RESEARCH PAPER

Tourism Impacts on Local Culture, Heritage and Architecture in the High Himalayan Settlements

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ABSTRACT

Tourism specifically ecotourism has been considered as an alternative approach to enhance community benefits vis-a-vis protection of natural and cultural heritage in the indigenous settlements. This study considers a case of indigenous communities from the high Himalayan settlements, such as the Everest region, to examine the perceived community impacts of tourism on Sherpa culture, heritage and architecture and explore whether local cultural heritage has been preserved or deteriorated with the growth of tourism. It has adopted a qualitative approach with descriptive and explanatory methods employing multiple tools of data collection such as household's survey, key informants interview, participant observation, informal discussion with local residents and archival research for examining the socio-cultural impacts of tourism. The survey results revealed that tourism has induced both positive and negative impacts on architecture, heritage and socio-cultural attributes of local residents. Although tourism has improved the local economic condition as well as social facilities and infrastructure in the settlements; the authenticity and significance of local culture, traditions and architectural heritage have been severely threatened by the rapid growth of tourism. The unplanned and uncontrolled growth of tourism along with lack of education and awareness among residents and tourism stakeholders about conservation of local cultural heritage are responsible for the deterioration of cultural heritage. In addition, lack of proper by-laws and control on the construction of private buildings, and no specific attention towards continuing the vernacular architecture, and cultural practices has pushed Sherpa communities towards crisis of cultural identity and authenticity. This study suggests formulating comprehensive policies of conservation of local cultural heritage and sustainable tourism and adopting an inclusive planning approach to promote sustainable community development in the Himalayas.

| **KEYWORDS** | Architecture, Heritage, High Himalayan Settlements, Local Culture, Tourism Impacts |

Introduction

Many developing countries are committed towards tourism development to receive economic growth through responsible use of natural and cultural resources (Duffy, 2002). The indigenous communities residing in the tourism destinations are often attracted towards tourism development specifically to receive socio-economic benefits. Sustainable tourism is supposed not only to contribute towards economic development but also bring changes in environmental and socio-cultural attributes of local communities. Mountain region is the most popular tourist destinations of Nepal specifically for trekking, mountaineering, and exploring wildlife and diverse indigenous culture. Settlements located in the mountain region are largely influenced by the development of tourism. The world's most famous trekking trail, Everest trail, is located in Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) in the High Himalaya region. As the large numbers

of indigenous people are living in or around the protected areas; rapid growth of tourism has affected their way of life, culture, architecture, heritage, economy and environment. With more than six decades of tourism development, several settlements around the Everest Trail in the High Himalayan region have not only experienced transformation in terms of land use, shape and size but also undergone through significant socio-cultural, architectural, economic and environmental changes (Nepal, 2003, Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004; Bhatta, 2019). In this context, this paper aims to critically examine the impacts of tourism on local culture, architecture, and heritage form the community perspectives and explore possible ways to conservation of cultural heritage and architecture in the case of settlements around the Everest Trail in the Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal. It highlights on the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism and critically argued whether local culture, architecture and heritage has been preserved or deteriorated with the growth of tourism.

Literature Review

Tourism Impacts on Local Culture, Heritage and Architecture

Tourism is an instigator of change (Wall, 1996), and these changes reveal the impacts of tourism which are often measured in terms of positive (beneficial) and negative (detrimental) impacts. The impacts result from the complex interrelationship among host communities, tourists, and natural environments, and are mutually interdependent (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Several scholars have conducted studies on the potential impacts of tourism on the destination communities (e.g. Bhatta, 2019; Bhatta & Chan,2013; Boo, 1993; Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004; Stone & Wall, 2003; Weaver, 1998). These impacts vary widely with variation in the quality of attraction, accessibility, regulations, management, and many other factors. Extensive research has confirmed that tourism not only plays an important role in the economic development, but also brings enormous socio-cultural impacts (Hall & Lew, 1998; Lindberg et.al, 2001; Pizam & Milman, 1984; Smith 1989). According to Pizam and Milman (1984), socio-cultural impacts are the "ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships, collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and organizations". It shows that the changes in communities might be the structural such as change in livelihoods and increase in population or changes in intangible heritages. Similar definitions have been proposed by many other scholars (e.g. Fox, 1977; Honey, 1999; Nepal, 2003; Bhatta,2019). The socio-cultural changes or impacts in local communities are brought by the interaction between host and guest, and the difference in their basic values and logic systems; religious beliefs; traditions; customs; lifestyle; behavioral patterns; dress codes; sense of time budgeting as well as attitudes towards strangers (Inskeep, 1991). In addition to type of tourist's activities, the time of interaction between tourists and local communities also determine the magnitude of socio-cultural impacts.

