Sustainable Tourism Practices in Nepal and Its Challenges

Ramesh Khanal*

ORCID: 0009-0000-6441-5190

khanalramesh16@gmail.com

Abstract

This piece of writing delves into the contemporary status of sustainable tourism practices within the Mount Everest region, emphasizing ecological conservation, cultural preservation, and revenue generation while pinpointing significant obstacles. A study was conducted in Solukhumbu district utilizing a purposive sampling technique to gather data from 23 individuals, comprising trekking guides, hotel proprietors, porters, local community members, ward committee personnel, and tourists. The results underscore critical deficiencies in sustainability practices across three dimensions. Environmentally, tourism stakeholders exhibit limited awareness and insufficient conservation efforts, exacerbated by inadequate waste management. Socio-culturally, the absence of advocacy for indigenous culture by local stakeholders and a lack of understanding of local traditions among guides jeopardize cultural preservation. Economically, the seasonal character of tourism engenders income volatility, compelling residents to pursue alternative livelihoods. This has resulted in migration to urban centers or abroad, further intensifying income disparity within the community. Challenges encompass ineffective environmental strategies, feeble cultural promotion, and inequalities in income distribution. Tackling these challenges necessitates collaborative endeavors among stakeholders to enact responsible tourism practices. Fortifying legal frameworks, advancing cultural education, and empowering local communities are vital to augment sustainability and equitable advantages in the tourism sector of the Everest region.

Keywords

conservation, environment, Mount Everest, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism

---

*Ramesh Khanal holds a Master's Degree in Sociology from Tribhuvan University, Saraswati Multiple Campus, Lekhnath Marg, Thamel, Kathmandu 44600, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism embodies an emerging framework within the tourism sector, prioritizing the conservation of ecological resources, the empowerment of local populations, and the promotion of cultural heritage. Its objective is to alleviate the detrimental environmental, social, and economic consequences of tourism while enhancing its beneficial effects. As a multi-faceted strategy, sustainable tourism aspires to harmonize economic, social, and environmental goals, thereby ensuring the endurance of natural and cultural heritage sites. Commonly referred to as responsible or eco-conscious tourism, it accentuates the reduction of waste, resource conservation, and support for local economies (Goodwin 2014). Moreover, it advocates for cooperation among stakeholders to attain collective sustainability objectives (UNWTO, n.d.).

Worldwide, sustainable tourism initiatives have been progressively adopted with varying levels of effectiveness. Honey (2008) chronicled Costa Rica's endeavors in biodiversity preservation and community assistance through eco-friendly tourism practices. Bhutan's "High-Value, Low-Impact" policy exemplifies a strategic approach to attract affluent tourists while emphasizing cultural preservation and environmental safeguarding (Dorji and DeLacy 2018). In Thailand and Japan, sustainable tourism is reflected in community-centered initiatives, wildlife preservation, the promotion of rural tourism, and the incorporation of traditional arts into tourism experiences (Mowforth and Munt 2009). These instances illustrate the potential of sustainable tourism to reconcile economic advancement with environmental and cultural preservation.

In Nepal, the tourism sector began to formalize in the 1950s, following the nation's political transformation and the opening of its borders to international travelers. The notable ascent of Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953 established Nepal as a premier locale for mountaineering and trekking. By the 1960s and 1970s, trekking tourism in areas such as Annapurna and Everest yielded significant economic advantages. However, this expansion

was accompanied by challenges, including deforestation and waste management complications. The acknowledgment of these issues prompted the initiation of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in 1986, a groundbreaking project in community-based conservation and sustainable tourism (Ojha, 2020; Thapa, 2012).

The following decades witnessed a consistent evolution of sustainable tourism in Nepal. During the 1990s, eco-tourism rose in prominence, despite interruptions caused by political instability and the Maoist insurgency. The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), founded in 1998, assumed a pivotal role in advocating responsible tourism. The 2010s experienced a surge in initiatives, including homestay programs, waste management in trekking regions, and the promotion of the Great Himalayan Trail. Efforts to reconstruct tourism infrastructure sustainably post the 2015 earthquake and the Visit Nepal 2020 campaign further underscored sustainability, although the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these plans (Nepal, 2022).

To institutionalize sustainable methodologies, Nepal has enacted a variety of initiatives and regulatory frameworks. Notable among these are the Community Homestay Programs, which promote cultural immersion while bolstering local economies, and the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), which leads conservation initiatives. Legislative measures, such as the Tourism Act (1978) and National Tourism Policy (2009), emphasize ecological protection, cultural preservation, and community involvement. However, gaps in implementation remain, particularly in high-impact areas like the Khumbu-Everest region, where tourism-related carbon emissions and ecological deterioration present considerable challenges (Joshi, 2018). This investigation concentrates on the Khumbu-Everest Trekking Region, a crucial nexus of Nepal's tourism sector, to assess the current condition of sustainable tourism methodologies. The research scrutinizes the roles and contributions of principal stakeholders, including tourism entrepreneurs, guides, and laborers, in advancing sustainability. By addressing the convergence of economic expansion, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation, this study aims

to determine practical strategies for enhancing sustainable tourism in this ecologically and culturally sensitive area.

