Cycling Through History
Towards Sustainable Explorational Tourism

Laying the foundation for sustainable tourism in Transylvania

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Preamble

One of the many treasures of Romania are Transylvania's fortified churches located at the very heart of the country. Sheltered by the Carpathian mountains, these churches were once a part of a complex defense system against the Ottomans. There are over 150 churches in this area, divided into three architectural styles: romanesque, early gothic and late gothic. Of these 150 churches, eight are UNESCO sites and other fifty are generally seen as important and worthy of conservation. There are numerous attempts to revitalise them, through events like music festivals, or cooperations with The Centre for Vernacular Architecture Studies of Ion Mincu Bucharest. There is an ongoing debate on how many of these churches need to be conserved. Our project aims to raise awareness of these churches and their situation, rather than suggest a particular use. The idea is to promote sustainable tourism and at the same time boost the region's infrastructure. Our focus area is the village of Dealu Frumos, where the church has been renovated with efforts of Ion Mincu. We propose to make Dealu Frumos the starting point for various exploration trips, by bike or hiking. To this end, we will plan a camping site near the village and explore and improve its connections to major cities nearby: Sibiu, Brasov, Targu Mures, Cluj. These serve as starting points for foreign tourists. Another possibility is to connect and expand the EuroVelo Network towards Transylvania.

1. Transportation to Dealu Frumos

There are airports in the cities of Sibiu, Brasov and Cluj-Napoca. Further connection points are Targu Mures and Sighisoara, which are also reachable by train. The first step is to improve the connections from these cities to Dealu Frumos. The situation of bycicle paths in Romania is poor, with very few cities building bike paths or lanes. The general consensus is that while illegal, it is acceptable to travel by bike on the national roads, whereas on european roads it is forbidden. Nonetheless, there are many regional roads that allow cyclists to enjoy the beautiful scenery. In the following paragraphs, we will analyse possible arrival points - major cities - and their connections towards Dealu Frumos. The bike connections were assessed with the planning tool BikeMap.

1.1. Sibiu - Dealu Frumos

This connection is the shortest, with an estimated duration of four hours and total distance of 61 km.

1.2. Brasov - Dealu Frumos

With a duration of almost seven hours (for 110 km), this route seems to pose more challenges, especially in the montainous area of Brasov, where the steep slopes reach up to 700 height meters.

1.3. Cluj - Targu Mures - Sighisoara - Dealu Frumos

This route connects three of the major cities with Dealu Frumos: Cluj-Napoca, the smaller city of Targu Mures and the touristic Sighisoara. With a total distance of 197 km and an estimate of 13.5 hours, it is rather challenging and requires a few rest stops. Targu Mures is the mid-point of this route (only 6.5 hours to Dealu Frumos), while the shortest segment has the length of 40 km and a duration of nearly three hours.

Fig. 1 Map of Romania with overview of suggested connections to Dealu Frumos

Fig. 1.1. Sibiu route

Fig. 1.2 Brasov route

Fig. 1.3 Cluj route

1.4. "Mocanita"

The national train network is good, though the small villages in the centre of the fortified church region are not connected to it. One historical rail is currently being renovated, that connects Sibiu and Sighisoara, passing though the disconnected area. This will provide further possibilities for sustainable transport, as well as added touristic value, since many people are attracted by the flair of old steam engine trains. Though it does not pass directly through Dealu Frumos, the line connects three nearby villages: Agnita, Ruja and Stejarisu. From here it is easy to access Dealu Frumos by bike or by foot.

Fig. 1.4 "Mocanita" railway and the distance to Dealu Frumos

Fig. 1.4.1 Mocanita train

2. EuroVelo Routes in Romania

There are currently two EuroVelo routes passing through Romania: EV 6 and EV 13. Both of them are located along the southern border. Eurovelo 6 is a route that connects the Atlantic to the Black Sea. The black sea section offers two alternative routes: North of the Danube, on romanian territory, or on the Southern side, on Bulgarian territory. The EuroVelo 13 is the Iron Curtain Route, which is located alon a portion of the south-Western border. There is also a possible connection to EV 11, of which the Hungarian section passes near the western border.

2.1

2.1.1. Drobeta Turnu-Severin - Sibiu

There are two possibilities to connect the southern side of EV 6 with Sibiu: one route from Drobeta Turnu-Severin takes the bikers through the mountains, and is on the adventurous side. The other possibility requires some extra distance, but it is mostly flat; moreover it overlaps with an existing bikeable path that connects major city Arad with the centre of Transylvania. (Fig. 2.1.1.)