Scholars such as Cater (1987), Butler (1990) and Wearing (2001) strongly argued that longer the duration of tourist's stay in the destination, more will be the tourist's understanding of host community, and also accelerate the changes on the socio-cultural pattern of the host. It shows that the host-guest interaction either leads to an improved reputation and visibility of the host community among the eco-tourists or it can also be overly intrusive and harmful despite the best of intentions among tourists (Wearing, 2001). The increase in number of tourists and their interaction with host communities can bring several local benefits, such as: new services and facilities become accessible to the host populations which are actually developed to cater growing number of tourists; local

arts, traditions and cultural activities are revived and preserved as a tourism product; and attitude of local people and tourists towards each other may be enhanced (Diamantis, 2004). Moreover, tourism has also provided new jobs to women and youths that led to their economic independence and integration into society. Alternatively, in some cases, cultural attractions through commoditization become overtly commercialized in nature, satisfying the visitors need but losing all meaning and significance for the local communities (Wearing, 2001). Moreover, in contrast to cultural revival, scholars also reported the "demonstration effect" where local people imitate tourists" behavior and their way of life to become more westernized like tourists (de Kadt, 1979; Mathieson & Wall, 1982).This impact is supposedly caused in large by perceived power differentials between tourists and community members (deKadt,1979). Moreover, the cultural concerns in the interaction between tourists and communities can also be viewed in terms of assimilation, acculturation and cultural drift (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). In many cases, tourism has created social problems on the communities. For example, in Costa Rica, Campbell (1999) reported the negative impacts of tourism such as: increased drug use, disorder, prostitution, crime, foreign land ownership and over-development. Influxes of tourists and outsiders such as entrepreneurs and labors also exacerbate the overcrowding which may displace local people to the periphery from the center of tourism activities, and may also create conflicts between locals and outsiders specifically for grabbing tourism opportunities. It may also contribute to power differentials between tourists and local people that further led to separation and antagonistic relation between them. Physical displacement may also reduce the local access to the PA resources also reduces local benefits from ecotourism.

These socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism on the host communities can be evaluated through proper judgment on changes on the population structure; transformation of types of occupation; transformation of values; influence on traditional way of life; and modification on consumption pattern of local people (Wearing, 2001). It is, however, crucial to note that the identification and examination of impacts depends on value judgments (Eagles, 2001), and who makes the judgment is a critical element of decision making process. In this regard, appreciation of local communities and their customs and traditions as a process of mutual respect and understanding between different societies is crucial to promote long term sustainability. Certainly, there exist mixed views about impacts of ecotourism on the local communities. In some cases, scholars pointed that ecotourism development has faced organized protests of communities to ensure that the projects should not be implemented in their areas. While on the other hand, increasing dependency of communities on ecotourism to receive economic revenues and benefits also make them unable to oppose ecotourism development. In this regard, the issues of who gets benefits, and to what extent, are a crucial concern specifically to sustain ecotourism development at the destinations. The widespread conception is that once communities get more benefits, they will continue to support the tourism development. The perceptions and responses of local communities towards ecotourism development are thus crucial to produce better results as well as sustain ecotourism for long-term.

