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S.P.S XIX. Congress on Dry Stone Walling

Krems, Austria (workshop Mon 20th) / Fri 24th – Mon 27 th Oct. 2025

The XIX. Congress takes place, for the first time, in Austria at the wine school Krems. The town of Krems is the entrance to the most famous wine region in Austria, the Wachau. The Wachau is part of the Danube valley, where the river broke through the granite massive of the northern part of the state of lower Austria. Along those 30 km of river valley between the towns Krems and Melk, vine terraces on dry stone walls shape the landscape. The Wachau region is world heritage region recognized by the UNESCO. Whereas the town of Krems itself a famous cultural site, the monasteries of Göttweig and Melk are well-known landmarks at both ends of the Wachau region.

History of the dry stone walls in the Wachau region

How long terraced viticulture dates back, is unknown. While south of river Danube wine growing is scientifically proven to be over 3.000 years old, there is no proof about the age of the dry stone walls. The first document that is clear evidence that vines were cultivated on the slopes, and therefore on wall terraces, is the “Jus Montanum” from the 11th century. Another script documents that in 1083 vineyards at St. Michael were donated to the monastery of Göttweig. This indicates that winegrowing must date back further.

The Wachau was owned by the monasteries of Passau and Niederaltaich. Since these also owned vineyards south of the Alps, and their libraries have documents about the skill of making terraces in north Italy, one theory is that this know-how was transferred by the monasteries from the Mediterranean climate zone to the Danube River sometime from the 6th to the 9th century. The oldest stone wall itself has been dated to be from the 13th century.

At present, the vineyard area of the Wachau is a little more than 1,400 hectares. Half of it is on wall terraces, in the neighboring wine growing valleys of the smaller rivers Krems and Kamp, walls terraces are less than 10%.

Until the 15th century, the Wachau had appr. 2,800 ha of vineyards. Since the flatland in the river valley is limited, nearly 1,400 ha of dry stone wall terraces have been abandoned. Their remnants, reaching from completely intact to being invisibly buried under soil and slopes, can be found in the now tree-covered side valleys, clefts or higher hillsides. From then, various factors led to a decline of the wine industry: the minor ice age in the 1570ies with frost in higher regions; the 30-years war in the first half of the 17th century; the secularization in the 1790ies with the need of farmer families; being new owners, to produce their own food by keeping animals on the hills; the Napeleon wars at the beginning of the 19th century.

The area of romance between 1850 and 1900 is the only period of economic revival and of the increase of dry stone walls. It is the time of summer resorts and weekend trips of aristocrats and the well-off middle classes, poets and painters – Wachau tourism as we know it now is born. It is also the period when builders of walls, not only the vineyard owners, are named in documents, when dates are engraved at top stones or door stones and when many of the dry stone vineyard huts were built. These stone huts, being corbelled dome constructions, have now mostly disappeared and are documented in a book by Renate Löbbecke in 2021, “Corbelled dome huts in the vineyards of the Wachau”.

From the end of the 19th century until 1990, more and severe events led to more rapid decline of dry stone terraces: the vine louse pest, the Peronospora disease, World War 1, the great depression of the 1920ies, World War 2 and after the latter the mechanization of farms hurt the wine sector generally and the most steep and remote vineyards, workable only by hand, especially. Since the 1990ies, the terraces of the Wachau have been growing again. More than 50 ha of stone wall terraces have been restored or newly build, the most famous family wineries with their economic potential being the initiate momentum for the Wachau. Re-cultivation projects and exploring historical stone huts are part of the Monday excursion during the XIX. Congress.

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The Stein & Wein festival – international practitioners' workshop

Mon 20th – Fri 24th October 2025

Working together with experts, wallers and beginners in a relaxed climate, creating a special object, talking and exchanging, enjoying evenings together: as the nine previous Stein & Wein, the 10th international workshop in Austria will bring stone lovers together for a common experience. The date 2025 being combined with the DSW congress, it gives you the opportunity to have the pleasure of a special practical workshop and the scientific congress at one travel, staying in the same place and accommodation.

What and where:

- Public gardens at the horticultural school Langenlois
- We are building a **stone ship**, later serving as a gazebo and giving the visitor the feeling of "sailing through the gardens and vineyards".

Please note:

- You have to bring your own working clothes and personal safety gear (safety shoes, safety googles, working gloves).
- You can, but you don't have to bring, your own tools. All tools are provided at the workshop.
- When you book in at the Stein & Wein workshop online and you require accommodation, please book the latter also at the horticultural school Langenlois.
- All midday and evening meals are included in the workshop, and if necessary transport to and from the workshop site (in case there are not enough rooms available at the horticultural school).

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Congress Topics 2025

The aims of the congresses are to disseminate knowledge of dry-stone construction as a traditional art, to develop and conduct research and practical work in this field, and to facilitate the exchange of experience concerning good practice in the construction, maintenance and development of dry-stone structures.

