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Tone Bleie

Pilgrim Tourism in the Central Himalayas

The Case of Manakamana Temple in Gorkha, Nepal

As a follow-up to the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE 2002) and the International Year of Mountains (IYM 2002), scholars and practitioners need to continue to address the challenges inherent in building pilgrim tourism on principles of sustainable tourism that reconcile cultural, developmental, conservational, and commercial interests. This article begins by reasoning that the increasing use of mechanical transport to pilgrim sites in the Central Himalayas erodes the cultural notions that have underpinned the Himalayan pilgrimage for centuries. Then, it seeks to demonstrate in two respects the relevance of insights into how sacred journeying interconnects persons, places, and time. The first insight concerns the travel patterns of and income potential from pleasure and pilgrim tourists in Nepal in the current situation of unstable national and international security. The second insight relates to local perceptions of sociocultural, economic, and environmental risks involved in the opening of cable car service to a famed pilgrimage site in Nepal. Finally, the article reasons that the cultural dimension must be included as a crosscutting concern in environmental, social, and economic impact assessments of transport projects to heritage sites. The study uses a combination of qualitative ethnographic methods, traffic and sociodemographic surveys, as well as official tourism statistics.

Keywords: *Pilgrim tourism; cable car; risk perception; impact assessment; Central Himalayas; Nepal.*

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Introduction

There are many studies on how to make mountain tourism in Nepal sustainable. They mainly focus on the local impacts of and responses to externally (nonlocally) driven tourism in protected park areas. The segments of tourism usually studied are culture, nature, and adventure tourism, and also include foreign ecotourists and mountaineers and nonlocal tourist agencies in situations where the institutional capacity of national and local authorities is weak and local returns are low (Gurung 1990; Rustomji and Ramble 1990; Fischer and Sulzer 1994; Banskota and Sharma 1995; Shrestha 1995; Shackley 1996; Rogers and Aitchison 1998; Nepal 2000; Metha and Heinen 2001). Religious tourism, of which (domestic and foreign) pilgrim tourism is the principal form, has received scant attention from policy makers and development researchers (Cohen 1992; Rinschede 1992).

Mass pilgrimage exemplifies both the worst- and the best-case scenarios: worst because extreme crowding occurs in fragile mountain environments often not accorded protected area or cultural heritage status; best because there is mutuality between hosts and visitors. Pilgrim tourism challenges the predominant assumption that a clear distinction exists between outsiders and insiders. At the level of cultural theory, consisting of declarative knowledge (D'Andrade 1995), both hosts and visitors recognize that they are all worshippers whose welfare and prosperity depend on the deities' benign and continued presence. At the analytical level of cultural models that are typically assertions by the analyst (D'Andrade 1995), both locals and nonlocals, as worshippers, share implicit moral ideas about sacred journeying and the nature of social exchanges among themselves and between themselves and the surrounding environment. Such mutuality does not, however, guarantee that mass pilgrimages might not have unintended negative cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic impacts.

On the basis of anthropological insights into how ideas of journeying, temporality, landscape, and space underpin tourism and pilgrimage (Sax 1991; Cohen 1992; Morinis 1992; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Ingold 2000), 3 main arguments are posed. These arguments are interrelated through the recognition that the "physical" arrangements of sacred space are integral cultural, social, and semantic aspects of the process of sacred journeying.

This article suggests, first, that the current transformations of mass pilgrimage to the temple of Manakamana in Gorkha District, Nepal, illustrate incipient blurred boundaries between pilgrimage and tourism in the Central Himalayas. This hybridization might provisionally be termed pilgrim tourism. Second, recognizing the increasing heterogeneity of both tourism and sacred journeying, insights into differences and similarities between modes of travel of pleasure and pilgrim tourists are of relevance in assessing the income potential of pilgrim tourism in Nepal under currently unstable conditions. Third, the article discusses how perceptions of sacred journeying affect economic and environmental risk assessments of the effects of a cable car facility to the aforementioned mountain temple in Gorkha District. Finally, some of the implications of the present study for policy and planning concerned with the environmental, economic, and sociocultural effects of introducing mechanical means of transportation to this heritage site are outlined.

