ON POLICYMAKING GROUNDED IN EVERYDAY PRACTICES

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The Esch Clinics project, situated in Esch-sur-Alzette, Luxembourg, serves as a pivotal case study in reimagining urban policymaking by integrating informal and non-normative spatial practices. This reflective workshop outlines an emerging framework that bridges everyday practices with formal policymaking processes, positioning the lived experiences of citizens as essential components in shaping future urban policies.[1]

Informal Practices as Catalysts for Policy Innovation

Informal and non-normative spatial practices often emerge as responses, enquiries, or challenges to the rigidity and limitations of formal urban systems. These practices, characterized by informality, adaptability, and collective creativity, reveal how urban life continuously evolves through negotiation, improvisation, and shared use of space.[2] They can serve as test ground of social and spatial innovation, offering policymakers valuable insight into the ways communities produce, organize, and sustain their environments outside official planning mechanisms.[2]

This requires a shift away from the top-down model of governance toward an embedded and more involved mode that values the contributions of those, whose voices are often excluded. The everyday becomes both source and subject of policy, challenging the distinction between "policy maker" and "policy taker".

Methodological Approaches: Participatory and Interpretive Frameworks

To capture the logic of everyday practices, methodological choices matter. Ethnographic, participatory, and interpretive methods allow the observer to witness how urban dwellers negotiate, repurpose, and reclaim space. These forms of research generate knowledge that is not only descriptive but generative—capable of informing policy design in ways attuned to lived realities.[3]

The first stage of *The Esch Clinics* project included a series of research residencies, where invited researchers, citizens, and local actors collaboratively explored the conditions and frictions shaping daily life in Esch-sur-Alzette. These residencies act as test ground for co-designing urban interventions—spaces where every day experiences can be transformed into policy-relevant insights, prototypes, and forms of situated knowledge. The residencies' findings will be synthesized into concrete urban proposals and dialogues with policymakers. The result is a model of policymaking that is more attuned, adaptive, and co-owned by communities rather than imposed upon them.

From Informal Practices to Formal Policies

One of the central challenges of *The Esch Clinics* project is how to translate informal practice into formal policy without voiding or sterilizing it. A promising strategy is to adopt modular, flexible policy "protocols" that respond to local conditions, adapt over time, and embed the logic of everyday life.[3] These protocols act as bridges between institutional structures and community practices, creating a governance architecture that is nimble and rooted.

In *The Esch Clinics,* spaces of encounter are created where citizens, planners, and public officials collaborate through specifically designed collective formats and assemblies. Imagining policy as an iterative, co-produced process rather than a monolithic plan allows institutional actors to remain open to the emergent logics of everyday practices.

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Inclusivity and Representation in Policymaking

Central to this framework is the inclusion of those traditionally marginalised: migrants, informal workers, low-income residents – the "invisible" city-makers whose practices also sustain urban life, because they are based on everyday lived experiences. Inclusion is not a token gesture but a structural imperative: policy must recognise and value the know-how of those who live outside dominant norms.[4]

In this sense, everyday practice is no longer the site of deficit but the locus of innovation. Policies that begin from the lived reality of the "other" become not only more just but also more effective. The field of solidarity politics offers a parallel: moving beyond empathy as a policy tool toward a commitment of care.[5]

The Esch Clinics aim to demonstrate the hypothesis that embedding informal, participatory, and inclusive practices into urban policymaking, can contribute to building a more equitable and resilient city. When policy is grounded in the lived and the everyday, we shift from prescribing urban life to enabling it. The framework proposed here sees policy not as distant command but as co-produced practice. The everyday, then, is not simply observed—it is embodied, problematised and re-imagined as the foundation of new models of urban governance.

Notes

1. Aristide Antonas and Thanos Zartaloudis, Archipelago of Protocols (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020).

2. Lindsey Garner-Knapp et al., eds., Informality in Policymaking: Weaving the Threads of Everyday Policy Work (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2023).

3. Antonas and Zartaloudis, Archipelago of Protocols.

4. Garner-Knapp et al., Informality in Policymaking.

5. Aruna D'Souza, Imperfect Solidarities (Berlin: Floating Opera Press / Columbia University Press, 2024)

CATHERINE WARIN is an Expert in EU Law and in human rights. A fully qualified lawyer at the Luxembourg Bar, she advises and represents clients before the Luxembourgish and European courts (CJEU and ECtHR) and the UN human rights committees. She represents the Luxembourg Bar Association in committees on the rule of law and on migration at the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe. In addition, Catherine is the co-founding president of Passerell, an NGO providing legal support to asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants in Luxembourg. She advises the organisation on legal and advocacy issues. Catherine also holds teaching positions at the University of Luxembourg and at Sciences Po Paris.

FRANK WIES graduated in law from the University of Liège in 1998 and pursued additional studies in Luxembourg law before being sworn in at the Diekirch Bar in April 1999. He began his career at the legal firm URBANY, where he worked until March 2002, before establishing his own practice. Alongside his professional work, he has been deeply engaged in the promotion and defense of human rights through Amnesty International Luxembourg and the Lëtzebuerger Flüchtlingsrot. He is a member of the Consultative Commission on Human Rights, a former elected member of the Council of the Luxembourg Bar Association, and currently serves as Chairman of the Legal Aid Committee as well as a member of the Immigration and Asylum Committee. In addition to advising various associations, he regularly contributes to a program on Luxembourg's public radio, FM 100.7.