

**TO DO!2001
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

Award Winner

TENGOBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

represented by

the Honorary Ngawang Tenzin Zangpo Rinpoche,
the Abbot of Tengboche Monastery

Michael Schmitz
Project Manager

Tengboche Monastery, Community of Khumjung,
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Rationale for the Award

by

Klaus Betz

“Our hands are big but our arms are short.”
Tibetan saying

1. INTRODUCTION

Investigations into the candidacy of the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT took place between November 20th and 30th, 2001 in Nepal. On behalf of the Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V. (Institute for Tourism and Development) the data concerning the concept, aims and success of the project as stated in the contest documents could be verified without any problems – with the following results: The expert appraiser proposes that the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT be awarded the TO DO!-prize.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 THE COUNTRY

The Kingdom of Nepal is situated between the region of Tibet annexed by China in the North and India in the South. It stretches from east to west along the southern slopes of the Himalayas with a length of just under 900 km and a width of up to 250 km. With its area of 147 181 square kilometres – corresponding to the surface of Austria and Switzerland together – it has a population of just under 25 million people (census of July 2001).¹

About 82 percent of Nepal's population make their living out of farming. The per capita income per year is around 220 US dollars. With this, Nepal ranks among the poorest and least developed countries in the world with almost half of its population living below the poverty line. The illiteracy rate stands at 60 percent.

There is an inter-relation between the great poverty and the increasing deforestation for private purposes (fire wood) which leads to aggravating soil erosion and therefore to the loss of fertile soils. Since forests also serve as storage reservoirs for water this situation may in the long term lead to serious floods in India and Bangladesh. What aggravates the situation is that tourism and the opening up of new regions increase the need for building and fire wood even more.

The two largest ethnic groups are the Indo-Arian majority (some 80 percent) and the Tibeto-Burmese minority (about 20 percent), clustered in altogether 50 ethnic sub-groups with their distinct languages and cultures. About 86 percent of the population is Hindu, 8 percent follow the teachings of the Buddha², just about 4 percent adhere to Islam and 2 percent of the population follow other faiths.

Here in Germany the best known ethnic groups of Nepal are the Buddhist Sherpas. Some 30,000 people in Nepal belong to this ethnic group with the majority living in Kathmandu. In most western countries the word “Sherpa” wrongly still stands for “porter”. But in actual fact the Sherpas belong to the better earning and more prosperous ethnic groups in Nepal (e.g. through the ownership of trekking agencies,

¹ Sources: Wirtschaftshandbuch Asien Pazifik 2001/2002, Editor: Ostasiatischer Verein e.V., Hamburg; Ländermappe Nepal, Deutsche Stiftung für internationale Entwicklung (DSE), Bonn; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Nepal, short reports from 18.6.2001; as well as various reports in: Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Bangkok Post and Kathmandu Post.

² If “Buddhism” is referred to in the following text what is meant is the Tibetan school of “Vajrayana Ningmapa” (the diamond vehicle) where the practicing of “boundless compassion” is of great importance: the constant consideration of needs, desires and the well-being of all forms of life, because these in their totality – following the law of cause and effect (Karma) can have certain impacts on lebensraum, place, human being and animals.

lodges, hotels, domestic airlines etc.). Some 400 years ago, the Sherpas came to Nepal from Eastern Tibet where they settled in the region south of Mount Everest. *Sher* means “east” – *pa* means “human being”.

2.2 TOURISM

The most important export commodities are carpets and textiles. The biggest trading partners are India (33 percent of exports), USA (26 percent) and Germany (25 percent). But the most prominent foreign exchange earner by far is tourism. In the year 2001, just under 215 million Euros could be gained (48 percent of export goods). Almost half of the tourist overnight stays are in the Kathmandu valley (focus on cultural tourism). The rest is spread over the other areas of the country, and is mainly in connection with Himalayan trekking or mountaineering and with jungle tours in the tropical lowland of the Tarai, along the Indian border.