The Khumbu-Everest region exemplifies the intricate interactions between natural ecosystems, socio-economic elements, and environmental sustainability. While tourism functions as a significant economic catalyst for local communities, it concurrently contributes to issues such as waste accumulation, habitat disruption, and cultural transformations. Existing scholarship has investigated facets of sustainable tourism in Nepal, including community-based tourism, economic ramifications, and eco-tourism policies. Nonetheless, these studies frequently concentrate narrowly on specific aspects, such as environmental sustainability or socio-cultural ramifications, without considering the holistic interaction of sustainability's three dimensions environmental, economic, and socio-cultural.

This research addresses these deficiencies by adopting a comprehensive framework to evaluate sustainable tourism practices in the Everest region. It accentuates the interactions between tourism stakeholders and local communities, examining cultural exchanges, conflicts, and their effects on social structures. By integrating all dimensions of sustainability, the study aspires to offer nuanced insights into the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism in the Khumbu-Everest Trekking Region. Ultimately, this investigation aims to inform strategies that harmonize tourism development with long-term ecological protection, cultural conservation, and economic stability, contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism endeavors to strike a balance among economic, environmental, and socio-cultural objectives to ensure the enduring viability of destinations while preserving natural and cultural heritage (Sharpley 2003; WTO 2004). Often referred to as eco-tourism or responsible tourism, this approach mitigates adverse impacts while fostering local economic and social advantages (Goodwin 2014). Cooperative efforts among stakeholders including governments, enterprises, and travelers are essential to achieving these objectives (UNWTO 2004).

The notion of sustainable tourism is deeply embedded in earlier discussions regarding the environmental and societal effects of tourism. For instance, the concept of "new tourism" highlighted preservation and education, reflecting sustainability principles. Similarly, Butler's (1980) Destination Life Cycle Model and carrying capacity theories established foundational ideas for sustainable tourism practices. These early frameworks illustrate the enduring significance of sustainability concerns within tourism discourse.

THEORETICAL INSIGHTS INTO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Mainstream sociology offers valuable perspectives on sustainable development. Giddens' (1990) structuration theory explores the dynamic relationship between social practices and structures, providing insights into global governance and environmental policies. His work highlights how interconnected global networks exacerbate environmental challenges, necessitating innovative governance frameworks. Similarly, Castells' (1996) network society theory emphasizes the transformative role of technology in societal organization, suggesting that technological advancements can drive sustainable practices when coupled with adaptive governance mechanisms.

Both Giddens and Castells underline the importance of global cooperation in addressing environmental issues. Their theories provide tools to analyze tourism's impact on global networks and vice versa. For instance, Giddens' notion of modernity and self-identity explains shifting consumer preferences in tourism, such as the demand for experiential rather than material consumption. Castells' insights on digital networks inform strategies for marketing sustainable destinations and using technology to enhance eco-friendly tourism practices.

The concept of "risk society" by Ulrich Beck (1992) further enriches the discussion by emphasizing the societal implications of manufactured risks like climate change. Beck highlights the global and interconnected

nature of these risks, underscoring the need for reflexive governance and collaborative approaches. Applying this framework to tourism reveals the industry's vulnerability to environmental risks and the necessity for adaptive strategies to mitigate them.

Complementing these perspectives is the role of social movements, which highlights grassroots activism's influence on environmental awareness and policy change. Likewise, urban sociology underscores the challenges of balancing urbanization, environmental justice, and equitable tourism development. These sociological frameworks collectively emphasize the interplay between global networks, local practices, and governance structures in advancing sustainable tourism.

GLOBAL PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Case studies from diverse contexts provide practical insights into sustainable tourism implementation. They reveal growing awareness of sustainable practices among local businesses, highlight challenges in financial resources and policy support. They discuss efforts to disperse tourism demand and promote rural heritage, emphasizing agritourism and cultural preservation despite commercialization pressures. Bhutan's "High-Value, Low-Impact" policy, analyzed by Dorji and DeLacy (2018), effectively balances economic benefits and environmental protection but faces challenges as tourist demand increases.