2.1.2. Galati - Brasov

The connection between the eastern part of EV 6 and Brasov is explained in Fig. 2.1.2.

2.1.3. Sibiu - Brasov

The main connection between these two cities is the national road DN1. The situation of this road allows for an extra bike lane along the road connecting Brasov and Sibiu. (Fig. 2.1.3.)
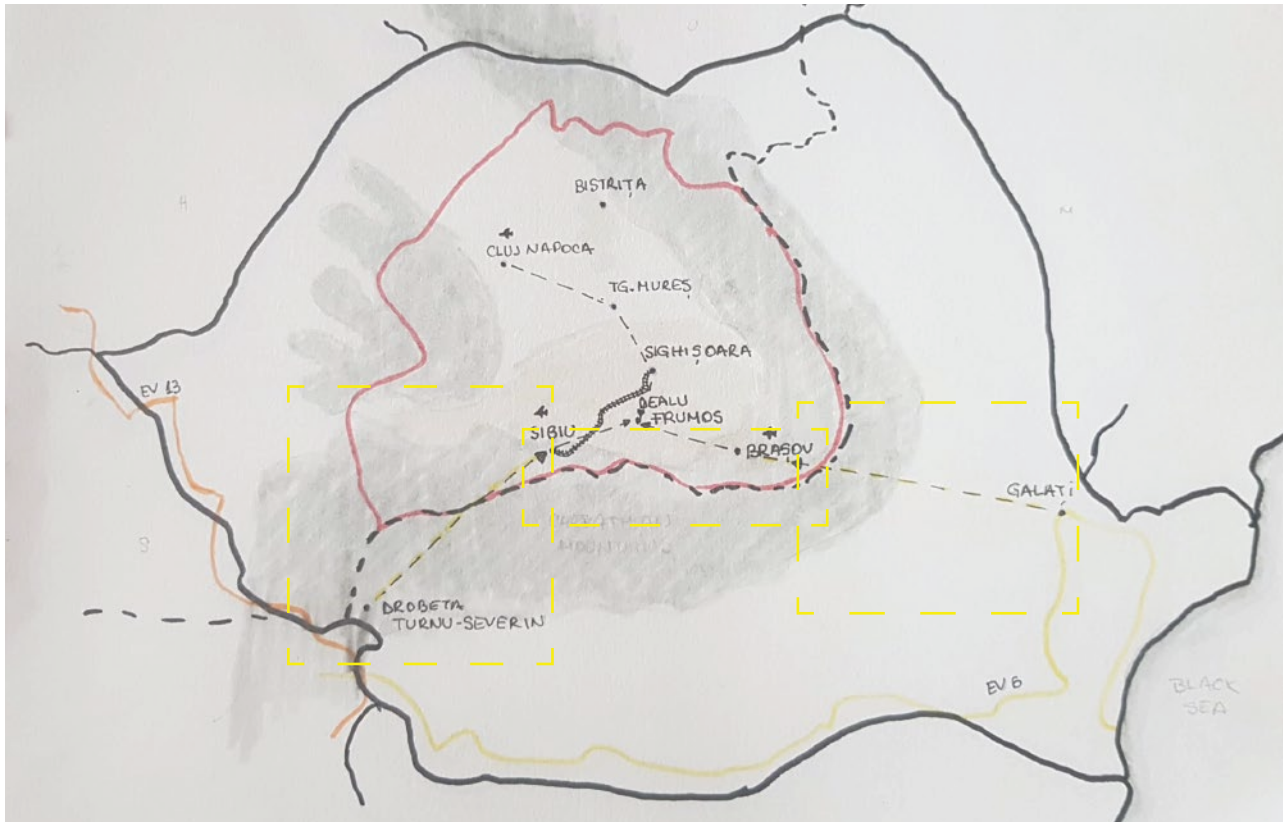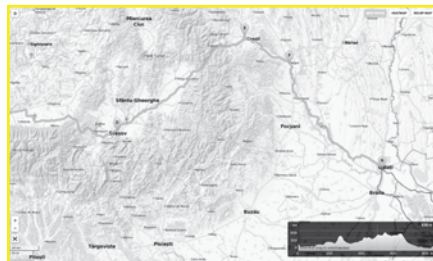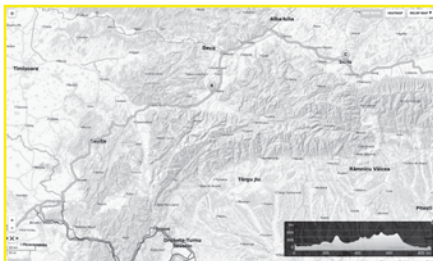
**Fig. 1** Map of Romania with suggested connections to Dealu Frumos

