

The Impact of Tourism on Urban Renewal through Stakeholders’ Perspective: A Case of Post-Earthquake Urban Renewal in Kathmandu Valley in the Wake of Covid 19

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Abstract

A 7.8 magnitude earthquake and its subsequent aftershocks struck Nepal more than seven years ago on April 25, 2015, triggering a huge humanitarian disaster. The earthquake caused significant socioeconomic destruction, from which the country is yet to recover. Currently, with the covid-19 outbreak, Nepal is engulfed in yet another unprecedented crisis. Tourism has been one of the driving forces for the urban renewal efforts in Nepal, but the epidemic has caused the industry to collapse. The purpose of this study is to recognize the effect of tourism on urban renewal projects in the wake of covid and analyze the impact of covid-19 pandemic on post-earthquake urban renewal efforts in historical commercial areas of Kathmandu Valley. For making the entire system more transparent a range of qualitative techniques is applied, including system mapping, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and locals, to understand the urban renewal processes and their outcomes. Using the primary data, a new approach to system mapping is developed which serves as a foundation for future strategy implementation and emphasize the necessity of understanding the influence of tourism on urban renewal strategies in Kathmandu. At different stages of the involvement process, and in relation to different outcomes, the participants narrated varying and even contradictory opinions about the urban renewal activities. The findings revealed that the government of Nepal has recognized tourism to have a vital role in urban renewal activities and it has both positive and negative influence upon urban renewal which can vary widely depending upon the various dimensions of urban renewal activities. While tourism has benefited the area in terms of increasing employment and revenue, it has also had a severe influence on the town's cultural and natural resources. The economic success achieved by tourism will not be sustainable in the long run unless the negative impact caused by tourism is addressed and mitigated. Hence, based on rigorous analysis, few strategic initiatives are proposed introducing more integrated planning mechanisms to help link physical, social, cultural, economic, and environmental preservation with tourism development which includes active stakeholder collaboration.

Keywords: *Urban renewal, Tourism, Earthquake, Covid-19, Pandemic, Kathmandu valley, Kathmandu durbar square, Stakeholder, System mapping*

Introduction

Nepal is a landlocked country, surrounded by two neighboring countries, India, and China. Kathmandu is the political and historical capital of Nepal. The main capital city comprises three main districts popularly known as Kathmandu Valley. The Kathmandu Valley is comprised of three historic cities of remarkable significance and cultural awareness namely Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan), and Bhaktapur. However, the major

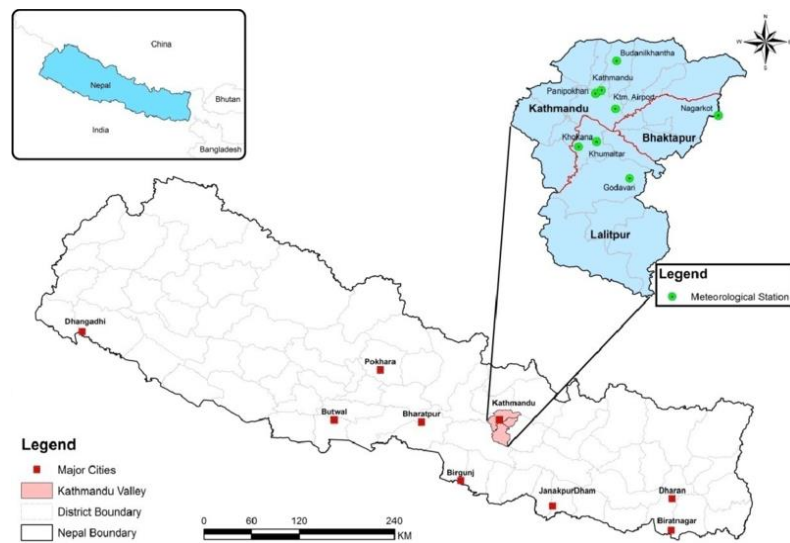


Figure 1: Map of Nepal showing Kathmandu Valley | Source: (Baniya, et al., 2018)

urban center lies in between the three districts. Among them, Kathmandu is Nepal's most important traditional and commercial hub, as well as the city with the most advanced infrastructure among urban areas in Nepal. Kathmandu, being the gateway to Nepal's tourism, is the country's economic center. However, the sister cities, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur are crucial to Kathmandu in terms of tourism, economics, and cultural history. The city is unique because of its cultural heritage, which is closely connected to its people, identity, and the way of life. In Nepal, the traditional heritage sector is recognized as an important aspect for development, mostly through tourism and job creation, even more as a symbol of national identity.

