Changes in environmental policy and mountain tourism in Nepal

Isabelle Sacareau

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1031>

DOI: 10.4000/rga.1031

ISSN: 1760-7426

This article is a translation of:

Évolution des politiques environnementales et tourisme de montagne au Népal - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/rga/1018> [fr]

Publisher:

Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine, UGA Éditions/Université Grenoble Alpes

Electronic reference

Isabelle Sacareau, "Changes in environmental policy and mountain tourism in Nepal", *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [Online], 97-3 | 2009, Online since 10 December 2009, connection on 08 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/rga/1031> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/rga.1031>

This text was automatically generated on 8 December 2022.

Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Changes in environmental policy and mountain tourism in Nepal

Isabelle Sacareau

EDITOR'S NOTE

Translation: Brian Keogh

- 1 Mountain areas in poor countries are a popular subject for research on the part of public authorities and international organizations. Studies quite rightly underline the biodiversity of such areas but also the poverty of most mountain communities and the environmental and socio-economic stakes involved in the recent advent of tourism. Action is being taken at all possible scales to safeguard the future of these mountain territories, in particular through the creation of protected areas and the promotion of sustainable tourism development. In Nepal, such development has taken the form of trekking, readily described by those who practise it or commercialize it as ecotourism, which is sometimes presented as a form of sustainable tourism providing an alternative to mass tourism (Fennel, 2000, p. 43), and sometimes as the Trojan Horse of international tourism in places with supposedly fragile ecosystems and communities (Butler, 1989, Wall, 1997). At the same time as Nepal has been establishing itself as the archetype of trekking destinations in the world, the country has become a testing ground for environmental and tourism policies that have evolved significantly over the last 30 years. Against a background of ecological crisis, the blame for which has been attributed jointly to trekking and to the agricultural, stockbreeding and forestry practices of the mountain people, Nepal has created protected areas with the purpose of preserving the Himalayan environment and promoting sustainable tourism in the areas concerned. But this policy has interfered to varying degrees with the role of mountain communities in local tourism development, a role that has often been greatly underestimated.

Nepalese Himalayas, a Mecca for trekking

- 2 Trekking can be described as a tourist activity involving travelling on foot from place to place either individually or in small groups accompanied by guides and porters, often along trails in mountainous areas entirely without infrastructures. Trekking has historic links with colonial explorations by the British military, with Himalayan expeditions and with long-distance hiking trips, and in Nepal is the product of the coming together of mainly foreign mountaineers and local communities, helped along by the state which saw that it could sell its mountain summits through a permit system and so bring revenues to its coffers. Mountain communities in the high valleys have been involved in trekking since the activity first began, working as porters for trekkers, providing accommodation in camp sites, lodges and inns in villages along the trails. Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards the Sherpa – quickly followed by other ethnic groups in the country's mountain areas – started to set up trekking agencies with the help of foreign guides. From the 1980s, this activity started to develop on the international tourism market with the appearance of small tour operators specialising in adventure tourism, catering to tourists in industrialized countries whose interest in the environment and their curiosity about distant civilisations was combined with a desire for physical well-being which they felt could be obtained through the great outdoors rather than mass tourism. This “marketing” led to a rise in tourist flows. From 6,179 visitors in 1962 to just under 46,000 in 1970, then double that number five years later, tourist numbers reached a peak in 2000 with 463,000 visitors. However, this rapid growth was interrupted by the intensification of Maoist activities and by 2006, when peace was restored in the country, tourist numbers had fallen to just under 384,000, which was roughly the same level as ten years earlier. But recovery was not long in coming and by 2007 Nepal had close to 527,000 visitors, including just over 100,000 trekkers and mountaineers (*Source: Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation, Tourism Statistics 2007*). Most of these visitors headed for three main destinations: the Annapurna massif (60,237 trekkers), Mount Everest (26,511) and Langtang (8,165). For the moment, other mountain massifs see no more than a thousand hikers and mountaineers a year.