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FIGURE 1 Location of Gorkha District and Manakamana. (Map by Andreas Brodbeck based on Shrestha 1989)

The study area today and in the past

Since the early 1970s, Gorkha District in the Western Development Region (Figure 1), 1 of 5 administrative regions of Nepal, has received attention in master plans as an area of considerable potential for tourist development (Banskota and Sharma 1995). Despite this, tourism development has been uneven. The northern region still has a low volume of visitors, notwithstanding its magnificent peaks and richly endowed Tibetan Buddhist monasteries. The district has 2 principal tourist hubs. One is the district town of Gorkha, the location of the restored palace of the royal Shah family, which led the multiethnic army that unified the country in the late 18th century. The other hub is the mountain village of Manakamana, situated southwest of Gorkha town.

This village harbors an ancient, exquisitely carved temple situated on the edge of a mountain ridge at 1363 m in the subtropical zone of southern Gorkha. From the temple village, visitors have a breathtaking panoramic view northward to some of the world's highest peaks in the Manaslu range (Manaslu, 8156 m; Himal Chuli, 7893 m; and Boudha Himal, 6072 m) and in the Shringi Himal (Shringi Himal, 7187 m) and westward toward the Annapurna Himal (Annapurna 1, 8091 m and Annapurna 2, 7937 m). The dwellers in the cluster village and on the nearby slopes currently combine tourism business with agriculture on the basis of a mixed farming system. All consider the Goddess of Manakamana to be their ultimate protector and the bestower of prosperity (Bleie and Bhattarai 2001). For more than 2 centuries, the power of Goddess's to fulfill wishes has attracted both local devotees and long-distance pilgrims in search of personal gain or disinterested spiritual enlightenment (Bleie and Bhattarai 2003).

When a highway was built in the late 1960s, the pilgrim journey, which had taken 10–12 days from the capital to Manakamana and back, could suddenly be undertaken with 1 overnight stay. The last part of the journey from the head of the road to the towering temple had to be made on foot. Porters could be hired to carry the luggage, the infirm, and small children.

In the late 1990s, a leading business house from Gorkha town received governmental approval to build and run the first cable car in the country. The cable car was designed to bring pilgrims effortlessly to the famed mountain temple. Investment by a local business in a modern cable car system, with the best of Austrian technical expertise and technology, promised to boost local opportunities and development and to become a flagship of the Nepalese tourist authority. Before discussing local perceptions of pilgrim tourism's cultural and economic effects before and after this transport facility was opened, certain basic changes in the Himalayan pilgrimage need to be considered in light of our case study.

Blurred boundaries between "tourism" and "pilgrimage"

Both scriptural high tradition and actual practice have established pilgrimage in the Himalayas as arduous

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FIGURE 2 Indian pilgrims arriving by means of the new cable car. Thousands of pilgrims choose to travel this way every day instead of walking, as prescribed by their religion. Using conventional categories ("foreign or domestic tourism," "tourism versus pilgrimage," etc) to describe tourist activities makes it difficult to account for these changed practices. (Photo by Min Bajracharya)

journeying par excellence (Bharati 1970; Bakker 1990; Jha 1991; Sax 1991; Messerschmidt 1992). The destination points—holy confluences, lakes, caves, and summits—are the abodes and birthplaces of deities, places of awakening, and burial grounds of the relics of holy beings (Slusser 1982; Allen 1993).

In light of this ongoing mass phenomenon, the term "pilgrim tourism" appears on first examination to be a contradiction in terms. There is a tendency to perceive tourism as a modern preoccupation with long-distance journeys to a periphery—in this case, the mighty Himalayas. Destinations are mere unfamiliar "attractions," viewed in a detached manner. Pilgrimage, by contrast, is the ancient mode of journeying in a sacred landscape. The pilgrim's profound spiritual quest tends to be contrasted with the tourist's shallow travel for pleasure. Whereas the presence of great numbers of pilgrims in one place enhances the place's authenticity and ambience, visits by crowds of tourists are said to spoil a destination. Hence, international tourism and pilgrimage may appear to share only a historical connection and a superficial and abstract resemblance because both involve long-distance movements in social space, the former increasingly from metropolitan centers to the periphery of (Western) civilization and the latter to a revitalizing cosmological center (Cohen 1979).

