

ASPECTS OF THE SOCIAL ROLE OF FOREST IN THE TOURISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF CHIOAR - LĂPUŞ TERRITORIAL SYSTEM. ACTIVE TOURISM: OFF ROAD AND CYNEGETIC

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Abstract: Through the functions performed, from social point of view, forests, as a functional system, offer a variety of recreational activities, in accordance with sustainable development. Thus, the tourist is able to conduct recreational activities and leisure activities, in a particular landscape. Among the forms in which active tourism manifests, off road has a favorable natural environment, of development in the area of Chioar - Lăpuş territorial system. Furthermore, organizing events in the region for this purpose facilitates the access to this type of tourism. This region still has significant forest resources, housing a diverse cynegetic fauna, favoring hunting tourism activity in a legally organized form.

Key words: forest functions, tourism development, off road tourism, hunting

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INTRODUCTION

Located in southern part of Maramures county, in a varied landscape, sprinkled with historical facts and legends, comprising a large number of administrative units (figure 1), Chioar - Lăpuş region, meets the conditions of a territorial system (Mojolic, 2012), so that, has the ability of self-organization and self-regulation tending to a steady state.

Tourism as an economic and social activity emerged from the oldest times, at a small scale, gradually evolving, manifesting itself as a system of interactions and relationship between the tourist and the activities carried out. Component of the economy and an integral part of social life, within Chioar-Lăpuş territorial system, tourism has potential of development for an average and long period of time, exploiting diverse resources.

Nowadays, contemporary tourism meet new prospects, new dimensions, developing based on various resources which are capitalized in order to shape various forms and types of tourism, forest ecosystem being one of them.

Taking into account the fact that the territorial system is influenced and conditioned by the existence of anthropogenic factor, its components express dynamism, in relation to each other, but also completeness, depending on the relations established (Ianoș, 2000; Leahu, 2001).

Knowing the fact that a territorial system consists of subsystems, being in its turn an integral part or subordinate to another system, we consider **the forest**, an integral part of Chioar - Lăpuş territorial system.

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Figure 1. Location of Chioar Lăpuș territorial system within Romania and Maramureș County

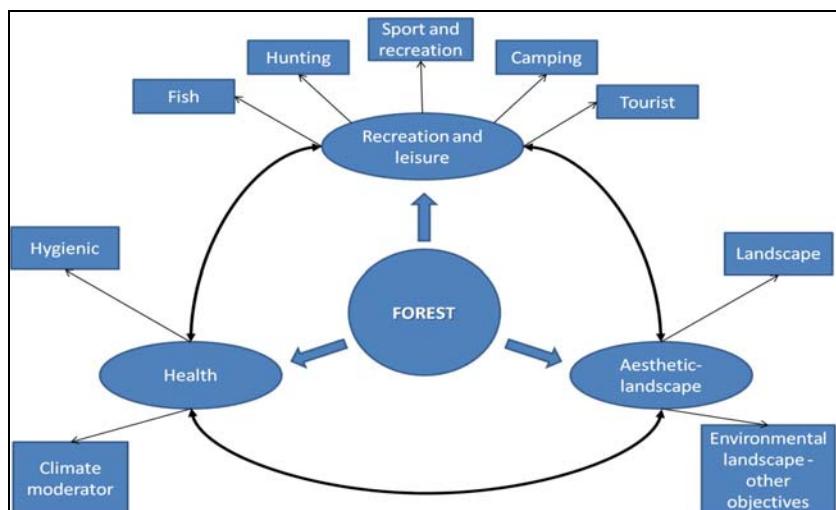


Figure 2. Social functions of forests
 (Source: according to Pătrășcoiu et al., 1987, p.69, with the author's modification and systematization)

The vegetative cover of the territorial system is diverse, arranged depending on the landforms, climatic conditions and hydrography and has special landscape potential. The largest surface of the area is covered by forests, the most complex ecosystem from this point of view, which diminishes right under our eyes, forests being replaced by pastures or crops.

