



Research Paper

## Professionalism of Tourism in Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the professionalism of tourism in the Sudurpaschim province of Nepal. Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business purposes. Tourism is a multidimensional discipline that covers various tourism-related phenomena such as accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services, etc. All these sectors require competent, efficient, and skilled human resources to provide better services. Employees gained professionalism as a result of training, education, a code of ethics, and organization. In this context, professionalism in tourism is a process of obtaining competencies, skills, qualifications, and experiences for working effectively and appropriately in the tourism sector. Tourist attractions, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, and transportation and travel services are core themes of tourism development. Professionalism is the process of obtaining the skills, qualifications, and experience that facilitate to make progress in career. Idea generation, planning, strategies, and success are core themes of professionalism in tourism. The finding indicates that Sudurpaschim province is a potential tourism area in Nepal. Its pristine natural and cultural diversities provide foundations for tourism development resources. However, professionalism in tourism is a prerequisite for success in the industry. It supports the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and practices through education and training programs. It requires a strong policy effort to identify effective professionalism for increasing entrepreneurs' knowledge and practices. It can only be achieved by the proper collective actions of professional organizations, state and local governments.*

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

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### I. INTRODUCTION

'Tourism development' refers to the growth and maintenance of the tourism industry in a given locality. It requires a tourism plan that can be implemented through integrated tourism-related phenomena such as 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 travel at least 80 km from their home for at least 24 hours, for business, leisure, or other reasons' (Westcott, 2015). 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. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2008) defines "tourism" as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that 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 (Westcott, 2015).

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 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) are accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services for tourism development. In addition, with accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation, entertainment, transportation, travel services, services like marketing, 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 now extensively grown in size and become very much diverse with several complexity, now requires higher level of skills from its personnel engaged 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). Cullen (1978) concludes that there will probably never be a definition of professionalism and cites the idea that professionalism is a sensitizing concept that connotes something about the differential status of occupational groups and the nature of their occupational. 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 a profession. Enhancement in these skills is must to the growth and sustainable tourism development in any area, country or region. There are different benefits of tourism professionalism as it increases confidence, enhances hiring potential, develops skills, increases job opportunities, and expands networking opportunities (Hoyle, 2001; Hussey, Holden & Lynch, 2010). Skills needed for professionalism in tourism can be developed through taking classes, training, and workshops (Tapper, 2004; Țigu & Călărețu, 2013). Professionalism assists individuals in staying up-to-date on new trends in their field and applying new practices to their current methods. The tourism-related phenomenon includes five sectors of the tourism industries (transportation, accommodation, food service, travel agents and 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 the following paradoxes in professionalism: voluntarism, individual responsibility, teaching-learning, personal learning for organizational development, life experience, values-driven development, and journey.

Sudurpaschim province is a natural museum for tourism development. It is a kaleidoscopic landscape, which is supposed to be the result of natural and cultural diversities. These are potential resources for tourism development. The development of a potential tourism industry can lead to the prosperity of this province. To improve the quality of tourism services, however, integrated efforts of tourism activities among tourism service suppliers, tour operators, and reselling travel agencies are required. In addition, professionalism in tourism is necessary for success in the sectors of accommodation, recreation and entertainment, and travel services. It helps to fulfil the sustainable flow of tourists and monetary values in this province. The review literature reveals that only a 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 the unanswered question of what type of professional knowledge, skills, and practices are necessary to develop a sustainable tourism industry in Sudurpaschim province, Nepal.

## **II. OBJECTIVE**

The main objective of this paper is to present the critical points of touristic products and methods to improve the quality of provided services and to investigate the level of professionalism in tourism and find out the positive aspects of professionalism with hidden lacking in it.

## **III. METHOD AND MATERIALS**

This study used a descriptive research design approach and was based on a 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 from official records. Questionnaire forms, checklists, and observation protocol sheets were used as data collection tools. Ancillary data were also collected from the interactions of key informants related to tourism entrepreneurs, tourism promoter agencies, hotel associations, local elites, and official personnel. Their views, perceptions, and personal experiences helped provide insight for analyzing professionalism in tourism.

### **Study Area**

The study area Sudurpaschim province of Nepal is surrounded by the Indian states of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh in the west and south, respectively, Tibet (China) in the north; and Karnali and Lumbini Provinces

in the east. From north to south, the province has covered three ecological regions: the Himalayas (40.6%), the Hills (34.5%), and the Tarai (24.9%). It is extended between 28°22' and 30°09' N latitudes and 80°03' and 81°25' E longitudes. Its altitude ranges from 109m to 7132m. The Sudurpaschim province has an area of 19539 square kilometers, or 13.27% of Nepal's total area. This province is divided into nine districts, including Darchula, Baitadi, Dadeldhura, Kanchanpur, Bajhang, Bajura, Doti, Achham, and Kailali. It has 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 255,517, which covered 9.6% of the total population of Nepal (CBS, 2012 and Census, 2011).