2.2. The Fortified Church Route - An oportunity

The EuroVelo Network is constantly expanding, so this is an opportunity to improve the cycling infrastructure. Eurovelo routes have two main requirements: to be international, and to have a recognisable identity - in other words, a marketing strategy. Our proposal is to connect the existing trails to a new EV route, the fortified church route. This route would pass through Transylvania, and continue on to Serbia, Croatia, Austria, Bavaria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and France where there are various other Fortress Churches. The main goal of this route would be to observe and compare the different types of fortress churches in Europe. Since there are already many routes across Central Europe, This route could borrow from existing infrastructure, and take detours towards the specific sites. Such a project would not only attract many more cyclists to Romania, but it would also provide relief to bikers inside the country and a welcome advertising strategy for the fortified churches of Transylvania.

OVERVIEW OF FORTIFIED
CHURCHES IN EUROPE
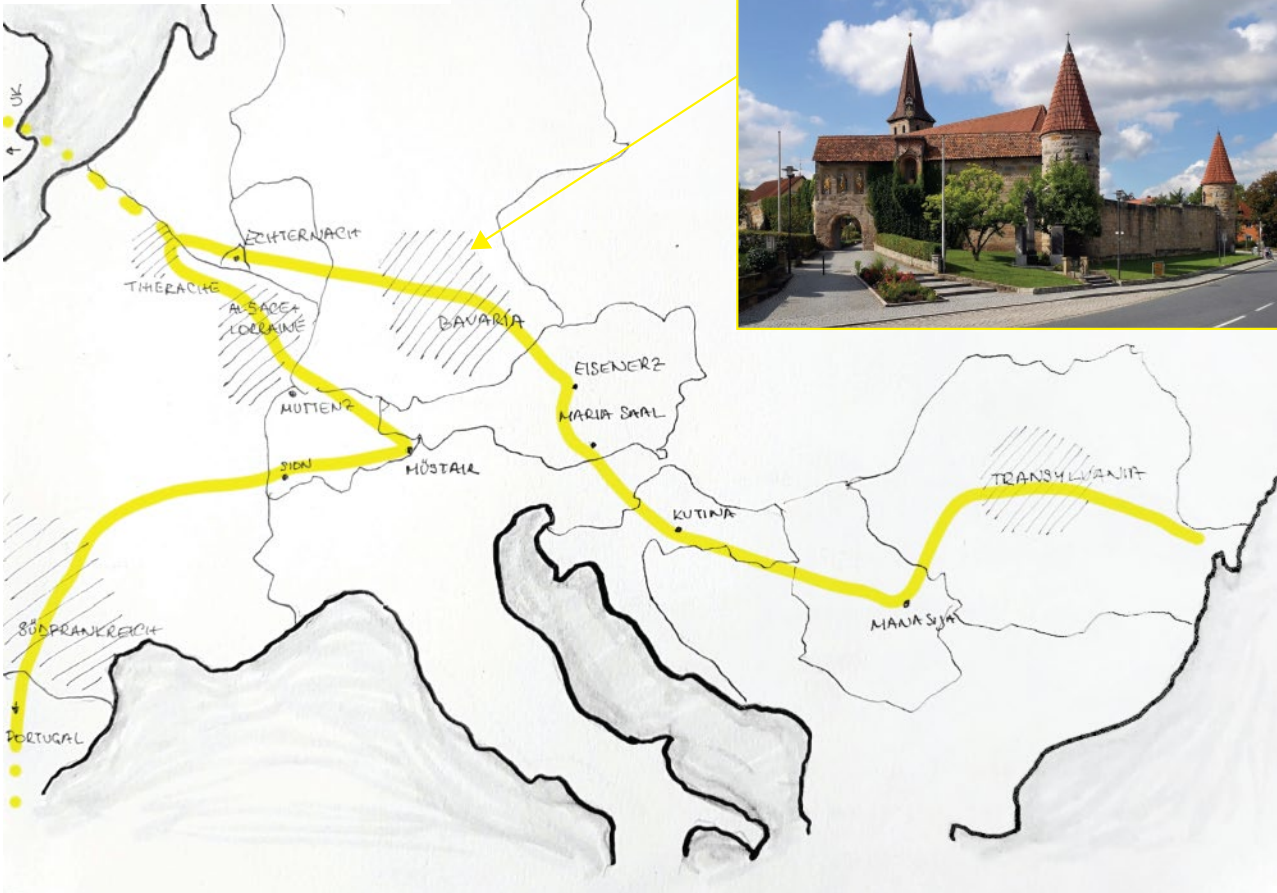
3. Dealu Frumos

