

## ASPECTS REGARDING THE CAPITALISATION OF THE TOURIST POTENTIAL OF APUSENI NATURAL PARK

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**Abstract:** Located in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains, Apuseni Natural Park provides a fabulous natural and cultural potential and a favourable position that allows national and international tourist flows. The tourist potential represents an important component for the environment and for the capitalization of its resources. The Apuseni Natural Park Administration was founded in 2004 and its surface is divided into two types of areas: the core area and the buffer zone. This paper focuses on the presentation of some aspects concerning a diagnosis analysis meant to determine the different types of tourism in the area and a prognosis analysis in tourism planning.

**Keywords:** *Apuseni Natural Park, tourist potential, buffer zone, tourism planning.*

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Touristic potential

Tourism has become, nowadays, an activity of equal importance to those taking place in other economic fields. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism is "*a form of cultural-educational and recreational manifestation of the human society*" (Bojan D., 2009).

In the vision of the same institution and of other organizations in the framework of the European Community, the tourism potential of an area or country is given by all the elements of the natural, cultural and socioeconomic components that offer possibilities of exploitation in the tourism field. The touristic potential offers or gives a certain functionality to a territory and provides the premises for the development of tourism activities. Thus, a certain geographic area may be found interesting from a touristic perspective to the extent to which it provides natural or man-made resources that can be put into use after being properly equipped and introduced in the internal and international tourist circuit (Cândea et al, 2000).

The touristic potential is an indicator of the utmost importance, being synonymous with the touristic offer. This, in the opinion of the author Cocean P. (2007), results from the spatial association of the tourism fund with the corresponding material and technical base. The term "touristic potential" or "touristic resource" is synonymous with the term "touristic fund". It represents all the natural resources, social, cultural and historical tourism exploitation, which form the basis of the tourism offer of a territory, being closely connected to the presence or absence of the tourist activity (Swizewski C. and all, 1978). Snack O. (1976) quoted by Cândea et al (2000), appoints the "primary touristic offer" as being the essential premises of tourism planning of an area and for the development of certain touristic areas. Muntele & Iatu (2006) complete the definition above, arguing that irrespective of the richness

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of the touristic potential, "touristic vocation" is also needed. Thus, the entire area can become the subject of tourist attraction due to its components of natural or human touristic potential, which nonetheless takes into account the motivations of tourists.

The touristic potential, as an essential premise for the touristic organisation of a geographic space and for the development of certain forms of tourism, includes all the forms of natural and cultural landscape of a territory, which by some qualitative or quantitative characteristics can become elements of polarization of the tourism flows (Cândea and all, 2000). This is the basic component of tourism, made up of the natural elements of the environment (attractions related to relief, climate, hydrography, vegetation and fauna). According to Ilieş M. (2007), "*the touristic potential represents only a component with capitalisation possibilities within the phases of exploration, when tourism planning takes place*"<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.2. Tourism planning

Tourism planning is the expression of the adaptation of the spatial resources, a foundation that emphasizes the full meaning of the touristic potential. Tourism planning is considered as an increasingly important component of the human organization of the geographic area (Ciangă & Deszi, 2007). Touristic activities are an integrated system alongside the following elements: tourism background, infrastructure, tourism product, tourism demand and tourism management (Figure 1). Tourism planning is the action of emphasising the aesthetic and economic point of view of a tourist attraction, an attractive resort or a touristic area (Cocean, 2007).

It also ensures, through its complexity, the attractive resource exploitation of a territory (natural or man-made), by creating a touristic offer and the formation of the touristic product itself. Thus, it is intended to integrate the touristic fund into an existing circuit. This fact "*should be seen as an action of systematic touristic planning*"<sup>3</sup> having as main motivation the efficient capitalisation of its attractive resources.

