

# FINAL REPORT ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE

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JUNE 2021



**culture 21**  
UCLG Committee





# THE CITY OF ESCH-SUR-ALZETTE

Esch-sur-Alzette is the second largest town in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and is the capital of the southern part of the country known as the “Red Lands” where the iron was once mined. This post-industrial town is known for the cultural diversity of its residents, of 121 nationalities, despite being home to just 36,000 people. It is comprised largely of workers, craftspeople, and trade workers, as well as middle class and senior managers, the latter particularly since university opened in 2013. It is also the workplace of many Belgian, German, and French cross-border commuters.

In recent years, the town of Esch has been committed to significant cultural development: in 2017, the town joined the *Agenda 21 for culture* network of the UCLG Committee on Culture and its European partner, Culture Actions Europe under the “Pilot City” program. The same year, the town’s cultural strategy, [Connections], was unanimously adopted by the local council. Furthermore in 2017, the town was designated a 2022 European Capital of Culture. This is a genuine effort to address cultural development in 2022 and beyond, focusing on culture as an essential component for sustainable development and key to the future of Esch.

The general goal of [Connections] is to “make Esch-sur-Alzette into a creative cultural hub that is recognized for the diversity of its culture and its capacity for innovation and creation”. To achieve this, six main priorities have been developed. It was clear from the outset that the town’s commitment to being the European Capital of Culture should be at the centre of the 10-year cultural strategy from 2017-2027. This would lead to a genuine convergence between the objectives of *Esch 2022 European Capital of Culture* and the [Connections] strategy.

*Esch 2022* includes the 10 Pro-Sud municipalities as well as the 8 French municipalities of the Community of communes of Pays Haut Val d’Alzette, which will be encompassed in the 2022 European Capital of Culture designation, under the project entitled, “Remix Culture”. The *Esch 2022* event was seen as an unmissable opportunity for the town to place culture at the centre of its development. It constituted a challenge to succeed in motivating and involving the population in this extraordinary year, while also supporting the actors, institutions, and cultural associations involved. What is particularly interesting from a cultural and sustainable development perspective is the remarkable uphill battle for implementation. This refers to the strategy detailed in [Connections], the lines of action under the European Capital of Culture program, and the pilot measures chosen by the town. These comprise a rare synergy that has yielded results.

In February 2017, the town of Esch conducted a first self-assessment workshop to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for culture in Esch. This was done in accordance with the UCLG Pilot Cities program. The results can be seen in the Radar 1 graph. The workshop consisted of a group review and discussion of 100 actions proposed as part of an approach based on *Agenda 21 for culture*, as outlined in the document Culture 21: Actions.

Following the first self-assessment in 2017, the town's decision to implement four "pilot measures" helped to establish priorities for the cultural strategy objectives contained in the [Connections] document, as well as to aid in their implementation. Four areas identified as a result of the self-assessment workshop made it possible to focus on lines of action that turned out to be "areas in need of improvement": 1. *Governance of Culture*, 2. *Culture and Economy*, 3. *Culture, Equity and Social Inclusion*, and 4. *Culture and Education*. Within each pilot measure, several actions and a timetable for their implementation were established, which has since been completed.

From 24 to 26 November 2020, a virtual visit (due to COVID-19 restriction) was organized with partner cities of the UCLG Committee on Culture and experts: representatives of the local governments of Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Baie-Mahault, Barcelona, Eleusis, Gabrovo, Galway, Izmir, Leeds, Malmö, Swansea, Terrassa, and Vaudreuil-Dorion took part in the seminar, as well as experts from *Agenda 21 for culture* and representatives of the UCLG Committee.

