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The Esch Clinics

INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE FUTURE OF ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE

JULY 1, 2024
18:00–20:00

Claudia Chwalisz
Christian Weis
Steve Faltz
Jean-Paul Espen
James Macdonald-Nelson
Maria Spada
Do Demuth
Fatima Rougi

CLAUDIA CHWALISZ is the Founder and CEO of Democracy Next. Prior to that, Claudia served as the Innovative Citizen Participation Lead at the OECD, where she established and analysed around 600 examples of deliberative assemblies around the world, co-authored the Catching the Deliberative Wave report, and set standards for implementation and institutionalisation. She was involved in designing the world's first permanent deliberative bodies made up of people drawn by a lottery in Ostbelgien, Paris, and Brussels. Claudia is an Obama Leader Europe 2023.

CHRISTIAN WEIS has been Esch-sur-Alzette's mayor, Luxembourg's second-largest city, since 29th November 2023. He joined the CSV (Chrëschtlech-Sozial Vollekspartei) at 17 and has been actively involved in politics ever since. Serving on the communal council since 2016 and joining the College of Mayors and Aldermen in 2020, Weis oversees Finances & Budget, Security, Building Regulations, Housing, Resilience, Health, Public Relations, and Relations with the Communal Council. He is dedicated to representing citizens' interests, focusing on modernising infrastructure and enhancing community well-being through close engagement.

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.

JEAN-PAUL ESPEN is the Secretary General of the City of Esch-sur-Alzette. Jean-Paul has a master and LLM degree in law. He started his professional as a lawyer and joined the City of Esch in 2010 as legal counsel, before being nominated in 2014 as its Secretary General. He oversees the development and implementation of policies in alignment with the goals and vision set by the city council or the mayor. This includes researching and analysing best practices, coordinating with various departments and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.

After a year of preparations and negotiations by the Chair of the City of Esch, Cultures of Assembly is starting a strategic collaboration with The City of Esch and DemocracyNext, an international non-profit, non-partisan research and action lab on Citizens' Assemblies, deliberation, and sortition – the practice of selecting decision makers by lottery.

In 2025, Esch will implement one Citizens' Assembly to address key and urgent questions about the future of the city – such initiative requires tapping into the collective intelligence of people living in the city to work together and find common ground on recommendations. The intention is to learn from this first experience to institutionalise Citizens' Assemblies and make them a part of Esch's expanded democratic structure.

This two-year-long collaboration between Cultures of Assembly and Democracy Next will run in parallel and in close proximity to the forthcoming research project, 'The Esch Clinics' (starting in September 2024), devised and conducted by the Chair of the City of Esch. The collaboration will focus on the implementation of a series of citizen assemblies in Esch-sur-Alzette that will produce a local base narrative and complement the activities and initiatives of The Esch Clinics to investigate questions around urban commons and innovating democratic urban governance.

Background
In 2023, DemocracyNext convened an International Task Force on Democratising City Planning –a group of globally renowned professionals from various spatial practices and the field of deliberative democracy to reimagine how urban planning decision- making processes could place more power in the hands of people.

The Task Force resulted in a paper with six proposals for systemic change to city planning decision making –- with Citizens' Assemblies playing a key role. Citizens, broadly representative of a community's diversity, are at the heart of these proposals, in constructive relationship with city government, planners, designers, developers, community groups, and nature.

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To bring these ideas to life, DemocracyNext is convening an international cohort of cities from July 2024 to December 2025 who are eager to make these systemic shifts. In early 2024, DemocracyNext held an application process for cities to express their interest in partnering to pilot the six proposals. They received over 20 applications from cities in 17 countries around the world, including Esch.

After several conversations with Mayor Christian Weis, Secretary General Jean- Paul Espen, and the Chair of the City of Esch Markus Miessen, we are happy to announce this collaboration between DemocracyNext and Esch-sur-Alzette.

What does the collaboration entail?

- DemocracyNext will build capacity through a 3-stage learning program to increase the knowledge and capacity of staff and decision makers to initiate and run a Citizens' Assembly.
- They will provide ongoing advice and guidance throughout implementation of the Citizens' Assembly by local partners.
- They will provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing and learning between a cohort of cities.
- It will be carried out shared research with The Esch Clinics to evaluate and learn from the process of designing and implementing the Citizens' Assembly for future iterations and institutionalisation.
- It will be promoted the collaboration in order to inspire other cities globally.

References

MacDonald-Nelson, James, Claudia Chwalisz, Ieva Cesnulaityte, and Lucy Reid. *Six ways to democratise city planning: Enabling thriving and healthy cities*. DemocracyNext, 2024

DemocracyNext (2024). Executive Summary Six ways to *democratise city planning*: Enabling thriving and healthy cities.

MiessenMarkus. *Agonistic Assemblies. On the Spatial Politics of Horizontality*. Sternberg Press 2024

JAMES MACDONALD-NELSON is the Cities Programme Lead at DemocracyNext. James is a designer with degrees in landscape architecture, urbanism, and global development studies. Having studied and worked in spatial practice for 10 years in Canada and Europe, James has a deep knowledge of how the built environment is transformed and managed—and how often citizens are left out of these processes. At DemocracyNext James coordinates the Cities Programme which focuses on making systemic changes to how we take decisions about our cities by empowering people through Citizens' Assemblies.

MARIA SPADA is an architect and urban planner with 32 years of experience in a renowned Luxembourgish architecture office. Dedicated to raising awareness of the built environment, public spaces and heritage, she developed a strong interest in industrial sites and their redevelopment. She has been involved in a number of projects, has worked as a volunteer for various associations, has been a co-organiser of civic participation events and has set up a consultancy firm. On 19 June 2023, she joined the non-profit organisation CNCI as Head of Industrial Heritage, leading efforts to preserve and promote industrial heritage sites.

DO DEMUTH has been a self-employed interior architect since 1999, focusing on renovation and restauration of old buildings. Her approach often unpacks the "archaeological" dimension, uncovering the original complexity and beauty by removing multiple layers of previous works. The balance between the needs of humans and those of buildings is a thread that weaves through many of her projects. This fascination for stories told by heritage is also at the centre of her involvement as coordinator at FERROFORUM asbl, an association committed to the transmission of the industrial heritage that has shaped the Grand Duchy for over 150 years.

FATIMA ROUGI was born in Morocco, grew up in Corsica, and studied history and journalism in France. Militant feminist, writer and former journalist, she is currently the head of press relations at Kulturfabrik, a key cultural center in Esch-sur-Alzette. With over 15 years of experience working in journalism and volunteering, her work mainly deals with issues related to culture, migration, and women's rights. She is member of the Board of Directors of Family Planning Luxembourg since 2015 and she is at the origin of the law which allowed to change the taxation of menstrual products from 17 to 3% in Luxembourg.