New Zealand's focus on community engagement and integration of Maori values in tourism showcases the potential for cultural preservation alongside environmental sustainability. Similarly, Thailand's community-based tourism initiatives, discussed by Mowforth and Munt (2009), empower local communities but require better coordination across diverse regions. Costa Rica, a leader in eco-tourism, employs eco-certification, promotes conservation-focused tourism, and invests in national parks, yet faces challenges in managing over-tourism and equitable benefit distribution (Honey 2008).

These examples underscore the importance of context-specific strategies that align with local ecosystems, cultures, and socio-economic conditions. Despite their differences, the shared challenges of financial limitations, policy coordination, and balancing tourism growth with sustainability goals point to the universal complexity of sustainable tourism.

TOURISM IN NEPAL: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Nepal, with its rich cultural heritage and unparalleled natural landscapes, offers significant potential for sustainable tourism. However, the sector faces challenges such as environmental degradation, limited infrastructure, and inadequate policy implementation. Balancing the demands of adventure tourism with conservation and community development is critical to ensuring the long-term viability of Nepal's tourism industry. Addressing these challenges requires integrating global best practices with locally tailored solutions, such as promoting eco-tourism, empowering local communities, and investing in sustainable infrastructure.

It has been an urgent need for environmental sustainability in tourism planning, citing the rapid melting of the Khumbu glacier as a significant concern in the Everest region. Nepal (2000) critiques the country's tourism and environmental conservation policies, arguing for integrated approaches that align tourism goals with ecological sustainability and social equity. Impact on indigenous groups like the Sherpas and the challenge of maintaining cultural traditions amidst economic development is highlighted

Sharma et al. (2016) assess the economic effects of tourism in the Langtang region, stressing the importance of equitable revenue distribution to support local communities. While examining adventure tourism's role in Nepal, particularly trekking and mountaineering, noting its economic importance, its social and environmental impacts are overlooked. Dixit (2014) focuses on the relationship between tourism and cultural heritage in the Kathmandu Valley, advocating

for integrated management to prevent commercialization. Maharjan (2011) addresses cultural heritage preservation amid tourism growth, though it lacks detailed strategies and community involvement. Singh et al. (2011) discuss the effects of climate change on high-altitude ecosystems, emphasizing the need for adaptive strategies in tourism. Bajracharya et al. (2005) argue for community-based conservation in the Annapurna region, and Stevens (1996) calls for sustainable practices in Sagarmatha National Park. Zurick (1992) underscores the economic importance of adventure tourism but warns against environmental degradation from rapid tourism development.

These studies reveal the complexities of sustainable tourism in Nepal, requiring integrated strategies that balance growth with the conservation of natural and cultural resources. International frameworks like the "Cape Town Declaration 2002" and "Our Common Future" (WCED 1987) offer guiding principles for responsible tourism. The Cape Town Declaration advocates for economic benefits from tourism while promoting community engagement, cultural awareness, and environmental conservation. Similarly, the WCED's principles stress the need for holistic, integrated approaches to tourism planning that prioritize cultural and environmental preservation, equity, and sustainable productivity.

Nepal has taken significant steps to promote sustainable tourism through the Tourism Act of 2035 (1978), focusing on mountaineering regulations and environmental preservation. The Nepal Tourism Sector Strategy (2015) aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), prioritizing goals such as job creation (SDG 8), responsible consumption (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), and biodiversity preservation (SDG 15). However, while current regulations mainly target mountaineering, there is a need for broader policies that address the full spectrum of tourism activities.

The Nepal government is committed to sustainable tourism, involving local communities in decision-making and ensuring they benefit from tourism. This includes promoting eco-friendly practices such as waste

management, energy efficiency, and wildlife conservation. Efforts to preserve cultural heritage, including traditional arts and heritage sites, are also central. Furthermore, capacity-building programs for tourism stakeholders, such as local communities and tour operators, are vital for implementing sustainable practices.

Despite these efforts, challenges like resource limitations, weak enforcement, and economic fluctuations hinder full implementation. To address these challenges, continuous collaboration among stakeholders, capacity building, infrastructure investment, and adaptive management are crucial for ensuring long-term sustainability. By aligning local efforts with international standards, Nepal can advance sustainable tourism that benefits both its communities and environment while preserving its rich cultural heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample Collection and Extraction

The target demographic for this investigation consisted of essential stakeholders within the tourism industry of the Everest region, encompassing local inhabitants, trekking guides, porters, hoteliers, and advocates of sustainable tourism. To ascertain the acquisition of nuanced and contextually relevant data, a purposive sampling methodology was employed. A total of 23 participants were chosen based on their direct engagement in tourism-related activities and their capacity to offer significant insights into sustainability practices within the region.