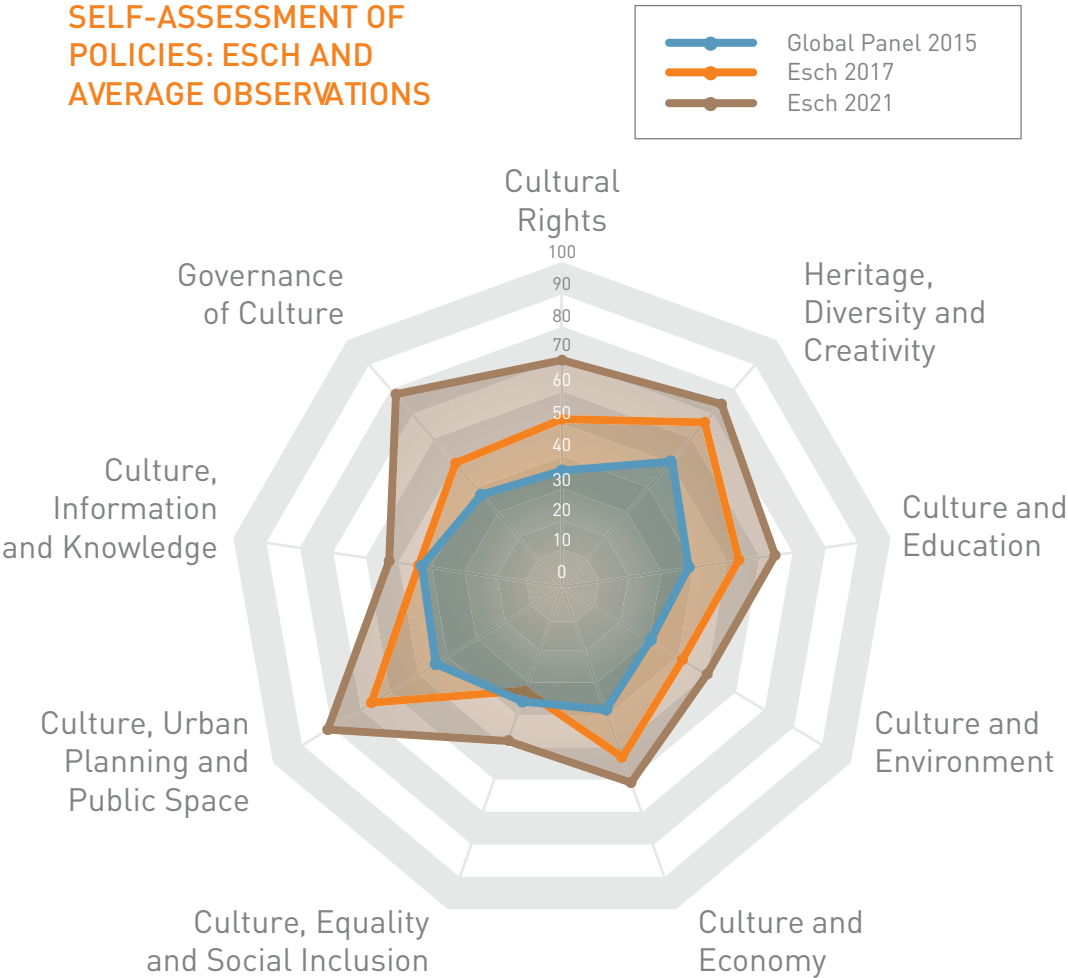
Then, in accordance with phase 4 of the program, a second self-evaluation of Culture 21: Actions was carried out virtually on February 26, 2021, four years after the first. The nine Commitments were reviewed by the cultural actors of Esch, which were divided into three groups and discussed three commitments. A new assessment graph was established, Radar 2.

## DETAILED REVIEW OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

The results of the self-evaluations of 2017 and 2021 show a good level of growth in all areas of the nine Commitments. If we quickly compare the two results, we see that the town of Esch has progressed overall, particularly in the areas of the four pilot measures that it chose to develop, a result that meets the expectations of the town and shows the work undertaken by the elected representatives, the department of culture, and the cultural actors.

It therefore seems appropriate to take a closer look at the actions from the nine Commitments that garnered the most discussion, or comments from the participants in the groups. For the sake of simplicity and clarity, the contributions are described as submitted by the "participants" (plural) from each group, even if in some cases the comment in question was only said by one person. However, the assigned score reflects the consensus of the appropriate group.