These objectives are of interest for specialists and actors of:

- the research in anthropology, history, geography, agronomy, earth and natural sciences, architecture and engineering,
- the application of the technique to all constructions and to town and country planning,
- the study and enhancement of built heritage, landscapes, natural and cultural environment,
- the development of green and/or cultural tourism,
- the training of craftsmen and advising of dry-stone users.

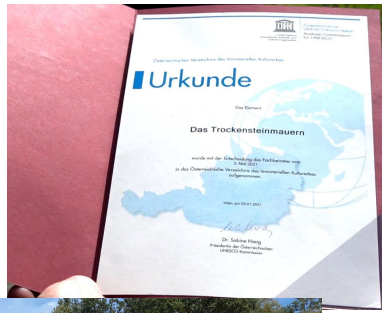
The scientific and technical field covered by these different approaches is very broad and offers several angles of attack.

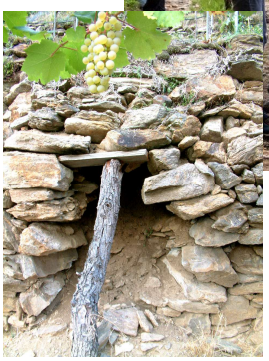
This year, the S.P.S. committee is proposing to look to the future by focusing on education and training (how and when to raise awareness among young people and the public, train apprentices and qualify professionals) and on terrace crops and products, those ‘edible’ walls that also help to moderate the climate. These particular themes are well suited to the Krems area, which has a past and is preparing a future in wine production, and which improves a renewed and dynamic tradition of teaching dry-stone construction.

For 2025 the presentation and papers are divided into four subject areas:

1. **Impacts** from UNESCO inscriptions, members' actions and innovations
2. **Didactics & training**: raising awareness, heritage enhancement, professionalisation
3. **“Foodscapes” - edible terraces**: old and new crops, products and usage
4. **Preservation & restoration** of structures and landscapes: theories and realities

The congress starts with an opening ceremony in honor of the UNESCO inscription.





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Excursion – you have different possibilities

Mon 27th October 2025

The excursion day comprises tours in two different regions, including lunch in between. Due to the limited place on the terraces or at wineries, for the morning excursion there is a choice of three different destinations. In the afternoon, the whole congress group has the same program.

Morning excursion – the Wachau wine region

Group 1: Wine cooperative & vine terraces

- Visit of the local wine cooperative "Domäne Wachau"
- Hiking up the Kellerberg vineyard on old terrace walls and stairways to the outlook platform.
  The vineyard hiking will take appr. 15 min going uphill.
- Visit of the historic baroque "Kellerschlössl" (cellar castle)
- Guided tour through the underground old and new (modernized in 2023) cellars

This option is recommended for everybody impaired: instead of going up the terraces of the Kellerberg a group can stay at the "Kellerschlössl" (baroque manor house) at the bottom of the vine hill with a guide giving the same explanation and information.

Group 2: Re-cultivation at the Johannserberg vineyards by the family winery Hick

- Since 2005, the winery is restoring vineyards which were abandonded in the 1920ies. The family on its own is building appr. 1,200 m² of news dry stone walls, making the vineyards workable with machinery. It is the most western vineyard on the south bank of Danube.
- Hiking up the Johannserberg is on a bad gravel road and will take appr. 30 min going uphill.

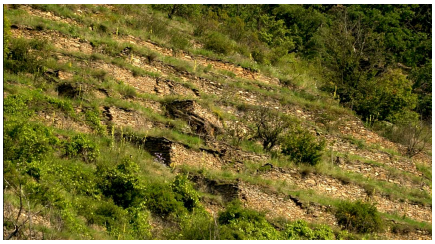
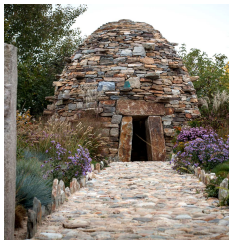
Group 3: The step terraces and old stone huts at the Atzberg and / or Spitzer Graben

- These are the steepest parts of the Wachau. Old walls, abandoned walls and old huts in hidden places will be seen as well as repaired and restored walls.
- This tour includes not only hiking, but also partly climbing over rocky places and abandoned walls and crossing deserted bushland. Total hiking time will be appr. 1.5 hours.

Afternoon excursion – DSW garden and art projects in the Kamptal region

All excursion groups will visit in rotation:

- Stone pyramids at Langenlois
- Public garden of the Garden school Langenlois with many DSW constructions: international types of walls, stone beehive hut, stone bridge, bee-bowl wall, fireplaces in dry stone construction.
- Stone pentagon hut at the Langenlois wine trail
- Kittenberger Adventure Gardens with the Moongate dry stone wall.
- The farewell dinner is then at the Kittenberger Adventure Gardens.