Community Perceptions towards Impacts of Tourism

The perceptions and attitudes of local people towards tourism depend, to a large degree, on the interaction with tourists and the possible consequences of tourism (Bhatta, 2014). Murphy (1985, p.120) pointed that attitudes are personal and complex; however, in terms of community attitudes, there are three main determinants. First is the type of contact which exists between resident and visitor. Second is the relative importance of

the industry to the individual and community, and the third is a tolerance threshold. A number of models have been used to elucidate the response of communities towards tourism. One of the first models is the "Irritation Index" proposed by Doxey (1976), who consider community attitudes towards tourism go through a series of stages such as euphoria, apathy, irritation, antagonism and the final stage when a community is undermined and destination lose its attraction (Telfer & Sharpley,2008). It indicates that local perceptions of tourism impacts are linked with the stages of development, for example: positive attitudes are found at less developed destinations or at initial stage of tourism, however with increase in tourism they may perceive negative impacts and oppose the tourism development (Bhatta, 2014). In a cross-cultural study of European tourists holidaying in Turkey, Dogan (1989) evaluated the response of local communities towards tourism from resistance to adoption of western culture, and proposed four categories of local responses, for example: resistance, retreatism, boundary maintenance, and adoption.

Although several models have been used to examine community perceptions and responses; the theoretical foundation for these studies is largely the social exchange theory, which was proposed by Ap (1992) to explain local attitudes towards tourism development. This theory contends that attitudes are influenced by the perceptions of benefits (positive impacts) associated with tourism development. It revealed that local people evaluate tourism in terms of expected benefits and costs obtained in return for their services that is social exchange (Lee & Back, 2006). Therefore, residents who perceive themselves as benefiting from tourism will most likely to view it positively; while those who perceive themselves as incurring costs will be negative towards tourism (Telfer & Sharpley,2008). Nevertheless, since Ap's (1992) study, social exchange theory has been widely used in evaluating local attitudes and perceptions towards tourism. This theory is most frequently confirmed by studies that link positive attitudes towards tourism development with economic benefits (Lee & Back, 2006; Walpole & Goodwin, 2001). However, understanding of local attitudes is not as simple as weighting up the perceived benefits and costs. In addition to the stage of tourism development, local attitudes and perceptions are also influenced by several other factors, for example demographic variables influence attitudes indirectly through values (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997). Attitudes are also related with individual's characteristics such as level of contact with tourists, length of residence at destination, ethnicity (Liu & Var, 1986), economic dependency (Milman & Pizam, 1988), education and many others. Once the perceived benefits of ecotourism outweigh the costs, local people may continue to support ecotourism development.

Material and Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with descriptive and explanatory methods. The high Himalayan settlements located around the Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) are selected for detailed investigation. Multiple methods of data collection such as questionnaire survey with households (n=195), semi-structured interview with key informants (n=8), participant observation, informal discussion and documentation analysis have been used. The set of questionnaires were designed with open and close ended questions that provided respondents an opportunity to express their opinions and suggestions. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5) has been used in evaluating perceived socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Besides impacts, the scale varies according to set of questions and its objectives. Documentation consisted of collection of written documents from the official records, relevant publications, reports, photographs and videos. Extensive discussion and field notes were

carried out through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and informal discussion.

A primary field survey was conducted during February 2012 to understand local context of the study area, and an in-depth field survey was conducted during September to November 2012, the peak seasons for tourists in the Everest region. The author visited the Everest region twice again on September 2015 and 2019 to explore new architectural development and perceived impacts in the settlements. The stratification criteria such as location of households, type of enterprise, use of the building and the household activities were used during the selection of survey unit. Considering the spatial context, households were selected from the Major Trail (MT) i.e. major streets in the settlements as well as from off-the trail (OT) i.e. secondary or branch streets in the settlements. These were selected as survey units through stratified random sampling. The approximate distance of a peripheral household from main trail is supposed to be 500 meters (maximum).

Households representing both the locations were selected specially to understand the perceptions and attitudes of households towards tourism impacts on local culture, heritage and architecture. In addition, the type of use of the building and the engagement of households in specific activities were considered as criteria for selecting the households as a survey unit. Local perceptions towards significance of local culture and heritage, and socio-cultural impacts in their life are examined. The perceived socio-cultural impacts are examined with regard to: (i) Local values, customs and identity (i.e. change in traditional values and customs; and change in family relationship and cohesiveness) (ii) Local art, craft, and heritage conservation (i.e. appreciation and revival of traditional art and crafts; conservation of local architecture, heritage and overall built environment; and codes of conduct) (iii) Cultural exchange and appreciation (i.e. interaction, intercultural appreciation and harmony between tourists and local community; education, and interpretation facilities) (iv) Crime and vandalism (i.e. use of drug, sexual harassment, vandalism and other crimes) and (v) Quality of life (i.e. social services and facilities.