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF  
POLICIES: ESCH AND  
AVERAGE OBSERVATIONS





# COMMITMENT 1 : CULTURAL RIGHTS

Cultural rights form a complex theoretical, historical, and concrete area, but it is central to a cultural and sustainable development approach. The town has made a clear leap forward since the first self-assessment in 2017, from a score of 51.25 in 2017 to 70 in 2021. Participants gave very good scores for the commitment by the department of culture, the involvement of the inhabitants, organizations, and civil society, as well as for the progress made in recognizing cultural rights in Esch.

This time, six actions out of the 10 were assessed to be at a developed stage, four at the developmental stage, and there were no scores assigned for the embryonic stage, unlike in 2017 when there were 3. With respect to an explicit reference to cultural rights in a municipal cultural policy document, the *[Connections]* framework acts as both a legislative and executive document. Participants considered this well-known to cultural actors: this assessment increased from a 2 out of 9 in 2017 to 7 in 2021. The second issue to be seen as moving from the embryonic stage to a developed stage is the local government's adoption of a reference text on rights, freedoms, and cultural responsibilities. The participants pointed out that while the cultural strategy *[Connections]* is considered to be local law, it has also influenced Luxembourg's national law on cultural rights. During the discussion, it was suggested that the town also adopt a specific document on cultural "responsibilities".

The actions noted to be under development or at a developed stage include the question of possible obstacles to the implementation of cultural rights, which has also developed significantly thanks in part to dedicating an officer to be in charge of training, studies, and evaluation within the culture department. The participants then discussed the issue of citizen participation in the town's cultural projects. They reached a positive consensus on Esch's serious involvement in projects such as *The Night of Culture* or *Bâtiment IV*, although it was noted that the existing participatory mechanisms still need to be properly established. On the issue of accessibility and inclusion in culture for the most vulnerable groups, there is not yet a study on participation. However, discussions in debate forums are taking place, and the fact that the town's Alderman for Culture is both responsible for culture and for non-discrimination is seen as a strong example of political will in this regard. Participants noted the difficulties the COVID-19 pandemic created for the government's ability to focus on the most vulnerable populations. They expressed their hope that cultural events would resume as soon as possible. With respect to women's participation in cultural life, the fact that there is a specific service for equal opportunities was considered a positive point for the town, even if the link between gender and cultural policies is not yet sufficiently developed, and that there are few women involved in the management of cultural facilities. While the score of 6 reflecting a developmental stage may sound a bit harsh, it shows that participants believe there is still work to be done.



# COMMITMENT 2 : HERITAGE, DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

Heritage, Diversity, and Creativity is one of the highest rated commitments in the two Radar charts, with 67.71 in 2017 and 72.92 in 2021.

The lowest score given by the group was for the link between culture and scientific culture (3 out of 9). On the other hand, the city received exceptional scores for other initiatives at a well-developed level: two 9s, three 8s, and two 7s out of 9 were awarded. Participants noted that some of the spaces for cultural practices provided by the town, such as residences, work, and rehearsal spaces are made available, while others are not, and which should focus more on support for creation. With regard to the town's promotion of public cultural dissemination activities (festivals, parades, competitions, etc.), the *Night of Culture* was highlighted and hailed as a significant example, with five "nights" focused on co-creation with citizens for the 2022 Esch European Capital of Culture initiative. The final action scored an 8 out of 9 following a discussion on the accessibility of training, creation, and production. The group observed that the town could do slightly better in its support of amateur productions.

On the subject of the diversity of cultural expressions, there were several remarks on the gap between the town's clear, visible, and expressed intentions and its practices, which participants felt were not sufficiently developed. It was also noted that the languages of some of the migrant communities were not adequately represented in the cultural sector's approaches. With regard to international cooperation programs, the participants pointed out that Luxembourg's national program for the promotion of culture, Kultur:LX, has recently been established and is set to develop further. On policies relating to the protection of cultural heritage, the specific example of the heritage of memory for migrants is not yet well-established in Esch.

