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RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A case study of Nepal and Finland

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ABSTRACT

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<p>Nepal is a beautiful country with vivid colors and contrasts. It is regarded as the world's favorite tourist destination. Despite a small country in size, it has unique places, breathtaking wonders of culture and nature. Here is vacation variety unlimited. With its deepest gorges, high mountains, waterfalls, rocky, natural villages, and national parks. Nepal is famous for a vacation paradise. The tourism industry is a crucial factor contributing to the Nepalese economy.</p> <p>The thesis aims to discuss opportunities and developments of rural tourism in Nepal. This thesis explores in depth the present condition of rural tourism, future possibilities, development strategies, and impact on the country's economy. More than half of the population is still living in a rural area. Thus, Nepal has a huge opportunity in the growth of rural tourism. There are many ways rural tourism will improve the lifestyle of local people, such as generating jobs, employment, awareness, and globalization.</p> <p>The thesis has a qualitative approach. The author reviewed previously published articles, newspapers, journals, and books associated with rural tourism development programs and policies in Nepal and Finland.</p> <p>The similarities and differences between rural tourism in Finland and Nepal have been discussed. Both countries carry potential as a rural tourism destination. Tourism has a huge impact on the local people's employment, bringing in foreign currency, and lifting the economy of the whole nation. Long term strategies and projects are necessary to achieve such an aim. Hence, both countries have launched various kinds of projects targeted to rural tourism. The review from articles reveal that similar projects that they have completed can be replicated in different parts of the country to develop rural tourism. Their project was based on identifying place and analyzing its future possibilities that resulted in creating a rural tourism hub. They trained local people to fulfill all the necessities tourists might need in a rural area. Besides, rural tourism development is an effective way to raise local communities out of poverty. Similarly, Finland has launched different projects, overtime for the development of rural tourism with proper strategies. Nepal lacks a similar approach and plans for the development of rural tourism.</p>		

ABSTRACT

Key words
Economy, Nepal, Rural Tourism, Sustainability

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NTB	National Tourism Board
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
UNEP	The United Nations Environment Program

ABSTRACT
CONCEPT DEFINITIONS
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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the act of spending time for pleasure, recreation, adventure, and for business purpose. Tourism also refers to the activities performed by visitors, also called the visitor economy. These activities are staying in a hotel, ordering a meal, and visiting a tourist attraction. Tourism has many forms, mass tourism, niche tourism, special interest tourism, domestic tourism, international tourism, inbound tourism, and outbound tourism. However, there is a wide range of tourism, and all come under the broad term tourism. (Stainton 2020.)

This thesis aims to identify the problems and solutions associated with rural tourism development in Nepal and compare it with Finland regarding rural tourism status in both countries. This thesis will present a condition of rural tourism and its policies made by the respective government organization. Another purpose of the thesis is to explore rural tourism in Nepal, which has not been identified yet.

Tourism is a fundamental and desirable human activity. The function of tourism is to import currency from foreign resources into the country. Thus, the impact of tourism is what tourist expenditures can do to the different sectors of the economy. A tourist is a person who goes out of his daily living zone to satisfy his curiosity and his desire to know, relax, and recover his strength in surroundings different from his usual environment. However, city-dwellers of any country may travel to the rural part of their own country for fun, recreation, and they are not regarded as actual tourists. But this kind of tourism is called domestic tourism. Thus, the economic difference is negligible because domestic tourism only moves local currencies. (Satyal 1988.)

According to the World Trade Organization, to qualify as a tourist, one must travel to another place, leaving one's usual residential area for not more than one successive year for various purposes. For the time with this COVID-19 pandemic situation, the travel and tourism industry is increasing. Countries like Nepal are dependent on the revenues generated by the tourism industry. The tourism industry is the key success of Nepal. Many people get employed and reduce their hunger and unemployment thanks to tourism.

2 IMPACTS OF TOURISM

An increase in tourism activity results in various consequences. It is not controllable, but one can manage and plan a strategy to minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive effects. Domestic and international tourism brings about a mix of people from diverse social, cultural, and geographical backgrounds. Besides, people have a different habit of spending money that also has a significant impact on the destination country's economy. The impact of tourism is measured by assessing the carrying capacity of natural resources, visitors' volume, characteristics of visitors' intention, and travel arrangement. However, natural features, political conditions, social structures are equally important for a sustainable tourism development. A range of variables is needed to understand the impact of tourism.

2.1 Economic impacts

Tourism brings huge economic benefits to a destination country. It helps in developing the destination country's tourism industry, employment, currency exchange, imports, and taxes. According to the WTO data, tourism numbers have increased globally at exponential rates except during this COVID-19 pandemic. Key factors for the increase in the tourism industry are the advancement of technology, an increase in disposable income, budget airlines' growth, and consumers' desire to explore more than ever before. According to WTO, the tourism economy accounts for 5 % of world GDP, and tourism has generated 6-7% of total employment. Besides, the tourism industry ranks fourth after fuels, chemicals, and automotive products in global exports. According to UNWTO, 1.4 billion international tourists were recorded in 2018. Furthermore, tourism is one of the five top export earners for 150 countries. (Stainton 2020.)

Besides the positive economic impact, building and developing the tourism industry is costly. It consists of lots of initial and ongoing expenditures. Expansion of the airports, and regular cleaning of various tourist sites are expensive to maintain. To sum this up, tourism contributes to the economy of the destination country by exchanging foreign currencies, generating employment, and uplifting economic activity. (Stainton 2020.)