The role of tourists and mountain dwellers in the creation of parks

- 3 Although tourist flows were not huge in the 1970s, their rapid growth caused concern among experts and the scientific community. Trekking tourism and the mountain people of Nepal thus found themselves at the heart of an environmental crisis scenario known as the theory of Himalayan environmental degradation, a critical analysis of which was published by Ives and Messerli (Ives&Messerli, 1989). This theory suggested that since the 1950s a vicious circle had been operating whereby demographic growth and pressure led to erosion and loss of fertility of the soil in the forests, which in turn led to poverty among the mountain communities who were forced to migrate to the lowland areas and flooding in Bangladesh (Eckholm, 1976, Blaikie *et al.*, 1980, Myers, 1986, Bishop, 1990, etc.). Experts were predicting that Nepal would have no forests by the year 2000. At the same time, the demand for wood to meet the needs of trekkers (firewood for campfires) and lodges (cooking, heating, construction timber) was placing

great pressure on the country's forest resources, which were also being threatened by the agricultural and stock rearing practices of the mountain dwellers. Massive deforestation and rubbish pollution would thus mar the trekking trails and the base camps of Himalayan expeditions.

- 4 Although this theory of Himalayan environmental degradation was largely disproved in the years that followed (Hamilton 1987, Ives and Messerli, 1989, Hofer, 1993, Thompson, 1998, Smadja (ed.)2003, etc.), it provided justification in the 1970s for designating large portions of forest as reserve areas and for the creation of four national parks in 1976: Sagarmatha National Park (1148 km²), (Sagarmatha is the Nepali name for Everest), which encompasses the Khumbu region, home to the Sherpa, Langtang National Park (1710 km²), north of Katmandu, Rara National Park (106 km²), in the west of the country and, in the Terai jungles along the border between Nepal and India in the southern part of the country, Chitwan National Park (cf. fig.1). Inappropriate agricultural practices by farmers as well as pressure from tourism provided justification for the creation of these parks. But, in 1976, the number of tourists visiting the mountainous areas of Nepal amounted to only 13,891 trekkers (*Source: Office National de l'Immigration*) with Sagarmatha National Park accounting for only 5,000 (26,000 in 2007). On the other hand, it is surprising that the Annapurna region did not figure among these first national park initiatives, since in 1980, before it was designated a protected area, the number of visitors to the area was three times the number visiting Everest, and it has maintained this leading position ever since. There is no denying the reality of the pressure exerted on the country's forests by the great expeditions in 1950-1960 which employed large numbers of porters, plus pressure on resources from groups of trekkers and lodges, which is a particularly critical concern in high altitude areas where the regenerative capacity of trees is poor. But the problem must be put into perspective. The trekking trails that were receiving so much attention represented just a tiny fraction of the area. The amount of wood used by trekkers, rarely calculated, has never been compared with the quantities used by thousands of porters and traders travelling the old caravan routes over the centuries. A field study in the Everest region, completed by an analysis of aerial photos and accounts given by tourists, shows that very little deforestation can be attributed to tourism (Stevens, 2003). While the composition and density of vegetation cover have changed in certain very specific areas, the phenomenon has been largely exaggerated and generalized.

Figure 1. Protected areas in Nepal, 2009.

