



# Local Development, Over-Tourism and Sustainable Environment: The Case of Mount Everest

*Somayeh Hassani <sup>\*1</sup>, Reza Shokouh Saljoughi <sup>2</sup>*

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## Abstract

Mount Everest faces the dual challenge of fostering local development while addressing the environmental and social impacts of over-tourism. This research borrows a qualitative methodology that uses open-ended questionnaires to gather data from people with first-hand experience in various sections at Everest. The chapter should detail the process of questionnaire distribution, collection of responses, and the criteria for participants' selection, emphasizing the rigor and reliability of the data collection process. The 50 questionnaires distributed resulted in 10 responses, analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis and an inductive approach. This section will provide an in-depth analysis of the responses received, developing articulated themes, patterns, and narratives that emerged in the data. The findings will be discussed against the research questions that gave rise to an understanding of the perspectives of tourists and their impact on sustainable tourism practices. The final sections will synthesize the findings considered in the literature reviewed earlier, concluding the balance between tourism, local development, and environmental sustainability at Mount Everest. This study will present recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers in line with the scope and objectives of the research towards advancing knowledge in the domain of sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** Local Development, Over-Tourism, Sustainable Environment, Mount Everest, Sustainable Development.

## Introduction

Over tourism, according to the UNWTO, is "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences the perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences negatively." Several alternative definitions have also been produced, but the core meaning remains the same (Park & Kovacs, 2020)

Tourism goes a long way in offering employment as well as income-generation opportunities for local residents, playing a vital part in the advancement of an area. Furthermore, it can contribute to preserving the environment and cultural heritage by generating financial resources. Nevertheless, when an excessive number of tourists visit a destination, a phenomenon known as over-tourism arises (Powe, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup>Corresponding Author: Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Culture, Planning and Management of Tourism Systems, University of Bergamo, Italy. <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1745-3893>, Email: [s.hassani@studenti.unibg.it](mailto:s.hassani@studenti.unibg.it)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Management, Kerman Branch, Islamic Azad University, Kerman, Iran, <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6528-1305>, Email: [Reza.sh.sa@gmail.com](mailto:Reza.sh.sa@gmail.com)

The fast growth in worldwide mobility that has defined the advanced stage of the globalization process in the last several decades has also resulted in the escalation of 'over-tourism' difficulties in many global tourism destinations, particularly heritage cities. While there is no doubt that tourism provides an economic burst to local communities, this also comes at a tremendous risk to the sustainability of cities in those regions and even their livability. These places have been required to accommodate levels of human occupancy that are not at all fitting for such unmet conditions. Over-tourism is one of the primary reasons for environmental pollution disasters (Antoci et al., 2021).

Damage to heritage sites due to one of the drawbacks of tourism is over-tourism. on cultural heritage. It refers to the physical deterioration, vandalism, theft, pollution, overcrowding, and congestion that can affect the authenticity and value of heritage sites when they are visited by too many tourists (Zhuang et al., 2019).

The endeavor to preserve a group or society's tangible objects and intangible characteristics that make up their legacy is known as cultural heritage preservation. These are carried on today, preserved for the benefit of future generations, and handed down from generation to generation (Otero, 2022).

Mount Everest, as one of the most iconic destinations in the world, has long been a source of fascination for adventurers and tourists. However, the increasing number of visitors to the region has led to significant challenges, including over-tourism, environmental degradation, and strain on local resources. While tourism has

contributed to the economic development of the surrounding areas, it has also raised serious concerns about the long-term sustainability of both the environment and local communities. This paper examines the complex relationship between local development, over-tourism, and environmental sustainability, with a focus on the specific case of Mount Everest. Through this lens, the study aims to highlight the importance of finding a balance between economic growth and preserving the unique ecosystem of this majestic mountain.