2.2 Socio-cultural impacts

Social impacts of tourism can be defined as the effects on destination country communities of direct and indirect relations with visitors, and involvement with the tourism industry. Tourism is mainly related to the interaction between tourists and visitors. Hence, host-guest interaction is unavoidable. This leads to compelling impacts on socio-cultural conditions. However, these impacts have both positive and negative consequences in a community. The positive impacts include preserving the local culture, enhancing cooperation among communities, social services arrangement, promoting culture and art, exchanging cultural values, and preserving heritage. To elaborate, tourists often come to visit and experience the local culture. Tourists travel to China to learn more about different dynasties. Many countries make efforts to preserve and protect the local culture to attract tourists. Eventually, this contributes to the conservation of cultures, sustainable tourism development of natural resources, and indigenous cultures' revival. Besides, local events and festivals are also a place of attraction for both domestic and international tourists. Due to the flow of tourists, more jobs are created. People are happy having jobs and regular income. Local people, entrepreneurs also have enormous opportunities to grow their businesses and organizational skills. (Stainton 2020)

Investment in the tourism industry is vital for gaining profit. The tourism industry requires improved infrastructure to meet the needs of tourists. Infrastructural developments are undergoing in the tourism industry, which is beneficial to the local people and fulfills the tourism industry's requirements. People can witness new roads, supermarkets, water facilities, and bus services in their respective areas. These facilities certainly have a huge impact on the improvement of livelihood. Due to tourism, many commercial businesses are operating, which is a positive social impact on the tourism industry. This enhances the morale of people as they have money to spend. These businesses also promote local art, handicraft, and art galleries. These are certainly helping people to earn money and preserve local resources. Many tourists travel to a foreign country to visit historical sites. It is the reason that simulates to preserve historical sites. However, tourism also has a negative impact on society. Tourism causes the changes in social lifestyle, changing societal values, increased crime, and destruction of ancient culture. (Stainton 2020.)

2.3 Environmental impacts

Tourism is fully dependent upon the quality of the environment in that place. However, tourism involves many activities that can have detrimental environmental effects. Infrastructure developments such as roads, airports, tourism facilities, resorts, hotels, restaurants, shop, and marinas impact the environment. The negative impact of tourism development also creates a beneficial effect on the environment by raising awareness of protection and conservation, which leads to economic growth. Negative impacts of tourism happen when an unlimited number of visitors can visit. The environmental capacity cannot cope up with the increased number of visitors. This results in the chaos of environmental resources. Uncontrolled and unsupervised tourism possesses the biggest threat to the natural resources around the world. It causes soil erosion, increased pollution, sewage, natural habitat loss, loss of endangered species, and high forest fire chances. Besides, it might cause water scarcity that leads to the local habitat to compete for the water resources. The issue of water scarcity is now everywhere, especially in the Mediterranean region. Due to the hot climate, tourists use more water than usual. It causes water scarcity and vulnerability of local people. Besides, the use of land resources has increased dramatically in recent years. Due to this, there has been enormous pressure on natural land resources. Deforestation is caused by fuelwood for tourism in the local environment. According to UNEP, one trekking tourist in Nepal can use four to five kilograms of wood a day. (Sunlu 2003.)

However, tourism also promotes awareness of protecting the environment. It happens when people come close to the environment and faces the problems imposed by over-tourism. This leads to the appreciation of the environment by raising awareness, campaign, and information related to nature conservation. According to UNEP, environmentally sustainable goods and services in tourism businesses could positively impact the natural environment. (Sunlu 2003.)

2.4 Tourism in Nepal

International tourism in Nepal started in 1950 by opening the doors to international visitors. After that, Nepal became a member of the international union of official travel organization (IUOTO), now called the New World Tourism Organization since 1959. Since then, Nepal is actively participating in international tourism conferences, seminars, and exhibition fairs to promote Nepal's image to international tourists. A tourist development board is looking after the tourism development in Nepal. The tourism de-

partment is responsible for policy making, marketing, regulating hotels, lodges, catering, industries, issuing licenses for the running and establishment of hotel industries, relaxation, and simplification of entry and departure formalities of foreign visitors. The department of tourism has established tourist information centers in various parts of Nepal. Besides, the ministry of tourism and civil aviation also plays a crucial role in promoting and developing domestic and foreign tourism. Another government associated organization, Nepal tourism board, is mainly responsible for marketing, exploring, and promoting tourism in Nepal. (Satyal 1998.)

Nepal is rich with ancient cultures and majestic scenery in the world. Visitors have the opportunity to discover nature and get unique experiences in Nepal. Nepal is an ideal destination for those who value an authentic and mesmerizing place. It is diverse both culturally and geographically. There are steamy jungles and plain lands to the icy peaks of the world's highest mountains. Trekking, mountaineering, and rafting are the favorite activities for international and domestic tourists. Sightseeing, village life, natural scenes are mesmerizing to international tourists. Tourists have the opportunity to get in with rural life, observe their lifestyle, culture, and experience the authentic Nepal. Activities such as a mountain flight around the Himalayas, a game of elephant polo are unique experiences in Nepal. There are fifteen national and wildlife parks, two of them listed in the UNESCO heritage site. Besides, Nepal is the only place on earth to spot the Asiatic rhinoceros and the Royal Bengal tiger. (MOFA 2020.)