Results and Discussion

Scholars are increasingly concerned about the rapid development of tourism and its socio-cultural sequences on the lives of indigenous people (Pizam & Milman, 1984; Hall & Lew, 1998; Lindberg et.al., 2001). Assumed to be a benign idea, ecotourism maximize social benefits while minimizing socio-cultural costs. The impacts of tourism development on the local culture, heritage, architecture and other socio-cultural aspects of community are discussed critically with reference to the views and perceptions of local communities in the Everest region.

Significance of Local Culture and Heritage

Indigenous culture, heritage and social attributes play an important role in the promotion of ecotourism development in the rural destinations (Chan & Bhatta,2019). Rural destinations provide tourists a unique and authentic experience of indigenous culture and heritage. In case of settlements of Everest region, majority of respondents acknowledged that Sherpa culture, tradition, and heritage are crucial for promoting ecotourism development. Survey findings demonstrated that about 81.1% respondents in ET believed their culture and tradition significant in attracting tourists in their settlements. Comparatively, higher proportion of respondents in MT (86.1%) perceived their culture and tradition crucial in promoting tourism development than that of OT

(69%). Local residents also perceived their built heritage and archaeological sites as important attributes for tourism development in the region. The survey results revealed that majority of respondents in ET (81%) perceived their architectural heritage significant in attracting tourists. Relatively, higher proportion of respondents in MT perceived built heritage more crucial for attracting tourists and promoting ecotourism development than that of OT. Majority of Sherpa residents considered their culture and architectural heritage crucial assets for promoting ecotourism and sustainable development in their settlements.

Community perceptions towards socio-cultural changes in their life

Research findings reported that majority of respondent perceived tourism as an agent of socio-cultural changes. Survey results reveal most of the respondents (89.2%) acknowledged that tourism has changed their socio-cultural life, however in a varying degree. Only 6.2% believed there was no change in their socio-cultural attributes, while 4.6% didn't know about it. Comparatively, higher proportion of respondents in MT (41.6%) perceived significant ('a lot') changes in their socio-cultural attributes than that of OT (13.8%). However, slightly higher proportion of respondents in OT (58.6%) perceived these changes minor than that of MT (54.7%). Overall, it is explicit that tourism has changed socio-cultural life of local communities in MT and OT in a varying degree (from 'a little' to 'a lot'). Households were also asked how they view tourism-induced socio-cultural changes. It is found that most of them perceived the changes positively (78.2%), and rest perceived mixed views both 'good and bad' (21.3%), and 'very bad' (0.6%). Higher proportion of respondents in OT perceived these changes positively (88.1%) than that of MT (74.6%). The positive changes are reported as increase in social facilities and services; inter-cultural interaction and appreciation; awareness of local culture and heritage; and exposure and understanding of foreign culture (Bhatta, 2014). On the other hand, negative changes include loss of traditional socio-cultural activities, gatherings and interaction among local residents.

Akin to socio-cultural changes in the life of individual households, majority of respondents (95.9%) also acknowledged that tourism has changed their community as well. Over half of the respondents (59.5%) rated these changes as major ('a lot') while 36.4% viewed as minor ('a little'). Those respondents who replied on the socio-cultural changes in their community (n=186) were further asked how they viewed such changes. Overall, only 37.1% respondents perceived the impacts positively; majority (61.3%) had mixed views ('good and bad'); and rest (1.6%) perceived negatively. Comparatively, respondents in OT (48.3%) are more likely positive with the changes than that of MT (29.9%). On the other hand, percentage of respondents perceiving changes both 'good and bad' is comparatively higher in MT (67.2%) than that of OT (37.9%). Tourism has indeed brought significant socio-cultural changes in the community, and majority of respondents perceived them both positively and negatively ('good and bad'). It is true that tourism in MT has induced both positive and negative impacts on the residents and community; however the level of tourism impacts on socio-cultural aspects is comparatively less in OT than MT.

