

***The Sherpa Community in the 'Yak Donald's' Era:
Competition over Access to Resources in the Mount
Everest Tourist Region (Nepal)***
***(La société sherpa à l'ère du 'Yak Donald's': lutte des
places pour l'accès aux ressources dans la région
touristique de l'Everest (Népal))***

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The Mount Everest region (Nepal) is often regarded by trekkers and mountaineers as a perfect heterotopia: an authentic, remote place. Yet, leaving aside tourists' representations of it, the conditions for the tourist economy to thrive rely increasingly on land property, water and electricity resources. Since the boom in tourism in the seventies, these three types of resources have generated considerable revenue for locals. The latter are mainly peasants, mountain guides and porters, and the flow of tourists outside their houses has prompted a large proportion of them to build lodges. Nowadays, water conveyance and hydroelectricity allow hotelkeepers to offer a wide range of new services: hot showers, international cuisine, Internet access, teahouses or pubs, such as a local 'Yak Donald's'. This tourist income has drastically improved inhabitants' standard of living, as witnessed by their investment in second homes in Kathmandu and in the education of their children who now have access to higher education and to new job opportunities abroad.

However, access to land, water and electricity is being challenged due to different factors: first, the demand for water and energy is on the rise; second, there is an uneven distribution and availability of resources; third, individuals do not occupy the same position or have

the same capacities (ie skills, sociocultural capital, spatial capital) to tap resources. Contrary to popular beliefs, the survey carried out among 300 households in the region in 2015 and 2016 shows that tourism is not identified as an exerting pressure on access to water and energy resources. On the contrary, the water supply and power plants are frequently funded by erstwhile tourists. On the other hand, access to resources greatly differs from one stakeholder to another. Educated children of former international mountain guides with a large network of clients are often those who obtain the best land. They import and develop techniques to benefit from water and electricity resources. At the lower end of society, peasant families and villages located off the main tourist trail are the most disadvantaged. In fact, competition over water, electricity and the best land is the main issue in resource availability. This pursuit of profits leads to a fight over the best places. In this small but highly symbolic region, this fight breeds antagonism not only among lodge owners but also among inhabitants. It also opposes members of the Sherpa community (who claim to be insiders but who, geographically speaking, are widely scattered) to a new population of outsiders (Tamangs, Rais, Magars) who seek entry into the region to improve their livelihood.

In the context of intense socio-demographic and cultural changes, this doctoral thesis calls into question resource governance within this tourist hub. It shows that far from being passive, Sherpa lodge owners still reign over the territory and its tourist economy often at the expense of the poorest families and other ethnic groups with whom they should share more.

Keywords: Everest, tourism, Sherpa, resources, globalisation

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