The village is situated right next to the geographic center* (it has been re-calculacted) of Romania. This idea was the starting point of our analogy - an epicenter of the "fortified church" biking / hiking trails. Furthermore, its connection to Ion Mincu offers a great opportunity for future academic collaborations and various learning strategies for the tourists staying here - info center, lectures, etc. In order to establish the village as the center of the network, there are various things required: the connecting lines towards other cities, as discussed in the previous chapters, but also a greater accomodation capacity. Our project proposes to solve this issue in a sustainable way, which is by creating a camping site on the outskirts of the village. The idea is to allow travellers to enjoy the nature, while taking care not to destroy it with extensive construction. The camping sites will be composed of a tent area, where you can rent your tent on site, of a bike / luggage storage facility, sanitary units and some facility huts. The visitors can spend their nights here, and proceed to explore various daytrip routes. The necessary facility huts will be build in the local style, as wooden huts.

The team took a daytrip and looked around the village, hoping to find a good place to locate the camping area. The camping place was meant to be outside the village so that the local people would not be disturbed by the tourists, but close enough so that the area would be connected to the plumbing and electricity in the village.

The place which was selected for camping was at the end of the main street in the village, by the last houses of the village and near the old orthodox church. It is separated from the housing area by a small field, which was still used for planting, so the chances that it turns into a living area for locals who would be disturbed by the tourists are very small.
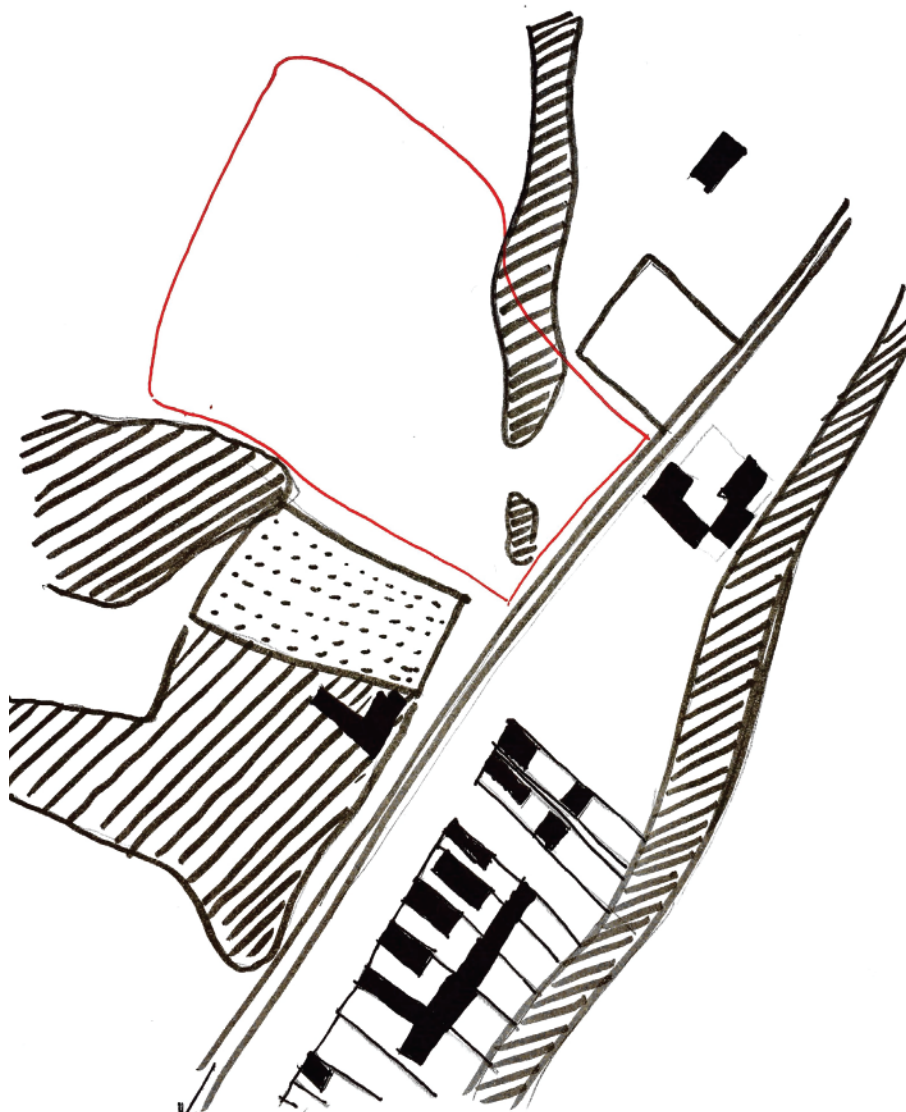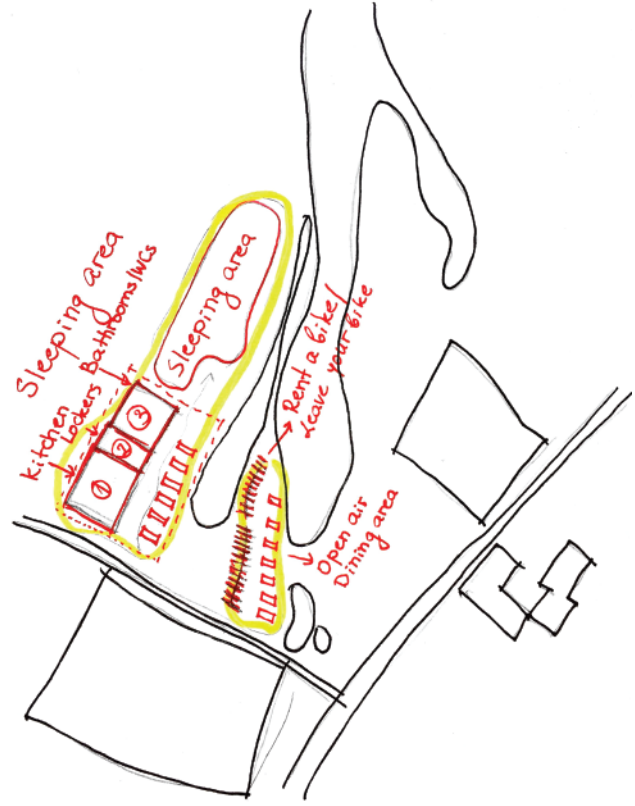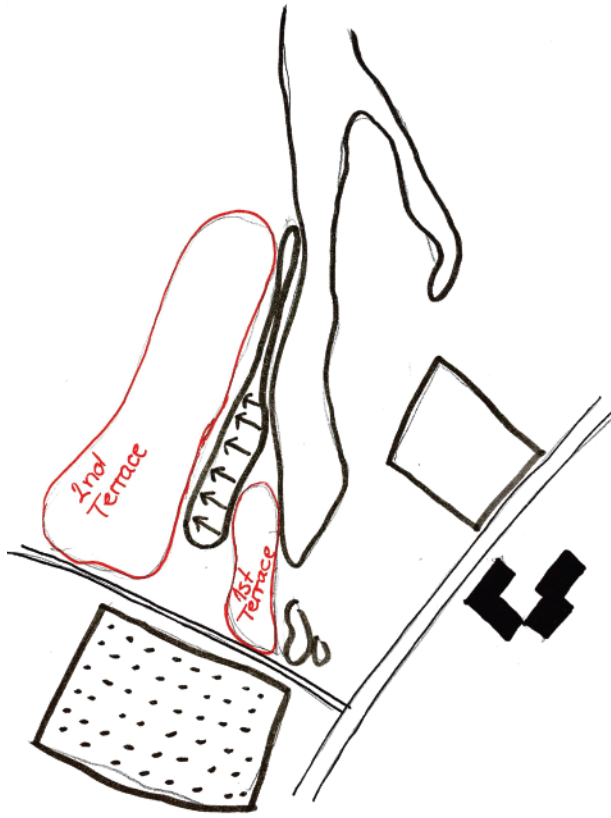
Orthodox
Church

3.1 Camping Place

The place we choose has a terrace landscape and it's slightly inclined even at its flattest areas. That means the travelers will not be overfloated in their tents when it rains. We use the flat parts to locate the sanitary facilities and the tents and dining areas. On the second terrace the tourists can find toilets, baths and the so called safes, where they can keep their important stuff locked in. There is also a kitchen and a dining area which are still outdoor but protected from the heavy rains in Transilvania and the burning sun in the summer.

Both "floors" give the tourists the opportunity to use a locker and keep their private stuff safe while they are traveling. The idea of the camping in Dealu Frumos is to give the tourists the chance to enjoy their stay in Transilvania without having to take all their heavy stuff with them. They should travel from one village or town to another by the paths planed to take them there by bike or by foot and come back to sleep,eat or just chill in Dealu Frumos.

On the first terrace there is a space planed for the bikes. People should be able to rent a bike at the camp or simply lock their own bikes there. Under the bikes area are the open air dining place or the fireplaces. They are far enough from the tents and the buildings and close enough to the road so if something happens they are easily reachable from the main road.

