

AIR – ARTIST IN RESIDENCE Report

Zdeněk Chmel – October 2015

It was a great pleasure for me to spend one beautiful autumnal month on the residency in Stein – Krems, Austria. It enabled me to step back from the daily routine and to get a new insights into my regular architectural practice.

The most important things for me were following:

- The place situated nearby the historical core of Stein, which is for me as an architect an ultimate source of inspiration.
- The silence and peace for concentration on my work.
- Very comfortable studio space with beautiful views into the surrounding nature.
- The season of my stay, with amazingly coloured vineyards right after the harvest.
- The interdisciplinarity and international connection with other artist in the residence. For me there was one particularly strong moment of this overlapping - when I took part in a sound recording of the sound artists Alice and Nigel in the old gothic Göttweiger chapel from the 13th century, where I realized how much can change the sound the subjective perception of the space.

I really appreciate the support which I received. From Sabine Güldenfuß regarding all the things related with my stay and all the information what is going on around.

And from Heidrun Schlögl all the support regarding my work and research. Particularly interesting was my meeting with architect Franz Sam, who kindly took me for a walk through the city of Stein and explained me some of the historical consequences. We also managed to visit a huge cellar digged in the rocks underneath the house called Kleiner Passauerhof from the 16th century, which was a particularly remarkable experience.

During my stay I was partially working on my ongoing projects, which is a residential project developed for a private client in Budweis, Czech Republic and an international architectural competition, which takes place in Berlin, Germany.

On top of that I used my time to work on a project related to a particular local phenomenon - Steiner Durchgänge

When I arrived to Stein for the first time last year because of my architectural practise, me and my colleagues have created a small photo-collection of various gateways, passages and archways. It was rather not an aimed method, but simply a spatial fascination. Later on when arriving for my residence I kept walking through the old core of Stein, which did not stop to fascinate me and I realized, that the phenomenon of the narrow passages and stairways exceeds much anything I have experienced so far in a medieval urbanism.

In my personal research about this topic during several last weeks, I decided to use a mix of subjective and objective methods to serve a comprehensive overview about this specific urban element. I have taken photographs in various time and light conditions, which may reveal unexpected relations. I have combined them with hand drawings which can somehow differently describe the spatial qualities without disturbing details.

Based on the cadastral map I have created a map of public spaces of Stein. In the plan is shown the basic urban built up structure and the private open spaces. Opposite of this private space stands out from the plan the public space, which is on its own remarkable through its sizes and shaping, clearly responding to the topography of the land and usage of the medieval city. On top of this are in the plan marked all the gates, passages and stairways providing overview about the connections inside the city. I also decided to describe the typological and structural qualities of the passages by axonometrical schemes of this spaces showing clearly the bearing structure and spatial proportions.

Based on the research I have made so far and talking with various people I have heard few hypotheses about the actual reason of the phenomenon, but after all according to my opinion, there is no clear reason, it is rather a combination of various influences and local needs. Because of the trade nature of the town, the townsmen needed maximum shortest connections to the river Danube to load and unload the boats. On the other hand these connections needed to be defended and the arched space could be easier closed.

Other hypothesis was connected with the floods, regularly arriving to Stein multiple times each year and the dense network of passages enabled to the water to leave the city faster after the river decreased without damaging the buildings. Other reason could be the

structural and topographical one. The city did not have much space to grow because of the steep slopes reaching almost the riverfront; the huge townhouses were built directly on the riverfront and it was structurally useful to interconnect them for a better stability of the walls on the relatively unstable ground (ex. structural element Schwibbogen).

The city of Stein developed in high density in restricted plot between the river and steep slopes and almost frozen after the death of the salt-trade is for me as an architect an ultimate source of inspiration – spatial qualities, spatial connections and relations, imprecise materiality and light, topography and constraint - together creating very special atmospheres of the place.