



## LUXEMBOURG by Siggy Koenig

### Overview

Luxembourg is the smallest founder member state in the European Union, with a surface area of 2,586 km<sup>2</sup>. Bordered by France, Germany and Belgium it is located at the cross roads of two major cultures, French and German. Its linguistic situation, its multi ethnic society, its economic welfare and ambitions within Europe create both constraints and opportunities for the school system.

The country has three official languages, Luxembourgish (a Franconian/Moselle dialect, spoken by the Luxembourgiens), French and German. These languages, as well as English spoken in multinationals, financial institutes and university, as well as the immigrant's mother tongues like Portuguese or Serbo-Croatian exist side by side, being used depending on the social context (private area, public area, shopping, civil service, cultural life). This multilingualism is vital for economic prosperity of the country and for social cohesion. 43 percent of the 520.000 inhabitants are from non-Luxembourgish origin; amidst the working population 70 percent are foreigners, either residents or border-crossers (180.000).

At school, each child learns four languages. Luxembourgish (*lëtzbuergesch*) is used as communication language in pre-primary school (3 to 6 years), reading and writing is learned in German (on the basis of Luxembourgish) in fundamental school (6-12 years). Introduction to French starts immediately after first steps in literacy (7 years) and English is taught from the second year on of secondary school (13 years).

Since half a century the Luxembourgish school takes up the challenge to integrate its numerous children (50 percent) who have not Luxembourgish as a mother tongue in a public school that should fit for all and qualify each.

The organization of Luxembourgish schools dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century, when primary school (6-11 years) was established, followed by secondary education in the gymnasium (12-19 years), a division almost immutable. Compulsory school was progressively extended from six years (1881) to twelve years (2009).

Main milestones in primary education are as follows:

1843: primary instruction where children acquire literacy in German language, whereas French teaching starts already a year later was set up. A remarkable decision all the more that after the loss of the French speaking Luxembourgish province of Belgium in 1839, the remaining Luxembourgish speaking population only used French in administration. At that moment school found itself under firm supervision by the Catholic church. The bishop's representative had his say in curricula commissions; teachers had to be agreed upon by the parish priest and take over teaching religious history. State supervision was operated by inspectors and municipalities were in charge to manage school administration.

1912: school emancipated from Church tutelage over teachers; science teaching was introduced in the curriculum; municipalities were obliged to give pupils school devices for free.

2009: since the end of the 1980's Luxembourgish governments have repeatedly experienced partial reforms to build up a school fitting as well for Luxembourgish as for non-Luxembourgish children. However only the socialist-social Christian government coalition(2004/2009) succeeded to work out new laws (passed by parliament in 2009) which launched a coherent makeover of the primary education landscape:

- school action focalizes upon the individual pupil, equity is substituted to equality in order to promote individualization and internal differentiation in the class
- targets are expressed in terms of competencies
- teachers work in teams. As there have never been school directors, newly created "responsables d'école" are put in charge to lead the schools. As teachers are expected to be more engaged in school, their assignment was raised in parallel with wage increase
- autonomy, however limited, is given to schools in order to allow them to work out a school success program (plan de réussite scolaire)
- structures for cooperation between school and institutions caring for children after school are set up
- pre-primary, primary school and units giving attention to children with special needs are merged into a unique structure: "fundamental school" (3 to 11 years), which is now organized by four cycles (3+2+2+2). First year of the first cycle remains optional, but almost 65 percent of the three-year-old children are enrolled. 2nd and 3d year are compulsory since 1992. It is considered essential, for reasons of equity, that the State should offer an opportunity to all the children to develop their abilities and learn to understand and speak Luxembourgish before attending second cycle where they are taught to read and write in German.

At the end of the sixth year of primary education, children are orientated either towards classical or technical secondary education and later vocational education. The way children from socially disadvantaged and immigrant families are divided at that moment, still leads to numerous criticisms: foreign children represent 43 percent of the pupils in primary education, they make up for a mere 19 percent of pupils in classic secondary education.

Regarding post-primary education:

1848 was the first item of legislation relating to secondary education largely build upon the model of the Humboldt Gymnasium;

1911 the establishment of schools providing secondary education for girls (previously the preserve of private associations, particularly religious orders) was authorized

1968: the organic law (10 May 1968) fixed the purpose of conventional i.e. classical secondary education as to prepare for university studies. It established a degree of four years of general studies, followed by a degree dedicated to specialization in various sections (mathematics, natural sciences, economics, literature, music, arts). This division has been reviewed several times because of the changing opinions about specialization. At the moment dominant trend is in favor to a larger general education and a reform is undergone.

1979: the numerous schools of vocational and technical education which had been created as the need for specific training came along, were merged into one unique coherent system, the technical secondary education. At that time the technical baccalaureate was introduced, equivalent to the classical baccalaureate allowing its scholars to accede to higher education. Technical secondary education included also a three years degree of general education followed by a three/four years degree of either technical or vocational education. In 1990 a third training way leading to technician diploma was added. In 2009 training to vocational or technician certificate has been separated from technical secondary education which has now to be face-lifted.