1. Kitchen
2. Lockers
3. Bathrooms and Toilets

2nd Terrace

1st Terrace

Sleeping area

Sleeping area

kitchen Lockers Bathrooms/wcs

Rent a bike/
Leave your bike

Open air
Dining area

## 3.2 Camping place details/planning/ sanitary facilities

All the buildings are placed in one and the nearest to the village spot at the camping so there would not be any troubles connecting it to the plumbing and electricity or worries that the landscape would be destroyed. Keeping the original landscape und traditional look of the Romanian village was the reason we gave our buildings the look and the atmosphere of the old Romanian houses. Our team stayed for 2 days at the Astra Museum in Sibiu and researched the traditional architecture of the Romanian folk. It inspired us to combine the traditional housing with modern technology and help the travelers feel comfortable without destroying the original look of the Romanian village.

The major site problem here is that the locals do not have water piping in place. Therefore, there is a. no drinking water and b. each house must use their own well and pump system. According to out discussions with the villagers, the piping is already in place, but was built defectively by the construction firm. We hope to bring a major benefit to the village by integrating it into the cycling network. Such a project could bring them the necessary funds to repair their water system, while allowing for good sanitation on the camping site. A symbiotic relationship could develop between the tourists and the locals.

Although the locals paid a lot for a household to build a working plumbing system in the village after a while it broke down and now they still have to use the water wells and purify the water themselves. There was indeed a very loud purifying device in the bathroom at the church where we slept so the locals already came up with their own ideas. That helped us to decide how we would provide pure water if still no one invests money or repairs the plumbing in the area. There is a simple way to get running water from a well with a water pump which is installed in the well and many people already use it mostly to water their gardens. The water pump is a simple and not expensive device which combined with a purifying device and electricity could be very helpful to provide running water for cooking and bathing. The woman also said that the mayor would be very interested in new ideas and in finding a way to have and keep the running water in the village. For now they are still arguing about the not working plumbing and trying to find a solution.

1. Kitchen
2. Lockers
3. Bathrooms and Toilets

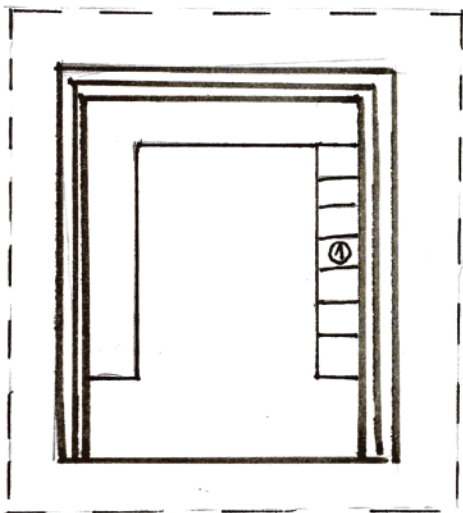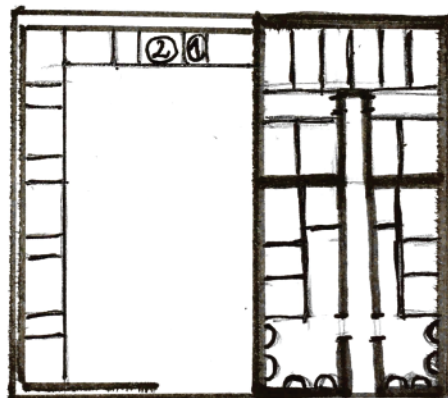1. Single Locker/ Kitchen Locker
2. Double Locker

①   ②   ③

④
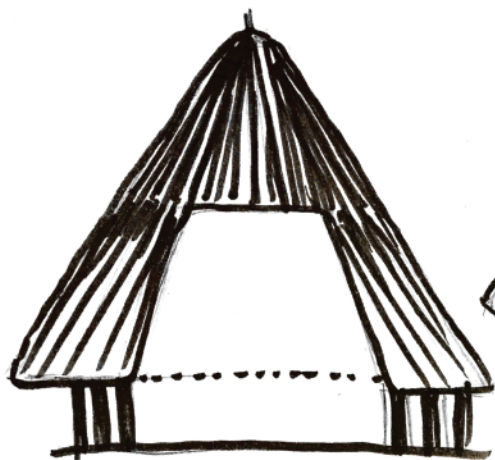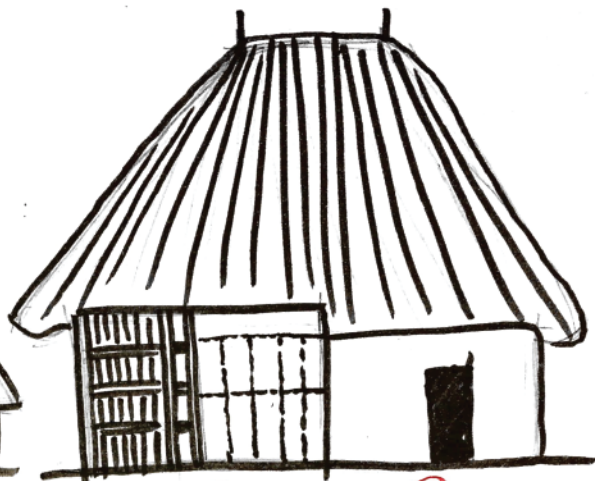
①   ②   ③

