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Sustainable Ecotourism Development in Rural Villages and How It Leads to the Community Development -A Case of Community Homestay Tourism in Arthar Village, Nepal-

Sayuri NAITO

【修士論文概要書】

Abstract

The economic contributions that the tourism industry makes are highly evaluated by many of the national governments, especially by those in developing countries. This movement led to the rapid growth of the tourism sector throughout the world, and as a result, negative aspects of the tourism industry, such as damage to the environment and local cultures, became more apparent. In response to such a crisis, a new concept of sustainable tourism emerged. Sustainable tourism is small-scale tourism designed to benefit the social, economic, natural, and cultural environments for the long term.

This paper explores the impacts the rural homestay tourism – one kind of sustainable tourism, gives to the rural villages in Nepal, and how it contributes to the community development, as well as the improvement of the local livelihood. The author selected Arthar village, Parbat district, as the study area and collected information for answering the research questions. Through the conduct of interview-based research and participant observation in Arthar village, homestay business is giving economic, social and environmental benefits to those who engage with the homestay business. However, at the same time, the lack of communication among homestays is causing fewer opportunities for them to discuss and improve the quality of their homestay and the severe income gap among them.

To solve these problems, the author suggests that the village installs the Tourism Development Committee system from another rural homestay village, Shree Antu, Ilam district, which allows the homestays to gather regularly and share opinions for the betterment of their businesses. To make sure that the installation of the new system is suitable for the conditions of the Arthar village, the author recommends first to have a joint workshop between these two villages.

Keywords and phrases: Sustainable tourism, Ecotourism, Rural village development, Homestay, Community-based tourism, nature conservation, South Asia, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal

1. Introduction

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization, the tourism industry is one of the largest economic sectors in the world, occupying about 10% of the world's GDP, and it is estimated that it will continue to grow in the future. The tourism industry provides economic benefits not only to those who engage with tourism service but also to those in related sectors. The positive impacts of tourism have led to the rapid growth of the tourism sector throughout the world. However, this puts enormous pressure on tourism sites and causes adverse effects to numerous tourist sites in the world. This movement resulted in the emergence of sustainable tourism, and it is now becoming an increasingly crucial tourism sector worldwide (Ana, 2017). It is seen as an ideal form of tourism that supports the poverty reduction and socio-economic development of the site.

The research aim of this paper is to investigate the impacts that homestay tourism could have on the tourist sites and to suggest how the targeted villages would be able to minimise the adverse effects and maximise the benefits of the tourism business. The study will focus on village homestay tourism, one type of sustainable tourism practised in Arthar Village (Parbat district) as a case study.

2. Literature review on tourism

- Economic Effects of Tourism

Stynes (1997) mentions that tourists contribute to sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues, and income in the area. In addition to the income-generation effects for the locals, the tourism industry also contributes to creating new jobs. According to the 2017 Economic Impact Report written by the World Travel & Tourism Council, the tourism industry creates one out of 10 jobs worldwide. This allows the locals to earn income and be able to afford their lifestyles.

On the other hand, the tourism industry could cause adverse effects for the local economy. Since tourism is an industry that is highly dependent on the situation of the area, unexpected events such as terrorism, political upheaval, climate change, and natural disasters could wreak havoc on a region, bringing adverse effects for an extended period.

- Environmental Effects of Tourism

Tourism could be a means by which tourists can learn about the environment and become responsible tourists. When talking about tourism, negative impacts on the environment are often discussed, but Stynes mentions that if more consumers become aware of the lasting benefits of "take only pictures, leave only footprints," it is possible to engage with natural conservation actions and minimise the impact on the environment by tourism.

On the other hand, as already well known, the massive flow of people could result in giving negative impacts to the environment, such as soil erosion, pollution, pressure on endangered animals, and forest fires (Srinivas, n.d.). This is known as over-tourism, and this phenomenon is creating a burden in many tourist destinations throughout the world.

- Social Effects of Tourism

Developing tourism in the area would result in a substantial investment to preserve the local heritage and to improve infrastructure and local facilities. These would also result in creating new job opportunities for the local people.

Also, when accepting tourists into the area, the locals will interact with the tourists and mix with people from diverse backgrounds, which would create a cosmopolitan culture in the region. Stynes (n.d.) also emphasised that tourism can create civic pride by encouraging cultivation and sharing of local customs, food, traditions, and festivals. By interacting with people from outside, the hosts can recognise the rarity and the values of their cultures and traditions.