The discussion on the issue of minority languages was fascinating and passionate – three official languages including the national language, Luxembourgish, the so-called minority language that is growing. Participants also pointed out that the languages of some migrant communities are not sufficiently represented in the cultural sector's approaches.



## COMMITMENT 3 : CULTURE AND EDUCATION

The choice of Culture and Education as one of the pilot measures under the *Culture 21 Actions* program corresponds with the town's aim to provide better culture and arts education. Indeed, from 2017 to 2021 the score rose from 53.75 to 65, respectively. This is the result of strong political engagement by the town to allow everyone to benefit from one of the cultural strategy pillars detailed in the *[Connections]* document: "to facilitate the possibility for everyone to be shaped by culture and cultures, which can be achieved by improving cooperation between culture and education". To this end, the town has chosen to set a number of benchmarks within primary schools and deploy a manager in the Municipal School Board. After a survey of the existing landscape and consultations with teachers and parents, the first initiative was to create theatre workshops for children and adolescents in line with the ILL at the Kulturfabrik cultural centre.

During the self-assessment on culture and education, and in response to the questions raised by the various proposed actions, following were assessed to be at embryonic stage of development. The first was current arts education programs in primary and secondary schools. Participants also pointed out that this is still under the jurisdiction of the state school curriculum, and that local authorities and cultural actors are involved in the field of cultural education largely in order to compensate for the existing gaps at the national level for education. The second action, rated 3 out of 9, concerns training on management and cultural policies. Despite being informal, the "*culture breakfasts*" have contributed in a very real way to this education. The town intends to work more closely with the university in order to be able to offer a permanent training program for this field.

Most of the other actions scored at the well-developed level. Four scores of 8 out of 9 were attributed to cultural activities driven by cultural institutions. Participants especially welcomed the progress in cultural communication, which today seems to reach the entire population through various forms of media. The actions necessary for good information on cultural rights within arts education were considered satisfactory. A score of 7 out of 9 was given for the appreciation of local cultural resources. Participants noted significant growth in the understanding of the relationship between culture and education, as well as growing synergies between actors and sectors. In 2017, the score assigned to this area was 4 out of 9.





## COMMITMENT 4 : CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The Commitment to Culture and Environment increased from 41.25 in 2017 to 50 in 2021. In 2017, most of the 10 Actions were assessed at an embryonic and a developing level. In 2021, the balance has shifted from developing to well-developed levels.

According to the participants, there have been strong actions connecting cultural and environmental issues, carried out by many cultural institutions and organizations: the projects of Transition Minett, Kulturfabrik, and the Francofolies stand out in particular. However, participants stressed that there was a lack of a formal strategy on connecting culture and the environment. Actions around the sustainable use of public spaces and the cultural importance of natural spaces have been able to take off with, for example, local organic gardens and the “Biosphere Reserve” designation given to the Southern region.

At the embryonic stage, three scores were given to the different aspects of local culture and its relationship to the environment; cooperation between the culture and environment spheres; and the existence of a civil society platform connecting culture and the environment. At the developing stage, the link between culture and environmental sustainability was debated. Participants concluded that Esch has many strong actions in this area, especially with Transition Minett or other cultural institutions. However, it was noted that this connection could be more specifically targeted. On the other hand, the participants felt that the town’s cultural strategy connects culture and the environment in a concrete way when viewing culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, in the same way as the other three pillars: economic, social, and environmental. However, they noted that this relationship could be developed with a more explicit and structured approach. Regarding gastronomy based on local products, participants mentioned initiatives by the Municipal Theatre. Unfortunately, they felt that this was not very systematic or cross-cutting.

The scores at the well-developed stage were for the town’s actions around enabling residents to use public spaces for things such as shared community gardens. Participants felt that the town has been bold in this area, with many initiatives and projects. As a result, the score assigned to this action increased from 3 in 2017 to 8 in 2021. When asked if the local government recognizes the cultural interest of natural spaces, participants highlighted the impact of the UNESCO MAB label and other projects such as the Francofolies.



