



# CITY PROFILE

# ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE

MAY 2017





# CITY DESCRIPTION

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Canton:** Esch-sur-Alzette

**Country:** Luxembourg

**Area:** 14.35 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 32.600 inhab. (2014)

**Density:** 1.951 inhab/km<sup>2</sup>

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**Mayor:** Ms. Vera Spautz

**Site web :** [www.esch.lu](http://www.esch.lu)

## CULTURAL CONTEXT

Welcome to Esch, or Esch-sur-Alzette as our city is also called due to the river that runs through it. We don't usually boast about being the second-largest city in Luxembourg because we know our country is small and that our size impresses no one. Luxembourg is a small country and we are used to crossing borders without thinking about it or even realising it. The southern region where we are located is particularly densely populated.

Likewise, when telling people from afar that you have a meeting in France, they often think you'll be travelling a long distance when in fact France is only five minutes away. It is so close that tens of thousands of commuters travel to Luxembourg every day for work, creating constant interaction between French and Luxembourgish residents. In this context the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Alzette Belval, was established in 2013, sealing and strengthening the cross-border partnership between four municipalities in the southern region of Luxembourg –including Esch – and eight French municipalities, which together form the CCPHVA, (Communauté de communes du Pays-Haut Val d'Alzette) that supports the Esch 2022 bid to become European Capital of Culture. It is to be noted that the CCPHVA has, in its 2014/2024 territorial project, chosen to "make culture an engine for the development of the territory". The shared determination to create true and constructive relations between neighbours is standard in our region. Cross-border and regional projects are very much at the heart of our territorial development. There is however a lot more we can do. We want to use the absence of obvious physical borders between cities to take down further boundaries and create an even more connected region. We all share the legacy of an industrial past, implying a welcoming culture by tradition, a land of migration, centrally located in Europe and at economic crossroads.



# ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE'S CULTURAL PROFILE

## CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The cultural development of our city has been built around four major pillars: the support provided to community associations and third-sector activities (from 1871), the backing of cultural and educational institutions (from 1913), the creation of a cultural centre and theatre (from 1950), and the accession of our alternative and rock culture (from 1980). From very early on, our wish to include everyone and to build on sectors that were above all relevant to our population and compatible with our unique environment has been an important part of our cultural identity and it continues to be so.

## MUSIC HARMONIES, CHOIRS AND THEATRE COMPANIES

The opening of mines and blast furnaces in Esch spawned a new working class and resulted in population growth. Both of these elements led to the need for more social activities and the development of new community interests. In Esch industrial expansion and migration first of all resulted in the creation of numerous music societies and theatre companies. The band society was created in 1871 by a group of music-lovers: Luxembourgish and Italian workers, local leaders and members of the bourgeoisie. It still exists today as the Municipal Harmony. Other societies and clubs followed: the Symphony club was founded in 1902, the Student Harmony in 1905, the Miner's Harmony in 1920 ... The first theatre company, Escher Liewensfrou, saw the daylight in 1907. Simultaneously, the Italian community set up its own choirs and theatre companies.

The municipality gave financial support to all of these associations, as they were considered to provide worthwhile occupations.

## CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, local politicians were keen on pushing forward popular education. The decision to create a music school and a public library was taken in 1913, but plans were put on hold because of WWI. The library opened in 1919 and remains the oldest one in the country. Local associations created the music school as a cooperative in 1923. Local authorities took over in 1926 to make it a municipal music school and in 1969 it became the Conservatoire. The Esch Conservatoire is a key institution today and its reputation shines well beyond the regional and national borders. It offers top-ranked classes in music (classic and jazz), drama, dance and singing and numerous students have emerged from here to head for international careers, as for example trumpet player Ernie Hammes, actress and singer Martine Breisch, jazz musician Pol Belardi, drummer Laurent Warnier, dancer Sylvia Camarda, opera singer Claudia Moulin, violinist Nikita Gerkusov and dancer Natascha Dudar. The Esch Conservatoire is also much appreciated for the numerous concerts of high standard it organises each year with renowned artists from all over the world.

The National Museum of Resistance opened in 1956. Through a series of photographs, objects and art works it retraces the Grand Duchy and its population's history between

1940 and 1945. A second section covers the Nazi repression and the concentration camp system, as well as the fate of the Jewish people of Luxembourg. In the temporary showcase space, there are exhibitions about the period around WWII but also about past and present events related to resistance against human rights violations or citizenship education. The museum is an important part of the young generation's education too: our view of history shapes the way we view the present and it dictates which answers we offer to existing problems. In Esch's continued effort to remember and understand the past, a Remembrance path through the city has also been inaugurated to provide explanations about precise locations and names in relation with WWII.