Forests are of social interest, as their purpose is to meet human need for benefitting from a clean environment, favorable to relaxation. It reaches two goals: environmental protection (soil, water, air, creatures) and the opportunity to carry out some recreational activities (Ritter & Dauksta, 2011, p. 88).

Thus, from social point of view, forests have three functions (figure 2), (Pătrășcoiu et al., 1987; Leahu, 2001; Smit, 2008; Legun, 2010):

- *hygienic and sanitary function*, representing the action carried out by forests on the environment aimed at moderating the climate and purifying the air;

- *aesthetics and landscaping function*, stimulating aesthetics, the sense of beauty, transforming forest into an element of the landscape or becoming a picture, a landscape, having the ability to mentally satisfy human being;

- the third function is *recreational* and involves to actually carry out activities such as hunting, fishing, tourism, sports and recreation, camping.

With its beneficial influence, forest, irrespective of the landform where it appears, offers to human body, rest and relaxation, a pleasant environment to carry out recreational activities, in harmony with its complex life forms.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on information obtained from various sources, analyzed and exposed in accordance with geographical methodology. Statistics were obtained from specialized institutions, from literature, but also from land application made for this purpose. The aim of this study is to highlight the touristic function of the forest and how to exploit it, in complementarity with other touristic resources, for the development of Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system, from this point of view.

In obtaining the survey results, geographic principles and methods from Romanian and foreign specialized literature (Gun & Var, 2002; Cocean, 2005; Armaș, 2006; Gill Valentine et al., 2010; Gomez & Jones, 2010; Walker & Walker, 2011), were used, employing in the research the *observation* method and the *bibliographic* method, *GIS mapping*, as well the *analysis* performed over the territory aiming at the resources that can be used within tourism activity, in this case, the forest and its products. Taking into account the complexity of the territory, overall landforms require the arrangement in tiers depending on the altitude of forest vegetation, as a resource for tourism activity, as well of the creatures which inhabit it.

Using *synthesis*, we correlate the distribution of forest in the area with the representative landform and with the activities which can be carried out, from touristic point of view, finding links in their conduct.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

The forest constitutes an oasis of tranquility, where lovers of wild places find the best moments of relaxation and refuge from crowded space. Thus, forest vegetation has some important functions from social point of view, of which the recreational function stands out, being considered „*a factor of relaxation and recreation ... Its power of attraction is directly proportional to the species composition, age of the brush, to massiveness (its spatial extension)*”, (Ciangă, 2001, p. 101).

This function of forest, increasingly stronger, is done in different ways, irrespective of the altitudinal zoning and „*introduces in their space a touch of variety, of harmony and even charm, provides an emotional framework, with many aesthetic and psychological implications*” (Cândea et al., 2012, p. 94) and the tourist is drawn consistently by the given environment.

Chioar - Lăpuș zone is a region with a long tradition as regards wood and forest use, forestry real estate belonging to Chioar – Lăpuș territorial system, being administered by 5 Forest districts: Baia Sprie, Groșii Tibleșului, Șomcuta Mare, Strâmbu Băiuț and Tg. Lăpuș (table 1).

The importance of these biocenoses is major for tourism activity, taking into account the singularity that each type of forest implements in the landscape. The area occupied by forests within Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system shows an imbalance in its framework (figure 3). Analyzing this surface it can be noticed the share of over 50%, which the forest registers on the

territory of the administrative units Cavnic, Băiuț and Groșii Tibileșului, which is a good thing, denoting the degree of protection and involvement of the authorities in this regard.