## COMMITMENT 5 : CULTURE AND ECONOMY

This is the second commitment to be the subject of a pilot measure, and increased from 53.13 in 2017 to 60.42 in 2021. The *[Connections]* document has been considered by the town to be a key element in supporting economic development through culture. The document outlines an economic and tourism development strategy, creating specific tools to attract creative people to Esch-sur-Alzette, such as artist residencies and cultural activities in the public space. This promotes engagement between professionals from the cultural, scientific, education, and research sectors.

There were no scores below 4 out of 9. To address the analysis and monitoring of the economic contribution of the cultural sector, participants observed that *Esch 2022* has planned an impact assessment project. Furthermore, *LuxInnovation*, a national initiative to create clusters to support innovation in Esch, is striving to map out the creative sector.

Participants rated four actions at a developing level. Some of these were: the inclusion of a culture element in programs giving access to employment; the existence of training programs offered by certain cultural institutions (Rocklab, Kultur:LX); programs carried out under the *LuxInnovation* framework. However, they only seem to be accessible to those who already have initial training in the field and not to those who wish to access them from another sector. On the issue of recognizing trades throughout the territory, participants expressed doubt about the relevance of crafts and traditional cultural production in the context of Esch. This is because artisan work is not sufficiently recognized, which prevented several companies from staying in the area. *LuxInnovation* has a focus on cultural industries that includes crafts, but is this enough? In response to the involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in cultural programs, participants stated that some of its members are aware of the importance of culture for economic development, but that the level of understanding here is still insufficient.

A score of 6 was given to four areas of action. The first was for the remuneration of cultural actors, an area where the participants felt that overall there was a good level of understanding of the issues, and an adequate desire to remunerate work in the cultural field. Due to Covid-19, a national working group was created for the implications of the pandemic on copyright issues. However, for some participants regulation does not appear to be uniformly adapted to the needs of a target population, especially when compared with neighbouring countries. For actions concerning information and training



## COMMITMENT 5 : CULTURE AND ECONOMY

spaces on copyright, there are several institutions that offer training or consulting at the national or local levels (Theater Federatioun, Rockhal, Grand Duchess Charlotte Project, etc.). In response to the presence of partnerships between companies and cultural actors, participants pointed out that there are strong relationships between certain companies and cultural projects in Esch: *The Night of Culture* as well as Bâtiment IV have several sponsors, Arcelor supports artist residencies, and Kufa's Urban Art project is partly sponsored. Of course, the town could always improve in this area, particularly in the transfer of skills. Finally, for the sustainable tourism model in Esch, participants underscored the importance of *Esch 2022* and the recognition of the Minette as a biosphere reserve.

Three actions were assessed at a well-developed stage. The first was the town's strategy to integrate the economy of culture, which rose from 3 in 2017 to 7 out of 9 in 2021. Participants observed a strong political will to connect culture and the economy, and noted a genuine level of awareness among elected officials. *[Connections]* has also contributed to this awareness. Several relevant initiatives were mentioned: Facilitec, Bâtiment IV, BENU Village, among others, although some participants felt that there is still work to be done, especially to support start-ups and incubators. Some noted actions on the promotion of patronage or volunteering in culture sphere included *The Night of Culture* initiative among others. Finally, participants pointed out that there are not many examples of cultural projects with a commercial focus. However, it was noted that in Luxembourg there are avenues for securing financial support for arts projects from companies, patrons, or public authorities.



## COMMITMENT 6 : CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The third pilot measure of the Esch Pilot City program shows the town's positive growth in this area, with a score of 33.33 in 2017 and a 48.96 in 2021. This pilot measure corresponds to the goal of providing "access to culture for all", which is stated in the *[Connections]* strategy. This was created as a tool to achieve certain objectives with a strong social sphere. Cultural institutions in Esch carry out many activities and projects to promote social inclusion. From its initial planning stages until it opened to the public, the *Night of Culture* has sought to create an event that is open to everyone - professionals or amateurs, artists, students, seniors, families, and art or gardening enthusiasts. The *Night of Culture* incorporates a large number of beneficiaries of the Red Cross network into its planning, and offers training for refugees at the two Caritas centres serving the Esch region. Moreover, there is a notable level of crossover in the events between different disciplines, popular and "high" culture, as well as participatory, demonstrative, or performative approaches, all of which are part of this initiative.