2.4.1 Cultural diversity and geographical phenomena

Cultural diversity is also known as multiculturalism, which is the diversity between people in terms of behavior, way of being, language, beliefs, norms, and values. Cultural diversity is the system of beliefs and behaviors that accepts and respects all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges their socio-cultural differences, encourages, and enables their contribution within the culture and empowers all within the organization. Cultural diversity is essential for any country because it helps us recognize and respect each other's cultural values, learn from one another, understanding and collaborating, living with a different perspective in the world. (Belfield 2012.)

Nepal is a small country having many tourist attractions, including sites full of art and architecture showpieces. There are many castes and cultural differences, but no rigidity. The major religions Hinduism and Buddhism are equally respected, and the blending of two religions has created Nepal's distinct culture. The authentic nature of the Nepalese people is warm-hearted and hospitable. Understanding and

compromise are the key factors for Nepalese people's society. The religious tolerance has created heterogeneous ethnic and cultural diversity living peacefully. Nepalese people are proud of their tradition of the ability to co-exist peacefully and live a happy life. Attractive festivals are top-rated in both urban and rural areas of Nepal. These festivals have enriched the calendar of events, which shows the country is rich with ancient culture. Nepal's ancient cultural heritage has helped to enhance the growth of magnificent art, architecture, and religious tradition. (Satyal 1998.)

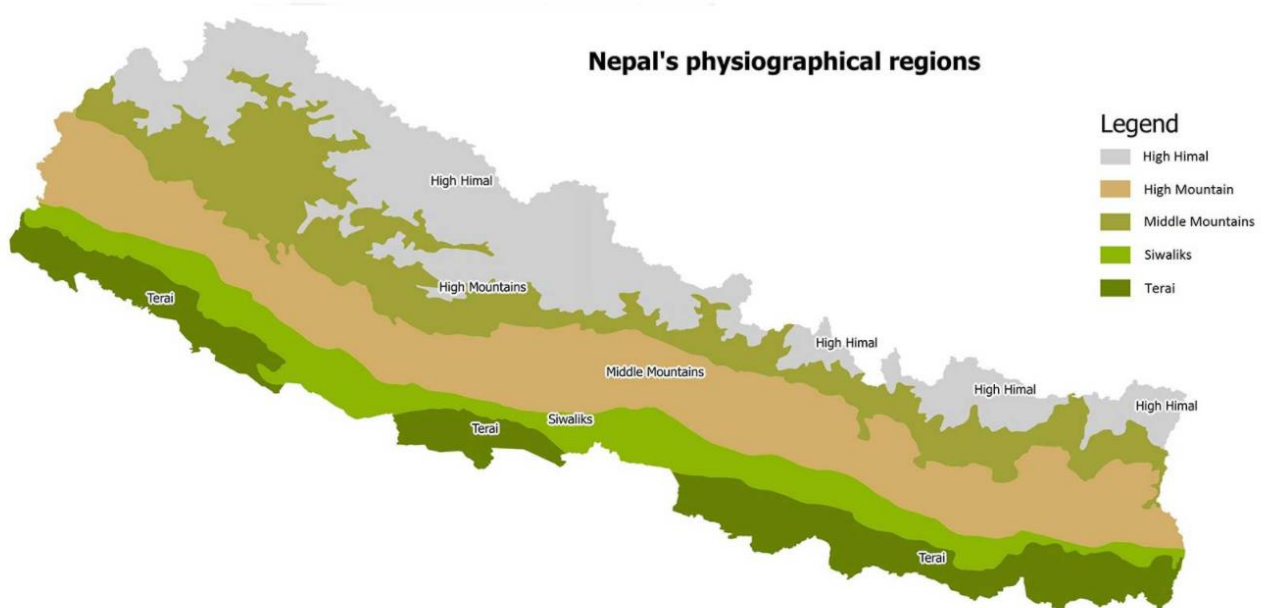


FIGURE 1. Geographical map of Nepal (adapted from Hop Nepal 2020)

Nepal's topography consists of a wide variety of climatic conditions, as can be seen in Figure 1 diverse terrain varying from plain lands to icy peaks, warm heat of terai to the cold of the Himalaya zone. Nepal is a landlocked country surrounded by India on three sides and one side by China. Nepal is rich in biodiversity even though it occupies 0.1% of the earth's surface. The country's highest peak is Sagarmatha (8,848m), while the lowest point lies in the terai plain lands known as Kechana Kalan in Jhapa district (60mm) from sea level. The Himalayan region covers 15% of the total area, while the Hilly and Terai regions cover 68 % and 17%. Eight out of the fourteen highest peaks in the world lie in Nepal. They are above 8000 meters from sea level. Nepal is also called water towers for South Asia because of many

rivers originating from the snow-fed Himalayas. Nepal can successfully protect endangered animals such as Royal Bengal Tiger, One horn rhino, different flora species, and fauna. (Nepal Tourism Board, 2020.)

2.4.2 Sustainable development and tourism

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, "sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that takes full account of its present and future economic, social and environmental impacts, satisfying the needs of tourists, the industry, the local environment, and host communities." For many countries, including Nepal, tourism has been one of the world's fastest-growing and important industries. The tourism industries have contributed a huge amount to the economy of the country. However, unlike rapid development in a certain sector, tourism has also created social issues, loss of cultural heritage, economic dependency, and ecological impact. Due to the rapid growth in tourism and its impact on the environment, various forms of sustainable tourism are implemented. They are nature-based tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism. (Stainton 2020.)