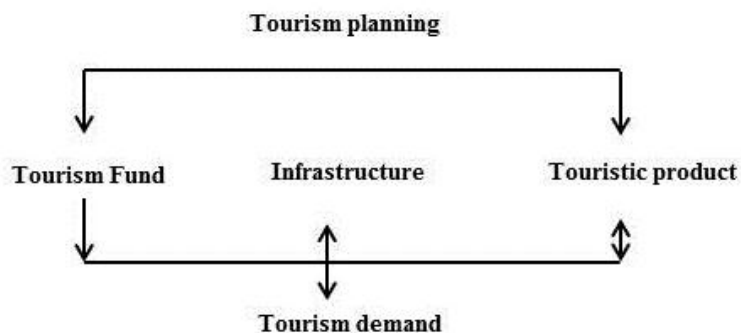


Figure 1. Components of tourism planning (after Cocean, 2007)

<sup>2</sup> Marin Ilieş, 2007. *Amenajare turistică*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca

<sup>3</sup> Pompei Cocean, 2007. *Geografia turismului*, Ediția a II-a, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca

### 1.3. The study area

Apuseni Natural Park (ANP) is an area protected by law with the aim of preserving the landscape, the environmental and cultural diversity, on a representative range of the national territory of Romania and the Apuseni Mountains.

Apuseni Natural Park lies in the Central - Eastern part of the Apuseni Mountains (Figure 2). This park covers the southern part of Bihor Mountain and the northern part of Vladeasa Mountain, spreading on the administrative territory of three counties (Cluj – 40.15%, Bihor – 31.92% and Alba – 27.92%) and covering a total surface of 75.784 hectares. The Park can be reached by means of one of the driveways that pass by its periphery from Oradea, Cluj-Napoca, Turda or Deva (ANP Adm., 2007).

ANP includes areas lying in the administrative territory of 16 communes and properties which belong to other 25 communes. Regarding the number of communities, ANP fully comprises 53 settlements and 3 holiday villages (Boga, Fântânele and Vârtop), while other 8 settlements are partly situated within the park's limits (ANP Adm., 2007).

The first initiatives to establish a Park in this area (belonging to the researchers Emil Racoviță and René Jeannel) date back to the 1930's. In the 1950, new efforts were attempted by Marcian Bleahu, one of the most important researchers of the karst in Bihor Mountains. However, the first scientific documentation on the park (including a first map) was only established in the 1970s. During this period, they also noted the importance of one other element of the area, namely one of the last natural forested karst areas of its size in Europe (Neacsu E., 2010).

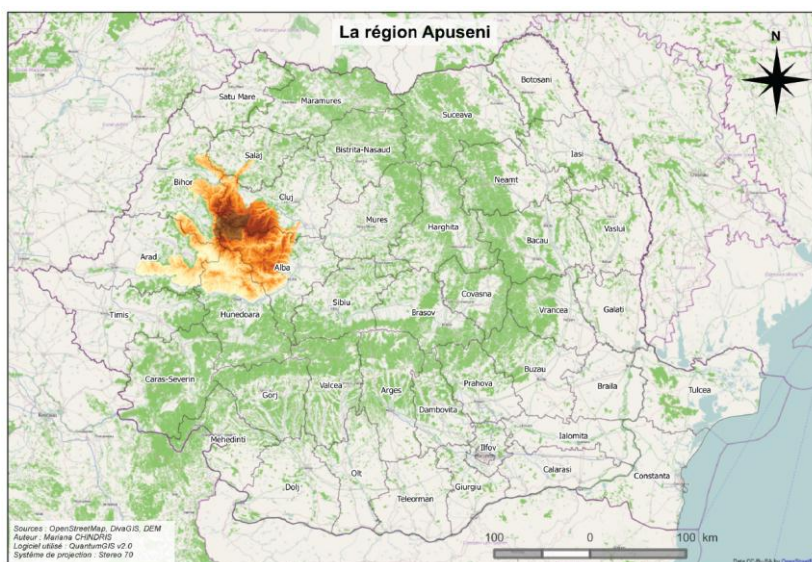


Figure 2 Position of Apuseni Natural Park within the Apuseni Mountains

The first legislative act setting up Apuseni Natural Park was the Ministry Order 7/1990, followed, ten years later, by Law 5/2000 on the territorial planning, where the Park is listed in the third Section regarding the management of protected areas.