In recent years the number of tourist arrivals has increased to about 500,000 (among which also the important stream of visitors from India/pilgrimage tourism). Other sources mention 400,000 Nepal travellers, among whom we find about 22 000 Germans. But last year the number of tourist arrivals decreased by about 17 percent, in November 2001 allegedly even by 41 percent. This is a hard blow for the kingdom because roughly 400,000 people earn their living directly from tourism while 1 million people do so indirectly.

One of the reasons was the short crisis after the murder of the royal family by the heir to the throne, Dipendra, (on June 1st, 2001). But even more serious is the smouldering conflict with the Maoist rebels. On November 21st, 2001 they tried to get hold of Saleri (municipality of the District Solu-Khumbu), and thus for the first time ever of the Sherpa region south of Mount Everest. For the first time, this led to massive military deployment which could avert the rebel offensive in the Sherpa country, an important region for tourism (with allegedly 200 dead and the proclamation of a state of emergency).

Other regions, however, especially in the west and mid-west of Nepal, are said to be firmly in the hands of the “Maoists” (almost a third of the altogether 75 districts). The reason for this state of affairs is that these regions are the breeding ground for poverty and corruption, i.e. a per capita income of under 100 US dollars per year and a life-expectancy of 52 years.

For a long time the political establishment in Kathmandu has not taken the rebel movement seriously and has played down the “people’s war” declared by the Maoists. For the first time last year under the reign of the new king Gyanendra and after the government had been restructured under Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba there were truce negotiations and peace talks with the rebels which ended, however, with the attempted offensive in Saleri. According to newspaper reports the defeat in Saleri was a turning point for the Mao rebels. It will probably bring them back to the negotiating table.

The TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT must be viewed against this background. It can serve as a model from various points of view. Particularly so through the way and means it utilises tourism as a transmission belt to overcome poverty and to enhance sustainable regional development.

3. TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

3.1 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The Tengboche³ monastery is the spiritual centre and the heart of Sherpa culture. It is situated on an incredibly beautiful, plateau-like “terrace“ at an altitude of 3,800 metres, surrounded by densely wooded slopes (pines, junipers, rhododendrons). The view to the south opens up the panorama of the Pahad, the Nepalese mountains, or rather promontory with peaks of more than 4,000 metres altitude. In the north, behind and above the monastery one can see the famous peaks such as the Mount Everest (8,848 metres) and the neighbouring Lhotse (8,501 metres) – seemingly close enough to reach out and touch. The monastery is also surrounded by the Ama Dablam peak (6,856 metres) and the Khumbi Lha (5,761 metres) just facing the monastery. The Sherpa people consider this latter as holy or sacred. It is the seat of the god-like patron saint of Khumbu (i.e. of their home), and therefore nobody has been allowed to climb it so far. Attempts by disrespectful mountaineers to climb the peak were vigorously thwarted by the Sherpas.

Even today the Tengboche monastery can only be reached by foot within three days from the nearest airport in Lukla (2,800 metres). Due to the required acclimatisation in most cases four days are more realistic. Up to now there are no roads but only trails on which everything needed in the Sherpa region is transported either by men or yaks (on rare occasions helicopters are also used). Tengboche is situated half way on the trail to the Everest base camp, which is the most frequented trekking route to the above mentioned eight thousand meter peaks. Today, almost the entire northern Khumbu region up to the border with Tibet belongs to the “Sagarmatha National Park“⁴ covering an area of 1,148 square kilometres. At the entrance gate to the national park in Monjo (15 Euro entrance fee) the number of visitors is registered on a blackboard. The year 2000 saw altogether 25,291 trekking holiday-makers, during the record month of October 7,537 mountaineers were on their way to Mount Everest (in October 2001: 6,440). Three aspects must be mentioned here:

- So far it has not been disclosed, whether even a single Euro of the 400,000 Euros obtained from the entrance fees within one year was returned to the region, unless perhaps for the expenses of the national park administration of which, however, one could hardly make out any activities worth mentioning.
- It can be assumed that almost four fifths of these 25,000 visitors also walk to the Tengboche monastery and then continue in the direction of the Everest base camp. Since Tengboche is situated half way to the camp it will quite often be visited twice, on the way to and from the camp. Considering this fact, the monastery will probably have to cope with 30,000 day visitors and people staying for a longer period.
- The season, which lasts just about six months, is either in the pre-monsoon period from March to May or in the post-monsoon period between September and November. Thus, there are about 5,000 visitors per month or at least 170 hikers on average per day who either just pass the monastery or stay there overnight.