## **Methods and Materials**

### *Study Design and Population*

This qualitative study is designed using a reflexive thematic analysis approach, grounded in an inductive reasoning framework. The aim is to deeply explore and understand the subjective experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals closely associated with Mount Everest. The research design facilitates the emergence of themes directly from the data without preconceived frameworks, making it particularly suited to exploring complex and nuanced phenomena.

### *Research Context*

The research focuses on individuals with direct and meaningful associations with Mount Everest. This may include climbers, local guides, support staff, and stakeholders whose lives and experiences are intricately tied to the region and its cultural and environmental significance.

### *Data Collection Techniques*

The study employs qualitative methods to gather rich, detailed insights, including:



- *In-depth Interviews*: To capture personal narratives and subjective experiences.
  - *Participant Observation*: To understand behaviors and interactions in context.
  - *Focus Groups*: To explore collective attitudes and perceptions.
- relationships, culminating in theory generation grounded in the data.
  - This approach ensures a bottom-up understanding, building new theories relevant to the topic.

### *Methodological Approaches*

#### *1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA):*

- *Interpretive Role*: The researcher's active involvement in analyzing data through their theoretical and contextual lenses is central, emphasizing reflexivity and subjectivity.
- *Flexibility*: The approach allows for methodological adaptability to align with the research goals and data nature.
- *Focus on Meaning Patterns*: Identifies and interprets themes to construct a coherent narrative.
- *Creative Nature*: Acknowledges the researcher's insights and interpretations as essential to thematic development.

#### *2. Inductive Reasoning:*

- Observations and data collection are the starting points, with no initial hypothesis.
- Data analysis identifies patterns, trends, and

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical issues are integral, ensuring:

- *Informed Consent*: Participants are fully informed about the study's purpose and their rights.
- *Confidentiality*: Personal data and identities are protected throughout the research process.

### *Data Collection*

A diverse group of over 50 individuals with extensive experience and knowledge of Mount Everest was invited to participate in the study. The data collection was conducted through an open-ended questionnaire containing ten carefully designed questions aimed at addressing the research objectives. Participants included mountaineers, tour and trek leaders, researchers, and local residents. Recruitment methods included professional networking platforms (LinkedIn, ResearchGate), social media groups (specialized Facebook groups), targeted searches on related websites, and direct outreach via email and messaging.

- *Participant Demographics*: The final sample consisted of ten individuals, including Sherpas, local leaders,

trekking planners, adventure travel experts, hoteliers, and scholars specializing in Himalayan studies and ecotourism. Their varied backgrounds enriched the data with diverse perspectives.

- *Recruitment Process:* A structured request detailing the research purpose was distributed across platforms, generating responses via direct messaging and email. Key insights were also gained from local conversations and online interactions, offering authentic regional perspectives.

### *Data Analysis*

The collected responses were transcribed and coded in English. Using NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, the data were systematically organized and analyzed following the principles of reflexive thematic analysis.

- *Thematic Development:*
  - Initial codes were generated from the raw data.
  - These codes were grouped into potential themes, which were iteratively refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research objectives.
- *Inductive Approach:* The analysis remained open to emergent themes, avoiding preconceived notions, which allowed for the identification of patterns directly rooted in the participants' responses.

The thematic analysis revealed key factors influencing the delicate balance between local economic development and environmental conservation in the Everest region. It also illuminated tourists' perceptions and behaviors related to sustainable tourism practices, offering valuable insights for future strategies.

### **Results**

The analysis of participant data, spanning 38 pages, identified key themes and recurring topics related to sustainable tourism and environmental conservation in the Mount Everest region. The findings, organized into two primary research questions (RQs), highlight critical areas of concern, opportunities for improvement, and actionable strategies.

#### *Key Themes from RQ1: Balancing Over tourism*

This section explores how to mitigate the negative effects of over tourism while promoting sustainable practices.

##### *1. Developing Alternative Employment Opportunities*

- Emphasizing diverse income sources beyond tourism to reduce economic dependency on Everest.
- Examples: promoting less frequented trekking routes and supporting local businesses.

