

LOCAL TOURIST SYSTEM (LTS), A MODEL FOR ORGANIZING AND DEVELOPING TOURIST OFFER IN ARIEȘUL MARE VALLEY FROM APUSENI NATURE PARK (PNA)

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Abstract: Local Tourist Systems (LTS), introduced in the Italian legislation by Article 5 of Law 135/2001, represent a network of public and private operators that is meant to promote and organize a territory into a territorial system consisting of elements and relationships aimed at achieving common goals (Ianoș, 2000; Landi, 2003). With this legislative regulation, legislators intended to give legal significance to the idea that the relevance of a tourist destination comes from the interaction of natural and cultural resources, infrastructures and offered services. In our opinion, the LTS model could be positively implemented in the upper Arieșul Mare Valley, which is the most developed area in Apuseni Nature Park (PNA) in terms of tourism. Upper Arieșul Mare Valley has a lot of resources ready to be fully exploited, but the quite small villages do not have the capacity to create their own tourism product. Thus, getting united through the LTS model, these villages would be able to organize a joint plan for tourism development, proposing a „*new territory*” on the tourism market. In this respect, PNA administration should act as the promoter of the plan that may constitute the basis for creating an „*Upper Arieșul Mare Local Tourist System*”.

Key words: local tourist system, Arieșul Mare Valley, territorial development

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LOCAL TOURIST SYSTEMS (LTS): INTRODUCTORY OUTLINE

Local Tourist Systems represent a network of public and private operators that is meant to promote and organize a territory into a territorial system consisting of elements and relationships aimed at achieving common goals (Ianoș, 2000; Landi, 2003; Costa, 2003).

The Local Tourist Systems (Sistemi Turistici Locali), resembling the Destination Management Organizations (DMO), were introduced in the Italian legislation by Article 5 of Law 135/2001 (Costa, 2005; Minguzzi, 2006;). These local tourist systems, only recently added in the Italian legislation, are present in territories defined as “*homogenous or integrated context of tourism, comprising territorial areas that can belong to different regions, characterized by an integrated offering of cultural and environmental assets as well as tourist attractions, including*

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typical agricultural products and local handicrafts, or by the widespread presence of individual or associated tourist enterprises” (Legge n. 135/2001; Leoni, 2001; Becheri, 2003).

Article 5 of Law 135/2001 reformed the Italian national legislation in what concerns tourism, legislation that was only expressing the arrangement philosophy at a national level until this article was introduced. With this legislative regulation, legislators intended to give legal significance to the strongly grounded idea that the relevance of a tourist destination comes from the interaction of natural and cultural resources, infrastructures and offered services. A tourist destination represents the sum of every product, service and experience present in the area and it becomes a system only when there is a collaboration and exchange relationship between the involved public and private sectors. The model needs to be flexible and open to any product or tourist service organization (Franceschini, 1998; Della Corte, 2000;).

LTS represents a new way of structuring the territory by using the idea of networks that integrate tourism, environment, culture and other additional economic activities, surpassing all the discrepancies existing at local level. LTS is a model that requires the involvement of every subject: local public administrations (Municipalities, Local Councils), private sector (enterprises specialized in offering tourist services, tourist agencies, etc.), other administrations (universities, schools, administrations of protected areas), associations (associations of employers, farmers and craftsmen) and other public or private stakeholders. This perspective is necessary not only to fully explore the territory but also to encourage social cohesion.

LTS: features and aims

LTS is created through the bottom-up procedure, involving all the local operators and actors in order to make the best out of the local identity and particularity. A specific relationship needs to exist between the public and private actors in order to create an institution that:

- organizes the territory;
- creates proper infrastructure and services;
- emphasizes the idea of protecting and developing the cultural and the natural frames because they represent the main resources;
- supervises the safety of citizens and tourists;
- simplifies the administrative procedures;
- creates an administrative office;
- creates a system of tourism promotion that engages the involved subjects;
- establishes quality standards for tourist services and offers.