- 5 In reality, behind the environmental issue, the creation of national parks was largely motivated by the prospect of increasing and controlling tourism resources, as clearly set forth in the Master Plan of Tourism of 1978. And while the law imposed strict regulations on the use of forest resources by local populations, it also provided for the possibility of constructing hotels and roads inside protected areas. This flexibility in the law explains why today roads are still being built through valleys that are designated protected areas. In the Annapurna massif, for example, the Kali Gandaki valley, an ancient trekking and trade route formerly used by mule trains, is now open to lorries and buses as far as Jomsom. Protecting part of the area was also a way of gaining the favour of international funding organisations and so obtaining subsidies. Finally, it would seem that this policy was also an instrument for controlling ethnic minorities and their resources, insofar as it provided justification for the presence of the army, the police and government officials in border zones deemed to be sensitive on account of their proximity to Tibet (Boisseaux, Ripert, Sacareau, Tawa-Lama in: Smadja *et al.*, 2003). The creation of national parks in areas where tourism was absent was not, however, a recipe for success, as in the case of Rara National Park. This park was created in 1976 with the clear objective of attracting tourists to western Nepal, an extremely poor, hemmed-in region. But barely a hundred tourists a year visited the park, which has no emblematic summits and is not easy to reach, while the local populations were prohibited from using forestry and grazing resources within the park with no compensation from the authorities for this loss. Farmers were forced to sell their livestock and survived either by overexploiting adjoining forests or moving from the area. (Shrestha in: Smadja *et alii*, 2003). In 1997, the area fell under the control of Maoist rebels, bringing the already very limited tourist activity to a halt. A return to peace did not attract tourists back to the area.
- 6 As regards the contribution of farming practices to the problem of deforestation (cutting down trees, wood gathering, grazing of animals inside the forest area), this should be put into perspective and examined in relation to public policies on the country's forest resources. Experts assumed that the poor, illiterate mountain

communities were incapable of managing their natural resources themselves. Yet in the past, certain mountain communities, such as the Sherpa of Khumbu, had well thought-out systems for collectively managing their forest resources (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964). When the forests were nationalized in 1957 villagers were deprived not only of their rights but also their responsibilities. Nepal's forests have been poorly managed by a Department of Forestry plagued with insufficient means and frequent corruption, they have suffered from illegal felling of trees and overexploitation of resources in zones bordering the reserve areas, and in many places have suffered from a policy that was supposed to protect them (Boisseaux, Ripert, Sacareau, Tawa-Lama in: Smadja *et alii.*, 2003). While the creation of parks gave the state more ways of implementing its policies, the logic of conservation prevailed over that of management. The army supervised the parks, if necessary using arms, as was the case in Chitwan against farmers in villages neighbouring the park who had been deprived of their traditional access to the forest. The Sherpa were more fortunate. Strengthened by recognition from foreign mountaineers and support from New Zealander Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to conquer Everest, they put forward the case that tourism had been an essential part of their economy for centuries, and they were thus able to obtain a dispensation from park authorities with regard to the felling of trees, which enabled them to continue to build their lodges and obtain wood to meet their energy needs (Brower, 1991).

Participatory management and community development: a new deal?

- 7 It can thus be seen that the first policies introduced to protect Nepal's mountain environment led to conflicts, since they barely took into account the traditional rights of rural communities nor their capacity to manage for themselves their territorial resources (tourism included). From the 1980s onwards, a complete turnaround began to take place in the methods of governance of protected areas. Nepal's environmental legislation was amended several times from the end of the 1970s through to the 1990s, with a gradual handing back of forest management to local communities (Heinen&Shrestha, 2006). To ease the conflicts with local communities, buffer zones with less stringent regulations were created around the periphery of national parks. It finally became clear that the best way to ensure that conservation measures were accepted by the local population was to combine them with development measures and involve the mountain communities in the management of protected areas. It is on the basis of this principle that conservation areas were created in Nepal in the context of sustainable development recommendations and under the growing influence of environmental NGOs from the developed countries and their local offices in the developing world¹. The Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA), created in 1983 and managed by an NGO, the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (*now called the National Trust for Nature Conservation*). The ACA is the first and largest of the country's conservation areas, and the one that is frequented by the most tourists. It was used as a model for the Manaslu and Kangchenjunga conservation areas. A further conservation area is being planned. Each conservation area is divided into zones with different levels of protection at different times of the year (reserve areas, or limited harvesting of certain species for which payment is required). The originality of conservation areas is

that they combine environmental protection with the integral use of entry fees in programmes to improve the living conditions of the local people. Local populations help to manage the projects through the creation of special local committees.