³ In Nepali Tengboche is often written “Thyangboche”. Since the Sherpa language is a Tibetan dialect it is advisable to use the original writing. Tengboche means: the great thing up there/above us .

⁴ Sagarmatha is the Nepali word for Mount Everest and means “Mother of the Universe“. The Tibetan word is “Chomolungma“ - as a reference to Miyo-Langsangma who (as one of the five “Tseringma sisters of longevity“) takes care of the nourishment of living creatures.

Before reaching the Tengboche monastery the trekking routes in the Everest region lead through an important trading centre. This is Namche Bazaar (3,400 m) with 1,500 inhabitants, situated in a nicely sheltered area. The citizens are relatively well-off since they own lodges, hotels, restaurants, equipment and souvenir shops or because they profit from trade between Tibet and the north-eastern region of Nepal.

Namche Bazaar is *the* junction in the road system for trekking tours and therefore the centre of the tourism industry. With the precarious effect of being very dependent on tourism and with the added effect that property prices (due to the accomplishments achieved so far) are said to be extremely high in Namche Bazaar. Because of the constricted space in the narrow, horseshoe-shaped high valley there are limits to further building measures. Depending on the location a property of two or three Ares is worth between 3,5 and 7,5 million Rupees (between 50,000 and 100,000 Euros). At the same time comparably high salaries are paid in this area. While a teacher in Kathmandu has to make ends meet with a monthly income of 1,500 to 2,000 Rupees (20 to 30 Euros), a waiter in the Everest region earns at least double this amount, and a cook or a mason four times this amount. A trekking porter, if fairly paid, can earn between 350 and 500 Rupees (5 to 7,50 Euros) per working day and does not normally carry more than 40 kgs (that is if he is not hired through one of the dubious porter agencies in Kathmandu which sometimes exploit the mass of some 30 000 porters like slave-traders – a fact which a lot of trekking tourists do not know).

By the way, Namche Bazaar boasts a functioning water and sewage installation – something which cannot be found anywhere else in the region. These infra-structural measures costing about 140 000 Euros could be constructed due to the Austrian Öko-Himal Foundation (half of the costs) and the mayor of Namche Bazaar, a young man of integrity (implementation and remaining costs). His name is Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa, he studied law, owns a hotel and has been in office for four years. He is seen as an important contact person of the Tengboche monastery in whom the Rinpoche has complete confidence.

For almost 40 years the Tengboche monastery has had the “bad luck” to be situated at the popular main route to the Everest base camp and to be used as a beautiful resting and camping site for expeditions and trekking groups or as Buddhist backdrop to the exotic Himalayan trip. And despite all this the monastery has never drawn any profit from this. In the opposite. The area surrounding Tengboche could be seen as waste disposal and open air toilet. Due to this pollution the scarce drinking water became undrinkable and was a health hazard to the Tengboche inhabitants and the visitors. In addition, an increasing amount of firewood was cut in the surrounding forests. Life in the monastery, in silence and retreat – the basis for meditation over weeks and months – was increasingly jeopardised by unbearable and disrespectful outside influences. To make things worse the monastery burned down to its foundation walls in 1989. However, thanks to donations, among others by Sir Edmund Hillary, the Himalayan Trust, the American Himalayan Heritage Foundation and through the support of a lot of individual donors from all over the world it could be rebuilt and reopened officially in September 1993.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

Since with the Tengboche Development Plan a new orientation was initiated in 1995 to guide and control the project, the “bad luck“ mentioned above has since turned to good luck. Care is taken that Tengboche gradually initiates the most important

impulses for a sustainable, basic and straightforward regional development and that it enhances the Sherpa culture.