LTS's objectives are to:

- strengthen the territorial system by uniting the involved institutions;
- help the local economy by creating new jobs in the tourism field;
- organize, develop and make every cultural and natural resource available for visitors;
- promote a single advertising strategy;
- create new places for accommodation, if necessary; the rehabilitation of the abandoned heritage could come as a good idea.

In order to highlight the presence of LTS in the territory, a logo, a website and a series of brochures are created (Manente, 2001; Quaderno, Formez, 2004; Landini, 2007).

An example of this kind of model that is worth mentioning is the *“Incoming Abruzzo”*. In 2003, due to a private initiative, the idea was launched of creating an LTS that comprise National Park of Abruzzo, Lazio and Molise (PNALM) and Cinque Miglia plateau (where the largest skiing complex in Appennini Mountains is situated) under the name *“Incoming Abruzzo”*, a LTS that should promote the area both nationally and internationally. It includes a large group of tour operators from the PNALM territory and private companies from Cinque Miglia plateau that deal with winter sports. The creation of this system comes from the need to increase the image and the tourist flow through the tourist development and exploitation of local identity elements, natural

and landscape resources, history of local communities, cultural and artistic specificities, gastronomy and various traditions.¹

A possible implementation of LTS model in Apuseni Nature Park (PNA)

The upper Arieșul Mare Valley (figure 1 and 2) is the most developed area in PNA in terms of tourism.