- 8 These measures have often been presented as new and as the best contribution to sustainable development, enabling local communities to reap the benefits of environmentally friendly tourism and improve their living conditions. From an environmental perspective, similar forest management measures (tree nurseries, for example) now exist under the supervision of village committees outside conservation areas. The community management systems set up inside conservation areas in fact simply reinstate decision-making powers which village communities had been deprived of during 40 years of state authoritarianism (Smadja *et alii*, 2003). The difference is that in the conservation areas, the community management committees are in part controlled by the authorities, who have the commendable aim of encouraging participation from marginalized groups (women, lower castes). In practice, villagers are most often called upon to ratify decisions that have been made at other levels (international, then national), on the basis of a predetermined vision of tourism development and environmental management. These committees are becoming a forum for newly empowered groups, in particular young educated people, supported by the many international NGOs present in the country, and these groups challenge the authority of the elders, deeming them to be uneducated and behind the times (Ripert in: Smadja *et alii*, 2003).
- 9 Furthermore, the creation of conservation areas has not stood in the way of the creation of new national parks. But Nepal in particular, like neighbouring Bhutan, has opened up new areas to tourism, while restricting the numbers of tourists through its much more costly trekking permits². The fees are levied directly by the Immigration Office, in other words by the government, in the same way as tourist visas, and rather than going to the mountain communities these revenues go straight into the state coffers. This policy of differentiated costs and limitation of tourist flows, which is based on the argument that the environment must be protected, would seem to serve as a pretext for maintaining political control of sensitive border areas, but in fact it is not certain that the policy can ensure the sustainable development of these isolated regions. There are not enough tourists to generate economic benefits for local communities, and most of the tourists who do come use tents rather than lodges that could be run by local people.

Is trekking tourism sustainable?

- 10 While it can be said that the ACA policy has produced positive results in terms of improving the environment and the living conditions of local communities (Parker, 2004, Bajracharia, Furley&Newton, 2006), as far as tourism is concerned things are not quite so clear. The conservation area simply provided additional support and supervision for an activity initially organized with very little influence from public policies, since tourism here was already structured before the ACA was created³. In fact, if we want to measure the real spin-offs from mountain tourism from the viewpoint of sustainability principles, we must look at the entire spatial system concerned by trekking, which is far greater than just that of the protected areas. The system in fact comprises the major trekking routes that are now part of protected areas but also the

Katmandou network of trekking agencies (977 in 2008), most of which are run by the mountain people, and villages that might be far away from trekking areas but where agencies recruit people to work as porters. This type of recruitment is facilitated by traditional kinship and ethnic networks that operate on the principle of exchange of services. Relational networks of this kind between guides and lodge owners operate at the level of protected areas and trekking trails, enabling maximum benefit to be obtained from tourists, who are usually directed towards establishments run by family members or others to whom guides might be indebted. Furthermore, at the international level, a similar system can be observed through friendships that Nepali guides maintain with former clients. It is relational networks of this kind that have led to the creation of numerous small associations that are involved locally in development projects, sometimes categorised under equitable tourism or solidarity tourism (Sacareau, 1997, 2007), and which are over and above the development projects managed by the conservation areas. In this sense, trekking responds well to recommendations for sustainable development, which implies that most or all tourism activities should be in the hands of local populations.