The main goal of sustainable tourism is to take care of the natural environment, community, and economy. The purpose is to minimize the negative impacts done by tourism while maximizing the true potential of tourism industries. The ever-increasing tourism industry results in several impacts on natural resources, consumption habits, pollution, and cultural norms and values. There are lots of scattered plastic bottles along the trail of the highest mountains in the world. It is also an example of an impact on the tourism industry. It is necessary to implement sustainable tourism planning and management in the tourism industry. Sustainable tourism aims to provide the tourist with a complete holiday trip, which is also beneficial to the local country and its people. (Stainton 2020.)

There are many ways sustainable development of tourism is possible. Stakeholders must decide and make the most out of limited natural resources. In other words, sustainable use of resources; natural, social, and cultural, make long-lasting tourism industry. Over-consumption of natural resources has a huge impact on the environmental balance. Reducing over-consumption and waste also contributes to sustainable tourism. It is necessary to maintain biodiversity, promote natural resources, integrate tourism planning strategically, support local entrepreneurs, involve local communities, and develop effective research methodology to create sustainable tourism. (Stainton 2020.)

2.5 Tourism in Finland

In 2018, the number of tourists in Finland continued to grow from the record numbers the year before. The total number of tourists was 6.8 million. This shows that Finland's travel industry is growing rapidly, and Finland could have the major potential to become the most attractive destination among the Nordic countries. The data shows that almost one million foreign tourists increased in one-year comparison to year 2017. The flexibility of the Finnish travel industry has maintained an increase in international tourists. According to the head of Visit Finland, the credit for the increase in tourists and their management goes to companies in the travel and tourism sector in Finland. Visit Finland's long-term strategies include systematic marketing, focus on target markets, global sales promotion, the nationwide development, and internationalization of the regions and companies' offering in the travel and tourism sector. However, the competition in this travel and tourism industry is getting harder. Hence, Finland must continue to extend its visibility and cooperation in the industry. (Business Finland 2019.)

Europe is the biggest market for tourism in Finland. In other words, 53 percent of the people spending the night come from the European Union. In contrast, the share of Asian people's night of expenditures was 16 percent. The geographical location might be the reason for most tourists coming from the European Union. The top five among the nationalities visiting Finland in 2018 are from Russia (81600), Germany (628000), the United Kingdom (595000), Sweden (560000), and China (38500). This happened because Finnish travel and tourism sector companies Visit Finland made the most marketing and sales pitching in the main markets in Germany, the United Kingdom, China, and Japan. (Business Finland 2019.)

The major tourist destinations for international tourists are the Helsinki region, Lapland, the Finnish lake district, and the coast and archipelago. The significant areas offer intense travel and tourism services for international tourists. A significant tourism region cooperation was launched a year ago. The cooperation model aims to consider each region's potential to promote its readiness to serve as a global tourist destination. The objective of coordinated major tourism region cooperation is to engage actors in each place to cooperate strategically to achieve the final outcome. Enhancing the region's infrastructure and its strengths for international marketing are the key strategies of Finland's travel and tourism. (Business Finland 2019.)

3 RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism is a kind of tourism that takes place in the countryside. According to OECD, rural tourism as a diverse activity consists of distinctive characteristics. It includes its location, scale, and character. The scope of rural tourism depended on specific characteristics of the rural areas such as location and physical environment. The main goal of tourists visiting rural areas is to get an authentic experience. Rural places are known for their natural beauty, simpler, purer, easier life than the hectic lifestyles, poverty, and inequality. However, each rural area is different from each other in terms of culture, tradition, religion, landscape, localities, and practices. (Dashper 2014.)

The rural areas are known for the traditional ways of farming, as a place of production of food. However, the authenticity of rural tourism has been completely affected by changes in farming methods, mechanization, and the influences of globalization. Rural areas have changed from production place to consumption place because of factors such as migration, globalization, and rural tourism. For job-seeking purposes and opportunities, many young people leave rural areas resulting in a lack of workforce. However, wealthy people, tourists are moving to rural areas for recreational activities, leisure, relaxation, nature safaris, and adventure tourism. Rural communities failed to provide them with high levels of services due to a lack of specialist skills and support. Expert are always difficult to find in supporting and launching rural tourism development programs. They are supported by the national government to benefit local communities socially and economically, preserving the regional identity and local traditions. However, rural tourism often lacks strategies, leadership, infrastructure, and corruption. (Dashper 2014.)

The preference for tourism has rapidly changed due to political, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental changes in the world. Climate changes are happening swiftly due to global warming. Tourists are looking for a relaxing place more than a usual place. Due to this, tourists are seeking new destinations, activities, and experiences. Nowadays, tourists are self-aware that they want to visit those places that are also beneficial to local communities. Thus, rural areas rich in culture and natural beauty are increasingly in demand for tourism. Besides, the alternative form of tourism, which benefits the local community and

the surrounding environment is rural tourism. It uplifts the lifestyle of poor people living in rural areas. Rural tourism also helps in alleviating poverty. (Joshi & Rajopadhyya 2018, 1-3.)