At the same time, the town has established criteria for granting subsidies to promote support for a diversity of cultural actors within the population.

The actions scored at an embryonic stage are for 3 areas. First, the current approach to monitoring the cultural fragility of certain groups or individuals in the region was considered by participants to be informal and without any adequate follow-up. Secondly, with regard to regular analysis of the relationship between personal well-being, health, and cultural practices, the group remarked that only a few actions in this area were taking place, and that the subject could be developed further. At the same time, participants noted that the Municipal Theatre opened in January despite the pandemic. This decision was motivated by the need to improve residents' mental health. The third action assessed at an embryonic stage was the existence of a training program for social workers who wish to develop their capacity to identify and deal with cultural factors that could be an obstacle to their access to certain public services. Participants said that if there are training courses on interculturality for people who work with migrants, there are generally not enough of them.

The actions in this area have been mostly classified as in-development. On the active promotion of women's participation in culture, participants felt that gender inequalities are recognized, but not specifically in the culture sphere, and that this should be further developed in the town's cultural strategy. On the current measures for ensuring



## COMMITMENT 6 : CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

accessibility to cultural facilities and spaces for all citizens, including for people with disabilities, participants pointed out that there is a law in place that guarantees this kind of access to public places. However, in reality, there is a lack of means for private or cooperative facilities, and existing public buildings are not always well-adapted to such a transformation. Participants also commented that the diversity of disabilities are not really taken into account. On local conflict resolution strategies that consider culture, participants replied that while there are initiatives in this area, there is no structured strategy for conflict resolution. Although, some projects stand out in particular: the Kufa's Urban Art project addresses points of tension and conflict within the region; Urban Talk and artist intervention in cultural mediation. There are some positive examples of programs that promote intergenerational cooperation, notably the activities of the KulturFabrik and the *Night of Culture*, which offer intergenerational workshops and other projects in this area. With regard to the available cultural innovation programs on social inclusion for young people, cultural languages, digital environments, or gender equality, the participants noted that there are indeed several initiatives and structures that offer cultural innovation activities or other initiatives to youth. Finally, the last action assessed to be at the development stage related to the existence of a platform or a local network of associations, cooperatives, or organizations that addresses the relationship between culture, equity, and social inclusion. Participants noted the work undertaken by the town on cultural governance, specifically the networking of local cultural actors and those working in the area of social inclusion.

Three actions received scores at the well-developed stage. The first pertained to local strategies in the social sphere (health, employment, well-being, and social inclusion) with an explicit cultural perspective. Here the participants noted that the cultural strategy [*Connections*] does indeed incorporate a social element, and that some projects have been implemented, especially around migrants and refugees on language and multiculturalism. The second was an area that increased from a score of 4 in 2017 to 8 out of 9 in 2021. This related to cultural institutions and their inclusion of people who experience discrimination. Participants felt that many projects are being carried out in this area, noting Hariko as an example.



## COMMITMENT 7 : CULTURE, URBAN PLANNING, AND PUBLIC SPACE

In 2017 this area received a score of 67.05, which rose to 80.68 in 2021. It had no actions graded at the embryonic stage and a majority were at the well-developed stage.

Participants pointed out that the Esch 2030 document, which links economic and urban development, takes into account the *[Connexions]* cultural strategy. Regarding a registry of cultural heritage, the town's archives have been cited several times as a good practice. Participants agreed that the archives had been abandoned and that it was important to revitalize them in the near future, adding that intangible heritage expressions also needed more support. On the notion of landscape and the relationship between natural and cultural heritage, participants pointed out that the word "landscape" is rarely used in a cultural context in Esch, but exists in mining and cross-border areas. However, this notion of landscape will be very present in the *Night of Culture* in 2022. On urban mobility policies that consider access to cultural life, participants discussed an overall lack of reflection on mobility and culture given that public transport is free in Luxembourg. They also observed that the "culture bus" exists and works very well in Esch. Finally, on civic participation in urban planning, participants considered that the work done in Esch-Schifflange on Urban Art is exemplary, with a very good level of citizen participation, and that this practice should be implemented in other districts.



