

## PROFESSIONALISM OF TOURISM IN SUDURPASCHIM PROVINCE OF NEPAL

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the professionalism of tourism in Sudurpaschim province of Nepal. Tourism is a multidimensional discipline which covers various tourism-related phenomenon- accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services. All these sectors require competent, efficient and skilled human resources to provide better services. In order to gain all these skills for professionalism employees get training, education and code of ethics through different organizations. So, professionalism of tourism is a process of obtaining competencies, skills, qualifications, and experiences for working effectively and appropriately in tourism sector. This paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data are collected from semi-structured questionnaire, field observation, and key informants survey. Secondary data are collected from various sources- published and unpublished documents, journals and e-resources. The finding indicates that Sudurpaschim Province is a potential tourism development area. Its pristine natural and cultural diversities provide foundations for tourism development that encompass sites for emerging both religious and secular contexts. However, professionalism of tourism is a prerequisite for success in tourism industry. It supports to enhance knowledge, skills and practice through education and training programs. It requires a strong policy effort for identifying the effective professionalism that needs for increasing entrepreneurs' skills. It can only be achieved by the collective actions of professional organizations, state government and local governments.*

**Keywords:** Professionalism, entrepreneurs' knowledge, policy effort, education and training, sustainable development

### Introduction

Tourism development refers to the growth and maintenance of the tourism industry in a given locality. It requires a tourism planning that can be developed tourism-

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related phenomenon- accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services in tourist destination areas. Tourism creates unique relationships between people (as tourists) and the host spaces, places and 'people who travels at least 80 km from his or her home for at least 24 hours, for business/leisure/other reasons' (Westcott, 2015, p. 1). It has significant implications for destination development and resource use and exploitation, which are exhibited through a range of economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions of a local geography. United Nations World Tourism Organization (2008) defines

'Tourism as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which imply tourism expenditure' (cited in Westcott, 2015, p. 1).

Westcott (2015) argues that using this definition, we can see that tourism is not just the movement of people for a number of purposes (whether business or pleasure), but the overall agglomeration of activities, services, and involved sectors that make up the unique tourist experience. The tourism-related groupings created using NAICS are: accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation and travel services. In addition, marketing service, customer service, environmental stewardship, risk management and legal liability are also equally important to tourism development (Hussey, Holden & Lynch, 2010; Collins-Kreiner, 2020; Abdullaev & Gulyamova, 2021). Tourism is the entire world industry of travel, hotels, transportation, and all other components that, including promotion, serve the needs and wants of travelers (Sheldon, 1989; Pittman & McLaughlin' 2012; Cheng, Lu & Chen, 2012).

The tourism industry has grown in size and complexity and now requires higher level skills from its personnel than before. Qualified and skilled personnel are the core of any profession, and so to ensure a professional status the tourism industry must attract and keep quality employees (Sheldon, 1989, p. 492). Cullen (1978) concludes that there will probably never be a definition of professionalism and cited a best the idea of professionalism is a sensitizing concept which connotes something about the differential status of occupational groups and the nature of their occupational tasks (cited in Sheldon, 1989, p. 493). Professionalism includes advancing skills, traits and competencies that contribute to success in the workplace. It is a process of building or refining knowledge and skills that are relevant to profession. These skills can be developed through taking classes, training, and workshops (Tapper, 2004; Țigu & Călărețu, 2013). Thus,

professionalism helps to individuals up to date on new trends within working field and applying new practices in tourism-related five sectors- transportation, accommodation, food service, travel agents/tour operators, and attractions/entertainment. In this context, professional knowledge, skills and practices are necessary for providing effective and appropriate service delivery in these sectors (Sheldon, 1989; Hoyle, 2001; Pittman & McLaughlin' 2012; Cheng, Lu & Chen, 2012). Megginson & Whitaker (2007) have identified following paradoxes in professionalism: voluntarism, individual responsibility, teaching-learning, personal learning for organizational development, life experience, values-driven development, and journey.