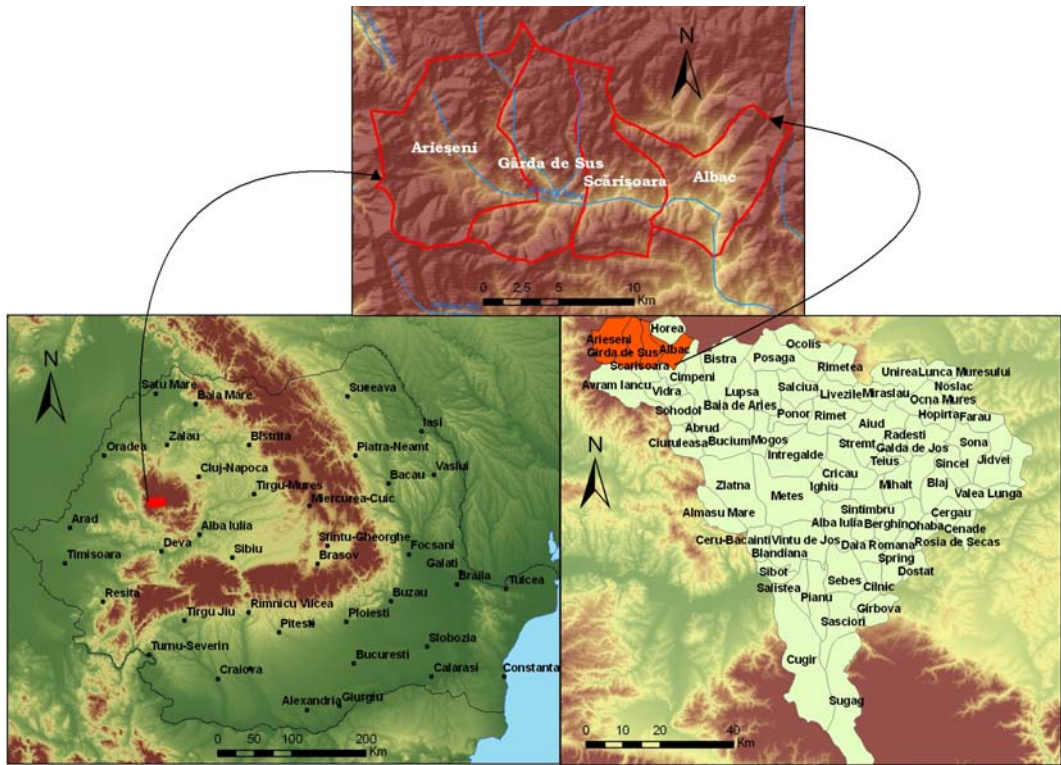


Figure 1. Geographical position of the upper Arieșul Mare Valley



Figure 2. Apuseni Natural Park and the limits of the upper Arieșul Mare Valley

¹ <http://www.upinet.it>

It is a part of the most important karst region of Romania. Arieșeni, Gârda, Scărișoara and Albac are tourist destinations where you can visit wooden churches (figure 3), woodworking workshops (figure 4) and traditional dwellings (Popescu, 1984; Anghel et al., 1982).



Figure 3. Wooden church from the hamlet Casa de Piatră
(Source: Photo 1992 Archive, Prof. Marta Maghiar)



Figure 4. Craftsmen
(Source: Marta Maghiar and Marcaș Zsolt Istvan)

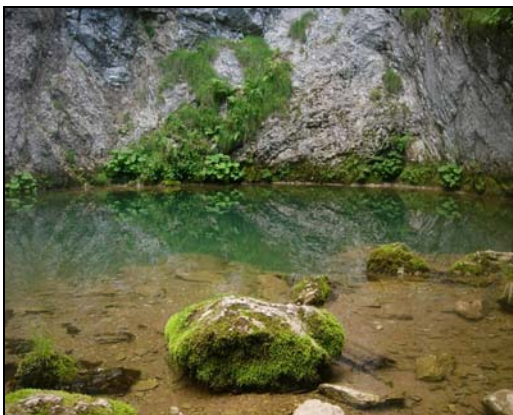


Figure 5. Tăuz Spring (Gârda Seacă Valley)

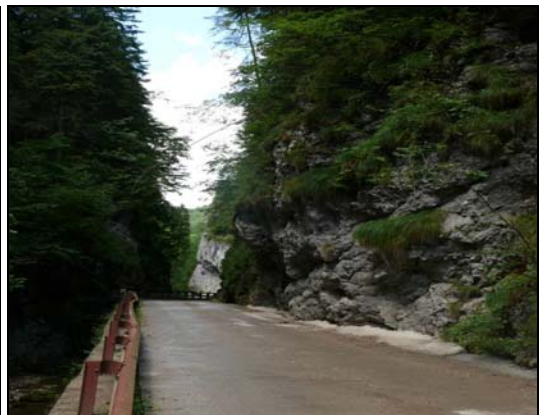


Figure 6. Ordâncușei Gorges

The attractiveness of the relief composed of caves, springs (figure 5) karst valleys, gorges (figure 6), constitutes a true natural heritage for this part of the Apuseni Mountains (Coccean, 2000) These mountains are inhabited even at altitudes of over 1400 m and they represent an ethnographic area (figures 7 and 8) which arouses attention through its uniqueness, an area where nature offers various possibilities for leisure and recreation (Petrea, 2004; Vedinaş, 1999).

Because of the value of these natural resources found here, in 2003, when PNA was founded, a large part of this area became part of the PNA protected area (HG 230 /2003; ANP. Adm. 2007; Appleton, 2003;).

The elements that define the Apuseni Mountains region in the collective imaginary – „*the most important mountain area for tourism from western Romania*”, where we can find one of the most important and known karst phenomena from Romania: „*the cave Gheţarul from Scărişoara*” (figures 9 and 10).



Figure 7. The hamlet Gheţar (Gârda de Sus)



Figure 8. Traditional house from the upper Arieşul Mare Valley



Figure 9. The cave Gheţarul from Scărişoara



Figure 10. The cave Gheţarul from Scărişoara

And the association of this region with the „*Apuseni Nature Park*” (a park for nature and people) in the foreigners’ collective imaginary (figure 11) - constitute a series of elements that represent a foundation for the sustainable development of the local communities and more (Moş, 2008; Abrudan and Turnock, 1998; Surd and Turnock, 2000).