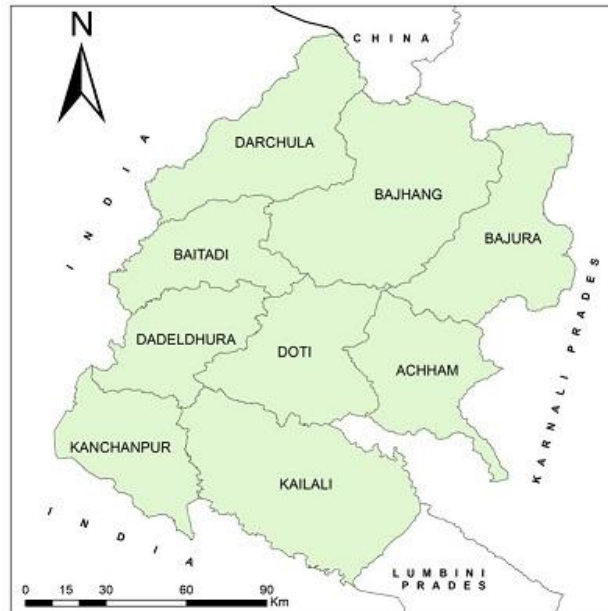


Fig. 1 Map of Study Area

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Scope and Status of Tourism Development in Sudurpaschim Province:

Sudurpaschim province has a diverse range of natural and cultural resources. It is supposed to be a natural museum for different types of flourishing tourism development. However, the nature and scope of tourism resources varied depending on the area's attractions, accessibility, lodging, and amenities. With a great geographical environment (mountains, hills, and tarai), climate, and scenery; Sudurpaschim province has become a reliable tourist destination area in Nepal. Sudurpaschim with its vast natural, cultural, and scenic beauty, has the potential to become a rising tourist destination, laying the ground for long-term tourism development in near future. In this context, intermediate entrepreneurs and organizations could play a leading role in integrating professionalism into tourism to provide better tourism services in the region.

### 4.2 Tourism Management:

Tourism management is an important and complex phenomenon in Sudurpaschim province. It encompasses a wide range of economic and tourism-related activities through the development of tourism products. These products are confined to a specific geographic area and have changed over time. It requires professional knowledge and skills to transform untapped resources into tourism products and services. The tourism industry sold these products to meet the needs and satisfactions of tourists in terms of attractions, activities, destinations, transportation, and other services. They can be discussed as follows:

**A. Attractions:** Sudurpaschim province has immense natural and cultural resources. These resources are playing a significant role in the fulfilment of tourists' leisure-oriented needs and satisfactions. It is also known as a tourist attraction location because of the following inherent and demonstrated values:

**i. Natural Attractions:** Sudurpaschim province has a wide range of potential tourist attractions in the mountains, hills, and Tarai regions. This province's natural heritage is diverse, with snow peaks, cliffs, caves, waterfalls, rivers, lakes, Simbars, and Ramsars. The Ghodaghodi lake of Kailali district is listed as a wetland area of world heritage. Suklaphanta National Park, Kaptad National Park, and Ramaroshan are the major

attractions of this province. The province is also known as a biological corridor for diverse flora and fauna of the Himalayas.

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

**iii. Man-made Attractions:** Sudurpaschim province has parks, towers, bridges, various architectures, temples, mosques, churches, and monuments in different towns. Local, provincial, and national governments have allocated budgets and financial supports to develop potential tourist attractions in different locations of the province.

**B. Activities:** Tourism activity refers to any activity of tourists, organizations, and individuals doing tourism business. Tourism fairs, festivals, and conferences (MICE programmes), seminars, and travel fairs at regular basis are being conducted for the development of tourism. These activities are supporting tourists to engage in activities such as:

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

**ii. Leisure activities:** Tourists can spend their leisure time in relaxing, swimming, and dining in peaceful mountains and near mesmerizing water bodies.

**iii. Business Activities:** Different business activities including attending seminars, business meetings, and promotions are increasing in the province with a rising economy and increasing tourism activities and tourists.