The sample was structured to represent a multifaceted cross-section of the tourism ecosystem, integrating diverse occupational roles, age categories, and ethnic backgrounds. Among the 23 participants, the composition included 4 trekking guides, 4 hotel proprietors, 4 porters, 4 local community representatives, 2 members of local committees, and 5 tourists. The tourist cohort encompassed both domestic and international visitors, with representation from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Singapore. This diversity within the sample

augmented the study's capability to capture a multitude of perspectives regarding the sustainability of tourism in the Everest region.

Socio-Economic Background of Respondents

The socio-economic background of the respondents comprises an array of parameters that collectively furnish a holistic overview of an individual's or group's living conditions, opportunities, and societal standing. These parameters are pivotal in research for comprehending how varying socioeconomic factors influence behaviors, opinions, preferences, and experiences among the respondents.

Distribution of Respondents

Occupational distribution pertains to how jobs or professions are allocated across various sectors, industries, or regions within an economy. It investigates the distribution of the workforce among different employment types, such as agriculture, manufacturing, services, and other sectors. Analyzing occupational distribution facilitates an understanding of how employment opportunities are disseminated and can illuminate areas of growth or decline in particular sectors. In the tourism industry, there exist distinct categories of occupations, including hotel/restaurant entrepreneurs, tour/trekking guides, porters, etc.

The respondents in this study were predominantly affiliated with the tourism sector. This cohort encompassed trekking/tour guides, hotel/restaurant owners, porters, local committee personnel, local community members, and tourists.

Table 1 delineates the distribution of the respondents. As indicated in the table, 21. 73% of the samples were tourists. This was succeeded by trekking/tour guides, hotel/restaurant proprietors, porters, and local community members, each constituting 17. 39% of the sample. Merely 8. 69% of the respondents comprised local committee personnel.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents

S. No.	Distribution of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Trekking/Tour Guides	4	17.39
2	Hotel/Restaurant owners	4	17.39
3	Porters	4	17.39
4	Local Committee Staffs	2	8.69
5	Local Community Members	4	17.39
6	Tourists	5	21.73
	Total	**23**	**100**

Source: Field Study 2023

Place of Origin of the Respondents

The place of origin pertains to the locale where an individual was born or from which their ancestors originate. Personal narratives typically encompass aspects of the person's geographical, cultural, and social background.

Table 2 elucidates the origin of respondents within the sample populace, illustrating the frequency and percentage from various locales. Solukhumbu is the most represented area, accounting for 43. 47% of respondents. Renowned for its proximity to Mount Everest and as a principal trekking nexus, this suggests that the survey may emphasize tourism, environmental issues, or local economic endeavors. Gorkha and Dhading each represent 17.39% of the sample, highlighting notable interest in these areas. Moreover, 13. 04% of respondents were international tourists from countries such as the UK, Netherlands, and Singapore. Only 17. 39% of respondents hailed from Kathmandu, visiting the Everest region as domestic tourists. This geographical diversity is crucial for comprehending the varied perspectives on sustainable tourism practices and the associated challenges in the region.

Table 2: Place of Origin of Respondents

S. No.	Place of Origin	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gorkha	4	17.39
2	Dhading	4	17.39
3	Solukhumbu	10	43.47
4	Kathmandu	2	8.69
5	Outside Nepal	3	13.04
	Total	**23**	**100**

Source: Field Study 2023

Age Group Status of Respondents

Age constitutes an important social characteristic that influences a nation's socioeconomic issues. The working-age population differs by country; in Nepal, it ranges from 15 to 59 years. In this investigation, the ages of respondents are categorized into distinct groups, as presented in the table.

Table 3 displays the age distribution within the sample populace, detailing the frequency and percentage of individuals in each age category. The predominant group is those aged 31-45, comprising 39. 13% of the sample, indicating that middle-aged adults are most represented, possibly reflecting their active engagement or interest in the survey subject. The subsequent significant group is individuals aged 20-30, constituting 30. 43% of respondents, suggesting robust participation from younger adults. The 46-60 age cohort accounts for 17. 39% of the sample, indicating that older adults also possess a substantial presence. The youngest cohort, those under 20, represents 13. 04%, marking the smallest segment. Overall, the distribution signifies a broad range of ages among respondents, capturing diverse perspectives vital for comprehensive insights from the survey.

Caste/Ethnic Composition of Respondents

Caste and ethnic composition pertain to the social structure and

Table 3: Age Group Status of Respondents

S. No.	Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Below 20	3	13.04
2	20-30	7	30.43
3	31-45	9	39.13\
4	46-60	4	17.39
	Total	**23**	**100.00**

Source: Field Study 2023

diversity within a population based on caste and ethnicity. It encompasses information regarding different societal groups, their hierarchical relationships, cultural practices, traditions, and social dynamics.