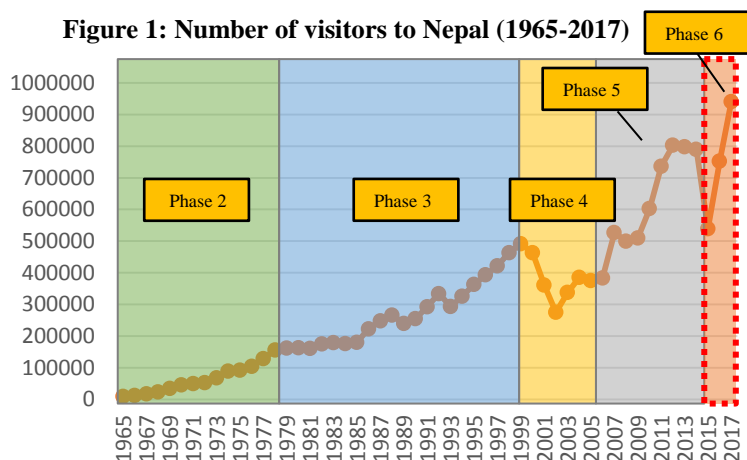
3. The tourism industry in Nepal

Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia, and it is considered one of the poorest countries in Asia, with an absolute poverty rate of 25% (2013) and a GDP per capita of 1003 USD (2018). The country is blessed with rich biodiversity due to its dramatic change in elevation (from 60–8850m) and is home to more than 130 ethnic groups. These unique features of the county are becoming important sources of tourist interest.

Currently, the tourism sector in Nepal is becoming one of the country's largest foreign exchange earners, and it is recognised as the key to community development and poverty reduction in rural areas (Shrestha, 2017). As shown in the graph below, the number of visitors has been increasing significantly over the period (MoCTCA, 2018).

According to Khadka (2012), tourism development of Nepal can be divided into Phase 1: the Himalaya Climbing period (1950s-1960s), Phase 2: the Trekking/ Hippies period (1970s-1980s), Phase 3: the Mass Tourism period (1980s-1999), Phase 4: Atrophy period (2000-2006), and Phase 5: Neo-Nepali Tourism period (2007- present). Also, the author believes that the new phase Post-Earthquake tourism period started from 2015 due to the

occurrence of the massive earthquake that year. As shown in the graph above, a transition of the number of visitors highly corresponds with the periods mentioned by the academics. Due to the decline in the number of visitors in phase 4, the national government became concerned about the fact that the tourism industry in Nepal depends too much on the Himalayan Mountains and trekking-based tourism.



Source: MoCTCA (2018) "Nepal Tourism Statistics 2017", Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation
 Khadka (2012). 「ネパール観光産業の現状と問題点」. 日本国際観光学会論文集, (19), 13-19.

To build a stronger tourism platform, the Nepal Tourism Board ¹ searched for "new" tourism that would be suitable for the country, other than the trekking tourism. As the result of examinations by the government, it was found that the keywords of the new tourism industry would be: homestay, rural area and cultural experience. Due to this, an attempt of making homestay tourism in the rural area as one of the new pillars of the new tourism industry in Nepal had begun. Two villages that the author selected as study areas have been chosen by the government as pilot villages in which to establish homestay tourism.

4. Case study

4.1. Background

Arthar is a rural village located at the foot of Mt. Panchase in Parbat district. The village has a population of about 1,000 people, and its main industries are agriculture and tourism. The primary ethnic group of the village is Gurung, whose members practice the unique lifestyle that has been inherited for generations.

Although Panchase is new to homestay tourism, it has been a popular destination for trekking tourism. One of the features of Mt. Panchase is its wide range of habitat that supports a variety of life forms due to its dramatic altitude variation, ranging from 1,500 m to 2,517 m. It harbours 300 plant species and is home to the common leopard and the Himalayan black bear. The mountain's five peaks are sacred sites for both Hindus and Buddhists; therefore, it is a characteristic pilgrimage tourist site. Due to these attractions, Panchase peak and its surrounding area have attracted attention from the national government as a homestay tourism destination with a lot of potential.

In 2004, the NGO Tara Gaon Development Board submitted a research report, "Panchase Rural Tourism Development Master Plan", to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. In the report, numerous types of tourism were brought up and assessed for their suitability in the Panchase area. Among those, rural homestay tourism was one of the strongly recommended types of tourism.