Impacts on Local Culture, Traditions, and Architectural Heritage

It is widely recognized that appropriate planning of ecotourism support revival of indigenous culture, traditions, and architectural heritage specifically through education, awareness, skill development, and financial contribution (Chan & Bhatta, 2013). With regard to settlements along the Everest trail, survey results revealed that most of the respondents perceived tourism both positively and negatively specifically for

its contribution in the preservation of local culture, traditions, and architectural heritage. Acknowledging the widespread impacts of tourism on the local communities including the cultural heritage, Sherpas have become increasingly aware of their indigenous culture, traditions, and heritage. Majority of households (90.3%) perceived that their feeling of pride and respect towards their culture and traditions has increased because of tourism development. However, with regard to the revival of cultural heritage, only 15.9% respondents believed that indigenous arts, crafts, customs and heritage have been revived, while majority (65.1%) disagreed and rest (19%) were unsure. There also exist difference in the perceptions of residents in MT and OT. For example, about 20.4% respondents in MT agreed with the revival of local culture, heritage, and arts and crafts through tourism development, while in OT only 5.2% did so. Majority of households in both areas (OT: 69%, & MT: 63.5%) also disagreed with the statement. The difference in the perception of residents could be because of their different levels of involvement and integration in tourism industry. Economic benefit of tourism is also one of the key factors determining the resident's perceptions in the rural destinations. Since residents along MT generally receive higher economic benefit from tourism than residents in OT (or peripheral region); they perceived tourism development more positively than that of OT. It also suggests that cash income from tourism and influence (dominance) of tourists has affected the Sherpas' way of living and socio-cultural process in the Everest.

Belonging to a Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, local Sherpas exhibit rich Buddhist traditions, ritual processes, and socio-cultural activities. Rapid growth of tourism has affected the continuity of local cultural activities; traditional dances, songs, and ceremonies are not frequently celebrated by the Sherpas. Although Sherpas consists unique folk dance, songs, dresses, and cultural activities; these are not yet developed as a tourism product. There seems a decreasing trend of Sherpas participating in the celebration of local festivals and ceremonies, essentially because of their involvement in tourism activities. Local Sherpas being the mountaineering professionals, stay out of their family most of the time, sometimes over 10 months, which has brought problems in Sherpa families and their community lifestyle. The increasing involvement of Sherpas including youths into tourism industry has pushed them towards western culture, lifestyle, and behavior which have essentially threatened sense of cultural continuity, authenticity and ethnicity of the Everest Sherpas.

With increase in economic benefits from tourism, some Sherpas specifically youths have adopted tourist's way of life spending huge amount of money in the bars and pubs. The development in the Everest region is largely tourist-centric with no attention towards Sherpa way of life, indigenous cultural activities, and authenticity. This is one of the key examples demonstrating changes in indigenous communities and their cultural identity brought by the influence of tourism and globalization. There is indeed a decreasing trend of Sherpas to participate in their cultural activities. With growing influence of western culture, indigenous culture has been increasingly neglected by Sherpa youths who involve in tourism or live in Kathmandu or abroad. Similar to Butler's life cycle (1980), research findings also suggest that the authenticity of Sherpa culture and heritage would be lost with rapid increase in tourism and growing influence of tourists, if proper planning interventions are not taken on time. Stressing on the need of educational awareness among local youths, one of the executive members of Youth Club in Namche, who is also a tourism entrepreneur, commented that:

"There is indeed a growing trend of adopting tourist culture while neglecting the local traditions and customs specifically by the Sherpa youths. To educate and aware local youths about the significance of our identity and culture, Youth Club and other local organizations have started

awareness campaigns for the youths. We have also asked all the Sherpas to wear traditional dress in the major cultural activities such as Dumje, and Mani Rimdu. We have also started promoting Sherpa culture as tourism products by organizing cultural activities for tourists, mostly in low tourist seasons"