The initiator for all these inter-related measures is the Tengboche Rinpoche⁵, who is respected by everybody as a highly esteemed personality. As a counselor, thinker, listener and, if necessary, in some instances also as a determined decision-maker he is almost constantly involved in a dialogue and consultation process. On some days he receives up to 30 or 40 visitors, both from among the Sherpa population as well as from among the foreign Tengboche visitors. On other days he travels on foot or horseback to deal with critical issues, to lead ceremonies, demonstrate tree planning activities or else to look at sites that seem suitable for medicinal herb plantations.

To draw up the Tengboche Development Plan and later on for the implementation of the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT the Rinpoche was able to recruit the German architect and city planner Michael Schmitz⁶ who, with some breaks, has been living in Nepal since 1975 and who has played a vital part in the recovery of the Tengboche situation which in itself was a six years balancing act. Meanwhile Michael Schmitz can be seen as a lay brother of the monastery and – compared to western Christian circumstances – as a chairman of the church congregation. He performed a balancing act since a Buddhist monastery is by no means and is not allowed to be a place to launch a business. Normally a monastery offers free access, but on the other hand it cannot provide resources free of charge just because it is unfortunately faced with a visitor culture which does not focus on voluntary “give and share“ (in the Buddhist sense of “acquiring merits“), but on paid service and service in return. And all this at a location declared to be a monastic zone and which must therefore be seen as sacred land.⁷

The approval of the Rinpoche to implement Michael Schmitz' masterplan via the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (which had become financially successful), was only given after one could foresee that not only the monastery would profit from it but also the people, the local population in the region. For what counted for the Tengboche Rinpoche were not only the aspects of a financial, infra-structural and structural guarantee for the monastery's future but in the long term also a number of closely interwoven objectives which would have an impact on the region. The most important of these are:

- support for the new generation of monks who, after their training, go back to their villages as teachers;
- support and preservation of Sherpa culture;
- improved medical service for the population (through medical doctors trained in indigenous Tibetan medicine);
- cultivation and production of medicinal plants for the Tibetan high altitude medicine and pharmacy production of teas from medicinal plants, incense sticks for ceremonial and health purposes;
- the creation of a second economic pillar to reduce the extremely strong dependency on tourism (direct marketing of the products to the tourists, the local population and to the Sherpa community in Kathmandu);
- jobs for young people (also for women) in the region instead of Kathmandu; reforestation and environmental measures.

⁵ The Tengboche Rinpoche, born in 1935 on the same day as the Dalai Lama, is the re-incarnation of the late Lama Gulu, died in 1934, who had founded the monastery in 1916.

⁶ With the additionally, in London acquired academic grades of “Master of Science” and “Master of Economics”.

⁷ The word “sacred” is here used in the sense of „consecrated“, since in the teachings of Buddhism there are not deities or saints, but the great veneration of Buddhas or Lamas.

3.3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

In order to implement such endeavours without conflicting with the restrictive regulations for commercial measures (enforced from outside) within the Sagarmatha National Park, an organisational structure had to be developed. One can only comprehend this structure if one compares it to a small stock-holding⁸ whose majority is owned by the monastery and which is transformed into a foundation, while its subsidiaries are having the status of NGOs (non-governmental organisations).

This somehow unusual construction is merged under the umbrella of the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT and controls all its essential activities. To reach this state money had to be raised in the first place, be it through world-wide fundraising, be it through the help of good and influential friends of the monastery (among them constantly the Nepalese Honorary Consul, Mrs. Ann-Katrin Bauknecht in Stuttgart), be it through rich Sherpas in Kathmandu or through the tedious collection of donations at the end of guided tours through the monastery and lecturers on the Buddhist Sherpa culture given by Michael Schmitz (who speaks German, English, Nepali and Sherpa-Tibetan).

The most evident sign of what has meanwhile been achieved is the “Tengboche Eco-Centre“ which was built outside the monastery and opened in early 2000. It serves as a visitors’ centre and forms a tourist-cultural bridge to the monastery and to the Sherpa culture. In addition it quickly acquired a kind of cash-flow function for the financing of the above named objectives (for details see 3.4).