## *The structure of schooling*

From the start, school organization was centralized. Short distances and brief procedures made this possible to such an extent that government and educators alike got into the routine of all decisions being taken by government administration: setting teaching programs, time tables, school books, exams, recruiting and managing staff. The belief that it only takes a good management of the input, the resources and rules, to obtain expected results, disempowered evidently local actors.

No wonder that the second hierarchical level, inspectors in fundamental school and heads in lycées had doubts about their mission and their competences. Heads of lycées were first to react in the 1990's and through a program of school workplans (projet d'établissement) promoting trend to autonomy they succeeded in creating identities and profiles for their lycées.

Concept of autonomy remained unknown in fundamental schools until 2009; the idea is at the moment getting popular as each school has to establish under the lead of the responsable d'école its proper program to school success.

Today limited school autonomy is regulated by law. It concerns syllabus, time tables and school books; however sidetracking choice must be motivated and authorized. Schools also receive administrative autonomy; they can draw up school organization within a given share of lessons and financial means. However certain unwritten rules must be respected as for instance to allow more resources to classes catering children from lower income families.

This enlargement has been decided in order to prepare schools for a transition from a centrally regulated administration and an a priori control to a system based on evaluation of results achieved.

In Luxembourgish schools the project leaders, the responsables d'école, the heads of lycées have exclusively a teacher background. They are not supposed to possess management or bookkeeping knowledge. However, good leadership is not necessarily sufficient for effective school management. Since 2000 selective training has been organized, but systematic training for expectant candidates to leading tasks is still lacking.

## *The legal framework*

Article 23 of the *Constitution* states that “the State shall ensure that each person living in the Grand Duchy receive primary instruction, which shall be compulsory and free of charge. Medical and social assistance shall be regulated by law. The State shall establish the requisite intermediate (i.e. secondary) teaching establishments and higher education courses, and shall also establish vocational training courses, which shall be given free of charge. The law settles financing public instruction as well as survey by the Government and the municipalities. The law regulates furthermore all aspects concerning education ... Everybody is free to study in the Grand Duchy or abroad ....”.

The Constitution is not very explicit about education and refers it to statute law. This has become very constraining. Not only all aspects referring to student carrier, eligibility, passing from one class to another, examinations and disciplinarian enforcement must be regulated by law but also all aspects of administration such as teacher recruitment and teacher assignments. Luxembourgish education is not ruled by a unique great organic law which regulates the outlines. Each degree is regulated by several particular laws amongst which the most important are:

1. Act of February 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 concerning compulsory education settles the major objectives of education and the principles each teaching must be based upon: ethics founded on Declaration of human rights, respect of equality between girls and boys, promotion of equal opportunities. It stipulates also that children's liberty of conscience is to be respected and teachers not to be allowed to show pointedly their adherence to any religious or political doctrine. It specifies that compulsory education is fulfilled in public schools but can as also be fulfilled in private schools, in schools abroad, or at home.
2. Act of February 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 organizing fundamental school sets the new landscape of pre-primary and primary education as depicted in the Overview
3. Act of May 10<sup>th</sup> 1968 organizing secondary education and act of September 4<sup>th</sup> 1979 organizing technical secondary education as related in the Overview.
4. Act of June 25<sup>th</sup> 2004 organizing lycées and lycées techniques introduces autonomy, however limited, of secondary schools and establishes the structures for parents, teachers and students participation in the organization of school life.
5. Act of February 6<sup>th</sup> 2009 reorganizing the Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques (SCRIPT) creates an Quality Agency whose task consists in backing schools in evaluation of their performance and establishing programs for school success. The Agency is as well charged with evaluating and monitoring the school system as a whole.
6. Act of June 13<sup>th</sup> 2003 concerning relations between State and private schools.

In Luxembourg the great majority of the primary and secondary education is in state schools. One must say that the Luxembourgish people have always shown a certain mistrust about

regarding schooling outside of public schools. When in the nineteenth century constitutionalists established freedom of teaching in the constitutions of other countries, the Luxembourgish constitution remained silent in this respect. Private schools were not explicitly authorized, nor were they forbidden. Actually, the first private schools were established in the nineteenth century by religious congregations to shelter young girls in day and boarding schools and give them an intermediate secondary education.

Until 1982 these schools were not subsidized by the State and at that time found themselves in very real financial difficulties over rising costs. In January 1982 the government, increasingly aware that if the schools disappeared the whole cost of education would devolve on the State, proposed a law which finally confirmed the right of existence to the independent sector in the name of freedom of choice, variety and competition, and proclaimed the duty of government to protect the legitimate interests of pupils in its schools. The measure was fiercely debated with all the usual arguments deployed on both sides. It provided for approved schools a contract under the condition that they adopted the syllabus of state schools (with a margin of 10 percent free choice in time-table) by which they received 80 percent of the cost of salaries of qualified teachers and 40 percent of those of others. At that time the only school that did not follow the syllabus of state schools was an American school operating outside the system and targeting specific groups employed in American firms, with the government putting buildings at its disposal.