##### *2. Education for Locals and Tourists*

- Enhancing awareness about sustainable practices and environmental conservation.



- Initiatives: integrating environmental education in schools and providing training programs for local communities.
3. *Local Community Involvement in Decision-Making*
- Encouraging inclusive governance in tourism-related policies and activities.
  - Examples: community-based tourism and equitable distribution of tourism benefits.
4. *Resource Management and Eco-Friendly Infrastructure*
- Addressing waste management, water systems, and energy supply.
  - Suggestions: building eco-friendly lodges, promoting micro-hydroelectricity, and biodegradable materials for climbers.
5. *Strict Regulations and Visitor Limitations*
- Enforcing quotas for climbers and improving regulation to prevent overcrowding.
  - Recommendations: reducing Everest permits and promoting alternative summits in the Khumbu region.

1. *Environmental Education*

- Raising awareness among tourists about the region's fragility and responsible behavior.
- Examples: pre-trip research and participation in awareness campaigns.

2. *Energy Conservation and Waste Control*

- Minimizing carbon footprints and single-use plastics.
- Recommendations: using reusable bottles, avoiding heaters, and proper waste disposal.

3. *Correcting Misinformation*

- Counteracting misconceptions about the region propagated by mainstream media.

4. *Observing Environmental Changes*

- Addressing concerns like global warming, glacier melting, and glacial floods.

5. *Respecting Local Culture*

- Promoting cultural sensitivity and preserving local traditions.

6. *Supporting Local Communities*

- Encouraging tourists to buy local products and contribute to community programs.
- Examples: supporting local schools, hospitals, and rescue centers.

*Key Themes from RQ2: Tourist Behavior and Sustainability*

This section focuses on how tourists can contribute to sustainable tourism practices.

*Notable Insights*

- Participants emphasized the need for better infrastructure, policies, and education to manage the tourism-environment balance.
- Community collaboration and stakeholder involvement were seen as critical for sustainable progress.
- Practical recommendations include promoting eco-friendly trekking and ensuring equitable tourism benefits for locals (Table 1), (Table 2) and (Table 3).

**Table 1.** The findings provide actionable pathways to address challenges posed by over tourism and enhance sustainability in the Mount Everest region.

Name	Files (case count)	References (Code count)
(RQ1) balance in overtourism	10	45
A better management of water	1	1
All the inhabitants of Khumbu should be part of forest management committees	1	1
alleviate pressure on Everest	1	1
alternative sources of income	1	1
benefits of tourism are distributed equitably	1	1
better connected electricity system	1	1
biodegradable tissue for use on the mountain	1	1
bring foreign currency	1	1
Community Involvement	2	2
decision-making processes	2	2
eco-friendly lodges	1	1
Educational institutions	5	6
education related to tourism	1	1
employment opportunities	3	3
High-end luxury developments	1	1
Encouraging eco-friendly and responsible tourism practices	1	1
Implementing and enforcing strict regulations on visitor numbers	4	4
infrastructure development	1	1
Large-scale hotel or resort developments	1	1
Locals need to be paid for any environmental efforts	1	1
Micro hydroelectricity and gas transportation	1	1
planning and publicity from the government	1	1



promoting trekking routes that are less frequented	1	1
quotas for climbers	1	1
respect local traditions	1	1
to balance the economic cycle with the lower region	1	1
unavoidable regulations	1	1
waste management	4	5
well-planned policy implementation	1	1
(RQ2) Tourism behavior	8	26
accommodations that align with their environmental values	1	1
actively engaged in sustainable practices	1	1
avoiding littering	1	1
Carbon-neutral trekking programs	1	1
conduct an awareness campaign to the local community	1	1
Decreasing layer of ice in the mountains	1	1
engage in pre-trip research	2	2
Glacial flood	1	1
Global warming	1	1
looking after the development of education	2	2
Minimizing single-use plastics	2	3
Most people's opinions are based on incorrect mainstream press reports	1	1
No one understands	1	1
respect for the local culture	1	1
Respecting local customs	1	1
supporting local communities through our purchases	1	1
sustainability matters the education and awareness about natural resources	1	1
tourist founded some organizations	2	2
tourists organized many kinds of a sustainable program	1	1
tourists should focus on wearing warm clothes instead of using heaters in lodges and controlling carbon	1	1