The High-Altitude-Plantation-Company acting as “Sacred Land Initiatives“ has its seat in Namche Bazaar. It comprises additional business lines such as pharmacy, clinic and research. For visitors it only becomes perceptible when they buy or drink “Wild Mountain Rose – Himalayan Healing Tea“ at the Eco-Centre or when they ask for healing incense sticks (with the “Sacred Land“ logo) or when they go to the Clinic in Namche Bazaar for treatment.

3.4 ACTIVITIES

During the last decade, the activities of the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT mainly centred around such basic needs as safe drinking water, toilets, waste disposal, electricity, medical service, telephone communication and, not to be forgotten: an autonomously controlled tourist management. This enables the project to determine its course in financial, social, ecological and cultural matters.

Therefore, Tengboche monastery invested among others in the following measures:

- Construction of water pipes⁹ over a length of 1.5 km, surmounting a gradient of 140 metres (35,000 Euros), 25 percent subsidy through “British Water Aid”,
- Construction of a small hydro-power station (60,000 Euro);
- Construction of the Tengboche Eco-Centres (30,000 Euro);
- Construction of a housing scheme for monks designed in the shape of an open and yet protecting wall for the inner area of the monastery (45,000 Euro);

⁸ “Share-holders” are the Tengboche Rinpoche and some “elders” among the monks. In addition the mayor of Namche Bazaar, Sonam Gyalzen Sherpa and Michael Schmitz as General Director.

⁹ Each part of the pipe line had to be flown in. Including also electrical wiring, an 8 kw pump, innumerable sacks of cement, tools etc. To transport 1 kg of material to Tengboche costs 0,75 Euro, a square metre of the construction amounts to 150 Euros.

- Construction of a lodge for porters (3,000 Euro), sponsored by the Khumjung community
- Inauguration of the Tibetan Clinic in Namche Bazaar and purchase of land for the cultivation of medicinal herbs (14,000 Euro);
- Installation of a satellite telephone unit (15,000 Euro) – two-thirds of which were donated by the Austrian mountaineer and Everest expert, Wolfgang Nairz.

One should know this story of advance contributions before realising that the Tengboche Eco-Centre and „Sacred Land Initiatives“ have a yearly income of about 18,000 Euros (a lot of money considering the local situation). At the Tengboche Eco-Centre people can visit the very informative “Sacred Land Exhibition” (entrance fee 100 Rupees, about 1.50 Euro), and in a small cinema a 30 minutes video film is shown about the “Sacred Land“. Information is also given on the history of the monastery, Sherpa culture, the basics of Buddhism, on the Khumbu region, its medicinal plants and on the issue “Buddhism and Ecology“. One can buy music CDs, T-shirts, devotional objects, prayer garlands, silk scarves said to bring good luck, there is healing tea, arts and crafts of the Sherpa culture and many other things. Visitors are informed about tours of the monastery, about the schedule of ceremonies taking place and how one should conduct oneself on these occasions.

The income earned in this way either goes to the monastery (food for the monks, social fund, school, library, support for an indigent nun monastery in nearby Deboche, wages for the “secular“ staff) or it is used for environmental measures or cultural projects in the region. The monastery earns additional income through the lease of a lodge, a small guesthouse and a camping site. Another two lodges are privately owned, a third one belongs to the National Park. Despite rising demand there are no plans to build additional lodges.

Without this money – donations are welcome any time – it would probably have been difficult to develop the second, i.e. the medical branch. On the one hand this is based on the medicinal herb plantations that are being developed (near Deboche, Namche Bazaar and near Halesi in southern Khumbu), and on the other hand on the clinic in Namche Bazaar. This clinic is run by the young newcomer Dr. Sherab Tenzin Barma¹⁰, who is specially trained as a “Tibetan medical doctor“. In order to work as an “Amchi“ (the local word for it) and to apply the classical Tibetan pulse diagnosis for the treatment of illnesses, nine years of study in medicine, pharmacology or phytotherapy are required. Among other things this is necessary because a “Tibetan doctor“, together with his helpers, cultivates, gathers, dries, processes and mixes the medicine to be used himself. Presently Dr. Sherab Tenzin Barma has more than 160 medical substances on a herbal basis at his disposal. The treatment of poor people is free of charge. Trekking tourists are requested to give a donation of at least 300 Rupees (5 Euros).¹¹

4. APPRAISAL OF THE PROJECT

The comparison of the activities of the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT with the TO DO! criteria for socially responsible tourism results in the following appraisal:

¹⁰ “Bachelor of Tibetan Medical Science“ at the Chakpori Medical College. In former times this famous institute was situated in Lhasa, today it is run at the Indian town of Darjeeling.