Drawing on Cohen (1992), the present study proposes that certain pilgrimage and tourism practices in the Himalayas may currently be better understood by avoiding simplistic, idealized generalizations restricted to dissimilarities at structural and phenomenal levels.

The blurring of the boundaries between the tourist and pilgrim categories partly reflects and partly increases the heterogeneity of both these categories. A significant segment of Western and Eastern tourists travel in the Nepal Himalayas, and indeed elsewhere in the Hindu Kush–Himalayan belt, seeking not only experience of nature and physical adventure but also spiritual renewal. Such tourists often diverge from the beaten track to major mass-tourist destinations. The initial motivation to travel in these experimental and experiential modes is not triggered by explicit and stable cultural meaning, which is the case with traditional pilgrimage (Cohen 1979, 1992; Morinis 1992). Within the context of the Self–Other or Center–Periphery conceptual model, regardless of whether the initial quest for authenticity was shallow or deep, such travelers end up experiencing an exotic Other as their new Center, which they visit for longer periods or revisit several times during their lifetimes and to which they feel a sense of loyalty (Cohen 1992).

Moreover, incipient transformation in the basic cultural categories of worship, place, and journeying of Nepalese and Indian pilgrims also blurs the boundary between pilgrimage and tourism. It is principally the pilgrims' use of modern means of transportation that spearheads this cultural change (Figure 2). The changing religious and social practices of pilgrimage at the Mountain Temple of Manakamana illustrate this contention. Practically, all domestic and foreign visitors to the Manakamana Temple appear to represent the classical pilgrim in so far as they conduct their ritual affairs in a proper manner at the Goddess's shrine. A picture of stable practices and underlying notions is radically questioned when focus is shifted from the rituals in the crowded temple courtyard and the inner shrine to the conscious motivations and the whole process of the pilgrimage, as illustrated below by our qualitative study.

Results of the qualitative study

Our investigations indicate that a sizeable portion of younger worshippers currently do not believe unconditionally in the efficacy of the public and secluded rituals they perform. Many younger worshippers state that social and recreational motivations are as important in the pilgrimage as religious motives. A comparison of statements made by younger and older pilgrims interviewed indicates that although recreational and social motives are not something qualitatively new, they have become more prominent and socially acceptable. Recreational practices also take on new forms of sociality, realized in a commercial context of public eating and drinking in hotels and restaurants on the way to and from the pilgrimage site and in the temple village. Indeed, to a greater extent than earlier, the travels of

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such pilgrim tourists and of tourists share a "getting out" character, where social codes are relaxed and daily routines abandoned. Pilgrims currently handle certain established caste-based codes related to eating and worship more pragmatically than before the commercialization of pilgrim services, which took off in the mid-1970s. Before that time, pilgrims strictly maintained purity in terms of food preparation, drinking of water, and other forms of social exchange.

According to local worshippers and temple staff, the temple until recently attracted scores of visitors whose motivation and understanding were in complete conformity with the classical ideas of what a pilgrimage should be. "Devout pilgrims" are nevertheless a heterogeneous lot, ranging from ordinary, deeply religious individuals to famous healers and itinerant ascetics. Surprisingly, many pious pilgrims have begun using the recently opened cable car, which brings them smoothly to the doorstep of the Goddess within 15 minutes. This mode of journeying indirectly violates the very essence of the Himalayan pilgrimage, captured in the proverb "no pain, no gain." In interviews, about 60% of all pilgrims (regardless of urban–rural backgrounds) have both directly and indirectly expressed considerable confusion and unease over their speedy and effortless ascent to the Goddess of Manakamana.

The pilgrims' individual experiences of discomfort point to the fundamental difference between smooth mechanical transportation in a cable car (or a plane for that matter) in geographical space and the heterogeneous qualities of physical movement in a landscape imbued with cultural significance. Traditional terrestrial pilgrimage on foot allows a perceptual engagement with an environment that is rich in heritage. Terraced fields, stone hedges, and small shrines tell of the lives and times of predecessors. The towering temple hamlet comes into sight very slowly as a result of one's own labor. A trip between the entry and exit stations in a cable car requires minimal physical exertion. Travelers get an unfamiliar and quick bird's eye view, which provides them with only a rough glimpse of the contours of the varied surface of natural and man-made landscapes underneath.