## COMMITMENT 8 : CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

This commitment, stood at 44.32 in 2017, but increased to 53.41 in 2021. Participants scored the following exemplary actions at the well-developed stage: Citizens' current access to, and right to participate in, cultural life is particularly commendable because there are many measures in place promoting it, such as the *kulturpass* or the subsidy system that allows economic access to culture. The participation of cultural actors in international cooperation networks was strongly associated with the *Esch 2022* project. Furthermore, the status of legislation guaranteeing freedom of expression, specifically artistic expression, freedom of opinion and information, and respect for cultural diversity and privacy was given 8 out of 9. Participants commented that while legislation guarantees freedom of expression, some individuals or groups may have less access to it, and that the town should analyze the causes and possible mechanisms of social self-censorship. On the existence of policies that guarantee access to free and pluralistic information, as well as measures that ensure citizens' right to participate in cultural life, participants confirmed that there are current measures to promote the latter, but there is still work to be done for persons with disabilities.

All other actions have remained relatively stable since the 2017 self-assessment, with only minor variations in one direction or another. For example, at the embryonic stage, the score of 3 out of 9 did not change for the presence of research or analysis on cultural reality and its interaction with other areas of human development connected to universities, government, and civil society. Participants wanted there to be stronger links between the public sphere, the university, and research centres.

Still in development was the issue of local media representing cultural diversity. Participants noted an overall decline in the place of culture in the media, pointing out that access to culture is not well developed in local media. Cultural media are said to be disappearing and traditional media are declining in the face of social media. In 2021 a score of 4, compared with 1 out of 9 in 2017, reflected the regular analysis of the relationship between basic cultural processes and social innovation. Participants noted that several projects around social innovation are being set up and will have to be followed up with studies and analysis. For example, the transformation of Bâtiment IV into a cultural centre is monitored and supported by analysis. Participants also recognized the town's actions on training or awareness-raising activities for cultural professionals, such as courses on copyright and other subjects organized by the department of culture.



## COMMITMENT 8 : CULTURE, INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

For the policies and programs on forms of digital creation, production, and distribution that are currently available to the population, participants pointed out many projects in this area, particularly Facilitec under the Transition Minett project, the *Night of Culture*, or online mapping projects. Finally, on the existence of training or awareness-raising activities for cultural professionals on forms of cultural reproduction (e.g. copyright, copyleft, open access, etc.), participants noted that training on copyright had indeed been implemented by the town's culture department.





## COMMITMENT 9 : GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

Aside from the area of Cultural Rights, this commitment saw the most progress from 2017 to 2021. The town developed a pilot measure that subsequently required four years of implementation and development. As a result, the score rose from 50.00 to 78.41.

The new approach to cultural governance in Esch consists of a “limited” Governance Council (CG), which has brought together the town’s main cultural institutions or associations since 2018. The council’s role is to guarantee representation for the diversity of cultural actors and to make concrete decisions. It is a matter of presenting problems, bringing out ideas to solve it, and then carrying out concrete projects in smaller working groups. Since 2018, the members of the CG have been asked to work on certain specific projects of the town. This includes reflections on cultural communication, artist residencies, arts and culture education options, public surveys, etc. The first goal for cultural CG members was to develop framework documents for the strategy, with new rules for funding cultural projects.

The cultural CG has also met 24 times since 2018 during the *culture breakfasts*. These three- or four-hour half-day meetings are aimed at solidifying cooperation and connection between the members of the Governance Council, contributing to the continuing education of its members, and further entrenching the primary goals of the town’s cultural policy.

