

Automatic Mills in Pardubice

One of the more intriguing projects on our tour was a visit to the city of Pardubice where a community development organization called *Offcity* has begun the process of getting local residents involved in plans for the renovation and re-formulation of a huge old flour mill known as the Automatic Mills in Pardubice (AMP). The mill, which is located in the heart of the city, closed in 2013. It was one of the ten largest mills in the Czech Republic to process wheat and rye, and served for generations as a major source of employment for the region. Our tour guide for the visit, Šárka Zahálková, President of *Offcity*, also explained the mill is an important monument of industrial architecture since it had been designed between 1910 and 1919 by the internationally known Czech architect, Josef Gočar. AMP has been registered as a National Technical Heritage Monument and as such deserves to be preserved for future generations.

In an amazing twist of fate, *Offcity* leadership encountered a Prague-based architect who recognized the historical and architectural importance of this abandoned flour mill and in 2016, he purchased the property. The new owner's vision is consistent with the vision of the *Offcity* collective: the building and whole area has great potential to become a vibrant cultural space. The new owner is very open to public discussion and *Offcity* helps him to facilitate these discussions. *Offcity* also invites artists, architects and other creative thinkers to help with the reconversion process. There are currently several small firms and entrepreneurs occupying other parts of the complex and community meetings continue to be held to discuss the issues of renovation and future use.

Via provided a grant to *Offcity* to jump start the process of designing and developing plans for the future use of this industrial complex. The community and city council have responded in positive ways to this initiative. Given the architectural appeal of the mill and its central location, the outcome could have a major impact on the appearance of Pardubice as well as an economic impact through the development of a wide range of community organizations and small businesses. We look forward to learning more about the work of *Offcity* in bringing AMP back to life again!

By Bill Lafe, Friends of Via Board of Directors



Šárka Zahálková, President of *Offcity*, and Ondřej Teplý, architect and co-founder of *Offcity*