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Please note:

- You give your choice for the morning excursion at the online registration.
- All groups will get the same information on the wine region, the history and the terraces.
- All destinations in the Wachau offer good views over the river valley and its landscape.
- All destinations in the Wachau include a wine tasting with local wines.
- At the excursions you need solid shoes.
- All groups will be accompanied and guided by trainers of the DSW school Austria.
- Keep in mind, that group 3 is only suitable when you have experience in climbing rock or broken-down wall surface and passing through bushland / undergrowth without path.
- You will not go back to your room before the farewell dinner. Therefore, when you board the bus after breakfast, you have to have everything that you need until after the fare-wall dinner with you.

Photo © ÖWM / Robert Herbst

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Accommodation choices

Valid for the Stein & Wein workshop and the XIX. Congress

The congress organisers offer five different places for accommodation. One of them is directly on site (wine school Krems), two are within walking distance (guest houses at wineries), for the other two transport to and from the congress will be offered (garden school Langenlois, Kittenberger Chalets).
For these five places booking, payment and billing will be handled by the congress team for you. The booking can be done immediately with the online registration; if one place is full and not available anymore, we will inform you. Breakfast is included in all places.
The aim is to have as many participants as possible in the close vicinity in order to avoid unnessary transport: so please check who of your friends, partners or co-workers in your field takes also part in the congress and consider booking double room!

Details see the extra room list.

Travel & local transport

Concerning logistics, you are expected to arrive at one of the three following places:

1. Wine school Krems directly (A-3500 Krems, Wienerstraße 101). Parking is possible directly there for free. In case you book accommodation in one of the two quarters further off (or at a place of your own choice not organized by the congress), please come first to the wine school for registration.
2. At the train station Krems. Pick-up will be provided for free.
3. At Vienna airport: Pick-up by minibus organized by us is available for 30,- € per person. Depending on arrival times and number of people, waiting at the airport can be necessary.

Travel times, means of transport and places you are asked to specify at the online registration.

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Online Registration

https://forms.gle/x8TC3Zt6EtyTpHwWA

Price

- Combined Congress + Stein & Wein workshop: 620,- (uniform price for everybody)
- Congress 3 days: 180,-, for S.P.S. members 150,-
  only one congress day (Sat or Sun) 100,- (members 85,-)
  only excursion day (Mon) 60,- (members 50,-)
- Stein & Wein Workshop: 490,-
- Breakfast is included in accommodation
- Dinners Fri, Sat, Sun and Lunches Sat, Sun 90,- € all inclusive, or 18,- for a single meal
- Lunch and dinner Monday invitation from sponsor & region
- Extra meal (Fri lunch, Tue lunch) 18,- per person and meal

For payment, you receive the bill and instructions before the congress. The will be only one bill in total for all arrangements booked by you at the organizer of the congress.

S.P.S. membership

For taking up the membership or prolonging it, please pay the two-years membership fee of 40,- € to:

IBAN: FR76 1910 6000 0208 0610 8000 860
BIC: AGRIFRPP891

For questions about membership please contact: contact@pierreseche-international.org

Contacts

Congress secretariat for registration, organisation, logistics

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S.P.S secretariat for submission of papers:

Ada Acovitsióti-Hameau, General Secretary SPS
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contact@pierreseche-international.org

Information is also available at

www.lako.at/landimpulse/dsw-congress2025/
www.pierreseche-international.org

Impressions of landscape & garden stonewalls and about dry stone walling in Austria, you find on the videos (partly available in English, French, Greek):

www.agrovideos.at → tab “Stein“

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Additional information about town & region

For those who take the chance to expand your stay in or around Krems before or after the congress, the following links are helpful:

About this…	**…you find information here**
Town Krems	https://www.krems.info/en
Region river Danube	https://www.donau.com/en/wachau-nibelungengau-kremstal/
Wine region Wachau	https://www.austrianwine.com/our-wine/wine-growing-regions/niederoesterreich-lower-austria/wachau
Wine region Kremstal	https://kremstalwein.at/en/
Wine region Kamptal	https://www.langenlois.at/weinbaugebiet-kamptal
Monastery Göttweig	https://www.stiftgoettweig.at/portal/en/home
Monastery Melk	https://www.stiftmelk.at/en/

If you are looking for individual accommodation instead of the five places organized by the congress, the following links help you to organize the stay according to your personal wishes:

https://www.krems.info/en/accommodation

https://www.langenlois.at/unterkuenfte

https://www.donau.com/en/the-danube-in-lower-austria/sleep-book/overnight-accommodations/all-overnight-accommodations/

In case you prefer a bit of surfing the internet on your own, recommended keywords of place are “Krems”, “Wachau”, “Kremstal”, “Langenlois”, “Kamptal”.

Photo © Stadt Krems