Current socioeconomic trends: Lack of differentiated data and informed debate

Currently, the investor behind Manakamana Darshan Ltd is contemplating (subject to a peace agreement between the government and the Maoists) a proposal to build a similar cable car facility to the famed Muktinath temple in Mustang District, also situated in the Western Development Region. Judging from the absence of an informed public debate in Nepal over the pros and cons of introducing a transport technology that undermines deep-rooted, cherished religious values, it seems that the pilgrims (including many politicians, high-ranking bureaucrats, and intellectuals) traveling by cable car have not translated their individually felt discomfort into a language suitable for public discussion. In contrast with Nepal, in the Indian Himalayas and Northern Thailand, complaints by pilgrims and priests about how motor roads, cable cars, and concomitant commercialization are about to ruin their mountain pilgrimages have stirred public debates about heritage conservation and development (Sax 1991; Pholpoke 1998).

Official tourism statistics in Nepal neglect regional and domestic religious tourism and focus on airborne, overseas "dollar tourists." Of the arrivals in this category between 1997 and 2000, those designated as "pilgrims" comprised mostly Japanese, Koreans, and Thais on pilgrimage to Buddha's birthplace, Lumbini (see Figure 1), which has been undergoing development into a regional Buddhist pilgrimage center over the past 3 decades (Gurung 1998).

Because surface transport is not measured, the actual numbers of Indian tourists, a great proportion of whom are pilgrims, remain unaccounted for in official statistics. According to our own estimates (based on interviews with traders and cable car staff in Manakamana), about 50,000 Indians (of a total of 500,000 pilgrims) visited the Manakamana temple in 1999. This number alone is markedly higher than the official total of 19,198 overseas pilgrim arrivals that year (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation 2000).

When we initiated our study in 1997, Nepal had experienced a nearly continuous yet uneven annual growth of overseas tourists for more than 2 decades (Ministry of Tourism 1996). This increase continued until 2000, when the number of arrivals started to decline. In 2001, overseas arrivals declined by 21.7% (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation 2000, 2001). This decline reflects the response to continued insurgence, the royal massacre, and regional instability after the terrorist attacks of 11 September. The influx of pilgrims to Manakamana, situated in one of the most insurgency affected districts of the country, continued relatively unabated in 2000 and 2001, with the same proportion of Indian pilgrim tourists as in 1999.

Loyalty to place: An important factor in pilgrim tourism

Beyond the more obvious reasons for these trends in national and international tourist travel is the neglected issue of loyalty. This term gains analytical currency through arguments made here about the importance of understanding the bonds between individuals, identities, temporalities, and places (Sax 1991; Morinis 1992; Ingold 2000). The attraction of Indian and domestic

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pilgrim tourists, alongside the experiential segment of Western travelers, should therefore not be judged simply in light of demographic factors, purchasing power, and service demands.

Unlike individuals in these categories, modern Western and Eastern pleasure tourists "shop" in a global market in search of new locations to explore. These tourists choose destinations in response to commercial promotion of new lowland or upland "Shangri-Las." Their modes of travel frequently fail to establish place loyalty. On the contrary, the very novelty of a destination renders it attractive. This lack of loyalty is cemented by the tourists' perceptions of uncertainty about the degree of risk involved in traveling to politically unstable destinations. The decline in the number of tourist arrivals to Nepal in 2001 illustrates such risk-minimizing decisions. Pilgrims, unlike pleasure tourists, are profoundly loyal to their cult centers.

Loyalty is important in another sense as well: for the local population, a deity's loyalty to a locality and his or her worshippers is not unconditional. A serious breach of purity regulations might provoke the deity's wrath, not only against the transgressing individual but the whole community. In cases of extremely desecrating or inauspicious events, a deity might decide to leave his or her abode permanently in favor of a new residence elsewhere. This possibility has very recently become more than theoretical in Manakamana because of human follies that were unrelated to any religiously desecrating act from a detached analytical point of view.

