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Project Report; ORTE residency, Krems, September 01-30, 2012

During the months of September of 2012, I participated in an artist residency in Krems through the Architecture Network Lower Austria ORTE. This opportunity came about through an open call invitation to realize an ongoing project – *Public Office for Architecture* – for one month while in residency in Krems. Located in a building along the Kunstmeile Krems, which houses a large number of cultural institutions, and across from the Kunsthalle, the 5 residency studio apartments take up the top floor of the building. The AIR studios are curated and programmed by various cultural institutions which ensured a welcome interdisciplinary mix of artists from fine arts, architecture, literature and music being in residence at the same time. The duplex apartment cum studio that was my home during my residency was a spacious and a productive work environment. The proximity of the Architecture Network ORTE, being located in the same building, was much to the advantage in realizing the work, as my project depended on networking and input from the local community.

The *Public Office for Architecture* is an action research project conceived in 2010 with prior realizations at MoKS, Center for Arts and Social Practice, in Mooste, Estonia, and at Galeria HIT, Bratislava, Slovakia. The *Public Office for Architecture* is conceived in the following manner: A mobile office for architecture and design has a nomadic existence in various rural, urban and semi-urban environments. The residents are invited to come with their architectural and design questions at no cost. Their architectural inquiries are met in a professional manner, however, decidedly expanded in regards to the scope of their problems by creating a design dialog over public concern. Typically, design services remain within the scope set by a client, which usually means a very narrow private concern over problems that are limited to the client's plot. The public as a client on the other hand remains concerned with infrastructure and strictly public buildings. A dialog of private design intentions with the surrounding public, i.e. on the material scale of the street, neighborhood or village, does barely exist outside legislative processes. It is the intent of the *Public Office for Architecture* to explore artistic and architectural practice to bridge this lack of social discourse. The project is intended to run for approximately 5 years with one or two realized projects per year. The work that is being produced during this time will be used as case studies for a publication that will develop the argument at the end of this research and project period.

Following this trajectory I established a working “office” during my stay at AIR Krems with regular office hours during which the general public was invited to drop in for free architectural consultations. The project was published through flyers posted throughout the city, as well as through the ORTE website and newsletter, and through a notice in the local newspaper. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The following 7 projects with different scopes were taken on by the office, some with a continued involvement beyond the actual residency period:

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1. House Doppler

scope:

The client asked for ideas to redevelop a site in Imbach, a village near Krems, for a residential building with 4 or 5 apartment units. Located on the bottom of a hill which belongs to the client and on which the ruins of the Imbach castle as well as a inter-religious chapel is located, the public component proposed in developing the project was to consider offering public access through the site to the ruin and to expand an existing processional art path - "Kunstweg der Religionen" - downhill back to the hiking trail along the river Krems.

2. Expansion Grundschule; Kirchlich Paedagogische Hochschule Wien/Krems

scope:

The Pedagogical University is a major institution in the education of future teachers and educators in Austria. Their campus in Krems, which was originally built in the 60s, is currently undergoing extensive renovations. The University operates a primary school next to the campus, for which the director was soliciting ideas for an expansion which would take into account new pedagogical concepts and translate them into architectural form. The process of this expansion could take a collaborative form with a neighboring high school to become a community driven design-build project which in of itself becomes an educational tool.

3. 15 Degrees East

scope:

15 Degrees East is a public art installation in Ispersdorf, Hofamt Priel, which was realized for the Waldviertel Festival in 2001 by the Austrian artist Alois Kronschlaeger. The installation consists of a 4x4x4 Meter metal cube which is situated directly on the shore of the Danube. The cube is split in half by a center cut which demarcates the longitude of the 15th degree East, which is the reference for the middle European time zone. The project is publicly accessible and was negotiated initially to be in place and up-kept by the municipality for 10 years. Over the years the project suffered some damage and disrepair, and the artist together with the major of Ispersdorf are thinking of a suitable afterlife for the project, and to transform the cube into a seasonal residency studio for international artists. The *Public Office for Architecture* was asked for a design to facilitate the conversion which will hopefully develop to be an integral part to the village life.

4. House Lethmayer

scope:

The client was in the final stages of renovating her single family house in Krems. She had not contracted an architect to do the renovation and found herself faced with some planning mistakes and afterthoughts that could have been avoided with a more thoughtful planning process on the front end. She contacted the *Public Office for Architecture* to solicit ideas if

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and how access to the attic could still be realized to add the generous attic space to the living area.

5. Schiefer Apartment

scope:

The client, a poet and publisher, is often times not in Krems for longer stretches of time and was soliciting ideas on how the living room may be designed to be easily transformed into a guest accommodation / studio apartment for a temporary tenant. She is part of a creative network and the design was intended to have a prototypical character for an apartment with multiple uses.

6. House Schwartz

scope:

For a single family house at the outskirts of Krems, built in the postwar period, the client was asking for ideas to renovate the building to make it more energy efficient and to allow for multi-generational living. The client was considering to implement a geothermal system – it was considered to investigate if a joint system with the neighboring house or houses may be advantageous.

7. House Zimmermann

scope:

The client solicited ideas for the renovation of a single family house in Mauerbach near Vienna to suit his and his wife's needs for retirement. The client is a sculptor and a spiritual person; the question was posed how an alteration to the site can reflect his concern with nature and radiate beyond the site boundary to the wider neighborhood.

My stay at Krems was highly productive, much appreciated, and a mile stone in this ongoing project. During my stay I was given the opportunity to have a brief presentation to the local architecture community and to interested citizens at a building site visit which was organized by ORTE and allowed to engage in dialog with local architects and designers and to initiate lasting contacts. I have stayed previously in various Artist-In-Residences and I may say Krems is one of the finest I have encountered - and much needed, as the architecture community, unlike other artistic disciplines, does not have the same widespread AIR network opportunities.

Thanks to the fantastic staff administering the residency, and thanks to the dedicated work of the Architecture Network ORTE!