The main objective of this study is to present the critical points of touristic product and methods to improve the quality of provided services. Sudurpaschim Province is a natural museum for tourism development. It is a kaleidoscopic landscape, which supposed to be the landscape of natural and cultural diversities. These are potential resources for tourism development that encompass sites for emerging both religious and secular contexts. The development of potential tourism industry can lead to the prosperity of this province. However, it requires integrated efforts of tourism activities among tourism services suppliers, tour-operators and reselling travel agencies for improving quality tourism services. In addition, professionalism of tourism is necessary to success in tourism sectors- accommodation, recreation and entertainment, travel services. It supports to fulfill the sustainable flow of tourists and monetary values in this province. The review literature reveals that only few studies have discussed the concept of professionalism in the hospitality industry focusing primarily on the issue of codes of ethics (Sheldon, 1989; Pittman & McLaughlin' 2012; Cheng, Lu & Chen, 2012). In this context, a rigorous study is needed to answer unrevealed question- what type of professional knowledge, skills and practices are necessary to develop sustainable tourism industry in Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal.

## **Methods and Materials**

### **Data Sources**

This study used descriptive research design and is based on the mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from questionnaire, field observation, interview and interaction. Secondary data were collected from the reviews of published and unpublished sources- books, articles, journals and e-resources as well as official records. Questionnaire form, checklists and observation protocol sheets were used for data collection tools. Ancillary data were collected from the interaction of tourism entrepreneurs, tourism promote agencies, hotel association, local elite people and

official personals. Their views, perceptions and personal experiences helped to make insight for analyzing tourism professional development.

### Study Area

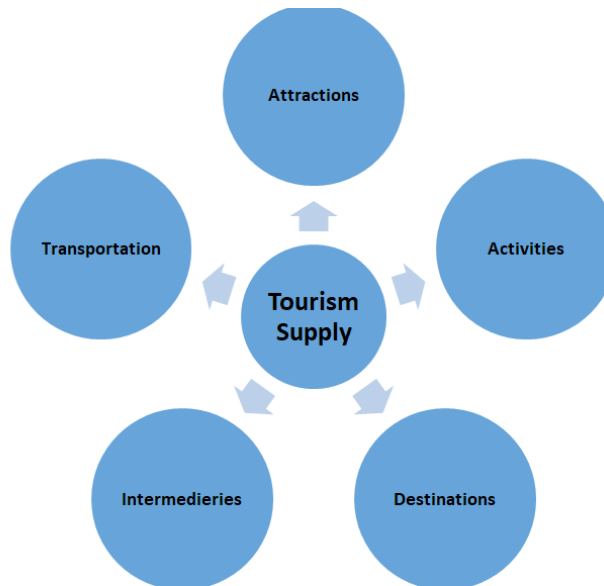
The study area is located in Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal. It is surrounded by the states Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh of India in the west and south respectively, Tibet (China) in the north and Karnali and Lumbini Provinces in the east. The province has covered three ecological regions: Himalayas (40.6%), Hills (34.5%) and Tarai (24.9%) from north to the south. It extends between 28°22" to 30°09" N and 80°03" to 81°25" E. Its altitude ranges from 109 m to 7132 m. The Sudurpaschim Province has covered an area of 19539 sq. km. or 13.27% of the total area of Nepal. This province is divided into 9 districts: Darchula, Baitadi, Dadeldhura, Kanchanpur, Bajhang, Bajura, Doti, Achham and Kailali. It is also divided into 88 local level units including sub-metropolitan (1), municipalities (33), and rural municipalities (54). In 2011, the total population of this province was 2552517 which covers 9.6% of the total population of Nepal.

## Results and Discussions

### Status of Tourism Development in Sudurpaschim Province

Sudurpaschim Province is rich in natural and cultural diversities. It is supposed to be a natural museum for flourishing different types of tourism development. However, the nature and scope of tourism resources varies from place to place in terms of its attraction, accessibility, accommodation and amenities of this area. Sudurpaschim Province has become a reliable tourist destination area with its geographical environment (Mountains, Hills and Tarai),

climate and scenery. These environments provide immense natural, cultural and scenic beauties that can develop the foundations of sustainable tourism development. In this



context, intermediate entrepreneurs and organizations, professional knowledge and skills are essential to integrate its untapped resource into tourism industry. It requires effective tourism management policy.