The limits of Apuseni Natural Park are established by Law no. 41/2000, which stipulates its total surface and the title of "natural park"; based on the Ministry Order no. 230/2003, starting with 2004, the Park has its own Administration, established as a subunit of the National Forest Administration Romsilva-Forestry Directorate Oradea in the base of the administration contract signed by the National Forest Administration-Romsilva and the Ministry of Environment and Water Management. The Ministry Order 552/2003 settled the

temporary internal zoning of Apuseni Natural Park, listing the special conservation areas, which are to be subject to rigorous protection rules, while the rest of the Park represents the buffer area, where the administration of the natural patrimony also takes into account the needs of the local population.

The internal zoning of ANP comprises management categories which begin with the most restrictive (scientific reservations, 1<sup>st</sup> category IUCN), where human activities are completely excluded and continues to the most permissive category of management of protected areas in Romania (natural park, 5<sup>th</sup> category IUCN) as areas in which promoting the development of the traditional communities is allowed as long as it is in harmony with nature (Popa V., 2009). According to the IUCN, ANP is included in the 5<sup>th</sup> category of protected area management. The internal zoning of ANP comprises four categories of management areas. The majority of the speleological landmarks serve the goals of protection, research and sightseeing.

Since its foundation, one of the concerns of ANP Administration has been the assessment of the network of hiking trails that cross the park, some of them dating back to 1903. These tourist trails are located especially in the buffer area of the park.

In order to solve out the various problems on planning, management, exploitation and present resources preservation in these national parks / protected areas, the setting up of a management team with a maximum functionality and economic efficiency was decided by MAB Man and Biosphere program of UNESCO-United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations. According to the authors (Minciu R., 1995; Ciangă & Deszi, 2007) in most countries, the structure of the systematic tourist park classifies territories into three types of areas:

- a first area, called wild nature inside a park, where it is necessary to protect the flora, fauna and landscapes and to control tourism. This area is dedicated mainly to scientific research and it is subject to certain restrictions on the development of the human activity;
- a second area, called the "buffer" zone or scientific area, which ensures the environmental protection of the park. In this area it is allowed to perform agricultural, pastoral, forestry and tourism activities or to have accommodation infrastructure (access roads, visitors' facilities etc.), but it is subject to strict regulations, human economic activities being limited;
- a third area, called the "peripheral" or "prepark" area, which consists of a large area around the park, providing a protected natural environment. The area allows the organisation of various human activities and touristic facilities can be found here, providing tourist reception inside the park. The "prepark" area is to reanimate and to develop the rural economy in decline, in association with the economic benefits resulting from receiving tourists.

The location or tourism planning in protected areas integrates the majority of the elements which represent the activity of this industry defined especially by the natural, historical and cultural components of an area. Basically, these represent the main attractions that motivate visitors to perform a journey (Berbecaru, Botez, 1977).

This paper focuses on the presentation of several aspects concerning a diagnosis analysis to determine the different types of tourism in the area and a prognosis analyze in tourism planning. The paper's originality resides in the interdisciplinary approach of the land in connection to its complex structure and the field research.

## **2. Methodology**

The main methods and tools that were used in this research are the ones described and tested by the scientific literature in order to promote natural resources and to develop new types of tourism. The first step was to consult the specialized literature as part of the documentation stage. The second step was to identify the current state of the touristic potential of the area under study. Thus, the diagnosis analysis is meant to determine the types of tourism development and other forms of tourism which can be developed. The prognosis analysis was achieved by tourism planning. Being a research work, the paper conforms to office and field work requirements in perfect harmony.

## **3. Fabulous touristic potential**

The Apuseni Mountains are one of the most important touristic regions in Romania, the natural attractions being complemented by the richness of the human elements. The touristic vocation of this territory is given particularly by the caves, gorges and beautiful landscapes.