Table 1. Surface of forests at the level of forest districts
(Source of data: O.S. Tg. Lăpuș, O.S. Strâmbu Băiuț, O.S. Groșii Tibileșului, www.marasilva.ro)

Forest district	Total surface/ha	State property/ha	Other owners/ha
Baia Sprie	10559	5030	5529
Groșii Tibileșului	11756	10541	1215
Șomcuta Mare	10622	4344	6278
Strâmbu Băiuț	14186	12482	1704
Târgu - Lăpuș	15707	8192	7515

There is a share of over 30% in the Lăpuș Depression region, (Târgu Lăpuș, Suciu de Sus, Lăpuș) region known for its tradition of wood, southern region (Vima Mică and Valea Chioarului), as well as Șișești and Cernești communes. The northern central part of the territory accumulates low percentage; here, the surface of forests was not very high, but it was also due to intense deforestation, the entire region dealing with this issue at present. The share of forests for each territorial unit is important in terms of value as forest vegetation forms a great resource for tourism.

In terms of altitude, forest vegetation of the region (figure 4), is present from 150 m, up to 1300 - 1500 m. Thus, up to 250 m altitude there are forests of oak composed of pedunculate oak species (*Quercus robur*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*), Hungarian oak (*Quercus frainetto*) and mixed with other deciduous species, ash, elm, birch, etc. Forests of common oak and mixed forests reach altitudes of 500-600 m; predominant species are common oak (*Quercus petraea*) or mixture with hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), maple, cherry tree, edible chestnut tree, ash. Beech dominates the region for more than 50% in each forest district, and can be found up to 1200 m altitude. Examples of species beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), common oak, hornbeam, ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), lime tree (*Tilia cordata*), (Miloiu, 2008).

Mixed forest regions make the transition to high regions, where there are resinous species, mainly spruce stands mixed with fir trees, but, due to temperature inversions, they can be found in the valleys (Izvorul Alb Valley), or on the peaks in Lăpuș Depression (figure 9). Bush vegetation consists of juniper trees, juniper (*Juniperus communis*), red bilberry (*Vaccinium vitis idaea*) and bilberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), which slope down and mix with forest vegetation. Grasslands formed mainly due to deforestation, in the past; they are formed of stalky vegetal formations, sedge, tickle grass, yarrow, heather and even peat moss (Miloiu, 2008).

By highlighting these issues, we consider that the forest, as a touristic resource, provides opportunities for various activities, for spending leisure time such as: biking, hiking, orienteering, education, fishing, campsites, picnic, barbecue, for fans of off-road trails, equitation (Nail, 2008).

The present situation of the society, tends to make the transition from mass tourism towards niche tourism, considered „the new tourism” (Wall & Mathieson, 2006), which is supposed to be more adventurous, diversifying the range of offers (Robinson et al., 2011). Taking also into account the landscape features (altitudes slightly below 200 m, gradually reaching 1800 m, depressions, valley color, etc.), in accordance with forest vegetation, specialized tourism is favored: climbing, paragliding, cycling (Gozner & Zarrilli, 2012), **off-road**.

Thus, active tourism is taking shape among adventure enthusiasts, escaping from a monotone environment, which can be carried out under good conditions within the territorial system, especially since such events take place every year, such as **MARAMUREŞ TROPHY 2012**, under the aegis of the event already established, **Maramureş Offroad Fest**, also including achievable routes in the analyzed territory. In most cases, those who practice this type of tourism have the necessary equipment: sport utility vehicles, ATV, but in its absence it can be obtained by rent.