Tourism management is a complex phenomenon in Sudurpaschim Province. It includes wide range of economic and tourism-related activities by creating tourism products. These products are confined to a specific geographic locality and not changed over the time. It requires professional knowledge, and skills to change untapped resources into tourism products and services. The tourism management policy should focus on how these products can be sold to the needs and satisfactions of tourists in terms of attraction, activities, destination, transportation and other services. They can be discussed as follows:

### **Attractions**

Sudurpaschim province is composed of the immense natural and cultural resources. These resources are playing a significant role for the fulfillment of tourists' leisure-oriented needs and satisfactions. It is also known as a tourist attraction *place for its following inherent and exhibited values:*

**Natural Attractions:** Sudurpaschim Province includes a wide range of potential tourist attraction destinations in Mountains, Hills and Tarai regions. This Province has diversified natural heritages- snow peaks, cliffs, caves, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, Simsar or Ramsars. The *Ghodaghodi* lake of Kailali district is listed as the wetland area of the World Heritage. Suklaphanta national park, Khaptad national park and *Ramaroshan* are the major attraction of this province. The province is also known as a biological corridor of flora and fauna.

**Cultural Attractions:** Cultural attractions include historical sites, monuments, local arts and crafts, local folk core, music and dance. There are a lot of *Kots*, *Gadhis* and palaces of ancient petty kingdoms, such as *Amargadhi*, *Silgadhi* etc. they are historical places of this province. Khaptad, Badimalika, Saileshwari, Ugratara are religious and archeological sites. It has a unique foods and feasts. *Gaura* and *Maghi* are the most popular folk cultures of this area.

**Man-made Attractions:** Sudurpaschim Province has made parks, towers, bridges, architecture, temples, mosques, churches, and monuments in different towns. Local, provincial and national governments have allocated budget and financial supports to develop potential tourist attraction destinations in different parts.

## **Activities**

In this paper, tourism activity refers to any *activities of tourists, organizations and individuals doing tourism business. Tourism fairs, fest and festivals, conference (MICE program) seminars, and travel marts are conducting for the development of tourism.* These activities are supported to engage tourists in:

***Adventure Sports:*** Sudurpaschim Province is supposed to be a place of adventure sports including sports, mountain biking, bungee jumping, rafting, and other similar activities.

***Leisure:*** Tourists can spend their leisure times in reclining, swimming, dining near water body.

***Business Activities:*** Business activities include attending seminars, business meetings, promotions.

***Health Activities:*** Dhangadhi is a health center of Sudurpaschim Province. Here people come for various purposes: treatment, Yoga sessions, exercise, naturopathy and so on.

## **Destination**

The World Tourism Organization defines a local tourism destination as a physical space, where the tourist spends at least one night. This includes various services and attractions and is defined by physical or administrative borders, which are important in destination management (UNWTO 2007). Sudurpaschim province is considered as the tourist destination place. It includes:

***Accommodation:*** There are a lot of hotels, motels, lodges, guest houses in this province. However, these services are only concentrated in district headquarters and major urban areas.

***Restaurant:*** There are different types of restaurants available in this province where tourists can enjoy all sorts of food items.

***Tourist Facilities:*** Sudurpaschim Province has developed various entertainment parks and shopping centers. There are wide ranges of tourist entertainment places located in different places. They are *Suklaphata National Park (Kanchanpur), Khaptad National Park (Doti), Api and Saipal Himal (Darchula and Bajhang), Ghodaghodi lake (Kailali), Badimalika (Bajura), Ramaroshan and Bedyanath Dham (Achham), Patalbumeshwor, Tripura and Niglasaini (Baitadi), Tikapur Park and Karnali Bridge (kailali), Ugratarata, Parshuram Dham and Ali Tal ( Dadeldhura), Dodhara Suspension Brigde and Bedkot Tal (Kanchanpur).* Other tourist destination areas are *Budhinanda Devi, Surmasarobar lake, Mahabharat Parvat, Ghanghashyalek, Bhelchhada, Gorkhali Jharna, Batase, Bire*