**iv. Health Activities:** Dhangadhi is a health centre in Sudurpaschim province. Here, people come to visit for treatment, yoga sessions, exercising, undergoing naturopathy, and similar activities.

**C. 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 a potential tourist destination in Nepal and includes:

**i. Accommodation:** There are a lot of hotels, motels, lodges, and guest houses in this province.

**ii. Restaurant:** There are different types of restaurants available in this province where tourists can dine in and takeaway food.

**iii. Tourist Places:** Sudurpaschim province has developed various entertainment parks and shopping centers. There are a wide range of tourist entertainment places located in different places of the province. They are Suklaphata National Park (Kanchanpur), Khaptad National Park (Doti), Api and Saipal Himal (Darchula and Bajhang), Ghodaghodi Lake (Kailali), Badimalika (Bajura), Ramaroshan and Bdyanath Dham (Achham), Patalbumeshwor, Tripura, and Niglasaini (Baitadi), Tikapur Park and Karnali Bridge (Karnali) (Karnali), and Dodhara Suspension Bridge and Bedkot Tal (Kanchanpur). Other tourist destination areas are Budhinanda Devi, Surmasarobar Lake, Mahabharat Parvat, Ghanghashya, Bhelchhada, Gorkhali Jharana, Batase, Bire Jharana, Chhatiwani Jharana, Raulakedar, Ajaymerukot, Parshuram, Khanidada, and Gowori.

**D. Transportation:** The transportation network is one of the tourism industry's core and key functional areas, and it plays a critical role in a potential traveler's decision about how to get to a desired destination for pleasure or business. Improving road connectivity is critical for the province's tourist destinations. Sudurpaschim province has developed both road and air transportation. Dhangadhi is a focal point for bus and air services. It is well connected to the Tarai, Hill, and Mountain regions of the province. Local governments have also been involved in road infrastructure development in potential tourist destinations. Long-distance railway line service is available from India. However, local people reported that it is very difficult for tourists who want to visit

Nepal to cross the border at Banbasa because the bridge only opens at certain hours of the day. Karnali, Mahakali, and Setirivers are potential areas for water games like boating and rafting, etc.

**E. Intermediaries:** Tourism intermediaries are playing a middleman 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 also provide tourism services such as packaged holidays, tickets, tours, lodging, car rentals, and so on. The Nepal Tourism Board, Hotel and Travel Association, Nepal Chambers of Commerce, etc. are also involved in tourism development in this province. The following agencies and organizations are playing mediator roles in Sudurpaschim province are as:

**i. Travel agents:** The business of selling hospitality and tourism products is mostly dependent on travel agents. These agents are also involved in providing information about the available travel and tourism products and services.

**ii. Tour Operators:** They deal with the operating components of rates, such as making reservations and travel arrangements. Tour operators also created travel packages, preparing tickets, confirming bookings, and contacting leads, prospects, and customers.

**iii. 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 centre at Dhangadhi to promote tourism and tourist destination centres in different localities of the province.

#### **4.3 Professionalism of Tourism in Sudurpaschim Province:**

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines professionalism as the conduct, aims, or qualities that mark a profession or a professional person. "Professionalism is commonly understood as an individual's adherence to a set of standards, a code of conduct, or a collection of qualities that characterize accepted practice within a profession" (Hoyle, 2001). It requires specialized knowledge, skills, and practices. Professionalism is a trait that's highly valued in the workforce in tourism sector. It has many attributes, including: specialized knowledge, competency, a code of conduct, honesty, integrity, and respect, accountability, and self-regulation (Cheng, Lu & Chen, 2012; Porcupile, 2015). Ap and Wong (2001) determined that if tour guides wished to raise the recognition, status and career opportunities open to them, they needed to develop their professional skills. However, the degree of the tourism and hospitality industries is determined by 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 the professionalism of tourism in Sudurpaschim province (Table 1) and can be discussed as follows:

**Table 1: Professionalism in Tourism in Sudurpaschim Province**

| Sl. No. | Characteristics      | Accommodation | Food service | Transportation | Attraction or Entertainment | Travel agent/ Tour operator |
|---------|----------------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1.      | Training & Education | 1             | -            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 2.      | Code of Ethics       | 1             | 1            | -              | -                           | -                           |
| 3.      | Organized            | 1             | 1            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 4.      | Complex Occupation   | -             | -            | -              | -                           | -                           |
| 5.      | Altruistic Service   | 1             | 1            | 1              | 1                           | 1                           |
| 6.      | Body of Knowledge    | 1             | 1            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 7.      | People-Oriented      | 1             | 1            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 8.      | Licensed             | -             | -            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 9.      | High Prestige        | -             | -            | -              | 1                           | -                           |
| 10.     | Competence Tested    | 1             | -            | 1              | -                           | 1                           |
| 11.     | Self-Employed        | -             | 1            | -              | 1                           | 1                           |



|     |             |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12. | High Income | - | - | 1 | - | - |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|

**Source:** Adopted from Sheldon, 1989, p. 494 and Field Survey, 2021. \*(1) true for majority of occupation available and (-) for unavailable in the Sudurpaschim province.