The complexity and diversity of the karst phenomena (endo and exo karst forms) give specificity to the Apuseni Natural Park relief. Caves, pot holes, dolines, swallow holes continued by underground water courses are other particular features of the regional landscape. Some caves shelter large ice deposits, the most famous of them being the Glacier Cave of Scărisoara. Another impressive geomorphologic structure which attracts tourist flows is Rusty Hole (the largest natural erosion site in Romania). The hydrographic network of the park is represented by Fântânele Lake, bogs, the drainage basins of Crisul Pietros, Somesul Cald and Aries, surface water courses and underground sectors.

Due to the specific conditions of the various ecosystems in Apuseni National Park, a high number of endemic plant species (over 1,000 species of plants) were identified, such as: Transylvanian lilac (*Syringa josikaea*), dianthus *Julii wolfii*, *Thymus comosus* (endemic species) etc. The most interesting fauna group in the Park is that of the cave-living animals, with numerous protected invertebrates, strictly localized in this area.

Some caves shelter large bat populations, species strictly protected by law: *rhinolophis ferrumequinum*, *Rh. Euryale* etc. Many animals fossils from the glacier period have been found in caves (cave bear, hyena etc.), just like remains of prehistoric humans. The most important habitats in the Park are forests and mountainous pastures entwined with the complex karst phenomena of the ground surface. Thus a lot of typical microhabitats were created, being favourable to a number of species of plants and animals, beautiful landscapes (Neacșu E., 2010).

The touristic potential of Apuseni Natural Park is mainly characterized by the caves situated in the karst forested relief. They give a special beauty to the area and they are visited by a large number of tourists. The main tourist attractions in Apuseni Natural Park are: the Bear's Cave (the only Romanian paleontological site containing the first fossils belonging to *Ursus spelaeus*), Galbena rocks, Boga rocks, the "Fortress of Rădeasa", the gorges of Somesul Cald, the Padis karst plateau, the Ponor glade, Bârsa Pit, the "Lost World" karst plateau, the Glacier Cave of Scărisoara, the Glacier Cave of Vârtop, the gorges of Ordâncuta, "Ioneles's Gate" cave, the "Rusty Hole", the gorges of Albac, Răchitele Waterfall, V5 Pit Cave etc. ([www.parcapuseni.ro](http://www.parcapuseni.ro)).

Only a few caves are of great scientific importance. Tourism planning was conducted in several caves along time, as it is the case of the Glacier Cave of Scărisoara and the Bear's Cave (possessing the most modern tourism planning of caves in Romania), which at the moment are electrified and benefit from modern infrastructure. "Ioneles's Gate" cave also has

tourism arrangements.

The uniqueness of the landscape of the Apuseni Mountains, which combines ecosystems of great value in terms of biodiversity conservation with a variety of karst phenomena and traditional activities, required the creation of a natural park meant to protect and preserve them. Taking into account the natural and cultural specificity of the Apuseni Mountains and ANP territory, we consider that the major issues of interest when visiting these protected areas are:

- primarily, the forested karst, endo and exo karst forms;
- culture and lifestyle of the traditional villages;
- flora and fauna;
- history (Moti Land, Horea, Closca, Crisan, Avram Iancu etc.).

#### **4. Conclusions**

ANP has a picturesque landscape with an attractive potential. It has a favourable position to generate national and international tourist flows (Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Germany etc.). The tourism and recreation forms practiced in Apuseni Natural Park can be summarized as follows:

- weekend tourism comprises in its sphere of reference short trips made for recreational purposes, leisure time spent in areas of natural beauty during the weekend. By its content, weekend tourism is focused especially on the population of the big cities, responding to people's need to escape in nature. The duration of a tourist's stayover is of two or three days in a tourist destination like Fântânele resort, Belis, Boga, Băita, Nucet, Gârda de Sus, Scărișoara, Albac etc.;
- ecotourism is a form of tourism which aims at the preservation, protection and sustainable development of protected areas. This form of tourism is found in the rural areas of ANP through: visiting caves and other karst areas designed for this purpose, thematic hikings etc.
- adventure tourism is a form of tourism which has recently appeared, being characterized by extreme sports (climbing and mountaineering in Galbenei Gorges etc.), camping, sports and exploring caving karst etc.;
- tourism volunteer;
- cultural and heritage tourism by visiting monuments, buildings, memorial houses of historical importance: ex. Horea, Albac, Chiscău etc.;
- scientific tourism is a form of tourism that occasionally occurs when taking part in scientific conferences. Important interest is given to visiting caves, nature reserves and natural monuments, guided tours (the Bear's Cave, "Ioneles's Gate" cave, the Glacier Cave of Scărișoara, the Glacier Cave of Vârtope etc.);
- Youth tourism is a form of tourism that aims to improve young people's knowledge through visits made in protected areas (flora and fauna), to make them understand the importance of the preservation and protection of such areas. Various tourism organizations (Apuseni Adventure, Apuseni Experience, Green Mountains Holidays etc.) organize activities within the territory of ANP, such as children and youth camps etc.