The discussion below deals with a series of events that highlight local perceptions of uncertainty and risk to livelihoods resulting from the construction and operation of the cable car. First, major developments in pilgrim tourism in Manakamana before the construction of the cable car are briefly summarized.

Local perceptions of risk attributable to infrastructural change

Economic growth before the cable car

The famous temple village's initial exposure to a new era of mass pilgrimage occurred when the first highway connecting the capital with the western region reached a nearby old ferry point in 1967. Since then, Manakamana has experienced phenomenal economic growth (Figure 4) attributable to the large-scale commercialization of goods and services for pilgrims. Enterprising local farmers initiated this growth, whose distributive effects were not equitable. They remained in control of the booming pilgrim tourist sector between 1967 and 1998. Pilgrim tourism in Manakamana represents a rare example in Nepal of locally rooted and guided economic development in response to new opportunities created through new linkages with the national and global levels (Bleie and Bhattarai 2001). From the late 1980s, marginal and smallholder farmers who did not belong to prestigious clans and lineages managed to enter the most profitable subsector (accommodation services) of the booming tourist business. A business survey conducted by the author in early 1998 showed that the 3 bustling bazaars contained 99 businesses mainly serving the pilgrims and nearly as many thrived along the trail between the temple and the road terminus. With about 250,000 annual visitors and increasing demands on hotel facilities, hot food, and imported goods, the temple hamlet faced a mounting waste management problem in addition to an acute drinking water, energy, and timber crisis.

Controversy over the choice of a gate site

Two years earlier, a Congress-led government had, without consulting the local authorities, unconditionally approved a plan by the aforementioned private investor for the construction, ownership, and operation of a cable car to the famed temple. The government also set up a National Manakamana Area Development Committee. The committee, composed of members of parliament from Gorkha District, local politicians, bureaucrats, and development workers, was given a broad mandate for supervision and intervention in all efforts geared toward cultural and natural conservation and development. When news about the construction project became publicly known, the project had already been approved by the government and registered with the Industry Department. Also, the company and some leading members of the temple trust had already secretly agreed on the gate for the cable car system and on the sale of land for the upper station, in conjunction with a restaurant and a hotel.

With the gate site for the cable car already settled, the choice of line for the entry–exit trail between the cable car's upper station and the temple became a controversial public issue. After a short period of intense debate, an alliance between the cable car investor and some local power holders managed to push through an alternative line that crossed the fields and farm cottages of some prominent trust members and bypassed all 3 bazaars. A longer side trail, which split off from the new main route, diverted some traffic through the 2 upper bazaar areas but cut the lowest market off from any direct connection with the upper cable car station (Figure 3).

Perceptions of economic risk

At this stage—6 months before the opening of the facility and with large-scale construction underway—we conducted the first phase of our investigations, including a substudy of perceptions of uncertainty and risk. Traders in the 2 upper bazaars had perceptions of uncertainty and risk affecting their own incomes and overall livelihoods that differed from those of traders and porters in

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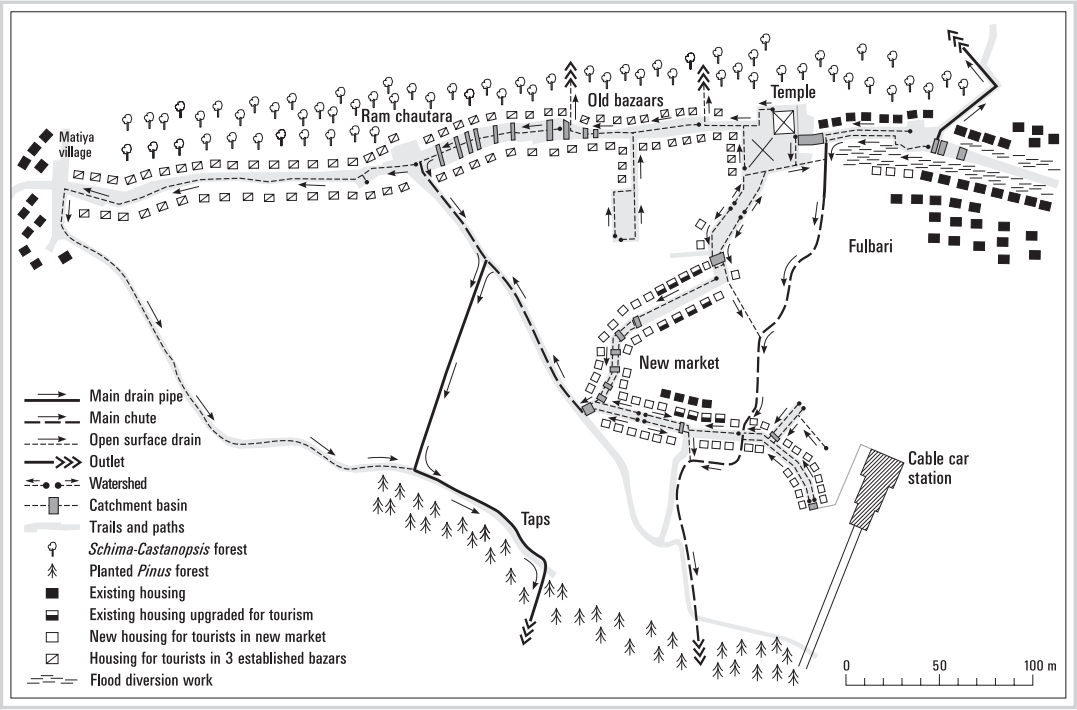