A cultural meeting point: the Municipal Theatre In the beginning of the 1950s, local politicians started working on how to expand the cultural offer for all. The idea of building an art gallery and a municipal theatre was launched in 1954. The art gallery became a reality in 1959 and the Municipal Theatre – the first in Luxembourg – was inaugurated in 1962. It was completely renovated in 2009-2011 and offers a wide-ranging and high-quality selection of performances in various languages and with both national and international artists: plays, dance, operas, operettas, concerts, musicals, etc. The Esch Theatre has a clear cross-border approach in its choice of programming and regularly collaborates with renowned foreign theatres all while initiating its own creations. It also offers a stage to various cultural associations in the region. The art gallery is situated on the second floor and temporary exhibitions are organised there.

## CULTURE FOR ALL

In the 1980s, Esch got its teeth into alternative culture, rock and street art. When the city's slaughterhouse closed down in 1979, local artists squatted the abandoned building and made it into a theatre and concert venue. Thanks to funds made available by our Ministry of Culture and the contribution of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), it was possible to start restoring the structures in 1996 and they opened again two years later. Today the 4,500 square meters of renovated space – the Kulturfabrik – is dedicated to culture in general but is far from limited to only Luxembourgish artistic activities. It is intended for the promotion and development of alternative cultures with strong cross-border collaboration. Seven buildings, two stages, an exhibition gallery, rehearsal rooms for bands and theatre companies, a cinema and a brasserie make the Kulturfabrik a unique forum for meetings and exchanges, promoting creation and access to culture. Building a concert venue for the younger generation had been on the agenda since the end of the 1970s, but it wasn't before 2003 that the construction of Esch's Rockhal was initiated. When Luxembourg City was ECoC in 1995, it generated a surge of creative activities in the whole country and revived the discussions around our concert hall. A first project was agreed upon and plans were made for the venue to be installed in the blower hall on the industrial wasteland in Belval- Ouest. However, due to the complex and costly operational alterations necessary to guarantee the organisation and running of events in adequate conditions without changing the nature of the original site, it was decided to construct a whole new, and bigger, building instead. The Rockhal opened in Belval- Ouest in 2005 and quickly became an essential location for Luxembourg and the whole south region. Boasting three concert halls, the complex managed by the public institution Centre de Musiques Amplifiées and co-financed by the Luxembourgish State, is the Grand Duchy's number one concert venue. And, when you have a great venue, you have a good scene: the biggest names have performed at the Rockhal, from the Scorpions, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, Bob Dylan, REM and Neil Young to Depeche Mode, Kylie Minogue, Daft Punk, Jamiroquai, Rihanna, Lady Gaga, Lenny Kravitz, Prince and David Guetta ... to mention but a few. The Rockhal is also a Music & Resources Centre, with six rehearsal rooms, a recording studio, a dance studio

and a documentation centre and thus allows players of the Luxembourg music scene, both professional and amateur, to interact. Because of its heritage and the needs and influence of many different cultures and communities, Esch has built a strong cultural offer, which attracts many non-residents too. It is however our hope that, should our city become ECoC, a larger part of our population will want to take advantage of all of our cultural institutions.

## THE EVENTS WE PUT ON

The city of Esch organises a great deal of recurring cultural events and music festivals every year, which attract both residents and audiences from afar. Among our most popular are: Festival Terres Rouges, Nuit de la Culture, Fête de la musique (this year, instead of the usual open-air concerts, we'll be bringing concerts to those who don't normally have access to live music; the artists will, for example, play in retirement homes), Gay Mat (Esch is home to Luxembourg's Gay Pride, the only national LGTB event), Sonic Visions (Music Conference and Showcase Festival), Out of the Crowd (indie, experimental music festival), Festival Flamenco, Festival des clowns, Festival du film italien and Screaming Fields (launch pad for young and talented bands and artists from Luxembourg).



## CONTACTS

For additional information about this exercise, please contact:



**Esch-sur-Alzette**

**Ralph Waltmans**

Email: [ralph.waltmans@villeesch.lu](mailto:ralph.waltmans@villeesch.lu)

Web: [www.esch.lu](http://www.esch.lu)



**United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) - Committee on Culture**

Email: [info@agenda21culture.net](mailto:info@agenda21culture.net)

Web: [www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net)