At the same time, an “expanded” GC was created to bring together all the institutions and socio-/cultural associations of Esch, municipal services, and other external actors relative to their field. At the end of 2019, the *culture breakfasts* were revised by the cultural CG, which led to the development of two new formats in 2020: The *culture lunches* were held once every two months to focus on the town’s immediate concerns or problems related to the cultural policy. The culture days, also held every other month, are more intensive days for awareness and training on different topics identified as being of interest to the members of the CG.

No score was assigned for self-assessments on Commitment 9, Governance of Culture, putting it this action at an embryonic level, while only two scores were given at the developing level. On citizen representation in cultural institutions, participants pointed out that some of them (Kulturfabrik, National Museum of the Resistance) have representatives from civil society in their governing bodies, but this remains insufficient



## COMMITMENT 9 : GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE

and has little impact on leadership spaces and decision-making processes. With respect to an independent platform or a civil society network made up of citizens and cultural actors from all sectors, participants observed that there are specific sectoral initiatives, but noted that the *culture breakfasts* have succeeded in bringing together all cultural actors.

The following actions were assessed to be at a well-developed stage: the town's cultural policy based on *Agenda 21 for culture* (8 out of 9); the presence of local cultural plans (8 out of 9); as well as public participatory bodies (a 9 out of 9) such as the *culture breakfasts*, whose existence and frequency were exemplary. The *Nights of Culture* were a notable example in the area of project consultation spaces, with the comment that there are indeed evaluations in place on their impact, and that *Esch 2022* also intends to pursue the same line of action. On the issue of gender in culture—cultural programs and institutions that have developed a gender perspective—participants pointed out that there is a growing awareness of the need for improved gender equality, and desire for this to be reflected in cultural institutions and initiatives. The culture CG also proposed that gender equality should be one of the criteria for funding cultural projects. As for the citizen participation in the management of cultural facilities, programs, or events, participants discussed the level of residents' will and motivation to participate, while acknowledging that the town encourages citizen participation in initiatives such as the *Night of Culture* and *Esch 2022*.



# CONCLUSION

The progress achieved by the town of Esch is exemplary in several respects. First, its consistent political will to sustainably develop cultural life in Esch was thanks to the approval of a cultural strategy in 2017 that would extend over 10 years. Secondly, the town's cultural services demonstrated an unwavering commitment to coordinate the work and the teams involved in the three-pronged political strategy: to adhere to *Agenda 21 for culture*; to pursue a cultural strategy based on the *[Connections]* document, and to undertake the challenge of becoming a *2022 European Capital of Culture*. Finally, there is now a network of cultural actors that are extremely mobilized to work together to develop culture in Esch in both the medium and long term. Of course, cultural life in Esch is not perfect but the fact that all stakeholders are aware that there are weaknesses, and are ready to identify and debate them in order to improve things is a rare characteristic in municipalities. The town has engaged a large majority of the cultural actors and leaders at its many *culture breakfasts* to discuss, learn from one another, and solve problems. Indeed, the essential building blocks were already in place to implement the *Culture 21 Actions* program, with concerned stakeholders always being present at various meetings, whose enthusiasm and critical thinking help fuel the desire to be better and to develop further. There is no question that Esch-sur-Alzette is ready to become a Leading City of *Agenda 21 for culture*. The Leading City program may focus on cultural rights and cultural governance, or on the impact and monitoring of the *2022 European Capital of Culture* project.

The four pilot measures selected following the first self-assessment in 2017 all progressed significantly in 2021. Additionally, the issues surrounding the Governance of Culture, Cultural Rights, and Culture, Equity, and Social Inclusion have seen the greatest progress. This improvement is sign that the town and its cultural actors are truly engaged in the core focus of culture in sustainable development - democracy, cross-cutting, citizen participation approaches.

Esch and its partners deserve nothing but the utmost success in its *2022 European Capital of Culture* year. It deserves to be congratulated on the last four years of work and synergy of all its development initiatives, which will have a significant long-term effect on the region.



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