Table 4 provides an overview of the caste/ethnic diversity within the sample populace, illustrating the frequency and percentage of individuals from various caste and ethnic groups. The Sherpa community is the most represented, comprising 34.78% of respondents,

Table 4: Caste/Ethnicity Composition of Respondents

S. No.	Caste/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Brahmin	3	13.04
2	Sherpa	8	34.78
3	Rai	3	13.04
4	Newar	3	13.04
5	Dalit	1	4.35
6	Foreigner	3	13.0
7	Other Janajati	2	8.70
	Total	**23**	**100.00**

Source: Field Study 2023

suggesting the survey was conducted in an area where Sherpas are predominant or actively engaged. This significant representation indicates a focus on high-altitude regions and mountaineering areas where Sherpas traditionally reside and work.

Brahmins, Rai, and Newars each constitute 13.04% of the sample, indicating moderate representation. Brahmins are commonly linked with religious duties and scholarship, signifying a demographic connected to spiritual and academic pursuits. The Rai populace, recognized for their unique cultural identities within the Himalayan region, enhances the sample's cultural diversity. Likewise, Newars, hailing from the Kathmandu Valley and acknowledged for their contributions to art, culture, and gastronomy, imply that the sample encompasses both urban and rural participants, particularly from locales adjacent to or within the Kathmandu Valley.

International respondents also represent 13.04% of the total, emphasizing the inclusion of non-local individuals. This may suggest a significant expatriate community or a favored tourist destination influencing local dynamics and focal areas of the survey.

Other Janajatis, representing 8.70% of participants, encompass various indigenous ethnicities with unique languages and traditions, enriching the sample's ethnic diversity. Their presence highlights the inclusion of a wider spectrum of Indigenous perspectives, crucial for comprehending regional cultural dynamics.

Lastly, Dalits, with the least representation at 4.35%, signify a marginalized group within the survey. This may reflect their socio-economic exclusion, a prevalent issue in South Asia, indicating that their viewpoints could be inadequately represented in research and broader societal considerations.

Ethnic distribution in this survey portrays a snapshot of a culturally and socially diverse community. Grasping these proportions is vital for accurately interpreting the survey's results

and ensuring insights incorporate the varied perspectives and experiences of these distinct ethnic groups. This diversity emphasizes the necessity for culturally informed methodologies in data interpretation, policy formulation, and community engagement within the surveyed region.

Gender Status of Respondents

Gender pertains to the social, cultural, and psychological attributes and roles that a society deems appropriate for individuals based on their perceived or assigned sex. In contrast to biological sex, which is determined by physical characteristics and reproductive anatomy, gender encompasses the roles, behaviors, activities, and expectations that society regards as suitable for men, women, and other gender identities. Gender identity describes how individuals understand themselves and what they choose to identify as, which may differ from their biological sex.

Table 5 depicts the gender distribution within the sample population, illustrating the frequency and percentage of individuals in each gender category. Males represent the majority at 56.5% of the total sample, while females account for 43.5%. This nearly equal gender representation suggests a relatively balanced sample, with males slightly surpassing females. This breakdown provides valuable insights into the gender composition of the surveyed group, underscoring the significance of considering gender diversity in any analysis or interpretation of the data.

Table 5: Gender Status of Respondents

S. No.	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Male	13	56.5
2	Female	10	43.5
	Total	**23**	**100.00**

Source: Field Study 2023

Educational Status of Respondents

Educational status refers to the level of education achieved by individuals within a population. It conveys information regarding the highest degree or educational attainment completed, ranging from no formal education to advanced degrees.

Table 6 elucidates the data regarding the educational qualifications of the sample population, illustrating the distribution across diverse educational tiers. A predominant portion of the respondents possesses undergraduate credentials, constituting 30% of the total cohort. Following closely are individuals with secondary education, representing 26% of the sample. Graduate credentials emerge as the next prevalent category, with 22% of participants attaining this level. Post-graduate qualifications are the least frequently observed, with merely 4% of the sample categorized therein. Moreover, 17% of the respondents are designated as literate without having received formal education beyond basic literacy.

Table 6: Educational Status of Respondents

S. No.	Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Post Graduate	1	4
2	Graduate	5	22
3	Undergraduate	7	30
4	School Level	6	26
5	Literate	4	17
	Total	**23**	**100.00**

Source: Field Study 2023

Income Level of Respondents

Income level denotes the monetary earnings of an individual or household within a specified duration. It serves as a critical metric of economic wellness, exerting influence over various dimensions of life, including living standards, access to resources, and prospects for savings and investments.