3.1 Rural tourism in Nepal

Tourism in Nepal has flourished since the 1950s by opening the doors to international visitors. (Satyal 1998) Nepal has attracted many international visitors with Mt. Everest, a constant attraction, the birth-place of lord Buddha, land of meditation, and religious harmonies between different cultures. The general stereotype of Nepalese people is welcoming and hospitable to visitors. They believe and respect visitors as a form of god. Tourism has been an important source of Nepal's foreign economy due to its location and the geopolitical situation. Empowering local people for rural tourism development is the best way for Nepal to become a developed country. Rural tourism in Nepal can reach the poorest communities and benefit needy people. Rural tourism in Nepal has a huge potential to benefit from local resources, which is linked with sustainable development. Rural tourism ultimately leads to the overall development of the country by improving the lifestyle of local people and protecting the local environment. (Joshi & Rajopadhyya 2018.)

Nepal offers a wide variety of cultural, language, religion, natural, and geographical places. The diversity of the country has provided a huge potential for tourism in Nepal. The local communities are in a vulnerable situation due to globalization. However, local communities must be aware of tourism's long-term benefits than present short-term global tourism trends. Rural tourism is slow, but it is the ultimate and long-term destination of future tourism. Tourism depends upon many external factors, thus impacting a larger community. Thoughtful promotion of rural tourism has the ability to provide economic gain and an uplifting community lifestyle. Rural tourism not only enhances the local community but also contributes to the economy of a country. (Joshi & Rajopadhyya 2018.) A Figure 2 shows the typical rural village of Nepal.



FIGURE 2. A typical rural village of Nepal. (adapted from Mountain View Homestay 2020)

3.1.1 Rural tourism development, management, and community benefits

Rural tourism is an important aspect of the tourism industry in a present-day context. It promotes sustainable tourism concepts through the implementation of natural resources. Local resources can be effectively used for infrastructure development in rural areas. This generates jobs and income for local people. Rural tourism is based on the preservation and promotion of local resources that eventually benefit the larger community. Due to the high percentage of illiteracy in rural areas, it is extremely important to raise awareness about sustainable tourism development and its impact on the entire community. People think that only entrepreneurs and business people are profiting through rural tourism. However, it is important to tell local people that hotels and restaurants generate jobs for local people and purchase local products. In addition, local people can sell their local products and souvenirs to visitors that eventually increase income and employment. (Joshi & Rajopadhyaya 2018.)

Nepal has many villages and remote areas that can attract tourism. However, they still lack even basic tourism facilities, such as healthy water, accommodation, health, and transportation. A national-level project called Annapurna Conservation Area Project aims to develop and conserve rural tourism in Nepal. Another project called Rural poverty alleviation program and eco-cultural tourism project is targeting the preservation and development of rural tourism through sustainable tourism principles. The ultimate objective of these projects was to manage resources, conservation, development of alternative energy, minimize the negative impacts of tourism, and enhance the rural people's lifestyle. They are role models for the entire country's rural tourism. The area covered by the ACAP consists of five districts of the western development region. They look after the rural tourism development in a designated area. More than 60% of trekkers chose this Annapurna region. Thus, projects were implemented in these areas to develop sustainable rural tourism by the local community with minimal intervention from the government. (Joshi & Rajopadhyya 2018.)

Another major project to enhance the sustainable tourism development is the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program by the government of Nepal- Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation in 2001. It was supported by United Nations Development Program Nepal, Department for international development Nepal, and the Netherlands' development organization Nepal. The aim of the project was to eliminate poverty in rural areas through sustainable tourism development. It was aimed at poor, rural communities, and socially backward women. The program was targeted to reach the grass-roots level in rural communities. The project covered six districts with 48 village development communities. They were Taplejung, Solukhumbu, Rasuwa, Chitwan, Rupandehi, and Dolpa. These districts were chosen because of the existing tourism development, a large number of poor people, marginalized people, and its potential to attract rural tourism in the future. These projects' main objective was to develop sustainable tourism development models for policy feedback and support the government to formulate sustainable tourism development policies. It was intended to include people from a rural place in the decision-making process. Rural people feel connected with the program, which ensures that benefits from rural tourism reach the poor and marginalized people. (Joshi & Rajopadhyya 2018.)

3.1.2 Importance of rural tourism in Nepal

The concept and development of rural tourism are fast-growing in Nepal. According to the world bank, 83 % of people live in rural areas. The data shows that sustainable rural tourism is significant for Nepal

to uplift its economy. There are many reasons for clarifying the importance of rural tourism in Nepal. Rural tourism is even considered an alternative for development besides the agriculture industry. The economic condition of rural people is very low as rural tourism increases the demand for products that eventually increases the production and value of the producer. Ultimately, people's living standard improves, personal income increases, and local employment grows, which is happening in various rural parts of Nepal. Rural tourism is affordable for most people. Therefore, more people with low incomes can go to rural tourism. This helps to increase in revenue of the society. Most of the people in rural areas are living under poverty and low income. Rural tourism significantly helps in improving people's living standards. In addition, the recent increase in immigration from rural to urban can be prevented by improving lifestyle and income in rural areas. People in rural areas can get an opportunity to understand and explore the outside world and thus are helped to become organized and conscious. They can learn useful information and utilize it. Rural areas lack infrastructure development. Rural tourism prompts the development of infrastructures such as transportation, water facilities, and accommodation. Rural tourism also promotes domestic tourism. (Yozukmaz & Ekiztepe 2014, 37-44.)