**Table 2.** In the table below, the themes derived from the coded data of Research Question One are presented: (RQ: research question, P: participant)

<b>RQ1</b>	A: (Theme) Developing other employment opportunities	B: (Theme) Education for locals and tourists	C: (Theme) Local community involvement in decision makings	D: (Theme) Source Management and eco-friendly facilities	E: (Theme) Strict regulations and tourist number limitation
<b>P1</b>	employment opportunities  bring foreign currency				
<b>P2</b>	economic opportunities beyond tourism  promoting trekking routes that are less frequented  alleviate pressure on Everest	Encouraging eco-friendly and responsible tourism practices	Community Involvement  decision-making processes	waste management  infrastructure development  eco-friendly lodges	Implementing and enforcing strict regulations on visitor numbers  quotas for climbers
<b>P3</b>	alternative sources of income  Large-scale hotel or resort developments	educational programs	Engage local communities in the decision-making process  community-based tourism  benefits of tourism are distributed equitably  respects local traditions		determining the maximum number of visitors
<b>P4</b>	to balance the economic cycle with the lower region	education related to tourism  Environmental education awareness		garbage management  rubbish management	
<b>P5</b>				biodegradable tissue for use on the mountain	unavoidable regulations
<b>P6</b>	Locals need to be paid for any environmental efforts				





<b>P7</b>	seasonal employment challenges	Education and awareness		waste responsibly	well-planned policy implementation  the permissible number of visitors
<b>P8</b>		with several awareness programs in the region taking help from the Nepal government and tourist organization in Nepal			planning and publicity from the government
<b>P9</b>			All the inhabitants of Khumbu should be part of forest management committees.	Micro hydroelectricity and gas transportation  better connected electricity system  A better management of water	reduce the number of Everest permits and promote some other wonderful summits to climb in Khumbu or other areas
<b>P10</b>		Schools to be introduced with good practices		Garbage on commercial routes and remote locations	

**Table 3.** The following table displays the themes generated from the codes, about Research Question Two:

<b>RQ2</b>	A: (Theme)	B: (Theme)	C: (Theme)	D: (Theme)	E: Theme)	F: (Theme)
	Education about environment	Energy saving and waste control	Incorrect information	Observing negative changes in the environment	Respecting locals' culture	Supporting local people's products
<b>P1</b>	tourist founded some organizations  looking after the development of education  conduct an awareness campaign to the local community  sustainability			Global warming  decreasing the layer of eyes in the mountains  Glacial flood		

	matters the education and awareness about natural resources					
<b>P2</b>	training locals in sustainable tourism					
<b>P3</b>	engage in pre-trip research	<p>avoiding littering</p> <p>Minimizing single-use plastics</p> <p>carrying reusable water bottles</p> <p>accommodations that align with their environmental values</p> <p>Carbon-Neutral Trekking Programs</p>			Respecting local customs	
<b>P4</b>	<p>organize many kinds of a sustainable program</p> <p>various volunteering programs like establishing schools, hospitals, rescue centers</p>					
<b>P6</b>			<p>No one understands</p> <p>Most people's opinions are based on incorrect mainstream press reports</p>			
<b>P7</b>	<p>actively engaged in sustainable practices</p> <p>preparation before their travels</p>				respect for the local culture	supporting local communities through our purchases
<b>P8</b>		tourists should focus on wearing				



		warm clothes and control carbon				
<b>P9</b>		plastic mineral water bottles				

## Discussion

In analyzing the findings of the study, three primary themes emerged in response to the research questions posed to the participants. Below, each research question's outcomes are discussed in depth, along with the implications and interpretations of the findings. As demonstrated in the accompanying tables, and based on the insights gleaned from the data, the most significant and influential factors, as perceived by the participants about Research Question One, are outlined as follows:

1. Education for locals and tourists
2. Source Management and eco-friendly facilities
3. Strict regulations and tourist number limitation

For the second research question, the following items were notably prominent:

1. Energy saving and waste control
2. Education about environment

The third item has not been specifically delineated as all the items exhibited uniformity in their characteristics or responses.

