentar settlements, its resilience, spaces and interaction. For this, the team worked locally with community members and leaders of committees, together with NGOs, scholars and experts in the topics both in Finland and Nepal.

The community welcomed the large version of the Nepali team in last February, at the time a total of twelve students from both countries, integrated with bachelor and master students from areas such as engineering, management, business, arts and design. For about a week, the investigation took place intensively, entailing relevant qualitative information for the current data analysis processing. Although not aiming to limit the outputs to only a proper project report, the team held a photography exhibition at the newly built Multipurpose Community Hall, framed as a pilot event, while thinking forward on possible future scenarios for the Dhungentar valley.

Back in Helsinki, the team is currently sharpening the data as the dates for delivering the Project Report 2019 are approaching. The Project Report 2019 will be designed in two versions, English and Nepali, looking for directly contributing to the large numbers of current and potential beneficiaries. Additionally, the photo exhibition in Dhungentar, Nuwakot District in rural Nepal, will be set up in Helsinki by the end of the European spring, framed within the release of the Photo Book, specially created for complimenting the process, investigation and exploration of social cohesion.

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