3.1.3 SWOT analysis on the status of rural tourism in Nepal

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. It is a technique used to assess these four aspects of a project or a specific study subject. A SWOT analysis was done to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats on the rural tourism status in Nepal. A SWOT analysis is essential for making the most out of what is available for a better outcome. It also reduces the chances of bankruptcy or failure because the SWOT analysis assesses the potential problems and solutions beforehand. Table 1 contains a 2 x 2 grid with one square each for Strength, Weakness, Threat, and opportunity.

TABLE 1. SWOT analysis on the status of rural tourism in Nepal (Rahnami 2013)

Strength	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosperity in agriculture and gardening • Increase in economic activities • Increase in investment • Friendly and welcoming people • Authentic cultural activities • Rich indigenous traditions • Homestay in a traditional house • Nature tourism such as planting rice, catching fish in the local river, plowing the fields • The beautiful and unique landscape • Affordable living and access to the areas • A quiet environment without any external noises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of proper health and service facilities • Lack of infrastructure • Lack of investment • Geographically rural • No government planning, management, and investment • Susceptible to foreigners • Illiteracy • Lack of skilled workforce • Lack of properly maintained facilities for recreation
Opportunity	Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase of private sector investment • Increase of government attention • Increase in domestic tourism • Improve in the local economy • Awareness for local people • Increase in employment • Avoiding the migration of young people • Boosting local products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding in natural areas • Increase in noise pollution • Loss of traditional culture and customs • Increase social crimes • The vulnerability of the local environment • Political instability

From the above Table 1, it can be concluded that the weaknesses and threats in the rural tourism of Nepal exceed the strengths and opportunities. The health facilities, security, hygiene, and geographical location are the key factors preventing the development of rural tourism in Nepal. The absence of a well-managed rural tourism industry put the rural area's development at a vulnerable spot. Through study the governing body must come up with a strategy to develop rural tourism in Nepal.

3.2 Rural tourism in Finland

People in Finland usually move to the countryside in the summer. Besides, 70% of the land area is covered by forest. Finland is regarded as one of the most rural countries in the European Union. Thus, rural tourism has bigger potential in Finland. Finland has a vast network of inland waters consisting of many lakes. There are many rural farms opening doors to international visitors. They perform various activities; horseback riding, canoeing, gardening, Finnish summer games, and swimming in the lake. Besides these activities, tourists go cycling, camping, hiking, and fishing. Winter is full of snow and darkness, while summer is all daylight and midnight sun. There are local farms in the countryside such as Haltiala Farm, that allow visitors to familiarize themselves with traditional animals like cows, horses, pigs, sheep, goats, and rabbits. These kinds of farms are popular travel destinations for families on the weekends. (Visit Finland 2020.)

3.2.1 Approach to Rural tourism in Finland

Rural tourism in Finland is increasing for the development and welfare of the Finnish rural areas. Different kinds of efforts such as financing for investments, local and regional development projects, and university level studies and researchers have been allocated in the development of countryside entrepreneurship and tourism in Finland. 70% of people in Finland are interested in using the rural tourism services. But the most popular were cottage rental, nature trips, visits to farms, and visiting household animals. It was found that people are interested in outdoor activities due to work stress. They mainly prefer to spend time in the natural environment in rural areas. Rural tourism has been long considered as a means of achieving economic and social development. It has been widely known as an effective source of income and increases employment. Rural tourism consists of farm tourism, rural cultural tourism, ecological tourism, lake tourism, and village tourism. Tourists travel to the countryside to skip the usual day. They want to relax and experience something interesting other than everyday activities. It is

necessary to have social contacts, spend time together with family, rest, and enjoy entertainment. (Tikkanen 2004,2-14.)

A small rural called Vaajasalmi is a typical village in the northern part of Finland. They are known for agriculture, berry cultivation, fisheries, milk production, and meat cattle. The rural place resources are farm tourism, horse riding, horse races, farmland, woodworks, library, cycling route, fireplace, game hall, fishing, and swimming pool. Many people come from abroad to pick berries every year. They stay for 4 to 6 weeks during the berry picking period. Rural activities such as fisherman's needs services related to lake resources, boating equipment, fishing, and catering services for better production. Likewise, real estate property owners need services such as forest services, field works, baby care, transportation, and road maintenance services. People consume services such as accommodation, kiosk, internet connection, summer camps, and accommodation services. In addition, there can be tourists that rent roller skaters, and skiers need refreshments, swimming places, accommodation, and catering services. However, most of the activities and services offered to the local people and tourists are produced by the teams on a voluntary ground. They have the networking of people for different kinds of activities such as fishing clubs, estate agents, and a Norwegian friendship municipality. The activities and services are given mainly for the needs of local residents. The activities and services to rural tourists can contribute to the development of the village. (Tikkanen 2004,2-14.)

3.2.2 Rural tourism development projects

Two parallel programs are undergoing in Finland for rural development: the rural development program for Mainland Finland and the Aland Islands' rural development program. The mainland program is handled by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry while the Aland rural development programmer is run by Aland's autonomous government. These varieties of programs enable all kinds of stakeholders to participate in rural tourism development in their own way. They are farmers, rural enterprises, rural residents, local entrepreneurs, and their organization. The main principle of rural development is such that the well being of rural Finland is vital for the whole country. These programs are implemented to make the Finnish countryside a better place to visit and live in. (Maaseutu 2020.)