¹¹ A hospital working in line with the classical “Western medicine“ is situated in Khumjung, a half day’s march from Namche Bazaar (for acute emergencies and surgery).

Contest criterion:**Involvement of the different interests and requirements of the local people through participation**

In the narrow sense the population of Tengboche is equal to the monks living in the monastery. In 1990 there were only 30 monks left, today there are again more than 60 monks residing there. Among these there are 35 novices and students, two professors teaching medicine, philosophy, debate, tantric sciences, ceremonies, painting and the production of ritual objects. In addition, the owners or leaseholders of the four lodges (with altogether 120 beds) and their staff must also be counted as local population.

In a broader sense, almost all the villagers living in the immediate and distant surroundings of Tengboche belong to the local population. Not only because the monastery, due to its spiritual importance, is frequently visited by the villagers, but also because all Tengboche activities directly or indirectly have an impact on the region as a whole (cultivation of medicinal herbs in various locations, reforestation, tree nurseries, need for building material, porters, craftsmen etc.). In addition, every tourist – especially on tented trekking tours – brings along 1 to 2 persons as “service staff” (again porters, cook, guide etc.). From the point of view of the monastery these migrating locals are also regarded as local population.

Their interests and needs have over the years been dealt with either through direct interviews or through the dialogue and consultation process mentioned above with the Tengboche Rinpoche, or else such issues have been communicated to the monastery. Besides: according to Buddhist understanding (the principle of “boundless compassion”), the needs of all living creatures have to be considered before initiating any intervention, changes or measures in living spaces and the possible impact that these might have. For this to happen a good deal of observation and attentiveness is required. This contest criterion reflects the permanent basic attitude of Tibetan-Buddhist practice. But it does not become as evident compared to Western understanding where this would happen through village assemblies and special hearings.

Contest criterion:**Strengthening the awareness among the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life**

The awareness about the chances and risks of tourism development has for a long time been well in the minds of the Tengboche inhabitants (monks, lodge owners, employees) and of the Sherpa population in the vicinity. For decades Tengboche has been confronted with quite a “hard tourism” and would almost have come to an end. One of the reasons is that even now there are enough big trekking agencies and operators sending their groups every third day, with the tourists bringing everything along so that they buy either nothing at all or very few things, they only use the facilities and resources of the monastery and try to bring down prices. These are clients who are doing this trip to the world famous landscape and scenery (“..I have been to Mount Everest”) for the sake of their own ego and not so much to come to terms with a culture propagating the renunciation of the ego.

As can be seen from the measures described under 3.4 it is quite evident that the era of defensive is over and that Tengboche has taken on the role of a guiding intellectual force. The dangerous dependency on tourism can gradually be reduced through the activities initiated by the Rinpoche.

Contest criterion:

Participation of a broad local population strata regarding the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism

During the almost 10 years of building and restructuring measures of and around the Tengboche monastery, up to 25 masons and carpenters from neighbouring villages have been fully employed.

Since its opening the Eco-Centre employs two young English-speaking Sherpi women from Namche Bazaar. In the context of the clinic in Namche Bazaar, i.e. the cultivation, collection of medicinal herbs and production of Tibetan medicine, healing tea and incense sticks etc., seven people are employed full-time and another five are hired as seasonal workers. One employee is in charge of the control and maintenance of the technical equipment (hydro-power) another one for the satellite telephone plant. (Trekking tourists also benefit from this, since a helicopter can be called to Tengboche in case of an emergency.)