On the territory of ANP a new series of tourism forms (proposals) can be practiced and promoted in consistency with the interests of the local communities and the protection of areas (flora and fauna reserves) concerning their territory:

- rural tourism can be defined as a particular form of tourism, based on the art of receiving tourists, on the hospitality of the rural community. This form of tourism is a product of the rural society (Petrea R., 2004). A number of localities can develop this type of tourism. They are Albac, Arieseni, Gârda de Sus, Scărișoara etc.;

- ecotourism in protected areas (it was identified as a priority in the tourism strategy of the Association of Ecotourism in Romania in 2005) and the development strategy of Bihor County;
- agrotourism involves accommodation in traditional houses, consumption of typical local products and participation in tourism activities in agriculture. This form of tourism can be developed in the following locations: Arieseni, Gârda de Sus, Scărișoara, Horea, Băita, Budureasa, Belis etc.
- bird-watching facilitates the study of the fauna and sightseeing (for example. the "Lost World" karst plateau etc)
- canoeing in small groups: valleys of Somesul Cald, Aries etc.
- paragliding (Padis Plateau)
- cycling tourism on marked trails (Padis-Fortress of Ponor, Poiana Ponor, 10 Hotare Plateau etc.).

In order to fulfil the preservation purpose of Apuseni Natural Park the development of certain forms of tourism should be avoided:

- hunting tourism;
- rough terrain tourism (off-road);
- ski slopes should be restricted to the limits of the Park
- mass tourism;
- camping in undeveloped areas.

Also in terms of tourism planning the following activities should be avoided within the limits of the ANP:

- constructing new access roads, if they pass through the protected areas or nearby;
- making buildings that are not integrated in the landscape (from the point of view of their architecture or materials used);
- developing holiday villages/resorts and camping areas without having a minimal infrastructure.

From the tourism planning point of view, only the Bear's Cave (Figure 3 and 4) and the Glacier Cave of Scărișoara (Figures 5 and 6) are designed for visitors, but the transport to these tourist attractions, as well as interest areas from the centre of Apuseni Natural Park (Padis) is not made in an organized way. Among the caves in tourism exploitation, only Bear's Cave enjoys a corresponding standard, the Glacier Cave of Scărișoara requiring the improvement of the existing works. The tourism planning of caves can influence the development of localities, through their integration in tourist packages with local value (Popa V., 2009).

Within the ANP there are currently five camping areas: three in Bihor county (Glăvoii Glade – an area called "La Grajduri", in the chalet Padis and Valea Sighetelului) and two in Cluj County (the Ponor area and the Ponor-Runcu Ars area). Other camping areas are provided by private entrepreneurs, especially in Alba County or local pension owners, on private property, on land, in built-up areas (Gârda de Sus and Boga). In Poiana Glăvoii camping, located in the central area of Apuseni National Park, it crosses several major hiking trails. In the park there is also a Salvamont refuge ministered by the Public Service of Bihor County Mountain and Salvaspeo Bihor.