Table 7 offers a comprehensive overview of the income distribution within the sampled population, depicting the frequency and percentage of individuals within each income bracket. The largest segment comprises those earning between 40,000 and 59,000 per month, representing 35% of the total cohort. Next are individuals earning 60,000 or more per month, accounting for 30% of the sample. The income range of 20,000 to 29,000 per month follows, constituting 22% of the total sample, while those earning between 30,000 and 39,000 per month represent 13%. This distribution signifies a diversity of socioeconomic statuses within the surveyed population, underscoring the necessity of considering income variety when analyzing trends or patterns derived from this dataset.

Table 7: Income Level of Respondents

S. No.	Income Range (Per month)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	20000 – 29000	5	22
2	30000 – 39000	3	13
3	40000 – 59000	8	35
4	60000 and above	7	30
	Total	23	100.00

Source: Field Study 2023

Overall Situation of Sustainable Tourism Practices
Sustainable tourism practices are employed to gauge and evaluate the sustainability of tourism undertakings. Various indicators facilitate the measurement of sustainability, including the level of awareness regarding sustainable tourism among stakeholders in the tourism sector, the resources consumed such as food and water, alongside their disposal methods, the status of greenhouse gas emissions, initiatives aimed at environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, the involvement of local communities in tourism-related employment, equitable distribution of tourism revenues among local populations, the level of local community participation in tourism planning, efforts

to preserve indigenous culture and traditions, and the interactions between tourists and local communities.

DISCUSSION

Sustainable tourism is a growing approach in the tourism industry that focuses on protecting ecological resources, empowering local communities, and preserving cultural heritage. It aims to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while maximizing its benefits. Sustainable tourism seeks to balance economic, social, and environmental goals to ensure the preservation of natural and cultural heritage sites. Often called responsible or eco-friendly tourism, it emphasizes waste reduction, resource conservation, and local economic support. Collaboration among stakeholders is essential to achieve common sustainability goals.

Around the world, sustainable tourism practices are being implemented with varying success. In Costa Rica, efforts in eco-friendly tourism have resulted in biodiversity conservation and community support. Bhutan attracts wealthy tourists with its "High-Value, Low-Impact" policy, focusing on cultural and environmental preservation. Thailand and Japan showcase community-oriented tourism and promote rural tourism, integrating traditional arts. These examples illustrate how sustainable tourism can link economic growth with conservation efforts.

In Nepal, tourism started to flourish in the 1950s, especially with the successful ascent of Mount Everest in 1953, establishing the country as a mountaineering hotspot. While trekking tourism brought economic benefits in the following decades, it led to issues like deforestation and waste management. In response, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project was initiated in 1986, marking one of Nepal's first community-based conservation initiatives. Over the years, Nepal developed sustainable tourism, with the Nepal Tourism Board advocating for responsible tourism since its establishment in 1998. The 2010s saw the rise of homestay programs, waste management initiatives, and efforts to rebuild after the 2015 earthquake; however, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many projects.

To promote sustainable practices, Nepal has launched various regulatory frameworks, including Community Homestay Programs and the National Trust for Nature Conservation, focusing on ecological protection and community involvement. Key legislation such as the Tourism Act of 1978 emphasizes these goals, yet challenges remain in high-impact areas like the Khumbu-Everest region, where tourism-related emissions and environmental degradation persist.

This research focuses on the Khumbu-Everest Trekking Region to evaluate sustainable tourism practices. It examines the roles of main stakeholders, including entrepreneurs, guides, and laborers, and seeks to identify effective strategies to balance economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation in this sensitive area. Tourism in this region poses both economic benefits and challenges, such as waste accumulation and cultural changes. Previous research on sustainable tourism in Nepal often not holistically consider all three sustainability dimensions.

The study uses a comprehensive framework to analyze sustainable tourism in the Everest region by investigating stakeholder interactions, cultural exchanges, and their effects on local communities. It aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities present, ultimately informing strategies to unify tourism development with long-term ecological, cultural, and economic goals.

Sustainable tourism aims to balance economic, environmental, and socio-cultural objectives to ensure the ongoing viability of destinations. Collaborative efforts among stakeholders, including governments, businesses, and travelers, are crucial for achieving these objectives. Discussions of sustainable tourism are rooted in earlier discussions around its environmental and social impacts. The "new tourism" concept emphasized preservation and education, reflecting ideas of sustainability.

Mainstream sociology offers insights into sustainable development, with theories like Giddens' structuration theory noting the relationship

between social practices and structures, while Castells' network society theory highlights technology's role in societal changes. Both emphasize that global cooperation is key in addressing environmental issues. The concept of "risk society" elaborates on the societal implications of risks like climate change, underlining the tourism industry's vulnerability to environmental challenges.

Sustainable tourism practices from various regions demonstrate the necessity of local contexts in developing strategies. Case studies show increased awareness of sustainable practices but also highlight common challenges like financial limitations and the need for better policy coordination. Countries like Bhutan, New Zealand, Thailand, and Costa Rica have varied approaches and face their unique challenges in implementing sustainable tourism.

