

The Creation of a New Economic Zone in Southern Luxembourg: Efficient Urban Planning and Social Integration through Cross-Municipal, Cross-Border and Cross-Sectoral Cooperation

Submitted by the Municipality of Esch-sur-Alzette

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Boite postale 145, 4002
Esch-sur-Alzette
Luxembourg



Contact person

Andreja Wirtz

International Relations
andreja.wirtz@villeesch.lu

Size of organisation

500-5000, people involved: >15

Type of sector

Regional policy and development,
decentralisation

Key words of project

Urban development, social cohesion,
cross-border cooperation

After the decline of the steel industry, the Luxembourg government decided in 2000 to implement a decentralisation and diversification policy, shifting part of the public administration and services to the southern region, i.e. to the city of Esch-sur-Alzette, formerly an industrial town that still hosts offices and a production plant of the steel giant ArcelorMittal. This led to the decision to reconvert the industrial wasteland located on the site of Belval – a territory shared by the City of Esch-sur-Alzette and the Municipality of Sanem – by creating a national research hub including the University of Luxembourg, public research centres, innovative companies, as well as residential and leisure areas.

The reconversion of Belval is creating new jobs and provides the whole region with a reinforced international standing. A year before the opening of the University, the local authorities had a major role to play in the integration of this new site into their cities. For this reason, they developed several strategies to prepare their territories for the new area. Infrastructures, leisure facilities and commercial offers were, for instance,

not sufficiently developed for a new population of approximately 5000 to 7000 inhabitants, and a forecast 25,000 daily users of Belval.

The socioeconomic context of Luxembourg, i.e. the large number of cross-border commuters and the small size of the country, create the need to develop the whole region and not only one city or territory in isolation. The Municipalities of Esch-sur-Alzette and Sanem are thus working together closely. In addition, the respective governments of France and Luxembourg have decided to develop the territory of Belval, which also borders France, in concertation with each other. An informal exchange has been taking place at local level, but the cross-border region has recently been provided with an autonomous legal structure, thanks to the creation of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

The multilevel and cross-sectoral cooperation has led to the elaboration of several sustainable projects. Much has been achieved thanks to the multilevel cooperation and since the Luxembourg government's reconversion decision in 2000. In 2008, the French government declared the urbanisation of Belval to be an operation of national interest, aiming at the construction of an ecocity on the French side, supplying new urban living styles and additional leisure possibilities to French commuters.