Finland's rural development strategy for the period 2014-2020 focuses on improving skills and spreading of information, innovations, and cooperation in rural areas. It also highlighted the significant climate change mitigation and adaptation. It is vital to maintain the healthy status of water bodies, soil, and an

increased biodiversity. In addition, the program focuses on the diversification of local enterprises, higher employment, better services, and active participation in social activities. Growth in agricultural production, high-quality product, and improving animal welfare are the main goals of the rural tourism development program in Finland. (Maaseutu 2020.)

The programs are implemented through tools called measures. These measures are linked with opportunities to gain support that are accessible to everyone. Training and provision of information, provision of guidance, investments in physical property, start-up support, support in the development of economic activities and farms, development of services and villages, support in organic production, cooperation, and leader. (Maaseutu 2020.) The Figure 3 shows the typical rural place in Finland. Tourists can visit local farms, enjoys scenery, and go hiking.



FIG 3. A farm in a typical Finnish rural area (adapted from Rahul Thakuri Instagram 2020)

4 RESEARCH PROCESS

A research methodology is a way through which research is done. The methodology presents the problem, objective, and results from the data achieved during the research period. This chapter elaborates on the research method used during the research process. There are two types of research study methodology: quantitative and qualitative. In a quantitative research methodology, the researcher aims to publish generalizable knowledge about the cause of a process, which requires a thoroughly designed study under controlled conditions. In qualitative research, the researcher aims to produce related real-world knowledge about a specific group of people's shared beliefs. However, the only qualitative research method is used for the research purpose in this thesis to investigate how to develop rural tourism in Nepal and to learn from Finland's rural tourism strategy.

4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a process of gaining a deeper understanding of an event, system, or culture. Depending on the various research aspects, qualitative research can give a broad understanding of events, systems, and culture. The researcher can get meaning, themes, or data from a qualitative study. Qualitative research uses non-statistical methods to gain an understanding of the research topic. It is a different research methodology, unlike dealing with the numbers in quantitative analysis. (Stephanie 2016.)

4.2 Document analysis

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and assessing documents, both paper and in electronic form. As usual, in qualitative research, document analysis requires data to be analyzed and interpreted to generate meaning and understand. Documents used for systematic evaluation are available in various forms. They include registers, books, brochures, diaries, journals, newspapers, organizations or institutional reports, newspaper archives, and organizational files. The researcher usually reviews prior literature as part of their studies and integrate that information in their reports. If a list of analyzed documents is listed, then it often omits previous studies. Undeniably, previous studies are a source of data, which allows researchers to depend on the definition and the interpretation of data rather than having the new data as a basis for analysis. The analytic method involves finding, selecting, assessing,

and synthesizing data enclosed in documents. Document analysis produces data extract, quotations, or whole passages, which are then organized into specific themes and categories through content explorations. (Bowen 2009.)

4.3 Articles and publications used in the study

Intensive studies in a particular subject produce detailed descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, or organization. Non- technical literature includes reports, and internal writings are also a potential source of data for case studies. In other words, documents of all types help the researcher uncover meaning, draw conclusions, develop understanding, and discover awareness relevant to the research problem. Documents may also be the most efficient method to collect data if such an event can not be identified or informants have forgotten the incident. (Bowen 2009.)

To carry out the research, keywords related to rural tourism were used. This qualitative study looked at many online documents listed under the following keywords: rural tourism development, sustainable tourism development, rural tourism in Nepal, rural tourism in Finland. The following table 2 lists the articles and publications which were used for the research.

TABLE 2. List of articles and publications used for the research.

1	Rural Tourism: A Conceptual Approach. Ayazlar G.& Ayazlar R. 2015
2	Rural Tourism: An International Perspective. Dashper K. 2014
3	Rural Tourism – A sustainable approach to rural development. Kumar S. 2018
4	Rural Tourism in Nepal: Development and Sustainability. Regmi N. 2016
5	Sustainable Rural tourism and local communities in Nepal- Joshi J & Rajopadhya M. 2018

6	Step into the Finnish countryside, VisitFinland
7	The attractiveness of rural tourism destinations in the republic of Karelia and Eastern Finland
8	Resource approach to rural tourism in Finland: case Vaajasalmi

4.4 Findings and discussion

Nepal is a popular destination for international tourists. Many tourists travel Nepal to its remote rural village, lifestyle, natural beauty, and friendly local people. Tourism has an impact on many sectors, from employment to foreign currency for Nepal. However, there is still much has to be done to improve tourism in Nepal. Rural tourism is one of the potential tourist destinations in Nepal for the coming years. Thus, Nepal needs to focus on sustainable rural tourism.

Projects are undergoing in Nepal to improve the rural tourism condition. The sustainable rural tourism and local communities in Nepal, reviewed by Joshi and Rajopadhya, point out that similar projects are easily replicable in other Nepal destinations. They elaborated that since the project is based on the basic method of identifying the place and analyzing its future possibilities for tourism. The Bandipur Eco-Cultural tourism project has strengthened the necessary infrastructure for the town to grow as one of the tourist destinations among other districts and initiated a network of people locally, nationally, and internationally. The project's outcome was sustainability to the activities. With the gradual improvement in political stability and joint efforts of local and international people, the number of tourists in Bandipur will continue to increase in the future. During the project, people who were trained will be the foundation for promoting and managing tourism in Bandipur. The project was integrated with physical infrastructure, human resources, training, and promotion, allowing more influx of tourists in the city without hampering the natural and cultural resources. (Joshi & Rajopadhya 2018.)