- 11 Thanks to the employment opportunities it creates (lodge building and catering, jobs as porters), mountain tourism also brings considerable economic benefits, since these jobs provide an alternative for young people who are underemployed and who otherwise might have no other way of surviving apart from emigrating to the Gulf states or India, joining the mercenaries in the army or, until quite recently, enrolling in the guerrilla⁴. In the country's protected areas, tourism is creating a service economy that is gradually replacing the former economy based on agriculture, grazing and forestry, which since the end of the 1950s had already undergone profound economic changes. These changes were linked to competition from products from the low-lying areas as well as to the shortage of labour following state-encouraged emigration to the Terai (Boisseaux, Ripert, Sacareau, Tawa-Lama in: Smadja *et alii.*, 2003). Lodges and restaurants, craft shops, mountain gear shops and even cybercafes can now be found along the trails. Tourism development in these valleys, which has brought to local populations bigger houses as well as basic services, such as electricity, water supply systems, secondary schools and even health centres, is in stark contrast with areas that are not crossed by trekking trails and whose inhabitants hope and pray for the advent of tourism. Contrary to popular belief, this "touristification" does not deter trekkers. Quite the opposite, too many tourists **do not** kill tourism. It has never been denied that the attraction of the earth's highest mountain, the experience of trekking itself, the comfort of lodges and all that is going on along the trails on a mountain that is frequented by people of all nationalities are all part of the tourism success story in the Everest region and Annapurna, despite a fall in numbers during the years of civil unrest⁵. On the other hand, the government is having trouble attracting tourists to other protected areas such as Manaslu and Kanchenjunga, which have far fewer services and far fewer tourists (1,443 and 1,490 tourists respectively in 2008 compared with 69,800 in the ACA). Finally, new commercial networks have made their appearance to supply lodges with food and building materials (cement, breeze blocks, corrugated iron) that might be in short supply locally because of restrictions on felling trees. Mule trains and now lorries go back and forth along an ancient trans-Himalayan trade route that had fallen into disuse with the closure of the Tibetan border. Such activity has boosted markets such as the one in Namche Bazar near Lukla, in the Everest region, and the one at Jomsom in the ACA.

- 12 As regards the environmental impact of trekking, it remains limited and in any case is under control in protected areas. The supply of electricity from micro hydro-electric power plants or solar panels, the use of bottled gas or kerosene instead of wood, the construction of latrines and rubbish collection systems can all be credited to the administration of protected areas and are made possible by revenues from tourism. There is no comparison between the environmental impact of trekking and the possible impact of road building that is now taking place on an increasing scale in the country's conservation areas. Indeed, such construction might jeopardise trekking, the only tourist activity currently allowed in protected areas, since hikers and lorries along the same route do not really mix. It might then be necessary to re-examine current forms of mountain tourism and perhaps accept that there are other ways of discovering the areas.
- 13 Most parts of the Himalayan mountain range along the border with Tibet are now included in some sort of protected area, whatever its status. No term other than sustainable could therefore really be used to describe a form of mountain tourism which pays considerable attention to controlling environmental impacts and which for over 50 years has provided the mountain people of Everest, Annapurna and Langtang in charge of this tourism with a level of development that is the envy of their neighbours.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACAP, 1990. – Three Year Retrospective Progress Report March 1986 - December 1988. Pokhara, ACAP.
- BAJRACHARYA S.B., FURLEY P.A., NEWTON A.C., 2006. – “Impacts of Community-based conservation on local communities in the Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal”. *Biodiversity and Conservation*, n°15, pp. 2765-2786.
- BAUMGARTNER F., BAUMGARTNER R., KOPPE R., ROHRBACH A., 1978. – Impact of Trekking Tourism in hill areas. Report of a field Survey in Fall 1977. Zürich : Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, 102 p.
- BISHOP B.C., 1990. – *Karnali under Stress: Livelihood Strategies and Seasonal Rhythms in a changing Nepal Himalaya*. Chicago, Chicago University Press.
- BLAICKIE P., CAMERON J., SEDDON D., 1980. – *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- BOISSEAUX T., 1998. – *Élaboration et mise en place d'une politique de protection de la nature et rôle des ONG au Népal*. DEA Mémoire, Université d'Orléans.
- BOISSEAUX T., RIPERT B., SACAREAU I., TAWA-LAMA S., 2003. – « Des discours et des lois : gestion des ressources et politiques environnementales depuis 1950 ». In Smadja J. (dir.) *Histoire et devenir des paysages dans l'Himalaya népalais, représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh*. CNRS éditions, pp. 365-400.
- BROWER B., 1991. – *Sherpa of Khumbu, People, Livestock and Landscape*. Delhi, Oxford, University Press.