A destructive 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Nepal on April 25, 2015, followed by thousands of aftershocks. It caused havoc in Kathmandu Valley, notably on the medieval town squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, all of which are recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It was an earthquake that seemed to specifically damage vernacular buildings and historical monuments (Weise, 2016). Numerous historic structures and monuments, many of which are world-renowned for their indigenous traditional architecture, were destroyed by the earthquake, entirely altering the built form of several old towns, including Patan, Bhaktapur, and most notably Kathmandu. Today, even after marking the seventh year since the disaster, the economic and social consequences are still being sorted, and the urban renewal efforts continue. After the earthquake, it was uncertain that the renewal activities would be a long and difficult road to recovery. However, the government was determined to highlight the urban renewal progress after launching a large tourism promotion campaign, Visit Nepal 2020. But, following the beginning of the huge tourism promotion campaign, Nepal was struck by covid on the same year. Now, with covid 19 there are additional challenges. It was Nepal's misfortune that all the expensive preparations for Visit Nepal 2020, during which the country hoped to attract a record 2 million visitors, have gone to waste because of the

covid-19 crisis (Rijal, 2020). Hence, the tourism industry has been severely affected by the covid 19 outbreak. Tourism has been one of the driving forces behind Nepal's urban renewal efforts, but the epidemic has caused the industry to collapse. The travel and tourism sector contributes 8 percent to Nepal's GDP, 6.7 percent to the country's total employment, and it generates 6 percent of the total foreign exchange earnings (Panthhe & Kokate, 2021). The government is losing revenue from taxes, entrance fees, and so on, which they used to invest in urban renewal projects. Meanwhile, the situation in Nepal continues to evolve due to ongoing political and economic aftershocks, this study aims to investigate the recovery of Kathmandu Valley's historical settlement area as well as the challenges it confronts on the road to recovery.

Problem Statement

The relationship between urban renewal and tourism is often viewed through the lens of conflict and dispute. However, various researchers identify tourism as a collaborative effort that benefits both urban renewal and tourism. Tourism is often perceived as a threat to conservation of historical sites but, tourism is a platform and a driver for exposing historical sites and their heritage to the public, protecting it, and ensuring its economic and social sustainability. Hence, tourism is in most cases is a balancing mechanism that keeps and protects the historical sites heritage. While tourism continues to be one of the sectors hardest hit by the coronavirus pandemic there are additional challenges in the decision making of restoration work in historical sites. Hence, the pandemic has strongly affected the urban renewal progress of traditional old settlements and their heritages in Nepal, and it is important to highlight tourism as an important aspect in urban renewal efforts of historical settlements.

In this regard, the paper aims to look into how stakeholders in Kathmandu view their participation in urban renewal and the results of such participation. This study primarily focuses on the tourism approach towards urban renewal efforts from the perspectives of institutions and/or experts while also considering the views and comments of local population. To do this, this study adopts conceptual system mapping as a way of describing the multidimensional relationships i.e., disaster, pandemic, identity between tourism approach and urban renewal, which are non-mathematical in nature. This study selects the inner city of Kathmandu Valley as the research site. Its looks at the traditional urban setting of residential and commercial places with historical value. This selection of case provides a way to understand the role of tourism in urban renewal in Kathmandu and even Nepal. This also enriches the applications and implications of the findings. In summary, this is a case study-based research that applies a qualitative technique to study how tourism is an important aspect in the urban renewal in Kathmandu acknowledging the viewpoints of different stakeholders and institutions. A disaster differs from a pandemic in duration and the severity of shocks, one is more localized, while the other has more widespread and systemic impacts (Sengupta & Sharma, 2020). However, both provide complicated difficulties that requires multi-level strategies. Hence, the primary goal of this study is to determine the impact of tourism on urban renewal in historical town of Kathmandu Valley prior to the pandemic, during pandemic and after pandemic.

Literature Review

This section reviews the major concepts applied in this research: institutional framework (divers, agents, and governance) and guideline for identifying criteria of different dimensions in urban renewal.