3.3 Small resting stations

Everyone can connect their card to a locker and use it during their stay at the camp. Everyone will be able to rent or change a bike at the camp stops with the card. We also planed small stations between the villages and the camp, where people can stop to eat something, chill for a while, use a toilet or repair their bikes. There are small "Bike stations" where you can find some very important tools to repair your bike if something happens on the way to your next stop. These are actually lockers, they can only be unlocked with a camp card, meaning they can only be unlocked after the persons that unlock them identify themselves. We also planed bigger lockers at the small stations, where you can find dishes and other useful stuff for your rest at the station. Having bigger and smaller lockers for different needs does not mean there are many kinds of lockers people could only use for one certain need. There is only one modul piece which combined can be combined with others. All the lockers used in the project are built from modul pieces and could be easily transformed in other sizes.

3.2 Lockers system

1. Single Locker/ Kitchen Locker
2. Double Locker
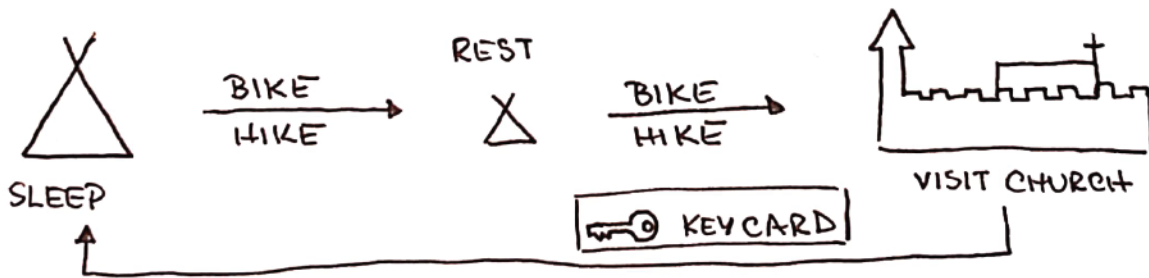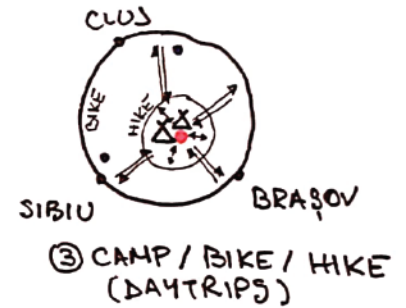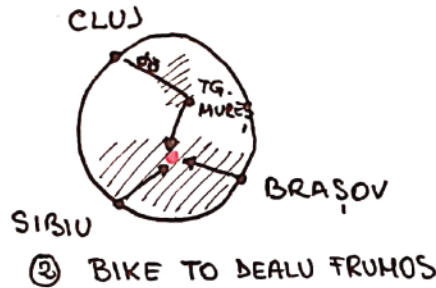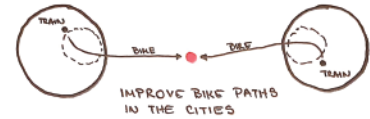
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①