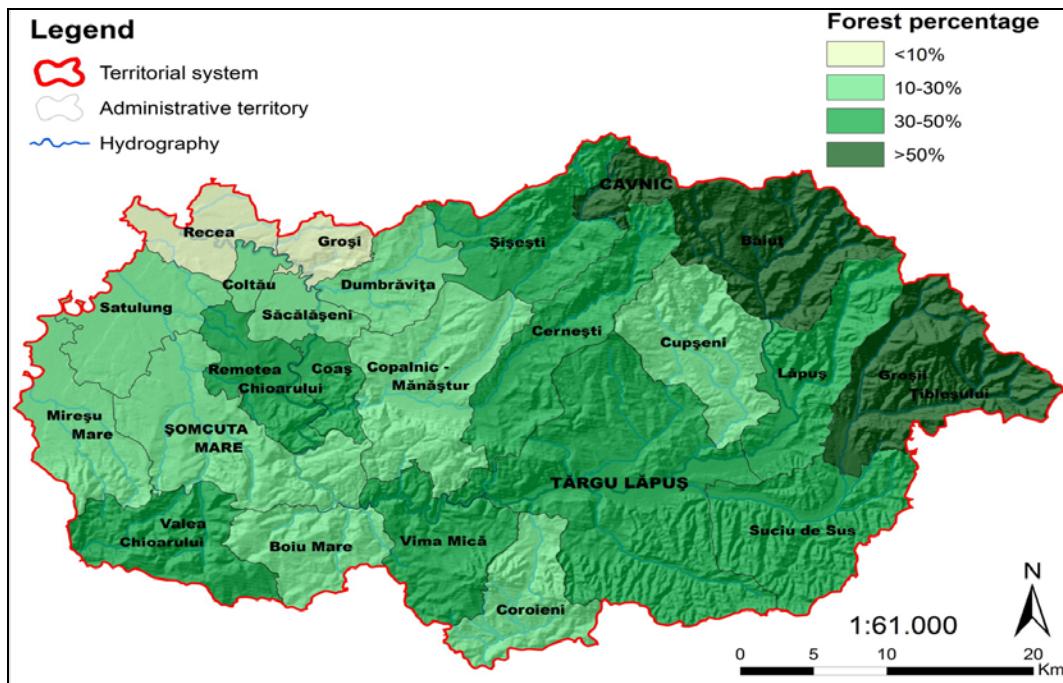


Figure 3. Share of forests within Chioar – Lăpuș territorial system
(processing after PATJ Maramureș, 2008)

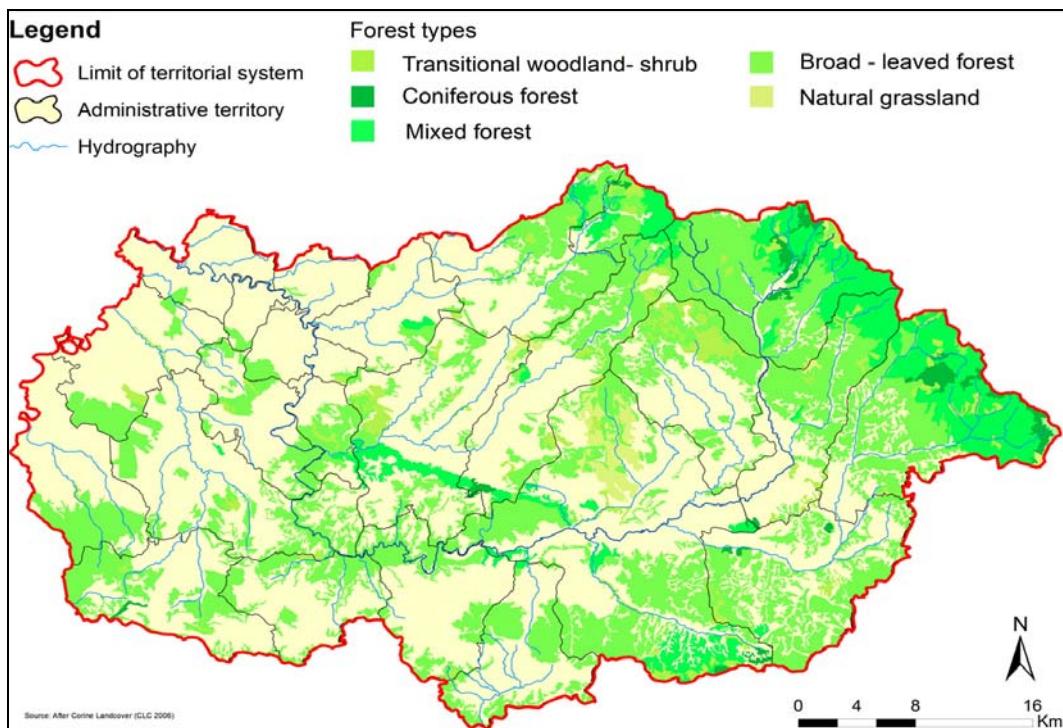


Figure 4. Vegetation types within Chioar – Lăpuș territorial system (after Corine landcover CLC 2006)