Firstly, based on the results of a comprehensive literature review and the situation of cultural heritage in Nepal, stakeholders are listed as the candidates for identifying who are the critical ones in the urban renewal of cultural heritage. The final composition of the stakeholders includes a list of stakeholders sorted by their roles, responsibilities, and interest particularly those who play a significant role in the urban renewal activities of cultural heritage of Kathmandu Durbar Square.

Table 1: A list of stakeholders as the candidates who are the critical ones in the urban renewal activities

S.N.	Stakeholder	Roles/ responsibilities	Interest/Demands
1.	Central government	Establishing the policies and specifications, supervising the implementation.	Using the economic potential of natural and cultural heritage, developing multifunction economic activities, development of local economies.
2.	Local government (Municipalities)	Municipalities and wards are responsible for restoration of structures within their jurisdiction.	Urban renewal of derelict regions, upgrading quality of life within its administrative division.
3.	International agencies (UNESCO, affiliated expert body, JICA)	Redevelopment of derelict regions, restore, repair and adaptive reuse of ancient buildings.	The reconstruction, restoration, and renovation of historic architectural fragments from the debris, and to shore up shaky structures to prevent collapse.
4.	Community resident committees	Conservation of heritage sites, traditional approach for cultural renewal.	Urban culture marketing, cultural and historic heritage protection, continuation of annual feast, festivities.

Secondly, five prominent field of criteria were identified for the urban renewal activities, i.e., physical, social, economic, environmental, and cultural renewal. However, there is no scale for assessing urban decline, stress, or deprivation that rings a bell when the city reaches a certain point. It is clear from the literature review that a new set of ideas for urban renewal is emerging that represents the goals of integrating people, business, and place and implementing suitable policies to achieve this goal. Further organization of the criteria was acquired from the prevailing concepts of urban renewal into categories that acknowledge the

post-earthquake scenario, resulting in a systematic framework presenting a set of criteria which covers multiple dimensions of urban interventions. The guideline appears to identify the existence of integrated methods and support the goal of community capacity building with the long-term goal of producing real improvements and leveraging ethnic competitiveness.

Table 2: Guideline for identifying criteria of different dimensions in urban renewal through Nepalese perspective

Urban renewal (Field of criteria)	Actions for realizing the criteria	Set of criteria
Physical renewal (Leads to improvement of urban fabric)	Reconstruction, Restoration, renovation, replacement, improving infrastructures, demolition, destruction, dislocation.	Redevelopment of derelict regions, re-allocation of land uses, repair and adaptive reuse of ancient buildings, development of physical urban infrastructures.
Social renewal (Leads to improvement of community and housing)	Rehabilitation, social security, upgrading quality of life, removing decline and distress areas.	Rehabilitation of weaker sections, upgrading of communal spaces, social awareness camps.
Economic renewal (Creation of employment opportunities and generate revenue)	Opportunities for employment, creation of resources, the generation of income, development of local economies, and tax benefits.	Emphasis on utilization of fund, fund generation, revenue generation mainly through taxation and charges.
Environmental renewal (Leads to minimizing ecological imbalances in urban environment)	Improve the quality of local environment through restoring sustainability, balancing ecosystems, using natural resources, and upgrading impoverished regions.	Stresses on environmental preservation and the creation of oxygen-rich places, awareness to sustainability issues.
Cultural renewal (Promotes enhancement of culture and traditions)	Creative tourism, urban culture marketing, cultural and historic heritage protection, rehabilitation of old buildings with historic importance.	Conservation of heritage sites, traditional approach for cultural renewal.

Materials and Methods

Since this research aims to understand the role of tourism in urban renewal projects and post-earthquake urban renewal efforts in historical commercial areas of Kathmandu Valley from different perspectives of the experts, it demands a wider approach. Therefore, the qualitative method was deemed more appropriate in this case as it offers more depth and significance that can be acquired from an individual's experience participating in the urban renewal projects. The main research instrument for this study was a qualitative interview question. The social interviews from the stakeholders were understood in term of their attitudes about tourism and urban renewal.

As part of this research, the experts were interviewed from different background relating to the post-earthquake urban renewal in Kathmandu Valley, and how the collapse of tourism industry during the pandemic has affected the urban renewal progress. The research participants were selected following the institutional framework and guideline for identifying criteria of different dimension in urban renewal from the literature review. The institutional framework was further classified based on the findings of a comprehensive literature review in order to determine which institutes are mainly accountable for or seek interest in the five prominent field of criteria mentioned earlier. The stakeholder interviewed are as follows: Physical renewal: Central government, Social renewal: Local government, Economic renewal: Central government, Environmental renewal: International agencies and Cultural renewal: Community resident committees.