70

80

40

②
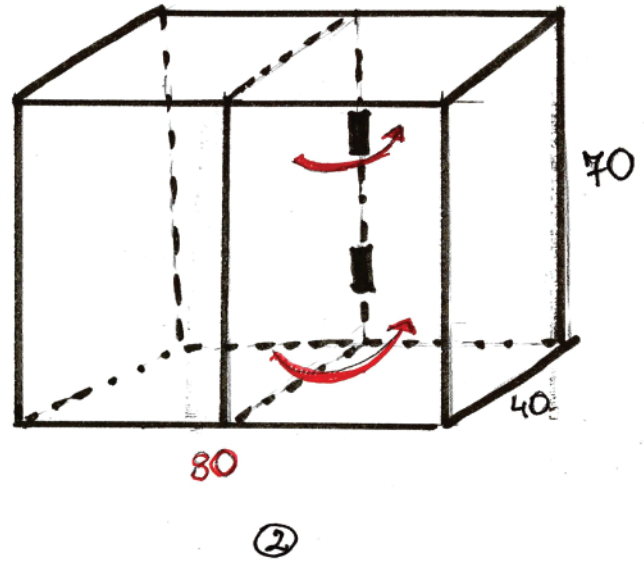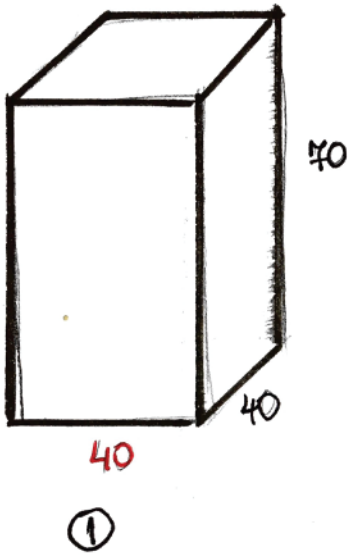
3.4 Security System & Camp Cards

To not have hire lots of people who are responsible for the bikes or who have to stay the the info points and to make it easier for the travelers we planed a system where they will use a magnet camp card as a key. Everyone can receive a card on their name at the bigger stations in the cities by showing an ID card and paying a deposit. You can connect your card with a credit or debit card and pay at all stops only with your Camp Card. Only with the key you will be allowed to enter the camp or open a locker or use the stuff stored at the smaller resting stations or of course rent a bike. Our experience with banks and ATMs in the villages and towns we visited in Transilvania was not very good, so we decided to give the tourists the opportunity to use their camp card as a credit card at the stops of the camp and pay for everything at the end of their journey when they are returning the card. The stations where tourists would get a card or return a card will be located in the bigger cities where people have easily acces to their bank accounts, internet or mobile connection. Between the big stations begins the real journey on which our project is concentrated and which we try to make more comfortable and entertaining with our project.

During our excursion in Transylvania we visited many of the fortified churches and we really had troubles entering them, because the main doors were always locked and we always searched for a person that had the keys and waited a really long time until someone showed up and unlocked the door. We also had to call one day earlier to let them know that we are coming and we would like to visit the church. We knew that because some people from our group came from Romania, but we were sure that foreigners would never know how to enter the church and after a while they would give up. That's why we came up with the idea to use the camp card to enter the churches. Since the fortified churches take very important place in our project, it was also very important to find a system that allows people to easily visit the fortified churches and since one identifies himself with the camp card it's impossible to enter the church and destroy or steal something without being recognized. Our idea is to change the main door and put a device there which would allow you to enter with your camp card. There would be a fee to pay at the device at the door so instead of calling people and waiting around and paying to the people to see the fortified churches it would be much simpler and faster with the card system. With our project we want to support the fundraising and the restauration of the fortified churches in Transylvania.

Overview of strategies and concept:

EUROPE

MARKETING STRATEGY:
EUROVELO ROUTE : FORTRESS-CHURCH

RO

BIKE   BIKE   RO

IMPROVE BIKE PATHS
IN THE CITIES

CARS

NEW BIKE LANE
ON NATIONAL ROAD

① COME TO
ROMANIA

BIKE   BUS
CLUJ
TRAIN
SIBIU   BRASOV
RO
PLANE

② BIKE TO DEALU FRUMOS

CLUJ
TG. MUREŞ
SIBIU   BRAŞOV

③ CAMP / BIKE / HIKE
(DAYTRIPS)

CLUJ
BIKE   HIKE
SIBIU   BRAŞOV

SLEEP

BIKE
HIKE

REST

BIKE
HIKE

VISIT CHURCH

KEY CARD

/// FORTIFIED CHURCHES   △ CAMPING / REST STOP

● DEALU FRUMOS   ● SECONDARY CAMPING

3.5 Fundraising and renovating

On our first day in Romania we had a lecture about the fortified churches where it was said that one of the opportunities is to restaurate and keep some of the fortified churches and let the almost destroyed ones die beautifully. So we took the idea from our first lecture and decided to use it for out project. We don't want to raise money and use them on the few fortified churches that are connected to our bike paths, but it would be a great start to raise some money using the bike and camping tourism combined with cultural tourism. The more tourists the more attention to the cultural heritage of the region. We build our project on the connection between the villages with fortified churches that are reachable by foot or by bike but the project starts in Dealu Frumos and can only get bigger. So one of the further steps would be to use donated money from the first fortified churches we used in our project to restaurate other fortified churches too und connect them to our system.

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