From a social point of view attention was finally given to the porters, in addition to the improvement of the previously unacceptable hygienic conditions (availability of safe drinking water and public toilets instead of the “illegal” and meanwhile forbidden toilet tents). The lodge specially built for the porters is not really attractive (a simple stone hut with a fireplace, a roof and a wall around) but compared to the situation the appraiser had met in May 1995 it is a real improvement. At that time the porters slept „with the animals“, a bitter paraphrase for the fact that they spent the night somewhere in the forest without any protection – especially in the post monsoon season this can be a serious health hazard since they are not well equipped (from October temperatures can fall below zero).

From a cultural point of view the Sherpas, with their activities and the exhibition at the Tengboche Eco-Centre, have now got a platform to portray their way of life. They are also very interested in showing the “Sacred Land Exhibition“ in other countries and in this context are looking for contact persons. This would of course imply that in western societies it is not only the superlative “roof of the world“ that counts but also the people who live there.

Contest criterion:

Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions in relation to payment, social security, working hours, education and training

In view of the prevailing conditions in Nepal this criterion can only be applied in a very limited way. What we are talking about is the provision of the most basic needs and the question in which way at least the subsistence level can be obtained – in a sector which, in the trekking line, only booms for six months in a year. For this reason the monastery has started to build up a social fund for the local population. Up to 25 percent of the Eco-Centre’s income will be paid to this fund in the future.

Contest criterion:

Reinforcement of the local culture as well as of the cultural identity of those living in tourism destination areas

In addition to the outside impact of the “Sacred Land Exhibition“ described above, the monastery considers it as its central task to strive for the enhancement and preservation of Sherpa identity. As mentioned earlier the monastery is the spiritual centre of the Sherpa culture and runs the only school in the region with the Sherpa-idiom as the teaching medium. The monastery also sees to it that trained monks return to their villages to teach there. Tengboche monks also tour the country to perform religious ceremonies for families asking for a home “Puja“. Every year the monastery celebrates the famous ceremonial Mani-Rimdu festival (mostly towards the end of October), and two years ago the Rinpoche celebrated the “Sherpa Prayer Festival“ in Halesi, lasting nine days. Some 7,000 Sherpas assembled there for something like a political-cultural ethnic meeting.

Contest criterion:

Avoidance or minimisation of social and cultural damage caused by tourism in destination areas

Some of these issues were referred to in the general description. The activities centre around: drinking water, construction of toilets, waste disposal, development/ re-introduction of traditional Tibetan medicine, awareness raising campaigns addressing trekking tourists (respect for the Sherpa culture, Buddhist values, ecology), but also addressing the local population (conservation of plants and animals). The Rinpoche is particularly concerned about reforestation. He tries to convince the Sherpa people to plant 10 trees for each felled tree, and in the villages he skilfully uses the high esteem the people hold for him to propagate and implement tree-planting campaigns. To set a good example the monastery has meanwhile built a common kitchen which provides the monks with one warm meal a day. Before that each monk had to cook for himself which meant an enormous waste of firewood.

Contest criterion:

Application of new methods in qualifying partnership and co-operation between the external tourism industry and the local people

In principle Tengboche is interested in building up co-operation with the external tourism industry, but only if outside control and decision-making as experienced in the past, can be avoided. This is a crucial point in the history of tourism experienced in the region.

Tengboche has hardly received any assistance from trekking agencies but rather from foreign embassies, well-meaning organisations and individual donors (also tourists). The tourism industry looked at Tengboche merely as a beautiful resting place. The monastery itself was seen as a highly esteemed “museum“. Over a long period of time sight-seeing tours have been offered free of charge. When donations were requested the monastery was criticised by exactly those travel agencies which had profited from its existence.

Today the situation is quite different because the “tourism branch“ through the Tengboche Eco-Centre is located in a place before one reaches the monastery (entrance fees are paid there while the access to the monastery is still free). This has

the added effect that a lot of visitors are sensitised through the information given in the film and the exhibition. As a result of this it was decided to discontinue using fire-wood for the warm-water showers but to install solar energy cells. This project was realised after clients had put enough pressure on the management.