This statement clearly signifies that Sherpas have been attracted towards tourist culture. It is further validated from the findings of the households' survey such as majority of respondents in (97.4%) agreed with statement "locals are inclined towards tourist culture". As deKadt (1979) and Mathieson and Wall (1982) pointed that copying of tourist way of life, habits and culture to become more westernized like tourists by the indigenous people is the 'demonstration effect of tourism'; which is also observed in the Sherpa community. The changes in socio-cultural values and culture of Sherpas, although, would have been partly by the introduction of radio, televisions, newspaper and migratory patterns of locals to the cities such as Kathmandu and foreign countries; tourism is the key factor accelerating the change in their socio-cultural values and attributes (Bhatta, 2014). Certainly, local Sherpas have been increasingly motivated towards financial benefits of tourism with less attention towards family life, cohesiveness and kinship among locals. The strong family cohesion and communal life existed in the past is being changed into individualistic life. About 40.5% respondents agreed that tourism has increased negative changes in family relationship and their cohesiveness. Similar percentage of respondents was unsure (neutral) and rest (19%) fully disagreed.

Besides changes in family cohesiveness and communal life, another substantial change brought by tourism development is the transformation of built structure, space, and the physical environment along the trail. Rapid growth of tourism has significantly transformed the shape, size, functional characteristics, and architecture of the settlements. The hotels, lodges, restaurants, and residences along the trail have been designed and constructed in an alien architectural style, building materials and technology. These buildings have neither addressed the features of local Sherpa architecture nor considered socio-cultural essence of Sherpa villages and communal life (Bhatta, 2014). On the contrary, interview with tourists revealed that majority of tourists prefer to experience genuine features of Sherpa culture and traditions including local foods, architecture, and cultural activities. One of the members of the BZMC commented that:

"Almost all the lodges, hotels and other buildings in the MT are constructed largely in non-local architectural style but equipped with modern facilities. Despite more flexible space and rooms, most of these buildings have lost vernacular identity of Sherpa architecture, culture, and society. They have introduced RCC technology, asbestos sheets, and glasses in the buildings to show their appearance more like western (modern) type. These buildings, in fact, are not climate responsive as they are too cold and consume high amount of energy to warm the rooms as compared to traditional Sherpa houses. Moreover, Sherpas have invested large amount of money to construct these buildings as the new materials need to be transported from outside the Everest region specifically from Kathmandu via helicopter or portering. The average cost for the construction of a lodge or hotel in the Everest region is usually 50-60 million NRS. The competition to secure high status in the society encouraged many Sherpas to invest high amount in the construction of lodge with modern facilities. One of the key reasons is that most of the entrepreneurs believe tourists prefer to live in quality hotels and lodges rather than traditional Sherpa house".

Certainly, construction of modern hotels and lodges with new scale and appearance has changed the built environment of the Sherpa settlements along the trail. Many Sherpas are aware of preservation of their culture, traditions, and customs; however they have not followed these norms in practice. It is because of the different

forces of tourism market, influence of globalization, change in their socio-economic status and lack of knowledge in marketing local heritage as a tourism product. Introduction of bars, pubs, massage, and other modern facilities in these remote settlements are the result of these forces. Another significant reason is the economic benefits from tourism, such as most of the entrepreneurs provide western cuisine which is comparatively expensive and more profitable than local foods. Key informants also suggested that local culture, architecture and environment have been severely affected by tourism development. Lack of proper regulations, architectural control, and awareness are also the key reasons accelerating degradation of local culture and architecture. It is arguably concluded that local architecture, built heritage and traditional identity of Sherpa ethnicity have been threatened by the uncontrolled and unplanned growth of tourism. The increasing tendency of Sherpa youths and tourism entrepreneurs to abandon their tradition, customs, values and heritage and to copy tourist attire, behavior and culture clearly indicate that tourism has adversely affected cultural heritage.
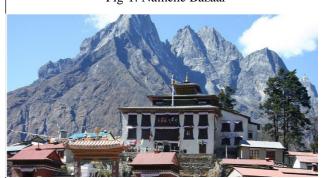