A total of 15 stakeholders, 3 from each field of criteria were chosen based on the framework. The data collection was completed through interview questions, from February to March 2022. Once all the interviews were done, the response were processed for the qualitative analysis. Firstly, the transcribed interviews were evaluated several times, searching for specific pattern in the answers. They were further categorized into four both positive and negative impacts. Secondly, all of it was combined to create a single thematic system map. Using the system mapping technique in qualitative interviews helped to comprehend the fundamental structure of a system and build a story about how the role of tourism occurred from a conceptual standpoint. It portrays all of the variables involved in the urban renewal activities and their mutual linkages (how tourism impact the activities in a negative/positive manner) while also interacting among themselves in a single frame.

Large-scale, rapid development, with a particular emphasis on developing infrastructure, is clearly going to have a significant physical, social, economic, and environmental and cultural impact on the Durbar Square and nearby regions unless measures are introduced. To protect the square's assets, the scale and circumstances of tourism development must be managed. Hence, it is crucial to adopt strategies to manage and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism on heritage assets. Finally, once the system mapping was prepared, considering different challenges for urban renewal and tourism, several strategies were proposed

based on the five prominent dimensions of urban renewal mentioned earlier. Therefore, the main tactic behind the strategies was to strike a proper balance between tourism and cultural preservation.

Results and Discussions

Different cities adopt different factors in tourism activities to revitalize cities and improve their image. Some focus on shopping and business investment in tourism, while others focus on sports and cultural activities to generate large investments. Certainly, Kathmandu emphasizes on cultural activities, and it is a reality that urban renewal projects improve the image of urban districts and transform them into attractive areas with pleasant environment. Urban renewal has grown into a strategy centered, less on demolition and more on renovation and investment over time, and it is now an important feature of many municipal government, frequently in collaboration with small and large incentive schemes. It has evolved into a complicated task. While urban renewal in Nepal has traditionally focused on physical improvements, the goals and methods of renewal have evolved through time to become increasingly comprehensive and difficult to manage. They bring together many sectors and players at various levels and in various circumstances. Four impacts of :tourism are summarized from the respective analysis of this research

a) Construction and resource consumption: New routes, walkways, streetlights, and stormwater infrastructure have been built in response to the increase in tourist numbers. However, the new infrastructure does not necessarily match the town's historic identity. In the ancient lanes, for example, new stone walkways were built. Originally, each home featured a tiny brick porch that matched the house's features. The respondent stated that ‘the new walkways are out of character for the area and have degraded the aesthetic of the historic streets.’ With the massive rise in visitors, building of restaurants and hotels has increased significantly, notably along the heritage stretch of Durbar Square. Such construction is often unsupervised, with little regard for the social and environmental consequences of such constructions. Buildings outside of the square are no longer constructed in the traditional manner. Traditional architectural types are becoming outdated as more hotels and restaurants are constructed in a contemporary style. The use of drinking water, energy, and other resources is rapidly growing as visitor numbers rise and residents' lifestyles change. Because this consumption is not monitored, it will not be sustainable in the long run. Wood, for example, is becoming increasingly scarce, making it difficult to restore ancient structures. There is no action plan or supervision of current wood supplies, despite the fact that heritage structures cannot be restored or maintained without wood.

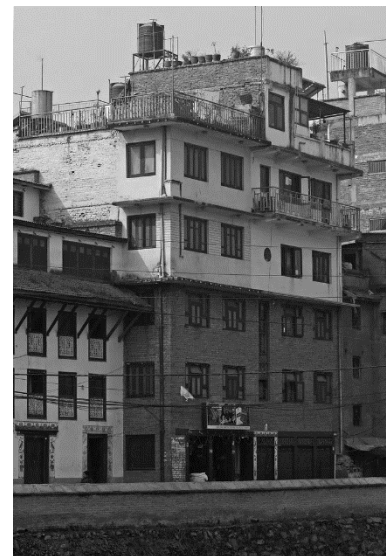


Figure 2: Inappropriate materials, such as iron grill being used in the roof for partial restoration of some old houses

