

99 Efforts to improve sustainable tourism and environment sustainability: understanding from local people's perspective in Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone, Nepal Himalaya

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Introduction

Nature- and culture-based tourism have been prevalent pathways for most of the world's indigenous people (McLaren, 2003). Tourism has been a significant component of Nepal's economy. Mountain tourism plays a leading role in Nepal's tourism industry. Sagarmatha National Park and Buffer Zone (SNPBZ) is the third-largest visited protected area in Nepal (Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civitation, 2020).

Rapid development of tourism has brought remarkable changes in SNPBZ. Spoon (2012) and Stevens (1991, 1993) discussed tourism impacts on cultural values and lifestyle of mountain residents. Nepal (2005) argued the unequal power structures and income differences induced by tourism in the park.

Tourism is one of the essential elements to realize sustainable mountain development. To realize sustainable tourism, it is vital to enhance the well-being of residents and visitor experience in mountain regions. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the efforts made by local residents to improve sustainable tourism and environment sustainability in SNPBZ.

Study area

SNPBZ locates in the eastern part of Nepal. Founded in 1976, the park was listed as a World Heritage Site in 1979 because of its outstanding natural and cultural resources (Baral et al., 2017a, 2017b). The core zone of the park covers an area of 1,148 km². The buffer zone, established in the south of the core zone in 2002, covers an area of 275 km². The landscape in the park embodies mountains, glaciers, and rivers, ranging from 2,800 to 8,848 m.

Until March 2017, the park area consisted of three village development committees (VDCs), namely Chaurikharka as the buffer zone and Namche and Khumjung as the core zone. After that, a new local-level government, Khumbu Pasang Llamu Rural

Municipality, was established to replace the VDCs. The inhabitant population in the park is predominantly Sherpas, followed by Rai, Tamang, and other ethnic groups.

With the first ascent of Mt. Everest by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay on 29 May 1953, significant trekking and sightseeing activities began in the Everest region, bringing profound changes to the Sherpa's economy. Trekking and mountaineering activities are generally conducted in the spring and fall seasons. Visitors trek either in single or group in the park. The number of visitors to the park had increased from 5,836 in 1980 to 52,424 in 2019 (SNP Jorsalle Entry Point).

Methods

This study is based on four sources: (1) literature review on Sherpa tourism; (2) on-site interviews mainly with lodge owners, government officials, trekking guides, and visitors between 2017 and 2019; (3) field observations between 2017 and 2019; and (4) 2 group discussions with local communities.

In total, this study conducted 41 interviews: 13 with lodge owners, 8 with visitors, 7 with government officials, 6 with trekking guides, 3 with lodge managers, 2 with school principals, and 2 with shop owners. This study employed two types of interviews. The interviews with eight visitors were open-ended and conducted in Chinese, Japanese, and English. The other 33 interviews with local people were semi-structured and conducted in English. The visitors' interview questions focused on general opinions and their experience of tourism in the park. The interview questions with local people mainly focused on tourism and park development, activities conducted in the park, and perceived benefits and costs in the park.

Results

The interview survey revealed that local people in SNPBZ had conducted various activities to improve

| Category | Type | Village | Name of Organization | Activities |
|------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| | Tourism-related | Toktok, Zamphute, Benkar | Culture and Environment Conservation Youth Club | Trekking trails repair; construction of Sherpa dancing hall to attract tourists to stay overnight |
| | | Namche Bazaar | Hotel Association | Setting lodge sign board; standardizing the price of common rooms; providing clothes to porters |
| Community | Environment-related | Namche Bazaar | Women's Group | Gabbage collection regularly in the village |
| | | Namche Bazaar | Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee | Construction and management of public toilets and water supply along trekking trails; construction of garbage bins and awareness program at schools; collecting gabbage from Everest Base Camp every year |
| | | Khumjung, Pangboche, Phortse | Khumbu Sherpa Culture Conservation Society | Nawa forest management system; setting bird conservation area |
| | | Thamo | Thamo community | Stopping firewood collection |
| | | Benkar | Himalayan Plantation Proramme | Tree nursery and plantation in needy place |
| Individual | Tourism-related | Namche Bazaar | Sonam Sherpa | Expanding Sherpa Culture Museum |
| | | Near Namche Bazaar | Pasang Sherpa | Building and maintaining the trekking trail to Everest Base Camp (from 1984) |

Table 1. Summary of tourism and environment improvement activities conducted by local people in SNPBZ, many of which are related to sustainable tourism and environment sustainability.

tourism development and environment conservation, many of which may lead to sustainable tourism and environment sustainability (Table 1).

Communities and individuals carried out these activities although many of the activities may be unconscious behavior. Furthermore, there are mainly two types of activities: one is tourism-related, and another is environment-related.

Discussion

The interview results with local people indicated the existence of imbalanced development and benefits among villages. Most local people agreed that villages along the main trekking routes benefited more than those located away from the main routes. In less developed villages such as Benkar, local residents need to develop strategies to design those villages to facilitate experiences to enhance visitors'

perceived experience value: otherwise, sustainability of those villages would not be guaranteed. The interview results with visitors indicate that hygiene is a top concern by visitors, and Sherpa culture is barely known among the visitors.

Conclusion

Mitigating the imbalanced tourism development and unequal benefits and increase visitors' experiences is crucial for the development of sustainable tourism destinations and villages. The findings of this study showed that local residents have conducted a variety of activities to enhance visitors' experience and environment sustainability in SNPBZ. However, whether these activities can mitigate the challenges above needs further examination.

References

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