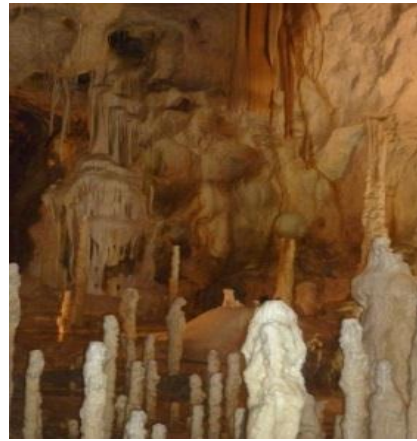


Figure 3 and Figure 4. Bear's Cave (Source : Mariana-Andreea Chindriș)

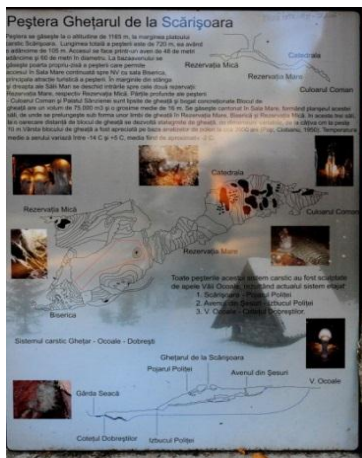


Figure 5 and 6. The Glacier Cave of Scărișoara (Source : Mariana-Andreea Chindriș)

Apuseni Natural Park possesses an attractive natural and cultural potential but an underdeveloped infrastructure to meet the needs of tourists. Although the tourism potential of ANP is one of the most important in Romania, its natural capital is still underestimated. This is largely due to the lack of interest of the local communities in the quality and ecological value of the area, to the lack of an adequate infrastructure and of a diverse range of services, a lack of collaboration and communication between the institutions and organizations involved etc.

The analysis of the number of tourist arrivals in the localities within ANP in Alba, Bihor and Cluj Counties enables the shaping of the profile of the tourists who choose this area as a tourism destination. The analysis reveals that only Arieseni has recorded a continuous increase of tourists because it has the highest number of tourist accommodation facilities and gathers the most important tourist attractions, the best known being the Glacier Cave of Scărișoara, Politei Cave, Zgurăști Cave etc. However, these localities have a high flux of tourists from the nearby cities such as Cluj-Napoca, Turda, Oradea, Alba Iulia (Table 1).



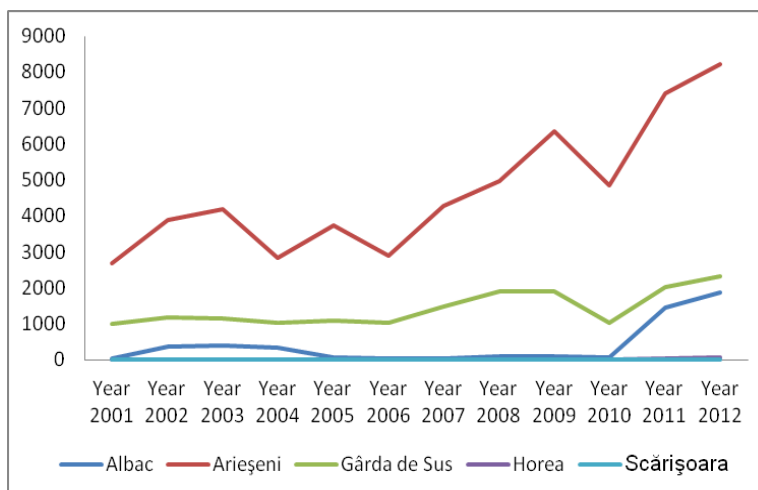


Figure 7. The number of tourist arrivals in the localities within ANP - Alba County (Source: INS, 2012)

Budureasa locality is the "gate" of Bihor County towards its tourist attractions, such as Padis karst Plateau with the "Fortress of Rădeasa", the gorges of Somesul Cald, V5 Pit Cave, Ponor glade, Bârsa Pit, Focul Viu Cave etc. This part of ANP is the first tourist area of the Apuseni Mountains, but it has a slow evolution of the tourist flows because of the restricted activities in the buffer area. After a slow decline, Nucet locality has also experienced increasing tourist arrivals during 2010-2012, due to a constant number of tourists (Table 2).