**i. Training and Education:** Training and education are the foundations for professional development in the tourism sector. These services are provided through both formal education and on-the-job training to increase employee knowledge and skills. Universities of Nepal have developed different academic tourism and hospitality management courses. Vocational training courses are also launched by different organizations. Thus, the number of tourism employees has increased over the years. However, a large number of educational institutions and training centres are confined to Dhangadhi and Mahendra Nagar only. Observation and results indicate that low-skill professional entry in the tourism sector predominated in this province.

**ii. Code of Ethics:** In this province, the federal government, state government, and local government each have developed their own professional code of ethics. It provides norms of behaviour to protect clients and the profession from unscrupulous practitioners. The Nepal Tourism Board is an authority to regularize and monitor the code of ethics.

**iii. Organization:** Tourism-related organizations provide solidity and an opportunity for the 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 involved in the professionalism of tourism. The NATTA Sudurpaschim and Tourism Development Society (TDS) is working in the field of travel and tourism in this province. Nowadays, the local governments have developed a motto: "Collaborate locally to compete globally." Municipalities have also set aside funds to build tourism infrastructure.

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

**v. 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 are known as altruistic. The government of Nepal has recently decided to give holiday propensity to the civil servants that support the tourism development and professionalism of tourism.

**vi. Body of knowledge:** Tourism-related conferences, seminars, and educational programmes provide knowledge about tourism and hospitality services in the province. Journals, books, manuals, social media sites and e-books are also great places to learn about hospitality and tourism services in the province.

**vii. People-Oriented:** The tourism industry is essentially a people's industry, and most of its employees come into contact with tourists daily. Tourism professionals are primarily concerned with tourism-related activities. Sudurpaschim visit campaigns are held on a regular basis to promote the jingle 'Visit the Beautiful Far West.' 'Once in a Lifetime' and 'The Voice of the Far West: A Tourist Selection' provides a logo for advertising Sudurpaschim province as a tourist destination. The organizers also offer a token of love to the tourists on the occasion of the visit to Nepal.

**viii. Licensing:** A license and certification are required to do business in the tourism industry. For officially issued documents, tourism agencies and tourist guides, as well as drivers of vehicles such as pilots, taxis, and tour buses, must have a license and certification. These documents are issued by the local, state, and federal government in Nepal.

**ix. High Prestige:** Most tourism-related occupations require high prestige such as medicine and law. However, the result indicates that tourism professionals do not have such high prestige. This is mainly due to the lack of competent and efficient manpower involved in and working in tourism-related activities.

**x. Competence Tested:** Tourism professionals have developed knowledge and skills in their respective fields. Different organizations have upgraded their skills, been tested, and received certification.

**xi. Self-Employed:** In this province, the dominant forms of tourism are small businesses by nature. They are actually self-employed. Many well-paid managerial and skilled positions are available, while unprofessional workers are paid less.

## V. CONCLUSION

Tourism is a specialized industry; tourism-related activities demand, first and foremost, professional knowledge. The professionals have made a deep personal commitment to develop their skills and practices in mainly five sectors: transportation, accommodation, food service, tour and travel agents and operators, and attractions and entertainment. Professional knowledge is considered the foundation of the tourism industry. This paper concludes that competent professionals can do a better job than unskilled workers. Professionals' personal accountability is equally important to tourism and hospitality. It is closely related to the honesty and integrity of professionals. To keep sustainable tourism development at the top of their priorities, local, state, and federal governments should develop dependable policies and plans. The provincial government and the local bodies should have to take more responsibility to enhance tourism and make it more professional.

Tourism authorities, associations, and agencies are also equally responsible for providing 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, the development of tourist attractions and destinations, transport, communication, and amenities. It can be concluded that professionalism in tourism and hospitality requires trained and efficient manpower in cooking, waitering, housekeeping, food and beverage service, and accommodation for providing quality service. To promote professionalism in tourism and make the industry more competent and sustainable, inter- and intra-regional cooperation and collaboration on an integrated basis are inevitable.

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