*Jharana, Chhatiwan Jharana, Raulakedar, Ajaymerukot, , Parshuram, Khanidada, and Gowori.*

### **Transportation**

Transportation network is among the core and key functional areas of the tourism industry that plays the pivotal role in deciding as to how to reach a desired destination for pleasure or business purpose by a potential traveler. Improvement of road connectivity is very important in the tourist destinations of the province. Sudurpaschim Province has developed both road and air transportation as a mode of commuting. Dhangadhi is a focal point for bus and air services. It is connected to Tarai, Hills and Mountain regions. Local governments have also involved in road infrastructure development in potential tourist destination areas. Long-distance railway line service is only connected in the Indian broader area. However, local people have reported that the tourists are facing a serious problem in crossing the border at Banbasa since the border opens for certain time during the day. Karnali, Mahakali and Seti rivers are potential areas for water boating.

### **Intermediaries**

Tourism intermediaries are playing a middlemen role between tourism service suppliers and consumers. The primary role of travel intermediaries in tourism is to **provide travel-related products and services to consumers**. They are also involved in tourism services, such as packaged holidays, tickets, tours, accommodation, car hire, etc. Nepal Tourism Board, Hotel and Travel Association, NATTA Sudurpaschim, Nepal Chambers of Commerce etc. are also involved in tourism development in this province. The following agencies and organizations are playing the mediator roles in this Province.

**Travel Agents:** Travel agents are involved in the business of selling hospitality and tourism products. These agents are also busy with providing information about the available travel and tourism products and services.

**Tour Operators:** They deal with the operating components for rates, such as making reservations and travel arrangements. Tour operators also create travel packages, prepare tickets and confirm bookings and contact leads, prospects, and customers.

**Media:** Local Newspapers, Radio, FM stations, TV stations and social media have been playing a vital role in the development of tourism in this area. It requires an information centers at Dhangadhi to promote tourist destination centers in different locality.

### Professionalism of Tourism in Sudurpaschim Province

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines professionalism as the conduct, aims, or qualities that mark in a profession or a professional person. It requires a specialized knowledge, skills and practices. Professionalism is a trait that's highly valued in the workforce in tourism sectors. It has many attributes, including: specialized knowledge, competency, code of conducts, honesty, integrity and respect, accountability and self-regulation (Cheng, Lu & Chen, 2012; Porcupile, 2015). However, the degree of the tourism and hospitality industries have determined five sectors- transportation, accommodation, food service, travel agents/tour operators, and attractions/entertainment (Sheldon, 1989). Sheldon (1989) identified twelve criteria for a professional analysis in Hawaii Island. This model is equally important to discuss professionalism of tourism in Sudurpaschim Province. Table 1 shows the available tourism service facilities in this area. A cross table is made to identify the status of professionalism- 1 for available and – for unavailable.

**Table 1: Tourism industry sectors’ achievement of professional characteristics**

Characteristics	Accommodation	Food service,	Transportation	Attraction or Entertainment	Travel agent Tour operator
Training& education	1	-	1	-	1
Code of ethics	1	1	-	-	-
Organized	1	1	1	-	1
Complex occupation	-	-	-	-	-
Altruistic service	1	1	1	1	1
Body of knowledge	1	1	1	-	1
People-oriented	1	1	1	-	1
Licensed	-	-	1	-	1
High prestige	-	-	-	1	-
Competence tested	1	-	1	-	1
Self-employed	-	1	-	1	1
High income	-	-	1	-	-

*Source: Adopted from Sheldon, 1989, p. 494 and Field Survey, 2021*

Table 1 indicates that the majority of occupations are truly available and minorities are unavailable in Sudurpaschim Province. They are discussed as follows:



**Training and Education:** Training and education is considered as the foundation of professionalism in tourism. This service is provided by both formal education and on-the-job training programs for increasing employees for tourism knowledge and skills. Higher education has developed an academic courses based on tourism and hospitality management at higher education. Vocational Training courses are also lunched by different organizations. Thus, the number of tourism employees has increased over the years. However, the large number of education institutions and training centers are confined to major cities like Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar. But the result indicates that low skills professional entry is predominant in this province.