In the case of Arthar, an attempt to develop homestay tourism was a part of a project supported by the United Nations Development Programme – Small Grants Program (UNDP-SGP). To look at the village from the bigger picture, it is crucial to understand what changes were made outside the tourism industry entirely.

4.2. Methods of research

The research on homestay tourism in Arthar was held in two ways. The first was to visit the nine houses out of 11 and have interviews with the homestay families. The questionnaire was prepared in

¹Nepal Tourism Board is a government authorized board, which keeps the entire necessary directory regarding tourism in Nepal.

advance and was designed to find out the current situation of the homestay business. The second way was to have a participation observation on homestay activities by staying at one of the 11 homestays. The observation was eight days long (13 – 20 February 2018), and every activity and event that happened during the stay was recorded in different formats (photographs, written notes) to see the real condition of homestay tourism in Arthar.

5. Result and discussion

Through conducting participant observation, it was found that Arthar has the right balance of both natural and cultural resources, making the area an attractive tourist site. Gurung's houses, paths, and fences are all built of stone, and their view of the Himalayan Mountains would undoubtedly become a strong tourist attraction. Staying at the local house would allow visitors to experience their culture and make them feel like they are part of the Gurung family. This would be one of the most critical aspects of homestay tourism.

The interview sessions with the host families have led to several findings on the attributes of the homestay guests. Firstly, it was found that about 82% of the tourists were domestic tourists. They are generally from larger cities, such as Kathmandu and Pokhara, and their primary purpose is to be away from the bustle of cities and to refresh themselves.

According to the hosts, three of the most common nationalities of the international tourists are Indian, Australian, and American. Since visiting Arthar requires climbing Panchase mountain, tourists are either used to or wish to be in nature and to experience a unique culture that is entirely different from theirs.

The practice of homestay tourism brought several benefits to those engaged with the business, such as (1) gaining additional income. Their income from homestay tourism ranges from Rs. 200,000-900,000 per year, depending on the homestay. (2) The village's infrastructure and hygiene improvement (bathroom, access to clean water and electricity, etc.), (3) recognizing the value of their culture by interacting with people from outside, and (4) increased awareness on the importance of the natural environment.

On the other hand, homestay tourism in Arthar brings some challenges or problems to the village, too. (1) There is a high language barrier with hosts and international tourists; (2) locals who do not engage with homestay business cannot benefit from the homestay business; in other words, the business is not contributing to the community development; (3) there is a large income gap among the homestay houses because there is no system for equally distributing guests to the homestay; (4) the profit from homestay tourism is not enough for some of the homestays, for supporting the entire family members, so they need to increase the number of tourists probably by extending the business to the international market.

6. Recommendation

To minimise the four challenges mentioned above, the paper will suggest that the Arthar homestay community install the Tourism Development Committee (TDC) model practised in another homestay village, Shree Antu (Ilam district). Shree Antu TDC is a local NPO consisting of 43 homestays, and each family provides one member as personnel to manage the committee. At the top of the committee system, there is an executive board, which is in charge of committee operation and making final decisions on fund usage.

TDC has two functions. The first is to operate the homestay tourism business. By managing the reservations and carrying out the clerical work, it is possible to distribute guests to the homestays equally. The second function is to manage the TDC fund. Annually, member fees and 10% of the homestay profits are collected from 43 homestays, and this money is stored in the fund to be used for quality improvement of the homestay service (language training, hygiene training) and the development of village facilities (new roads, upgrade of the school building, etc.). The author recommends that if this model were installed in Arthar, challenges would be solved. For the installation process, the paper suggests that the village first have a joint workshop with Shree Antu village to design a TDC model that suits the conditions of the village.

7. Conclusion

The study was successful in discovering how homestay tourism has been practised and has impacted the local livelihoods in the remote village of Nepal. It was also possible to find out what natural conservation activities were done in the past and are supporting sustainable tourism development. This paper contains the real voices of the stakeholders; in other words, it strongly reflects the realities of the tourism situation.

The aim of the study has been achieved; however, the research does not end here. To get to the next level, it would be effective that the voices of some other stakeholders, such as tourists, the villagers not engaging with homestay tourism, and others, be recorded and added to the analysis.

Also, since this study only focused on the two villages, the research area should be extended to other villages for increasing the credibility of the research. These would allow to look at sustainable homestay tourism from different windows and perhaps lead to further discovery of the keys to successful sustainable tourism development.

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