In Nepal, the potential for sustainable tourism is significant, but challenges such as environmental degradation and insufficient infrastructure remain. Striking a balance between adventure tourism and community development is crucial for long-term sustainability. Integrating global best practices with local solutions, promoting eco-tourism, and investing in infrastructure are essential steps forward.

The research engages key tourism stakeholders in the Everest region to gather relevant data on sustainable practices. A diverse group of 23 participants, including trekking guides, hotel owners, local community members, and tourists, were selected based on their involvement in tourism activities.

Data collection focused on the sustainable tourism practices in the Everest region, particularly in Solukhumbu district. The diverse backgrounds of the respondents highlighted different perspectives on sustainability. The study aimed to evaluate practices across environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions, with findings indicating significant gaps in awareness, cultural preservation, and uneven income distribution.

Challenges noted in the research include a lack of awareness regarding environmental conservation, insufficient understanding of cultural significance among guides, and seasonal tourism impacting local livelihoods. The overall status of sustainable tourism practices in the region was found to be inadequate, emphasizing the need for integrated strategies that address both growth and resource conservation.

FINDINGS

The principal aims of the research were to assess the state of sustainable tourism practices and to identify the obstacles to implementing sustainable tourism in the designated area. The study was concentrated on the Everest region, specifically in wards 2, 4, and 5 of the Solukhumbu district. Information was gathered from Chaurikharka, Namche Bazaar, Khumjung Village, and Pangboche Village, as well as from individuals in Thamel, Kathmandu, who are directly engaged in tourism activities within the Everest Region. The sample comprised trekking/tour guides, hotel/restaurant proprietors, porters, local committee personnel, community members, and tourists. A total of 23 participants were intentionally selected, which included 4 tour/trekking guides, 4 hotel operators, 4 porters, 4 local community members, 2 local committee personnel, and 5 tourists. Among the tourists, there were 2 domestic visitors and 3 international visitors from the UK, the Netherlands, and Singapore.

The research involved a heterogeneous group of tourism stakeholders from various locations: Solukhumbu (43.47%), Gorkha (17.39%), Dhading (17.39%), Kathmandu (8. 69%), and international areas (13.04%). This demographic included individuals of varying ages, predominantly middle-aged to senior, with a nearly balanced gender ratio. The ethnic composition was varied, featuring Brahmins, Newars, expatriates, Janajatis, Sherpas, Dalits, and Rais. The majority of stakeholders, including tour operators, hoteliers, tourists, guides, porters, muleteers, and community members, possessed educational qualifications up to the undergraduate level. Furthermore, a notable proportion of respondents indicated a monthly income within the mid-range (RS 40,000-59,000).

These socio-economic attributes illuminate the perceptions and practices of sustainable tourism strategies in the investigated region. The evaluation of sustainable tourism practices was conducted across three dimensions: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic. In the environmental sphere, the emphasis was primarily on waste management and environmental conservation. The socio-cultural aspect focused on the safeguarding of local traditions and heritage. The economic dimension analyzed community involvement in tourism-related employment, income levels, and the allocation of tourism revenue among local populations. Environmentally, there is a deficiency in awareness and inadequate conservation efforts for sustainable tourism. Socio-culturally, stakeholders demonstrate insufficient understanding of the significance of preserving and promoting local culture. Economically, the seasonal surge in tourist arrivals and other factors compel locals to pursue alternative income-generating activities, resulting in imbalanced income distribution among tourism stakeholders. Overall, the status of sustainable tourism practices in the region was deemed unsatisfactory.

The research further pinpointed challenges pertaining to environmental preservation, socio-cultural conservation, and equitable income distribution derived from tourism-related endeavors in the region. Environmental challenges primarily stemmed from a lack of awareness among tourism stakeholders and inadequate waste management by the overseeing committee. Socio-cultural preservation and promotion encountered difficulties due to tourist guides' limited knowledge of local customs, while hotel proprietors and local communities did not sufficiently endorse indigenous culture. Economically, the main challenge was the seasonal character of the tourism sector, which necessitated alternative sources of income for sustenance, leading local youths to seek employment in urban areas within Nepal or abroad. Additionally, there were concerns regarding income inequality among diverse stakeholders and inequitable income distribution within local communities.

CONCLUSION

The results reveal significant issues in the tourism sector of the Everest region, particularly due to poor waste management. This leads to harmful practices like burning waste and dumping it in sensitive areas, threatening the region's beauty and wildlife. Additionally, a lack of awareness about cultural preservation and unfair income distribution complicates the tourism situation.