- BUTLER R.W., 1989. – “Alternative Tourism: Pious Hope or Trojan Horse?”. *World Leisure and Recreation*, n°31, pp. 9-17.
- BYERS A., 1987. – “An Assessment of Landscape Change in the Khumbu Region of Nepal Using Repeat Photography”. *Mountain Research and Development*, vol. 7, n°1, pp. 77-81.
- DIXIT K.M., TÜTING L., 1986. – *Bikas-Binas. Development, The Change in Life an Environment of the Himalaya*. Kathmandu Ratna Book Distribution, pp. 382-393.
- ECKHOLM E.P., 1976. – *Losing Ground*. New York, W. Norton and Co.
- EQUIPE MIT, 2005. – *Tourismes 2, Moments de lieux*. Paris, Belin.
- FENNEL D.A., 2000. – *Ecotourism: an Introduction*. Londres, Routledge.
- FÜRER-HAIMENDORF C., 1964. – *The Sherpas of Nepal*. H. Murray, Londres.
- HAMILTON B.F., 1987. – “What are the Impacts of Himalayan Deforestation on the Ganges-Brahmaputra Lowlands and Delta? Assumptions and Facts”. *Mountain Research and Development*, vol. 7, n°3, pp. 256-263.
- HEINEN J.T, SHRESTHA S.K., 2006. – “Evolving policies for conservation: An Historical Profile of the Protected Area System of Nepal”. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, vol. 49, n°1, janvier, pp. 41-58.
- HIRINCHEN D., LUCAS P., COBURN B., UPPRETI B.N., 1983. – “Saving Sagarmatha”. *Ambio* n°11, pp. 203-205.
- HOFER T., 1993. – “Himalayan Deforestation, Changing River Discharge, and Increasing Floods: Myth or Reality?”. *Mountain Research and Development*, vol. 13, n°3, pp. 213-233.
- IVES J.D., MESSERLI B., 1989. – *The Himalayan Dilemma. Reconciling Development and Conservation*. London, Routledge.
- KMTNC/ACAP, 1996. – *A New Approach in Protected Area Management*. Kathmandu.
- MINISTRY OF CULTURE, TOURISM & CIVIL AVIATION, 2007. – *Nepal Tourism Statistics 2008*. ([http : // www.tourism.gov.np/pdf/final%20Book%20NTS_2008.pdf](http://www.tourism.gov.np/pdf/final%20Book%20NTS_2008.pdf)).
- MYERS N., 1986. – “Environmental Repercussions of Deforestation in the Himalayas”. *Journal of World Forest Ressource Managment*, vol. 2, pp. 63-72.
- NEPAL S.K., 2000. – “Tourism in Protected Areas: The Nepalese Himalaya”. *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 27, n° 3, pp. 661-681.
- PARKER S., 2004. – *National Parks and Integrated Conservation and Development Programmes: the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, Nepal*. Liverpool, John Moore University (disponible en ligne à l'adresse url : www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/socspark).
- ROGERS P., ATCHINSON J., 1998. – *Toward Sustainable Tourism in the Everest Region of Nepal*. IUCN Nepal and ICPL.
- SACAREAU I., 1997. – *Porteurs de l'Himalaya, le trekking au Népal*. Paris, Belin.
- SACAREAU I., 1999. – « Les Transformations d'une haute montagne par le tourisme : le massif de l'Annapurna dans l'Himalaya du Népal ». *Annales de géographie*, n°605, pp. 20-44.
- SACAREAU I., 2007. – « Au pays des bons sentiments, quelques réflexions critiques à propos du tourisme solidaire ». *Dossier Tourisme et solidarité*, Teoros, automne 2007, pp. 6-14.

SHRESHTHA K.K., 1976. – “The Impact of Tourism on Mountain Environment”. In : Mountain Environment and Development, pp. 85-95.