Fig-1: Namche Bazaar

Fig-2: Construction of a House at Namche

Fig-3: Monastery at Tengboche

Fig-4: Chorten along the Everest Trail

Fig-5: Traditional Sherpa House at Namc

Fig-6: Traditional Skills and Households Activiti

Community-tourist interaction and inter-cultural appreciation

Unlike cultural degradation caused by mass tourism, ecotourism is considered supportive to promote inter-cultural appreciation and protection of cultural heritage. Interaction among host (residents) and guest (tourists) is therefore inevitable to foster cultural continuity and identity of the local residents. The indigenous communities thus need to be considered as an integral part of the national park, not merely an anthropological museum of pieces but as living centers. Research findings revealed most of respondents in ET (62.6%) agreed that interaction between tourists and local community has increased cultural exchange and respect to each other, whereas 9.2% disagreed and rest (28.2%) were unsure. Comparatively, higher proportion of respondents in MT (64.9%) agreed with the statement than that of OT (56.9%). Since, the respondents in OT are also adjacent to MT, most of them participated in tourism activities and got exposure to tourist's culture. As highlighted by scholars such as Butler (1990) and Wearing (2001), more the duration of interaction between host and guest, more will be the understanding of local culture, and thereby respect each other and appreciate socio-cultural values.

Ecotourists are usually assumed to perform responsible and purposeful visit to protected areas, and also expected to appreciate local culture and heritage of the indigenous communities. In case of ET, most of the respondents (67.7%) agreed that tourist's stay in their communities has increased the appreciation of local culture and heritage. Similarly, about 68.7% in MT, and 65.7% in OT perceived tourism positively in appreciating Sherpa ethnic culture and traditions. With regard to overall satisfaction of residents towards tourist's behavior, findings revealed that majority of respondents (73.3%) are satisfied with tourist behavior. Respondents in MT (78.8%) seem more likely positive with tourist behavior than that of OT (60.3%). It seems that respondents did not perceive tourist's behavior so negatively. It is because most of the respondents depend largely on trekking and mountaineering activities, and economic benefits from tourism might have outweighed its cultural impacts. Key informants and some local entrepreneurs were more conscious about negative impacts of tourism in the indigenous culture and traditions. It's ironic that while tourists respect local culture, traditions and heritage of Sherpas; increasing number of residents specifically youths are neglecting their culture but adopting tourists' culture and their way of life. It is therefore essential to educate, aware, and encourage local youths to respect, preserve, and practice their local culture, spiritual values and traditions to sustain cultural continuity.

Education and Awareness Activities

Education and awareness activities are the fundamentals of ecotourism development for promoting sustainability. Ross and Wall (1999a,b) asserted that these activities are the backbone of ecotourism development enhancing mutual understanding between tourists and locals, and thereby increase respect towards indigenous culture, traditions and heritage. Indigenous communities should be able to properly communicate and interact with tourists specifically to aware them about local lifestyle, culture and indigenous identity (Bhatta, 2014). With more than half century's association with westernization, and opportunities to travel abroad, the local Sherpas have learned many western and oriental languages, and acquired new tastes. It is common for a Sherpa guide to speak 6-9 languages and to be able to prepare a variety of dishes uncommon to the Everest region (Sherpa, 1985). It is, however, not the case for other Sherpas specifically farmers and non-entrepreneurs. Findings of household's survey revealed that only 37.4% respondents agreed with the statement "local people can easily interpret their culture and social activities to tourists", while 36.4% disagreed, and rest (26.2%) were unsure. Comparatively, higher proportion of respondents in MT (41.6%) agreed

with the statement than that of OT (27.6%). It could be because tourism entrepreneurs and trekking and mountaineering professionals mostly live along MT and frequently interact with tourists than the residents in OT.

In addition, most of the residents seem positive towards tourists' behavior and culture and commented that tourism has provided opportunities to explore foreign culture in their own villages. It is true that Sherpas have learnt many positive things from tourists such as cleanness, mutual respect, hospitality, respect to local culture and traditions and foreign languages (Bhatta, 2014). Sherpas are, in fact, well-connected to rest of the world and also aware of new issues arising at national and global tourism industry. They interact with the most educated tourists such as professors, scientists, researchers, doctors, engineers, and many others from different part of the globe; tourism has provided them numerous learning opportunities. More specifically, Sherpa life in the Everest actually revolves around tourism, and tourism development would not be possible without the support of Sherpas.