Figure 11. Panel at the entry in PNA

Therefore, it's clear enough that the upper Arieșul Mare Valley has a lot of resources ready to be fully exploited, but the quite small villages do not have the capacity to create their own tourism product. Thus, getting united through the LTS model, these villages would be able to organize a joint plan for tourism development, proposing a „*new territory*” on the tourism market, and when we say „*new territory*”, we refer to the new image transmitted through a network of tourism promotion that is meant to advertise the entire territory. The creation of this kind of institution - the LTS - that combines public and private operators and deals with the territory's tourist development, would involve both private and public actors in a new form of systemic development that follows the bottom-up principle by also taking into account the criteria for the sustainable development. Of course, common quality parameters should be reached in order to promote upper Arieșul Mare Valley properly, because a tourism product of quality can only be achieved through an agreement that conditions the application of a single method when it comes to qualifying the tourism product in the territory.

A LOCAL TOURIST SYSTEM IN THE UPPER ARIEȘUL MARE VALLEY: AN HYPOTHESIS OF TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

It's quite clear that a general agreement needs to be reached among all the local stakeholders in order to promote the entire territory through a local network or system. In this respect, PNA administration should act as the promoter of a plan that may constitute the basis for creating an „*Upper Arieșul Mare Local Tourist System*”, and may have an essential role in initiating and facilitating a dialogue among the four communes (Arieșeni, Gârda de Sus, Scărișoara and Albac) and in convincing them to jointly develop and promote holiday offers without which, inevitably, the tourists direct themselves towards other destinations. In this way, PNA could gain trust and confidence by offering concrete solutions for helping the local community and revitalizing local economy, therefore providing its support and interest towards the adjacent territory. European funds allocated for Rural Development and Rural Tourism could be accessed for the creation of this LTS.

„*Upper Arieșul Mare Local Tourist System*” would take into consideration every asset existing in the territory - natural resources, human resources, culture and tradition – and would aim at creating a network of local actors, not only to promote the territory but also to give birth to an unitary project able to trigger the integrated development processes (figure 12).