To tackle these problems, coordinated strategies are essential, focusing on improving infrastructure, conserving culture, and raising environmental awareness. Involving all parties, local communities, business owners, tourists, and government bodies is crucial to ensure tourism benefits the economy while protecting the environment and culture in this famous area of Nepal.

Key recommendations for authorities and stakeholders include strengthening tourism regulations, improving waste management, and promoting alternative trekking routes to reduce overcrowding. Empowering local communities through education and skills training can create more economic opportunities and help preserve traditional cultures. It is important to encourage responsible tourism practices among tourists, such as respecting local customs and minimizing waste, to keep the Everest Region attractive and viable as a tourist spot.

Fostering sustainable tourism in the Everest Region requires collaboration and innovative solutions that balance economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation. By adopting sustainable practices and shared responsibility, all stakeholders can protect the region's unique identity and ensure its future prosperity.

Sustainable tourism aims to safeguard the environment, empower local communities, and celebrate cultural heritage by minimizing tourism's negative effects and enhancing its benefits. This approach includes waste reduction, resource conservation, and support for local economies through stakeholder collaboration.

Globally, regions have successfully adopted sustainable tourism practices. In Nepal, tourism has faced challenges since its formal start in the 1950s, leading to the establishment of initiatives promoting sustainability, particularly in the Khumbu-Everest region. Research focuses on assessing current sustainable practices and the roles of various stakeholders, while emphasizing the need for integrated strategies to balance tourism growth with resource preservation.

The Everest region's tourism sector faces significant challenges due to inadequate waste management, cultural preservation awareness, and income distribution issues. Addressing these requires coordinated efforts among local communities, businesses, tourists, and governments to improve infrastructure, conservation, and environmental awareness. Recommendations include enhancing tourism regulations, waste management, and educational initiatives for local empowerment. Adopting sustainable tourism practices can protect the region's environment and culture while promoting economic growth, drawing inspiration from successful global examples. Integrated strategies are essential to ensure a balance between tourism development and resource preservation in the Khumbu-Everest area.

REFERENCES

Bajracharya, Sagar Bahadur, Furley, Peter A., & Newton, Adrian C. 2005. Integrating conservation and development in Nepal: A case study from the Annapurna Conservation Area. *Journal of Environmental Management* 76(4):381-391.

Banskota, Krishna, Sharma, Anup, & Koirala, Rajendra. 2018. Tourism and its socio-economic impacts in Solukhumbu, Nepal. Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change 16(3):307-323.

Beck, Ulrich. 1992. Risk society: Towards a new modernity. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Butler, Richard W. 1980. The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *Canadian Geographer* 24(1):5–12.

Castells, Manuel. 1996. The rise of the network society. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

Dorji, Kinley, & DeLacy, Terry. 2018. Bhutan: Tourism in the realm of Gross

National Happiness. In Terry DeLacy (Ed.), Tourism and Sustainable Development pp. 1-17. Channel View Publications.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. The consequences of modernity. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goodwin, Harold. 1996. In pursuit of ecotourism. *Biodiversity and Conservation* 5(3):277–291.

Goodwin, Harold. 2014. Responsible Tourism Partnership. https://responsibletourismpartnership.org/what-is-responsible-tourism/

Honey, Martha. 2008. Ecotourism and sustainable development: Who owns paradise? Island Press.

Hunter, Colin. 1995. On the need to re-conceptualize sustainable tourism development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 3(3):155–165.

ICRT GLOBAL. 2002. First International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations. The Cape Town Declaration, Cape Town. https://responsibletourismpartnership.org/cape-town-declaration-on-responsible-tourism/

Joshi, Anup. 2018. Nepal's per capita carbon emission growth highest in South Asia: Report. https://earthjournalism.net/stories/nepals-per-capita-carbon-emission-growth-highest-in-south-asia-report

Mowforth, Martin, and Ian Munt. 2009. Tourism and sustainability: Development, globalisation and new tourism in the third world. Routledge.

Nepal, S. K. 2000. Tourism policy integration in Nepal: A critical analysis. Journal of Sustainable Tourism 8(6):435–459.

Nepal, S. K. 2022. The quest for sustainable tourism in Nepal. Current History, 122(834):147–153.

Sharma, Krishna Raj, Suman Dhakal, and Sushil Ghimire. 2016. Economic impacts of tourism on local communities: A case study of the Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 19:34–41.

Stevens, Thomas H. 1996. The impacts of trekking and mountaineering on vegetation in the Sagarmath National Park, Nepal. *Mountain Research and Development* 16(1):75–88.

Thapa, Man Bahadur. 2012. Tourism and sustainable community development in Nepal (Bachelor's thesis). Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences-Unit for Technology and Business, Kokkola-Pietasaari.