Local culture, architecture and lifestyle have been strongly portrayed in the tourist information centre as well as private cultural museum at Namche. These two centers have become key tourist attractions in Namche. Some lodges and hotels have also prepared brochures and maps to inform tourists about Sherpa culture, heritage, and traditions along with natural resources. The survey result showed only 18.5% respondents perceived that the educational facilities such as museum, maps and information are well established in the ET, whereas majority (63.1%) disagreed, and rests (18.5%) were unsure. Nearly similar proportions of respondents in both areas agreed (MT: 19%, & OT: 17.2%), and disagreed (MT: 62.8%, & OT: 63.7%) with the statement. It arguably suggests that there is a need for implementing more effective information and educational awareness programs about local culture, traditions, heritage, arts and crafts, and socio-cultural life of Sherpa people (Bhatta, 2014).

Impacts on Quality of life of Local Communities

Significant proportion of respondents believed that tourism has significantly improved social facilities and overall quality of life in the Everest region. Since the first successful ascent of Mt Everest, the local Sherpas have received widespread recognition from the tourists specifically the westerners. Trekking and mountaineering activities thus brought a momentum for the development of local communities and the region. In cooperation with local and national government, several international organizations have implemented different development projects both for the ease of tourists as well as the local communities. The collaborative efforts of several I/NGOs, PA authority, and local communities along with international tourists have played crucial role to develop social facilities such as school, health post, electricity, drinking water, and other services. Survey findings in the ET revealed that majority of respondents (99%) agreed with the statement " tourism has brought significant improvement in the social facilities and infrastructure (education, health, and telecommunication) for locals". About 98.5% respondents in MT and all from OT (100%) agreed with this statement. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most crucial changes that tourism has brought to the local communities. Additionally, majority of respondents in ET (overall: 86.9%); MT (87.6%) and OT (84.5%) perceived that tourism has increased their happiness and quality of life. However, on the other hand, despite its significant benefits to local communities, tourism has also been perceived as an agent to increase crime, and use of alcohol and drug in the villages. Significant proportion of respondents (ET: 34.3%; MT, 33.5%; & OT, 36.2%) agreed with this statement. Several residents acknowledged that alcoholism and addiction of drug is

not only increased among tourists but also significant number of trek guides, porters, and local youths has been involved. Almost every hotel, lodge, restaurants and grocery shop sell alcohol. The operation of pubs and bars along the trail justify the increasing influence of tourist's culture (negative impacts) on local communities and their way of life.

Conclusion

Research findings revealed that tourism in the Everest region, the high Himalayan settlements, has induced both positive and negative impacts on architecture, heritage and socio-cultural attributes of local residents. The social facilities and infrastructure such as school, health post, drinking water, telecommunication, electricity, trekking trails, and information have been improved. However, on the other hand, the authenticity and significance of local culture, traditions and architectural heritage have been severely threatened by the rapid growth of tourism. More specifically, the cultural identity and authenticity of Sherpas is in crisis. One of the key reasons is the lack of comprehensive policies on sustainable ecotourism and the cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) conservation. The unplanned and uncontrolled growth of tourism along with lack of education and awareness among residents and tourism stakeholders about conservation of cultural heritage are responsible for the current situation of the Everest region. Undoubtedly, lack of proper by-laws and control on the construction of private buildings, and no specific attention towards continuing the vernacular architecture, and cultural practices has pushed Sherpa communities towards crisis of cultural identity and authenticity. Conservation of biodiversity is however placed at the highest priority with less attention towards continuing socio-cultural attributes and preserving the authenticity of Sherpa culture and sustainable management of tourism. These activities accelerate the degradation of socio-cultural attributes of local residents. It is noteworthy that better the implementation of conservation policies of local culture and heritage, better will be the tourism situation in the Everest region that would eventually benefit local communities and promote their sustainability. As such, it is recommended that there is a need of formulating and implementing a comprehensive policy of conservation of local cultural heritage and sustainable tourism and adopting an inclusive planning approach to promote sustainable community development in the Himalayas.

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