Knowing the degree of difficulty of the route (figure 5) is essential when starting the activity, taking into account the fact that other factors may contribute to its change: weather conditions, but also its usage. I propose routes with easy or average degree of difficulty¹ within Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system, from touristic point of view.

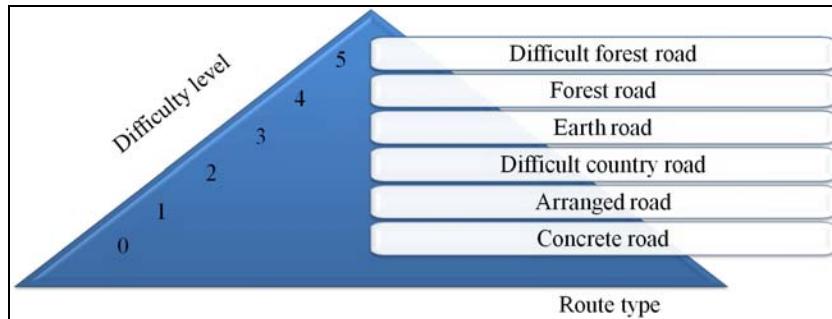


Figure 5. Degree of difficulty of off road trails practicable in Chioar-Lăpuș territorial system
(Source:² with the author's adaptation)

For example, off road activity with 0 difficulty degree (figure 6), is done on paved roads, with no need for special equipment; they can be made by any participant in the tourist activity. Trails on arranged roads or more difficult country roads are conditioned by weather issues; in case of rain or snow, they require 4 x 4 vehicles. Earth roads (figure 7), normal forest roads (figure 8) or difficult roads (figure 9), will challenge more the tourist, especially the last two, basic knowledge of off road being recommended.³

Off road tracks within Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system offer also besides adrenalin, thrills, the possibility to view some impressive natural landscapes (figure 10, 11), sheepfolds, a part of the wood civilization, etc. Even though this type of tourism is included in the category of niche tourism that cannot be achieved in mass; it has limits too, posing a risk; that is why we have considered the fifth level of difficulty, at the most, because I believe that other routes which are heavier are for professional athletes.

Nevertheless, for innocent people, eager for adventure and escapade in nature, Club 4x4, Baia Mare, organizes off road pilot courses, during three days, in weekend, most times, or on demand during week. They address mainly people passionate about tourism activity, as well as hunters, fishermen or other categories of activators.⁴

Like any tourist activity, off-road has also environmental implications, not always positive. Most of the times it reaches a degradation of forest vegetation, also impacting on animals, destroying their environment and casting them away from their habitat. Being aware of this fact, measures are taken by specialized organizations: Sport Club Association Club 4 X 4 plants each year about 10,000 seedlings, within a campaign named „It matters what you are breathing”.⁵

It is therefore important that off-road activity is carried out in an organized manner, through these associations, not in a chaotic manner, thus trying to diminish the negative impact on forest ecosystem. Forest ecosystem also includes besides forest vegetation the animals that inhabit it, therefore they can be exploited for tourism.

Since ancient times man has made his living hunting and fishing, exploiting certain species, for food or clothing. Evolving humanity has also found other ways to survive; nowadays, eventually, hunting is a passion, a leisure activity.