Contest criterion:

Creation of other favourable conditions for socially responsible tourism development in destination areas

In this context the foundation of the company “Sacred Land Initiatives“ is particularly important since the underlying basis of this business is the valuation of natural and sustainable resources (cultivation, gathering and processing of medicinal herbs). At the initiative of the Tengboche Rinpoche the status of being particularly worthy of protection was granted to these products. Through the Eco-Centre this is pointed out to the trekking tourists, and through the monks and staff of the medicinal herb company to the local population.

Considering the professionalism the company showed in using the brand name and logo “Sacred Land”, and the initial success with regard to the demand for the “Himalayan Healing Tea“ and also considering how popular Dr. Sherab Tenzin Barma is with his “Tibetan Clinic“ one can rightly assume that a modest “healing tourism“ may develop in the near future. In addition, there is the exclusivity: The high altitude herbs in the southern region of the Everest grow very slowly and therefore are said to be highly effective. If this branch continues to develop at the present pace, there might be a potential of 500 jobs for the entire Khumbu region.

Contest criterion:

Projects and measures entered for the contest must be in line with the principles of environmental compatibility

The holistic approach described above in relation to the design, handling and management of a living space comes close to the fact that in Buddhism the issue of ecology is not seen as a separate entity within quite different ways of conduct. On the contrary, ecology is part of the universal balance assuming that everything is interrelated with each other. If the basic elements that determine our life (fire, earth, water, wind and – the universe, the space above us) lose their balance, it affects everything and everyone, people, animals, plants and trees.

Therefore all actions (even those omitted) are of equal importance. From this point of view all the previously described environmental activities in and around Tengboche are much rather the natural result of an awareness process and must not be labelled “environment“. Even such small but effective measures as the banning of glass bottles in the lodges must be seen in this context. “Western“ drinks such as beer or Coke can now only be bought in tins since they weigh almost nothing, and can be crushed and transported back at low cost.

A problem which has so far not been solved is the sewage of the monastery and the lodges. Although it does not affect the well for drinking water, the sewage runs down the slopes in an uncontrolled way and it seeps into the soil. Tengboche urgently needs some further financial means and support to solve this problem.

Waste disposal is still not functioning adequately. It is hard to cope with the waste at the monastery and along the trekking routes (caused both by the local people as well as by tourists) with a yearly clean-up campaign organised by a committed circles of German trekking and expedition agencies. True, such actions are of a highly symbolic significance but they do not solve the problem as such – at least not as long as products are in demand by the visitors which are not compatible with the climate or the height of the region. The waste collection carried out by the monks and the other inhabitants at Tengboche is just as ineffective.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is a phenomenon that the lodges along the trekking routes and also in Tengboche charge relatively high prices for meals while at the same time charging extremely low prices for accommodation – that is if the visitor accepts to have his meal at the lodge. Indeed, the expensive meals are subsidising the cheap beds. Some lodges assume quite an unprofessional attitude. They offer an overnight stay for 50 Rupees (0.75 Euro) – provided it is coupled with a meal. If not, they “threaten” with overnight charges of between 500 and 1,000 Rupees (7.50 to 15 Euros). By doing so they want to prevent the tourist from having his meal next door (since this would naturally upset the mixed calculation). The appraiser recommends that the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT should discuss a more practical solution with the lodge owners.

Some lodges also have very inadequate washing facilities, and the thin plywood walls often used to separate the “rooms” are not acceptable in the long run. This might be one of the reasons that a trekking agency has started to build its own lodges in the Everest region, at sites that are quite attractive but not quite undisputed. Should this development be imitated, the local lodge owners could easily become the losers in this business. It would also have the effect that the added valuation in the region would decrease.

6. CONCLUSION

On the whole the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT can meanwhile take the role of a model since it demonstrates two things: the difficulty to liberate oneself from structures imposed from outside, and the way in which one can contribute, in small steps, to overcome poverty. Namely by responding to normal tourism business with a socially responsible concept and by turning the channeling of income for a few into spreading this income for many. Not least the TENGBOCHE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT shows that and how it is possible to enhance identity-creating and culture-preserving forces.