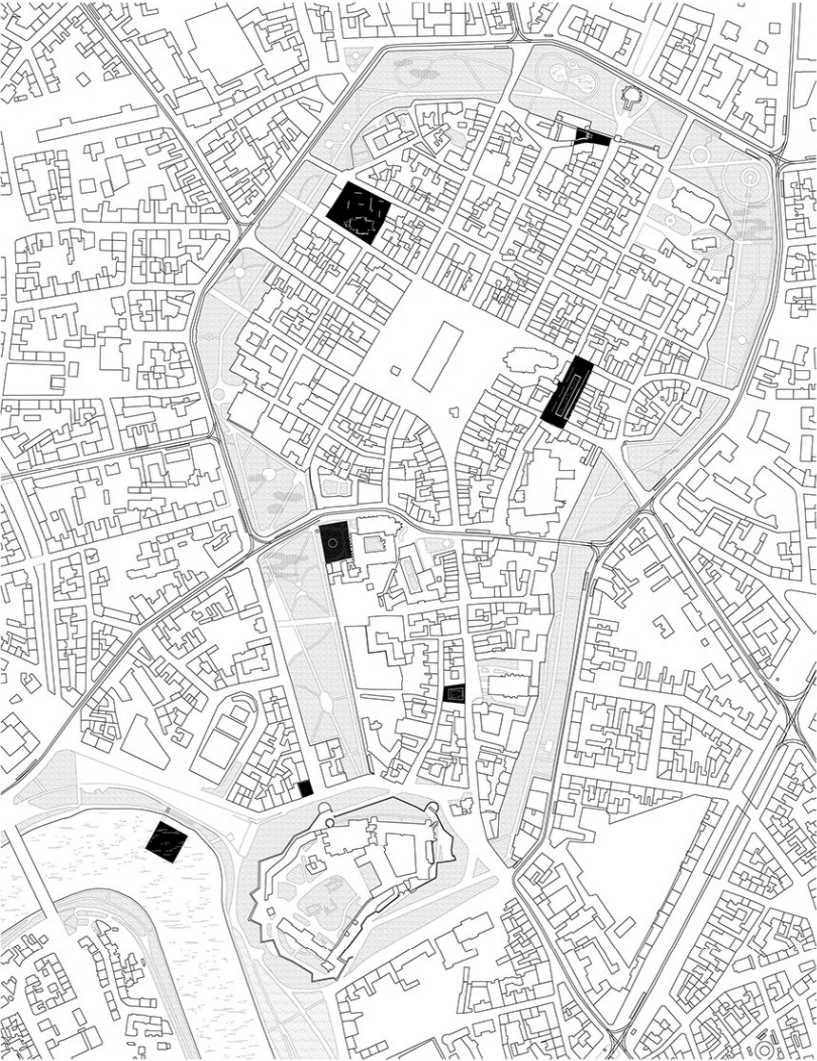


A city built on water

Water was a dominant landscape element of the early Kraków. Why a city built on water disconnected itself from its river?

Kraków was set up among swamps bogs and mist. Early buildings were located on hills surrounded by water between a dense network of three rivers. The name "Wawel" is etymologically associated with the word "wawel" which means a hill among swamps, a place located on water. Rivers and wetlands were natural guards for the city. Water was used for transport, trade, agriculture and industry. In the course of time, together with the lifestyle change of the habitants, industrial development and urban tissue densification, the Vistula became less and less essential and physically isolated from the city. In parallel, separation between the river and habitants progressed on a mental level. Water was perceived as a destructive element rather than a life-giving one. The city was haunted by multiple floods and epidemics caused by the bad water condition. All these factors caused the contemporary ignorance towards the river neglecting it as a significant part of Kraków's heritage and its public space. While the river should be a natural extension of the city, currently the Vistula is seen as an obstacle. Difference in water presence in the city over centuries is illustrated in following drawings based on historical texts and archive cartography studies.



Reflection of the past

Our proposal is an attempt to achieve the connection between the city and its river. It could be reached by implementing a series of sheer interventions bringing water into significant public spaces of Kraków and in parallel embedding them in the cognisance of both habitants and visitors. Interventions have a site-specific profile. They commemorate the past in an indirect way, express the humans' longing for nature and harness the potential of some neglected places surprisingly found in the Old Town of Kraków.

By the use of remarkably ephemeral properties of water - translucency, reflection, changeability, evaporation, the introduced elements are quiet and gentle. They do not bring new forms into the already quite cacophonous Old Town. They emphasise the qualities of the place instead (genius loci). Furthermore, the nature of the interventions is not permanent - they are phenomena. Most of the elements appear temporary, according to the time of the day, external factors and functionality. They come and disappear creating a changing landscape of the city. Good example to illustrate this intention would be the temporary river on one of the main squares of Kraków - Mały Rynek. At times it could stay there for a day, another time appear for just a short while or not at all. The same principle can be found in the main gesture of the project - the square on water - according to the water level of the Vistula, it appears or vanishes completely under the surface of the water.