Clarifying more about the headings in the table some explanations are necessary:

**Files (Case Count) Definition:** In NVivo, a "File" typically refers to a single source of data, which can be a text document, audio file, video file, or dataset. Each file represents an individual case or unit of analysis within

the research project. The "Case Count" is the number of distinct cases (or files) that have been associated with a particular node or theme.

**Importance:** The Case Count offers insights into the breadth of the data, showing how many unique instances (or cases) support a specific node or theme. It helps researchers understand the distribution of evidence across different sources and can highlight areas where data may be more concentrated or diverse.

**References (Code Count):** "References" in NVivo refer to instances where text segments, images, or other data pieces have been coded under a specific node (which can represent themes, ideas, or concepts). The "Code Count" is the total number of coding references associated with a particular node.

**Importance:** The Code Count is indicative of the volume of evidence supporting a node or theme within the data. It allows researchers to gauge the prominence or frequency of certain ideas or themes in their dataset. A higher code count suggests a theme is more frequently discussed or represented in the data, providing a quantitative measure of its significance.

**Theme:** A "Theme" in NVivo analysis is a conceptual element identified through the coding process. Themes are derived from nodes, which are containers for related codes or references. Themes represent key ideas, topics, patterns, or issues uncovered in the

data and are fundamental to qualitative analysis.

Importance: Themes are critical for interpreting qualitative data, as they encapsulate the core insights and patterns emerging from the analysis. Identifying themes helps researchers synthesize data into meaningful categories, facilitating the understanding of complex datasets. Themes are used to construct narratives, support arguments, and derive conclusions from research findings (Ramezani et al., 2024).

Interpretation and Analysis: In NVivo, the interplay between Files (Case Count), References (Code Count), and Themes is crucial for a nuanced analysis. Researchers must look beyond the numbers, considering the quality and context of references, the diversity of cases supporting a theme, and the depth of evidence within each theme. It's essential to integrate these quantitative indicators with a qualitative understanding of the data, ensuring that interpretations are grounded in both the breadth and depth of evidence collected. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis that accurately reflects the complexities and nuances of the research data (Shanmugasundaram, 2023).

Regarding the first research question and its associated inquiries in the questionnaire, participants expressed diverse views. Notably, education emerged as the most critical factor on which they concentrated. Several participants opined that education is not only vital for tourists but also for local inhabitants. Many of these locals, despite lacking formal education, serve as mountaineering or trekking guides, primarily due to their familiarity with the region's

terrain and routes. This perspective highlights the intersection of local knowledge and the need for educational initiatives in such areas. These perspectives underline the need for targeted educational programs tailored to the local context, focusing on enhancing the capacity of guides while respecting and integrating their traditional knowledge. This approach ensures that education becomes a tool for empowerment rather than replacement (Stanciu et al., 2022).

Concerning the second item, a considerable number of participants focused on waste management issues prevalent in the region. They noted that waste disposal systems are not extensively developed there. While garbage management has seen some improvement in recent years, largely due to financial assistance from tourists and enhanced facilities, the overall situation remains far from satisfactory. Persistent challenges in this domain continue to be a significant concern for both locals and visitors. The observation that financial contributions from tourists and enhanced facilities have led to some improvements is noteworthy. Tourism often brings economic benefits, and this case demonstrates how such resources can be directed toward addressing local challenges. However, relying solely on tourist contributions may not be a sustainable solution, as it ties essential infrastructure development to the fluctuating nature of tourism revenues (Baloch et al., 2023).