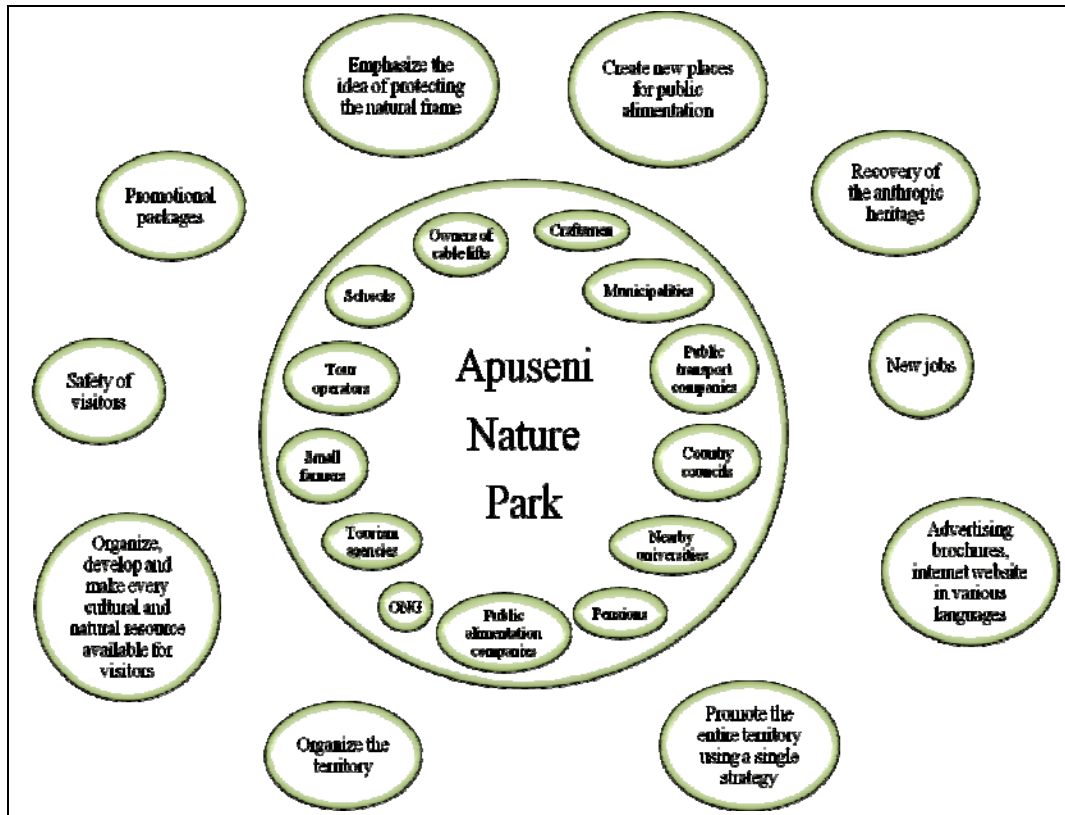


Figure 12. Local Tourist Sistem “Upper Arieșul Mare Local Tourist System”

Therefore, it should involve local and regional administrations, pensions owners, operators working in the area (Transilvania Tour, Green Mountains Holidays, Apuseni Adventure, Horizon Tours, Daksa, Bihor Mountain Rescue Association, Apuseni Experience, „Izvoarele Arieșului” Association, Local Committee OVR - Operation Villages from Romania, Association of Ecotourism in Romania), local transport companies, owners of cable lifts and ski slopes, small farmers and craftsmen, tourist agencies promoting the Apuseni Mountains, schools, nearby universities (University of Oradea, „Babeș-Bolyai” University from Cluj-Napoca, the West University from Timișoara, etc.). All these actors would be put in a collaboration relationship and would work together as a team in order to promote the territory.

The objective of this LTS should be that of creating a new image that imposes itself as a brand, a new tourist product that would promote the entire territory and help the entire area to develop from a tourist point of view by suggesting concrete programs that support the presence of this destination in the respective market segments. In this way tourism may become the main source of sustenance for a significant part of Arieș Valley residents.

CONCLUSIONS

There’s a general agreement among scholars (Miani, 2008) and operators about the advisability of a bottom-up approach to territorial development of rural and mountain areas, with particular regard to the tourist sector. This kind of approach, compared with the top-down one – this latter having too often been experienced, even in the recent past, in ineffective interventions of territorial planning - can better guarantee the respect of environment and landscape, the valorization of local specificities and resources, the consensus of local communities.

In this theoretical and operational framework fits the Local Tourist System (LTS) model, introduced in Italian legislation in 2001: in the intention of the legislator, the LTS should be the formal instrument to pursue and boost bottom-up and systemic forms of tourist development, in a network aimed at promoting the regional tourist destination in a more effective way in comparison with the mere sum of the results that very single operator could achieve acting individually.

Starting from these premises, we think that the LTS model could be successfully implemented also in Romanian rural and mountain areas. Our study case, the upper Arieșul Mare Valley, has a great tourist potential, but its full exploitation is still hindered by the lack of coordination among the operators. In our opinion, Apuseni Natural Park administration would be the right subject to take the initiative of creating a network inspired by the Italian LTS model (that could be named „Upper Arieșul Mare Local Tourist System”), involving all the public and private stakeholders acting in the territory and pushing them into a cooperative relationship. Furthermore, a very crucial aspect of every form of modern tourist promotion is the branding, that is the creation of a strong image based on the most relevant tourist features and resources: only a systemic approach – that would be made possible by the implementation of the LTS model – would enable a marginal and peripheral region as the upper Arieșul Mare Valley to effectively enter and occupy a space in the tourist market, at the national and international levels.

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Submitted:
April 20, 2012

Revised:
May 09, 2012

Accepted and published online
June 15, 2012