Cost of living (b: While increasing tourism revenues have helped many households boost their income levels and reduce poverty rates, local inhabitants are seeing considerable rises in their cost of living as a result of increased tourism. As the number of tourists has increased, so has demand for almost all goods, driving up the price of numerous things. Prices are driven further higher since tourists are ready to pay more for the same product or service as locals. Tourists consider some costs fair since no comparable product or service exists in their own countries. Others believe they are paying more than locals but are willing to pay more to those who make less money. Eventually, the increased price becomes the standard for everyone, including locals. One example is the cost of riding a rickshaw which is higher in the durbar square than in the outskirts of the valley. Nowadays a driver is not willing to take a local resident at a reduced rate when a tourist is willing to pay more.

c) Traffic, noise, and air pollution: Tourists seeking cultural and psychological connections come to locations rich in heritage resources and beauty. Because these people care about the environment, certain natural places have been preserved, maintained, and protected from further environmental degradation. However, as the number of tourists has increased, so has traffic, noise, and air pollution. The peaceful small-town ambience of Kathmandu Durbar Square is vanishing as huge tour buses and other vehicles congest the tiny alleys, causing noise and pollution.



Figure 3: Vehicle congestion in small alleys

d) Employment and income levels: Tourism has created considerable employment opportunities in Kathmandu Valley. Jobs are multiplied in many occupations, especially in the areas of hotel and restaurant work, handicrafts, souvenir sales, transport services (rickshaw, bicycle renting, motorbikes) etc. Handicraft industry was a good example of how tourism had an impact on the local enterprise. In the past, this industry targeted local residents and the export market but when tourist



Figure 4: Tourists enjoying rickshaw tour in the durbar square

numbers began to increase in the durbar square, some people quickly realized the opportunities. Today, the handicraft industry is well established in the square and extends well beyond the core heritage area. In addition, some handicraft shop seeks to extend their customer base by creating websites to collect orders from overseas. However, the interviews conducted with the community resident committee showed that the attractions of the outside, modern culture are drawing young people away from traditional occupations. The respondent stated that ‘there are increasing number of young people choosing not to

become an artist or run the handicraft business like their older brothers and fathers.’ Despite that, it is evident that the increased revenue from tourism is increasing the average income for local people and therefore contributing to reducing poverty rates. Almost all the stakeholders feel that tourism is significantly adding to economic growth.

On the basis of the participants interviews, a casual loop diagram is created as a synthetic representation that depicts all of the different drivers of urban renewal, impact of tourism on urban renewal activities and the effect due to pandemic. Causal loop diagrams are effective tools for qualitative analysis as they help in the representation of a system's structure. Therefore, causal loop diagrams are a good tool to capture stakeholders' perspectives and ideas within a model framework. The system map shows the interconnections between different prominent drivers, the mutual linkages between different drivers, the interaction between positive/negative impact of tourism upon it. The components of the system are connected by arrows that connect cause and effect variables to construct causal chains in these diagrams. A positive link indicates parallel behavior of variables: in the case of an increase in the causative variable, the effect variable also increases, while a decrease in the causative variable implies a decrease in the affected variable (Azhar Inam, 2015). A negative link, on the other hand, denotes an inverse relationship between the variables.



Figure 5: System map portraying the relationship between urban renewal and tourism in the case of Kathmandu

Kathmandu's most important sector and employer is tourism. The success of the tourism business is dependent on the cultural heritage resources; thus, if these resources are not maintainable sustainably, the

tourism industry will suffer. While tourism has a good economic impact, it may also have an adverse influence, if it is not properly managed. As a result, tourism industry must be managed to ensure that the industry meets people's expectations while still remaining within the built and cultural environment. The system map describes the relationship between urban renewal and tourism through Nepalese perspective. It portrays that the tourism business is closely linked with the rebuilding of tourism infrastructure and cultural/religious attractions of touristic importance that were destroyed by the earthquake. And the development of tourism business is closely tied with the timely restoration of important tourism infrastructure that will drive future tourism businesses of the country. Hence, it is important to highlight tourism as an important aspect in urban renewal efforts of historical settlements. Urban renewal activities, regardless of its various dimensions is undeniably important in the development of tourism. As a result, in the post covid scenario, proper policies and recommendations for tourism in cities are required. The growth of the tourism business is built on the foundation of various dimensions of urban renewal.