FIGURE 3 Development of the Manakamana Temple site, showing the planned growth of housing structures and new drainage system. (Sketch courtesy of Manakamana Darshan Ltd, modified by Lok Bhattarai and Andreas Brodbeck)

the lowest bazaar and along the trail. Based on shared assumptions of risks and benefits, the traders in the upper bazaars anticipated largely positive short- and long-term effects for themselves and society at large, even if some lost out. An expected dramatic increase in arrivals would compensate for the rise in the number of day visitors, in which case the total bed coverage would at least not decline. Another widely shared anticipated risk was the future market share of the hotel and restaurant planned by the cable car investor.

In contrast to the upper bazaar families' optimism based on their sense of calculated risk, the great majority of traders in the lowest bazaar on the trail and the porters (those carrying pilgrims and their luggage) expressed a sense of great uncertainty about the upcoming opening. The overwhelming majority (roughly 90%) anticipated that the effects on their own income and livelihoods would most probably be either moderately or severely negative.

This salient difference in responses hinged on differing expectations about the decline of traffic on foot. A small majority of trail respondents assumed that modern demand for travel comfort and a vanishing traditional notion of pilgrimage would result in a dramatic and permanent decline in the number of walkers. A sizeable minority assumed that most of the visitors held deeply ingrained notions of pilgrimage that would compel them to return to terrestrial journeying after a once-in-a-lifetime adventure with the cable car.

The most dramatic effect of the opening was the drop in traffic along the pilgrim trail resulting from the overwhelmingly positive response to the new mechanical facility. The overnight change in pilgrims' decisions about mode of transport was a direct result of the company's tactical policy of pricing 2-way tickets favorably compared with 1-way tickets. Members of the local elite who had benefited from the sale of land and the flourishing trade along the new entry–exit trail and around the temple courtyard managed to stop a community effort demanding a change in the company's ticketing policy. The high-powered Area Development Committee, acting on its own vested interests, chose not to oppose the alliance between a fraction of the local elite and the investor and remained inactive in this turbulent period. In the months following the inauguration, the company therefore had to make only a few piecemeal concessions to the local protests.

Perceptions of environmental risk

During the heavy monsoon in 1999, the anxiety many downtown lodge owners and trail shopkeepers had experienced because of miserable business conditions was made worse by an unprecedented disaster. One night the stone-clad road in the upper settlement above the temple complex turned into a muddy stream. The courtyard was quickly flooded and the inner shrine threatened. Water burst over from the edge of the courtyard, poured in cascades along the temple's stone foundation, and into a jungle-clad gorge far below the ridge. The temple villagers' resolute efforts to divert upstream collection of water and sediments managed to eventually stop the accumulation of water.