**Code of Ethics:** In this province, federal government, state government and local government have developed their own professional code of ethics. It provides norms of behavior to protect clients and the profession from unscrupulous practitioners. Nepal Tourism Board and NATTA Sudurpaschim are authorities to regularize and monitor code of ethics.

**Organizations:** Tourism related organizations provide solidity and an opportunity for exchange of new ideas. The Tourism Board, Travel and Tourism Association (TTA), Nepal Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Transport and Communications, Hotel Association, Federation of Travel Agents Association etc. are involving in professionalism of tourism. The NATTA Sudurpaschim and Tourism Development Society (TDS) are working in the field of travel and tourism in this province. Nowadays, the local governments have developed a motto of *Collaborate Locally to Compete Globally*. The Municipals have also allocated budget to develop tourism infrastructure development.

**Complexity:** Tourism is a complex sector. It requires different stakeholders for handling tourism occupations. A large numbers of people, data and technologies are necessary to fulfill needs and satisfaction of tourists. In addition, airline reservation, hotel booking and environment related agencies should also have necessary professional knowledge for effective service delivery. Nowadays, information and communication technology has changed the nature and scope of tourism-related activities. It requires a higher level tourism occupants and professionals in this province.

**Altruistic Service:** In this province, different service sectors provide tourism and hospitality services, but tourism professionals have focused on the tourist's satisfaction and needs. The tourist centered services known as altruistic. The government of Nepal has recently decided to give holiday propensity for the civil servants that support to professionalism of tourism.

**Body of Knowledge:** In this province, tourism-related conferences, seminars and educational programs provide tourism and hospitality service knowledge. In addition, journals, books, manuals, e-books are also sources of hospitality knowledge.

**People-Oriented:** The tourism industry is essentially a people industry and most of its employees come into contact with tourists daily. Tourism professionals primarily focus on the tourism-related activities- ground-keepers in a hotel and visitor attraction job. Sudurpaschim visit campaign has been organized regularly that develop a jingle-*Visit Beautiful Far West Once in Your Life Time* and *Voice of Far West Choice of Tourist*. It provides a Logo for advertising Sudurpaschim Province as a destination of tourists. The organizers also offered a *Token of Love* on the occasion of this visit.

**Licensed:** Licensed and certification requires for tourism business. Tourism agencies and tourist guides, pilots, taxi, and tour bus drivers require license and certification for officially documents. These documents are issued by the local, state and federal governments.

**High Prestige:** Most of the tourism-related occupations must be regarded prestigious profession compared to medicine and law. However, the result indicates that tourism professionals do not have such high prestige. This is mainly due to lack of competent and efficient manpower involved in tourism-related activities.

**Competence tested:** Tourism professionals have developed knowledge and skills in their respective fields. Different organizations are involved in upgrading their skills and the skills are tested for certification.

**Self-Employed:** In this province, the dominant tourism activities are small businesses in nature. They are actually self-employed. There are many well-remuneration paid for managerial and skilled positions and less remuneration for unprofessional workers.

## **Conclusion**

Tourism is a specialized industry. It requires foremost and professional knowledge to operate tourism-related activities. The professionals have made a deep personal commitment to develop their skills and practice in five sectors- transportation, accommodation, food service, travel agents/tour operators, and attractions/entertainment. Professional knowledge is considered as the foundation of tourism industry. This paper concludes that competent professionals can get better job than unskilled workers.

Professionals' personal accountability is equally important to tourism and hospitality. It is closely related to honesty and integrity of professionals.

The local, state and federal governments should develop a reliable policy and planning to keep their priorities in sustainable tourism development. Tourism authorities, associations and agencies are also equally responsible to provide education, training, exposure and knowledge sharing activities to deliver effective and appropriate tourism services. The professionalism of tourism should focus on accommodation, tourism and hospitality management, tourism marketing, tourism products, development of tourist attraction destination, transport and communication and amenities. It can be concluded that professionalism in tourism and hospitality requires a trained and efficient manpower in cooking, housekeeping, serving and providing food and beverage and in accommodation too in order to provide quality service.

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