¹ <http://4x4fun.ro>, 2012

² *Idem*, 2012

³ *Ibidem*, 2012

⁴ <http://maxoffroad.ro>, 2012

⁵ *Idem*, 2012



Figure 6. Off-road activities with car on asphalt road- degree 0 (Breaza Peak)



Figure 7. Dirt road route- degree 3 (Gutâi Mountains)



Figure 8. Off-road activities with car on forest road - degree 4 (Gutâi Mountains)



Figure 9. Undeveloped trail (difficult forest road) – degree 5 (Gutâi Mountains)



Figure 10, 11. Landscape in Gutâi Mountains



Thus, **cynegetic tourism** emerges, being conditioned by the presence of faunal resources (table 2); some of the animals in the hill and mountain areas of the territorial system are hunted as trophy. This type of tourism is a niche product that implies a completely recreational activity in the wild, in the natural environment (Fennell, 2002; Lovelock, 2007), although it is not accepted by any culture (Swarbrooke, 1999). This type of tourism is becoming more active, although it is made by a small number of people at present (Gozner & Zarrilli, 2012), being practiced especially by men (figure 13).

Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system has four hunting chalets, as well as access roads, forest roads or public roads. Hunting funds are arranged by works for the protection of the game, pastures and hayfields care, building of feeders depending on game species, supplied with water in the territory without reserves, or salt works.

Simultaneously, works for harvesting game are made; there are houses and hunting chalets (figure 14), high hunting observatories (figure 12) as well as watch places and ground observation.⁶



Figure. 12. Hunting observatory at the limit of the Region



Figure. 13 Hunter in western part of the Region



Figure.14. Poiana-Șomcuta Mare forest cottage⁷

Faunal resources are included in funds of hunting brought into service by GVS (Special hunting households) and AJVPS Maramureş (County Association of Hunters and Anglers of Maramureş), which can be accessed legally under prescribed conditions.

The main species of hunting, found in the territorial system (table 2,) are cervids, *roe buck* (figure 15, (1)), found in vast area, in mountain forests, as well as in lower areas and *Carpathian stag* (figure 15, (4)), that after the resonance of name, was acclimatized to mountain regions. *The Carpathian bear* (figure 15, (3)), spread also in mountainous regions, prefer vast and quiet forests, its territory including rocky spreading areas, beneficial for building its lair. *Fox* (figure 15, (3)), occupies the central - western part of the territorial system, a diversified region in terms of altitude. *Boar* (figure 15, (2)), is found in deciduous forests and mixed forests, but we can also find it in cornfields during agricultural cultivation periods. *Rabbit* (figure 15, (2)), prefers fields, hilly areas, but it can be also found in the forest patches; it marks two areas in the southern part of Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system.

Among birds with cynegetic function, *pheasant* (figure 15, (4)), can be found in Someş meadow, in the western part of the territory.

Table 2. Species of cynegetic interest within Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system
(Source: DS Maramureş, Baia Mare, www.marasilva.ro)

Species	Period of hunting	
<i>Roebuck</i> (<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>)	male	15 May-15 October
	female	01 September-15 February
<i>Deer (Stag)</i> (<i>Cervus elaphus</i>)	Common stag - male	1 September - 31 December
	Common stag – female and calf	1 September - 15 February
<i>Pheasant</i> (<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>)		1 October - 28 February
<i>Rabbit</i> (<i>Lepus europaeus</i>)		1 November - 31 January
<i>Wild boar</i> (<i>Sus scrofa</i>)		1 August - 15 February
<i>The Carpathian bear</i> (<i>Ursus arctos</i>)		15 March - 14 May
<i>Fox</i> (<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>)		All year

