

CULTURAL GOVERNANCE IN ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21: ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
8. CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE
9. GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

**GOVERNANCE, CULTURAL, BOTTOM-UP, LOCAL,
COOPERATION, INSTITUTIONAL, SUPPORT,
EMPOWERMENT, CAPACITY, PARTICIPATION**

1. Esch-sur-Alzette and culture

With a population of 36,220, Esch-sur-Alzette is the second largest city in Luxembourg, despite having undergone an industrial decline. Its demographics reflect a diverse population with 57% being foreign inhabitants from 130 nationalities, and half border workers. It is a veritable breeding ground for a rich cultural sector. This can be seen in the approximately fifty socio-cultural associations, a theatre, a library, a national conservatory, a cultural centre, a national museum, a concert hall, galleries, cultural third spaces, an artists' residence, and a contemporary art exhibition space. It was also the European Capital of Culture in 2022, and as a leading city under Agenda 21 for culture, Esch promoted creative culture as a pillar of the socio-ecological transition.

Before 2017, no city in Luxembourg had a cultural strategy in place. Work on governance was proposed by the city's Culture Department. To ensure consistency in these actions with those of other city regions and its role as Esch2022 European Capital of Culture, the Connexions strategy was devised. Governance helps by amplifying the actions of the area's cultural actors who have long been sensitive to the vital role of culture as a pillar of the socio-ecological transition. This approach aligns with the Leading City program, with the 75% Climate Pact, and with the 2030 Climate Neutrality Pact, aiming to "decarbonize" culture and to improve equity and social justice.



**GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE WAS SET UP IN 2018 TO JOINTLY
OUTLINE THE 18 OBJECTIVES OF THE CONNEXIONS STRATEGY.**

2. Project goals and implementation

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The objective of the governance of culture plan was to create favourable conditions for implementing Connexions and Connexions 2 (its 2022 update) and to ensure its long-term success. The Governance Council (CG) is the central body for the implementation and the will of cultural policy in Esch-sur-Alzette. It also ensures the independence and autonomy of the structures. Governance of culture defines the roles and responsibilities of its cultural stakeholders.

Specific Objectives:

- 1) Joint, grassroots, and transparent decision-making by cultural actors who participate in the development of cultural strategies and the funding of certain projects.
- 2) Better use and valuing of knowledge and skills in the cultural sector, which thereby informs the municipality and elected officials of new projects that may affect the sector.
- 3) Better coordination of the city's cultural activities, with better communication between the stakeholders, an increase in partnerships, and greater consideration of cultural events in institutional planning.
- 4) Raising awareness among stakeholders on topics related to the administration of culture (cultural democracy, socio-ecological transition, among others) and providing them with a common vocabulary to implement strategic actions within their institutions.
- 5) Improved access to knowledge, for the entire cultural sector, about the city's overall cultural events and the cultural practices of its people.



2.2. Project development

The project targets all of the stakeholders in the cultural sector but the *ultimate* aim is to serve the city's inhabitants. A strengthened cultural sector that is more aware of the socio-ecological issues of culture and better coordinated is better positioned to offer more thoughtful and cohesive cultural projects. In addition, studies of audiences requested by the CG made it possible to consider the decline in cultural participation. This, in turn, made it easier to respond to the needs of the population, while the training offered also made it possible to attract more audiences.

Governance of culture was set up in 2018 to jointly outline the 18 objectives of the Connexions strategy. It helped prepare the city to become a European Capital of Culture by strengthening the ecosystem and conducting specific studies on local cultural activities and audiences for several of the city's flagship cultural events; by organizing meetings (Culture Breakfasts and Lunches) and specific training, and by setting up funds for more than 70 projects. Finally, the project was updated in 2022 with a strategy that refocused the project's sights on governance, the environment, and health.

This work around governance of culture involved the Culture Department; cultural institutions and associations, artists, representatives of Esch 2022; political leaders and leaders from other municipal departments or services; researchers or international experts; as well as the inhabitants themselves who were involved during public surveys. Certain entities or businesses may also be invited on an ad hoc basis. More than 125 stakeholders were invited to join the CG's actions and working groups, representing all of the institutions and part of the local cultural associations.

GOVERNANCE HELPS BY AMPLIFYING THE ACTIONS OF THE AREA'S CULTURAL ACTORS WHO HAVE LONG BEEN SENSITIVE TO THE VITAL ROLE OF CULTURE AS A PILLAR OF THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

There has been improved collaboration between stakeholders, a high level of shared knowledge and dialogue, new data on audiences, and therefore more appropriate decision-making. The involvement of municipal services, relevant private and public partners facilitated constructive work and exchange. *Connexions* and the governance of culture initiative were a *sine qua non* condition for obtaining the European Capital of Culture designation.



THERE HAS BEEN IMPROVED COLLABORATION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS, A HIGH LEVEL OF SHARED KNOWLEDGE, NEW DATA ON AUDIENCES, AND THEREFORE MORE APPROPRIATE DECISION-MAKING.

3.2. Assessment

The evaluation of this project was carried out in two phases:

1. A qualitative evaluation halfway through the program in 2022 analyzed the stakeholder feedback: what they learned from the project, their representations of the work carried out, and their expectations. This evaluation was conducted with 22 stakeholders selected for their diversity via semi-structured interviews. It allowed us to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the work and to reorient certain actions in *Connexions* 2.
2. A final evaluation will take place in 2027. Aside from the discussions with stakeholders, it will have to verify whether there have indeed been more partnerships between institutions, whether the cultural activities are more cohesive, whether funding has been more fairly distributed, and more.

3.3. Keys factors

1. Esch boasts a rich cultural sector, enlivened by talented stakeholders and supported by exceptional infrastructure. Shared values and the desire to work, train, and achieve common goals together are important factors.
2. This motivation is maintained and valued by the local government via a mechanism to ensure ongoing work, provide tools to stakeholders to empower them to undertake their own decision-making, and value the exchange of ideas and dialogue.
3. Politicians must agree to share power and trust the skills and decisions of the actors in this sector.

3.4. Continuity

The city and the university have developed a research project on the role of culture in the ecological and social transition, which is funded by the city and then taken over by the University. Specifically, the head of studies and training is then sent to the University of Luxembourg to develop this project. This is the first university post dedicated to culture in Luxembourg, which will then give rise to the first research group on this subject in region. This project has been validated by the Council of Mayors and Aldermen, and is the lasting legacy of the Esch2022 and Agenda 21 Culture program.

4. Further information

Esch-sur-Alzette was a candidate for the fifth UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (February - June 2022). The jury for the award drew up its final report in September of 2022, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices implemented under Agenda 21 for culture.

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