Rural tourism in developing countries like Nepal has often been publicized as the savior of rural areas as an effective way to raise local communities out of poverty, but it's not in reality. In Botswana, the country hugely benefits from tourism, but the benefit is not shared equally across the country. It has been

found that many tour operators are foreign-owned and employ more foreign people than local people. In another example, Lenao's tourism is predominantly controlled by local people, but they do not make any economic growth for the local community. There are factors like education, assets, financial issues, power, and mediators acts as barriers to poor people's involvement in the tourism sector. Young people believe that they benefit from local tourism, but they feel that their traditional ways of living are threatened. Much government support and investment in human resource development are necessary if local people are to benefit from the rural tourism in general. (Dashper 2014.)

Vaajasalmi is a typical small rural village located in Rautalampi municipality, in North Savo county in the middle of Finland. Despite having enough resources for the development of rural tourism in Vaasalmi, local people found out that the teamwork is an essential factor for its growth. The major part of tourism development in the village is played by voluntary teamwork. They were needed for allocating the recourses, managing tourists, local resources, and providing various services. Thus the cooperation between five key sectors such as farm tourism, rural cultural tourism, ecological tourism, lake tourism, and village tourism for developing regional rural tourism. The researcher finds out that one resource activity group is related to another resource activity group. In other words, every activity is interrelated to each other. In addition, the researcher also discovered that the key problem faced by rural entrepreneurs is how to conceptualize the rural tourism activities into a service concept into a permanent, wide, and profitable market. The researcher suggested that the first key step to achieve this aim might be the deeper analysis of needs, wants, motivations, and activities behind each rural tourism resource-based category. The following step might be to identify different kinds of behavioral activity-based sectors within each activity interest group. In addition, it is necessary to design a service package meeting those needs and motivations in each activity sector. Furthermore, the final step might be to design the appropriate marketing strategy for each sector and implement it. This could be a lesson for countries like Nepal to initiate a voluntary team for the development of local tourism. The team could be formed by local people. They are responsible for conceptualizing the concept of development of rural tourism. (Tikkanen 2004,2-14.)

In comparison between Finland and Nepal, Nepal's rural tourism status is far behind Finland in terms of policies and development programs. Despite having enormous potential in rural tourism, Nepal lacks development programs in such areas. Finland has launched different development programs like rural tourism development 2014-2020. But the government of Nepal is only focusing on attracting international tourists to urban areas. In terms of similarities between Nepal and Finland, local people in both

countries are welcoming in nature and peace-loving. There are farms, trekking routes, and beautiful scenery in both countries.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the thesis was to find the similarities and differences between Finland and Nepal in terms of rural tourism. The author aimed to find out the projects and programs that are ongoing in the development of rural tourism in both countries. In addition, it was intended to analyze the shortcomings and future possibilities of rural tourism in terms of government strategies and planning. The thesis has a qualitative approach for research findings. The author has gathered seven different articles and journals related to Finland and Nepal related to rural tourism development projects, strategies, and planning.

Nepal's economic growth and stability are dependent on the tourism industry. The governing bodies must focus on developing the tourism industry and keeping it alive. The tourism industry is vital for the people that are making their living. Nepal's rural areas are a new potential destination for international tourists. Nepal is culturally and geographically rich and has enormous potential to grow in the future. Tourism is the key industry that brings different aspects of development in rural areas. The government should focus on the development of the infrastructure, which would automatically attract visitors.

Along with the proper definition of Nepal's rural tourism status, three different impacts of tourism were discussed: economic impact, socio-cultural impacts, and environmental impacts of tourism. The major purpose of thesis was to evaluate rural tourism development in Nepal, its economic impact, and the development of rural tourism development in Finland. It was also intended to find out if Nepal could learn from Finland's sustainable tourism development program. Thus, the author analyses articles, books, and journals associated with rural tourism, rural tourism development, policies and programs, related to Nepal and Finland.

The development of rural tourism is vital for economic growth and employment of local people in Nepal. The sustainable development of rural areas protects the country's natural and cultural resources to benefit local people. The author found out that there are not many rural tourism development programs in Nepal. Some programs are undergoing but not making enough impacts. The rural tourism industry is huge, but the development of infrastructure is not enough. The author struggled to find books and articles related to rural tourism in Nepal. The concept of rural tourism is new, and it is still in an early phase in Nepal. Thus, there have not been many academic works before. Hence, the author used online journals and books to analyze the potential of rural tourism and its impact on Nepal's economy. The author finds out that Finland is ahead of Nepal in many sectors, including tourism, by reviewing Finland's rural tourism

development plans and policies. They have a significant and long-term program that has impacted the growth of rural tourism in the countryside. The government of Finland has implemented programs for running such a project that impacts rural tourism development. However, the government of Nepal has a department that looks after the development of tourism, but they do not have effective plans and strategies.

In conclusion, Nepal, and Finland, is full of natural resources and beauty and has enormous potential for tourism attraction. The author of this thesis has described the rural tourism possibilities from every aspect of tourism. The development of rural tourism in Nepal can change rural people's living conditions and contribute to Nepal's economy. In contrast, the rural tourism in Finland is already in progress and it is becoming a potential local tourist destination. The government of Nepal must implement rural tourism development programs targeting local people and local entrepreneurs to achieve such a goal in the future.

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