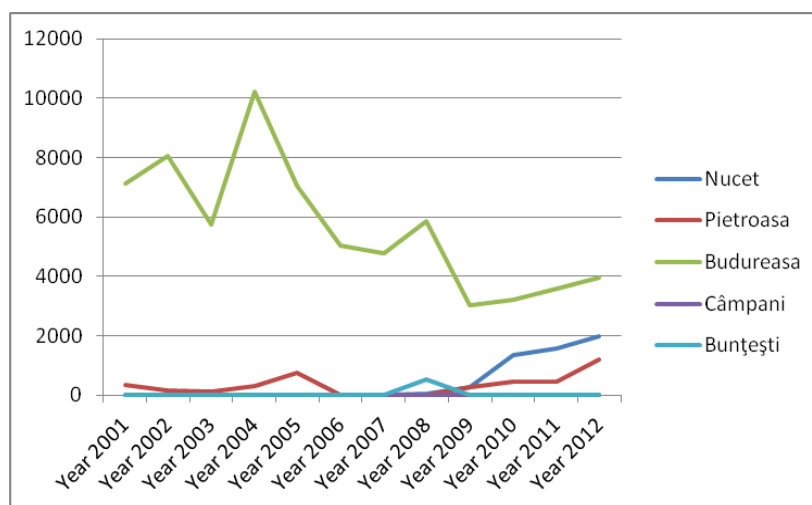


Figure 8. The number of tourist arrivals in the localities within ANP - Bihor County (Source: INS, 2012)

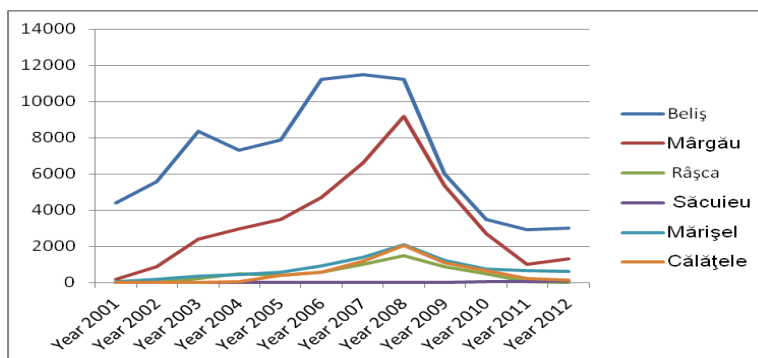


Figure 10. The number of tourist arrivals in the localities within ANP - Cluj County (Source: INS, 2012)

Table 3 reveals that all the localities within the ANP in Cluj County have a decreased number of tourist arrivals due to the global crisis after 2009. The tourist destination Beliș registered more than 11,000 arrivals in 2007-2008 due to Fântânele Lake/Resort, the tourism recreation potential of the area and the gorges of Somesul Cald. The second tourist destination of this locality within ANP in Cluj County is Mărgău, with tourist attractions such as Răchitele Waterfall (a protected area), Ponor Cave, Vârfurasu Cave (speological natural monuments) etc.

Arieseni has the highest rates of tourist arrivals. The transport infrastructure has an important role in the area, especially from Bihor to Cluj County (the ANP can be accessed through one of the main roads passing by its periphery: Oradea-Huedin-Cluj-Napoca; Oradea-Beius-Deva and Stei-Câmpeni-Turda). The most part of the localities accumulate a relatively low number of arrivals in Apuseni Natural Park. The southern and western part of the park could transform the natural area into an attractive foreign destination in accordance with the legislation for the protected areas and the management plan of the ANP.

National Parks were set up in order to preserve nature for the benefit and recreation of the public. Although satisfying the human needs has been one of the arguments for the establishment of national parks, they have become significant tourist destinations only relatively recently (Minciu R., 1995).

Tourism development in this area requires a competitive development strategy to ensure an evolution of this protected area. As a result, it requires an approach to tourism activities from the perspective of the sustainable development in accordance with the requirements of environmental protection and balanced development of the natural and socio-human society. Considering that protected areas represent surfaces with rare species, the organization, administration, management and tourist equipment on scientific principles is a viable solution for the protection of nature.

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