The persistence of waste management issues suggests that piecemeal solutions are insufficient. A systemic approach is needed, integrating policy reforms, infrastructure development, and education. For example,



mandatory waste segregation at the source, coupled with adequate disposal and recycling facilities, could significantly improve the situation. Additionally, fostering a sense of shared responsibility among tourists and locals can encourage sustainable practices (Brtnický et al., 2020).

Participants expressed the belief that the primary factor in mitigating the adverse effects of tourism on the region and its environment lies in the implementation of stringent regulations. This includes limiting the number of tourists during designated periods to prevent over-tourism and manage negative impacts, such as waste issues. They also emphasized the importance of adopting alternative modes of transportation, favoring electric vehicles over conventional cars and buses. Additionally, the use of recyclable materials for food and water packaging, as well as for heating lodges, were among the solutions highlighted by the respondents. These measures are seen as crucial steps toward sustainable tourism and environmental conservation in the area. The excerpt highlights participants' perspectives on mitigating tourism's adverse environmental impacts, focusing on the necessity of stringent regulations and sustainable practices. Their recommendations address key areas, including visitor management, transportation, and resource utilization, aiming to balance tourism development with environmental conservation (Kaykhosravi & Rashiedpour, 2024).

Limiting the number of tourists during peak seasons emerges as a significant strategy to combat over-tourism. This approach helps

reduce the strain on local infrastructure, natural resources, and ecosystems. Implementing quotas or permit systems can ensure a controlled flow of visitors, preserving the region's ecological and cultural integrity (Damjanović, 2021).

In response to the second research question, respondents advocated for a reduction in carbon emissions at accommodation facilities, emphasizing the need for carbon-neutral options. They suggested implementing guidelines that encourage tourists to wear additional clothing as a measure to minimize the generation of pollutant gases, thereby contributing to the mitigation of global warming, climate change, and the alarming trend of mountain ice melting. A significant majority of participants reiterated the importance of education and pre-travel information, considering them to be highly effective and essential components in addressing these environmental concerns. Combining carbon-neutral practices with tourist education offers a dual approach to mitigating environmental impacts. This strategy not only addresses immediate concerns, such as the melting of mountain ice but also lays the foundation for sustainable tourism and climate resilience (Molinario et al., 2020).

To mitigate the environmental impacts of tourism, a combination of carbon-neutral practices, behavioral changes, and education is crucial. Encouraging energy efficiency in accommodations and raising awareness among tourists can significantly reduce carbon emissions and support sustainability. These measures not only address immediate challenges like climate change but also

contribute to long-term environmental conservation, promoting a responsible and sustainable tourism industry.

### **limitations**

Due to the unique nature of Mount Everest and its limited accessibility, finding individuals with firsthand knowledge was challenging, and this issue was further exacerbated by the difficulty of reaching these knowledgeable individuals. The use of open-ended questionnaires also faced obstacles, as many respondents either lacked sufficient time or were unwilling to provide detailed answers. The diverse backgrounds of participants, ranging from article authors to local leaders, led to varied perspectives. Although categorizing responses based on socio-economic status and educational level could have provided clearer insights, this was impractical due to the impossibility of on-site access. Additionally, some respondents had visited Everest many years ago, potentially resulting in outdated views and perceptions.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the complex interplay between local development, over-tourism, and environmental sustainability in the Everest region. Key findings highlight the need for balancing economic growth with ecological conservation, addressing over-tourism through stricter regulations, improving waste management and eco-friendly practices, and fostering education and awareness among stakeholders. It emphasizes collaborative policymaking involving local communities and

governments to achieve sustainable tourism. Challenges such as privileged control and methodological limitations were acknowledged, but the research provides valuable insights for future strategies in sustainable high-altitude tourism and conservation.

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