There was no local memory of such a disaster having occurred previously. Based on participant observation, we found that this event triggered conflicting opinions about its ultimate cause and consequences. Drawing on the ancient idea of a deity's conditional place loyalty, many worried that if nothing was done to

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stem the flood of pilgrims disrespecting the temple's sanctity, their Goddess would leave her abode permanently. Others tried to focus public attention on the concrete circumstances that had led to the flooding. The government-approved leveling work done by the cable car company near the hillock had destroyed the old drainage corridor there and caused the flooding and erosion. Although no one denied that the hazardous leveling work was partly at fault, there was profound disagreement as to the ultimate explanatory power of this unsafe work. On the other hand, there was growing public recognition of the severe consequences of the undemocratic process that had led first to the choice of gate for the cable car and later to the choice of entry–exit route. Some also pointed out that the temple structure showed worrying signs of movement, probably as a result of the torrential force with which the water had penetrated the temple's stone foundations. Our own investigation confirms that the foundation of the ancient temple was indeed damaged and will require restoration. Local resources for restoration were not available because the huge income generated from pilgrims' offerings was considered the chief god-guardian's private income. Besides, the local government had minimal public claims on the income of the cable car company and the local business community.

Further study results

Our study team conducted a second round of traffic and business surveys in November 1999, 1 year after the cable car opened. The results showed that those in the previous year's survey who had anticipated a rather dramatic decline in pilgrims using the trail and in the tourism-related incomes of most households have been proven correct thus far. The cable car company and a small number of businesses situated along the new entry–exit trail and around the temple courtyard benefited from the newly opened facility. The number of visitors nearly doubled, but less than 10% chose terrestrial journeying. Of 36 hotels and lodges in the 2 upper bazaars, only one reported both increased income and occupancy rates. All others reported income losses ranging from 90% down to 45% and occupancy rates from 98% to 50% less than the previous year's levels. The rise in incomes from sale of food was much less than expected, even though the cable car company had not as yet built the planned hotel and restaurant in conjunction with the upper station. Many day visitors had no time for an elaborate meal. Others brought food of their own (to compensate for the high costs of the cable car tickets) or had a meal included as a member of one of the many organized tours. In the lower bazaar, only a handful of the lodges remained open, hoping for the return of pilgrims traveling on foot. Worst hit were smaller establishments in the bazaars along the trail and porters who earn a living by carrying pilgrims' baggage.

Conclusions

Pilgrim tourism represents an emerging form of journeying and transactional behavior in the Central Himalayas. The increasing numbers of pilgrims who make use of modern mechanical means of transportation erode basic ideas of the individual, of temporality, and of the landscape that have underpinned Himalayan pilgrimage for centuries. Decision makers in the Himalayas should therefore consider the cultural implications of various policy options before and after approving transport projects to heritage sites. Measures must be considered that facilitate the preservation of the traditional Himalayan pilgrimage and its unique experiential and structural dimensions while ensuring a more equitable and sustainable path to development.

It remains true that the growing numbers of pilgrim tourists and the prospects for further increases attributable to pilgrim tourism's broad domestic and regional appeal point to considerable income and development potential for both national economies and local communities (Figure 4). The effects on international travel of the current unstable global and subregional security situation should alert researchers and policy makers to

FIGURE 4 View of the upper station of the new transport system, the first of its kind in Nepal. Planning of such major tourism developments requires careful consideration of ecological, social, and cultural factors. (Photo by Min Bajracharya)



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focus on the significance of pilgrim tourism in terms of development potential, rather than almost exclusively on the Western pleasure tourist market.

This brief account of some early impacts of the new Manakamana Temple transport facility illustrates what might go wrong—despite the mutuality between hosts and visitors as worshippers—in the absence of socially responsive and actively regulating state and representative local institutions. Before approval or rejection of such projects, multistakeholder impact assessments ought to be undertaken that include cultural, environmental, economic, and social consequences, reflecting the impacts of different forms of commercial pilgrim tourism, at varying scales, on different local and nonlocal stakeholders. Subject to approval through a transparent decision-making process, an extensive range of complementary regulatory measures should also be considered. These could include price policy regulations that ensure continued terrestrial traffic along established routes and markets catering for various local commercial interests. They could also include a restrictive policy on approval of large-scale, capital-intensive tourist facilities and on securing public income and viable public–private partnerships for development of basic infrastructure, thus meeting the multiple needs of both local residents and visitors.

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