SHRESHTHA S., 2003. – « Protection des milieux, appauvrissement des hommes. Le village de Botan en bordure du lac Rara ». In Smadja J. (dir.) Histoire et devenir des paysages dans l'Himalaya népalais, représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh. CNRS éditions, pp. 365-400.

SMADJA J. (dir.), 2003. – Histoire et devenir des paysages dans l'Himalaya népalais, représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh. CNRS éditions.

STEVENS S.F., 2003. – “Tourism and Deforestation in the Mt Everest Region of Nepal”. The Geographical Journal, vol. 169, n°3, pp. 255-277.

THOMPSON A., 2007. – “The Annapurna Conservation Area Project: Tourist as Agents of Development an Environmental Managment in the High Himalaya?”. International Journal of Environment and Sustainable Development, vol. 6, n°4, pp. 405-421.

WALL G., 1997. – “Is ecotourism sustainable?”. Environmental Managment, n°21, pp. 484-491.

NOTES

1. In 1998, 850 NGOs were working in Nepal (Boisseaux, 1998).
2. While the entry fee for the ACA is only 2000 NR (around 26\$), an extra fee of between 50 and 70\$ per week has to be paid, depending on the season, for entry into the Manaslu conservation area, and 500\$ for 10 days access to the Upper Mustang area north of Jomsom in the ACA. Permits for the Shey-Phoksumdo National Park and the Kanchenjunga conservation area cost 10\$ a week.
3. It is difficult to measure the success of the other conservation areas, since they are more recent and their action has been seriously inhibited, for example, in the Manaslu area, by the hostilities of Maoist rebels who disapproved of the project's close links with royal power.
4. Note that the guerrilla forces have never been hostile to tourists in areas under their control, preferring to extort money from them or use them to spread their propaganda. On the other hand, guerrilla members have launched several attacks on offices of the ACA, seeing the organisation as a product of the Nepalese monarchy.
5. The number of tourists visiting the Everest region rose overall from 11,314 in 1990 to 26,511 in 2007. The drop in numbers in 2002 (13,982 tourists) was made up two years later with over 20,000 tourists in 2004 (source: Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, report 2008).

ABSTRACTS

Against a backdrop of environmental crisis, attributed to the impact of tourism and the practices of rural populations, Nepal has created protected areas with a view to preserving the Himalayan environment and promoting sustainable tourism in the regions concerned. Given the conflicts between conservation needs and development needs, local communities are now being given a bigger role in the governance of these protected areas. Yet the measures being taken simply accompany and guide well-established tourism dynamics that operate on a much greater scale.

Trekking is thus a tourism system largely in the hands of the country's mountain communities and is an activity that has enabled these communities to improve their living conditions while at the same time limiting environmental impacts. In this sense it is very much in line with the principles of sustainable development.

Le développement du trekking au Népal a suscité des inquiétudes qui ont abouti à la création d'aires protégées sur la foi d'un scénario de crise environnementale dont les touristes et les paysans étaient jugés responsables. Devant les conflits entre la conservation et les nécessités de développement des régions concernées, la gouvernance des aires protégées a évolué dans le sens d'une meilleure prise en compte des sociétés locales. Pour autant les mesures prises ne font qu'accompagner et diriger des dynamiques touristiques plus anciennes qui s'exercent à des échelles plus vastes. Le trekking constitue ainsi un système touristique très largement aux mains des sociétés montagnardes du pays qui a permis l'amélioration de leurs conditions de vie tout en limitant ses impacts environnementaux. En ce sens le trekking répond assez largement aux principes du développement durable.

INDEX

Mots-clés: tourisme, développement durable, aires protégées, conservation, gestion participative, théorie de la dégradation des milieux himalayens, Népal, trekking

Keywords: tourism, sustainable development, protected areas, conservation, participatory management, theory of himalayan environmental degradation, Nepal, trekking

AUTHOR

ISABELLE SACAREAU

Université de Bordeaux 3, isabelle.sacareau@wanadoo.fr