ON URBAN PLANNING: CHALLENGES IN ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE

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The city of Esch has a turbulent past that is closely linked to the development of the steel industry. Its urban growth was conditioned by the establishment of three steel sites: Terres Rouges, Esch-Schifflange, and Belval. The entire infrastructure, mines, and industrial buildings were operating according to their own logic, which was guided primarily by the most profitable exploitation of resources rather than coherent urban development.

As a result, this development has left significant fragments, fractures, interstices, and abandoned areas in the urban fabric and its landscape. These territories with an uncertain destiny require a considered approach to give them a strong identity without abandoning historic realities and without neglecting the necessities of the socio-ecological transition.

Belval was the first major urban development initiative on the territory of the city, with the aim to transform a former industrial area into a vibrant, sustainable, and contemporary urban district. This project represents a significant urban regeneration effort that has had a substantial impact on the city and the surrounding region, with all its problems.

In proximity to Belval, another ambitious urban development initiative is currently being implemented on the brownfield called "Rout Lëns", covering an area of about 11 ha. The project represents a holistic approach to urban development, in which history, sustainability and modern living converge to create a more lively and livable new neighborhood in Esch.
Another significant urban interstice is formed by the industrial brownfield known as "Metzeschmelz", which is directly connected to the city center of Esch and the municipality of Schifflange. In 2019, Urban Agency in collaboration with COBE won the urban planning competition to transform this former steel plant of about 60 ha into a new district focused on innovation, craft, and sustainable mobility and represents a significant shift towards a mixed-use development integrating historical significance with modern needs.
Due to these regeneration projects, the city is now dealing with several urban poles with a strong identity and significant urbanity. The territorial strategy of the city currently aims to coordinate and make the development of these poles complementary –– and using the in-between locations with an enormous potential for development.

DAISY WAGNER is the head of the Urban Development Division at the City of Esch-sur-Alzette. She is a trained engineer in spatial planning with a specialization in urban development. Before entering the public sector, she spent several years working in a private planning office. Within the city's Urban Development Division, Daisy and her team are working on the continuous improvement of the city through an ongoing process that includes description (inventory), analysis, identification (priority areas), definition (strategies, concepts), and implementation (utilizing both formal and informal tools such as PAG, PAP, Schémas Directeurs, and planning concepts).

PHILIPPE NATHAN co-founder of 2001, a think-and do-tank besed in Esch-sur-Alzette, engaged in radical design and which is developing territories, buildings, spaces and strategies. He taught at the University of Brussels in 2015, was assisting between 2016 and 2018 at the ETH Zurich, studio tutor at MArch UNI.lu in 2019 and guest professor at TU Kaiserslautern in 2021. He has been an invited guest critic among others at the AA Architectural Association in London and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure Versailles in Paris. He has been co-curator of the Luxembourg Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2012 and 2018.

DENIS SCUTO is the Deputy Director of the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH). He worked as history teacher in secondary school in Echternach and Esch-sur-Alzette (1989–2003), lecturer in history and history didactics at the Institut Supérieur d'Etudes et de Recherches Pédagogiques (1997–2003) and since 2003 lecturer and researcher at the University of Luxembourg. His research interests lay inthe history of nation-state as a triple integration process (national, social, transnational), migration and citizenship history, labor history and industrial heritage in Luxembourg and the Greater Region. He is also known for his many interventions about contemporary history and uses of the past in the Luxembourg public debate since the 1990s.

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In conclusion, it can be summarized that—in urban terms—the goal is to repair the territory and prepare it for its future roles. Repairing involves:

- Restructuring the existing fragments;
- Establishing connections between these fragments;
- Restructuring the infrastructure that links them;
- Creating small-scale and decentralized social hubs;
- Rekindling the desire to linger in the city.

Ultimately, it also means shifting from the current perspective that stops at the boundaries of industrial brownfields and national border. Instead, one needs to call for a comprehensive understanding that provides a different value to interstitial spaces. By doing so, those spaces and territories can become zones of strength—connecting spaces, municipalities, regions, and countries.

STEVE FALTZ was born and is living in Esch-sur-Alzette. Professionally raised as a civil engineer in road construction, he works for the Ministry of Sports, where he acts as an advisor for communities concerning sports infrastructure. Steve is the president of the local (Esch) section of the Socialist Party and was placed as their top candidate in the past local elections in Esch-sur-Alzette in June 2023.
His focus in politics is, amongst others, a courageous urban development to make Esch a more sustainable, social, contemporary, and best-practice city.
On the recreational front, he is also the president of the Escher Volleyball Club and an urban beekeeper.

LIZ BRAZ is a Luxembourgish lawyer and politician (LSAP). She completed a bachelor's degree in law at the University of Luxembourg followed by a master's degree in public and international law at the ULB in Brussels. She has been working since May 2023 as Chargée de mission at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In May 2022, together with Brian Halsdorf, she founded a socialist youth section for the south, of which she became co-president. In the municipal elections of 2023, she came as the third elected member of her party to the Escher municipal council. In the same year, she ran for the parliamentary elections and was elected to the chamber for the LSAP in the southern district.

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