The map reveals the analysis of urban renewal efforts in promoting Kathmandu Durbar Square as a worldwide tourism destination and the intimate linkages between tourism and urban renewal. Given the progressive reopening of international travel, it is critical to establish a set of principles and rules that will aid in the growth of the tourism industry in the years ahead. Hence, from the stakeholder's perspective, table 3 depicts the direct drivers, impact of tourism and effect due to the pandemic respectively. In summary, the system map portrays the main goal of urban renewal that is to address the complex dynamics and challenges of urban area and tourism is a critical component of it. Tourism activities, by their nature, have an impact on the environment and they may differ based on the scope of tourism activities as well as the causes influencing their growth or decline. The identification of problems and possibilities for the city to accomplish urban renewal through tourism can provide insight into the nature of policy-making and executive measures.

Table 3: System variables of the impact of tourism on urban renewal activities

System variables		
Direct drivers	Impact of tourism	Effect due to pandemic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Damages heritage - Tangible/ Intangible heritage - Festivities/ Annual feasts - Motivation for reconstruction - Traditional approach for cultural renewal - Uplift economic activities - Economic growth - Urbanization - Improving quality of life - Old houses/ Old commercial buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overcrowding - Commercialization of culture - Marketing of cultural tourism - Ability to produce jobs - Vandalism, physical wear, and tear - Deteriorated built environment - Quality of life - Improvement of urban fabric - Bring back community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human resources - Material supply - Funds for urban renewal activities - Recovery of heritage resources - Delay in completion of projects - Economic attractiveness recovery - Cultural asset reconstruction - Reduction in revenues

Conclusion

The whole idea of urban renewal has gained new insights especially in the aftermath of the great earthquake in Nepal as there are new dimensions added to the renewal of towns, especially those housing cultural heritages and traditional buildings from ancient times. The structures are poorly constructed, and due to lack of maintenance more vulnerable to disasters like earthquake. The main goal of urban renewal is to address the complex dynamics and challenges of urban area and tourism is a critical component of it. Tourism activities, by their nature, have an impact on the environment and they may differ based on the scope of tourism activities as well as the causes influencing their growth or decline. The identification of problems and possibilities for the city to accomplish urban renewal through tourism can provide insight into the nature of policy-making and executive measures. As a result of the fast development of tourism, tourism destinations are experiencing excessive pressure on their natural, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Uncontrolled tourism development degrades the attractive natural and cultural features of a location, and it cannot sustain the basic resources on which it relies, nor can it rely on itself as an industry in the long run, despite the fact that tourism can benefit many countries, regions, and local communities economically. On the other hand, it is crucial to accept that covid-19 might not go away in the near future. This once more highlights why we need to make our cities healthier today. Hence, urban renewal may be a potent tactic in the battle against the pandemic because it is about more than just energy efficiency or the removal of existing structures. It's more about a new way of looking at urban life, one in which social

inclusion, environmental protection, digital innovation, and tourism, all play a role in the same development. As a result, it is crucial to strike a proper balance between tourism and cultural preservation. At the same time, it is important to have a responsible tourism strategy to maximize the positive impact and minimize the negative ones. Therefore, some recommendation for future decision-making processes is proposed to manage and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism on heritage assets of the square.

Physical Impact Mitigation: implementing restrictions to prohibit vehicle circulations in portions of ancient quarter at particular times of day in order to minimize traffic, noise, and air pollution. Encouraging the use of traditional passive cooling methods of shop houses (i.e., keeping doors open to maintain airflow, etc.) as an alternative. Cultural Impact Mitigation: promote the preservation of traditions and rituals as part of everyday life rather than only as tourist attractions. Social Mitigation: integrate cultural heritage education into the curriculum of local schools in order to teach fundamental awareness of historical values, build pride in cultural heritage, and encourage respectful behavior while encountering visitors. Economic impact mitigation: offering training and financing to low-income families in order for them to obtain the essential skills for careers in the tourist industry. Environmental impact mitigation: developing environmental (green) credentials for local hotels and tourist businesses so that guests may choose ecologically conscious decisions. Legal mitigation measures: creating suitable and acceptable property rights rules, as well as commencing land-use planning by local governments, to guarantee that the needs of the most disadvantaged communities are not neglected.

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