⁶ www.mmediu.ro, 2012

⁷ www.marasilva.ro, 2012

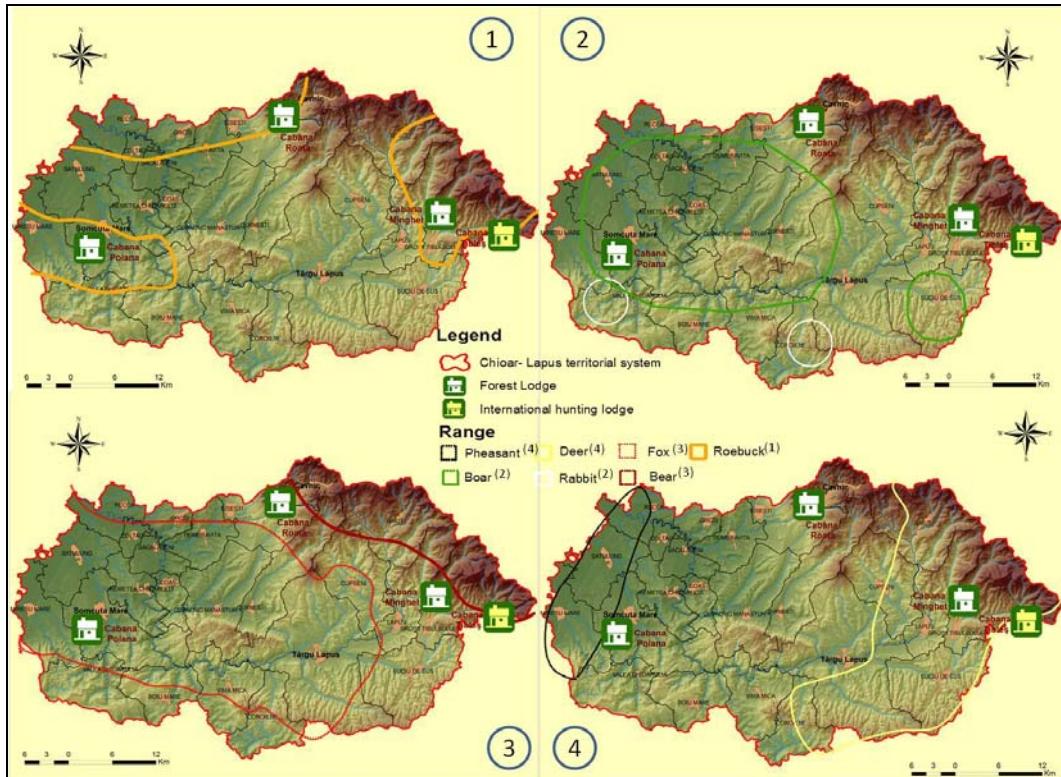


Figure 15. Area of spread of animals for hunting

Hunting funds existing within the territorial system are managed at local level by Hunting Associations located in the main towns within the area (*Hunting Association Diana - Nimrud*, *Somcuta-Mare*; *Hunting and Sport fishing Association Diana - Transilvania*, *Târgu - Lăpuș*; „*Tara Lăpușului*“ *Hunting Association*, *Târgu - Lăpuș*). Nevertheless, poaching is more frequent.

This type of activity is not accessible to all categories of tourists, due to quite high costs involved. Nevertheless, cynegetic tourism is perspective, and it can bring significant incomes to the region contributing also to its touristic image.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, tourism activity, at the level of Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system, is diverse, taking into consideration the variety and diversity of natural resources. They can be exploited for tourism, being made available for people for rest and recreation, maintaining natural environment in an ideal state without major anthropogenic action. From social point of view, forests have three important functions. The forest allows by its functions to carry out some specific types of tourism, an integral part of niche tourism. Chioar - Lăpuș territorial system still has a considerable wooded surface and is increasingly a favorable framework to carry out some new tourism activities. Off road activity opens new horizons for those fond of adrenalin and escape to nature, and cynegetic tourism becomes more active and offers economic rewards, if we consider the value of trophies. Although these activities are interesting, there are also risks which affect their proper course. If we consider off road, it is a source of pollution, which is not in accordance with sustainable development. Hunting tourism is less practiced within the territorial system, although it has diverse cynegetic resources which can be accessed at different times of the year or even throughout the year, in an organized framework managed by Hunting Associations of cynegetic funds within the area.

Thus, by the appropriate fitting out and human community collaboration, the tourism potential of the region can be valorized and by evaluating resources and facilitating the forms of access to the region, by promotion, optimal development from touristic and economic point of view can be accomplished.

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