In 2003 subsidies given to denominational schools were raised to 90 percent. The Act of 13<sup>th</sup> June 2003 extended the principle of support to private schools which did not follow the State school syllabus. Since 1982 the number of these private schools, alternative schools (Waldorf schools), and international schools has increased. They were allowed to enter contracts with the state and receive subsidies limited however to 40 percent of the cost of salaries of teachers.

Luxembourgish public opinion still remains divided over the question; during parliamentary debates the council of State (Conseil d'Etat) expressed not less than three recommendations, each reflecting a different opinion in this matter.

At this date alternatives to the State school system are the following:

- denominational schools,
- Waldorf School,
- international schools
- European school (which has no legal relation to the State)
- education in one of the neighbouring countries

During decades the impact of non-public schools on ideological and political debate was more important in Luxembourg than their impact on education. Enrolment in primary denominational schools is only 0.25 percent (2011), rising to 10-12 percent in secondary education. Among the schools which do not follow the official syllabus, the European and Waldorf school have kept their enrolment stable, whereas international schools have spectacularly grown (340 percent) during the last decade.

Considering the emergence of international schools in the stream of internationalization of Luxembourg's economy, the fact that Luxembourg has subscribed to international conventions guaranteeing parents free choice in the matter of education of their children, considering that present law gives state no instrument to refuse authorization to private organizations which pick

out the most profitable parts of the educational market, and considering on the other hand the deep changes occurring in Luxembourgish schools since 2004, legislation referring to private schools will have to be reconsidered once the education reform implementation process has been achieved.

## *Homeschooling*

Law authorizes teaching at home under the condition that the reasons put forward by parents be accepted by the inspector. The scarce demands are generally introduced by foreign parents undertaking a short time job in Luxembourg before going back to their country. Even more seldom, parents with a child affected by a long term disease request this authorization and meanwhile a unit for school help at home is created.

Home schooling is supervised by the inspector; he withdraws authorization if teaching is not in accordance with education principles. So, those rare demands are not a product of parents refusal of education in public schools for religious or philosophical motives. The matter is not subject to debate.

## *School choice not limited by family income*

In public schools, the State does not encourage parents to enroll their children in schools outside the borough where they live. In principle, children living and growing up in the same environment should be sent to the same school. However, during the last decades more and more frequently parents have introduced demands: mostly they want to ease their family life and find a school closer to their work place, sometimes also they want their child to be enrolled in a socially more homogeneous school. In the second case, demands are usually rejected. In the first case however, if the destination municipality gives its agreement, the municipality of residence compensates for the school fees.

Since in fundamental school municipalities put school equipment for free at disposal of their pupils and since all parents are given a back-to-school allowance, there is no need for a grant policy.

Some difficulties are encountered by Luxembourgish parents, more and more numerous, who decided to reside, for reasons of savings, across the border. As they keep on working in Luxembourg they want to enroll their children in Luxembourgish schools. However they cannot benefit from grants and have to pay the school fees the municipalities demand.

As regards public secondary education, parents are in principle free to enroll their child in the lycée they have chosen. This leads each year to a rat race for enrolment in the lycées considered – rightly or wrongly -- as the most reputable by the parents. During the last decade, when lycées were overcrowded, this rush brought about stress and demotivating disappointments for many candidates. Since long daily trips in private or public transport (free for pupils) to reach the lycée of choice are not necessarily beneficial to children, the Government set up a monitoring system in order to channel the enrolments: for each lycée, a proximity zone was defined. Parents are still free to choose a lycée which is not the lycée nearby, but their choice cannot prejudice other parents who use their right to enroll their child in their conterminous lycée. Since that time several new lycées have been built and each new lycée must offer as well classical as technical secondary education.

The State allows grants to pupils from families with low income whether they are enrolled in a public, or in a private school, or in a school abroad. At the moment almost one pupil in ten is given a grant.

As public secondary education offers today several alternatives to the usual curriculum (experimental schools, international baccalaureate) there is no reason why the State should allow grants beyond what is provided for social reasons.

It may however occur that an exception is made for students who want to attend vocational training, that for reasons of rarity cannot be offered by a Luxembourgish school. The government gives them – sometimes substantial – grants for vocational training abroad. Grants have also been given to exceptionally gifted children enrolled in specialized schools abroad.

Fees in private schools are spread over starting at 400 euros per year in denominational schools, comfortably subsidized by state (90-40 percent) to 15.000 euros per year in some international schools. The Waldorf school, subsidized to 40 percent by the state, demands an average of 2.500 euros per year; the individual tuitions are graded according to the parents income.

Private schools have to show their balance sheet to a State commission instituted by law of 2003. This commission considers both the amount of wages and the subsidies given by the state. In case the balance sheet shows an income surplus due to higher tuition, the State subsidy is reduced.

### *School distinctiveness protected by law and policy*

Since it has become obvious that finding identity, profile and ethos constitutes an important element for a school in making education a success for its pupils, the State pushes schools to take specific initiatives. The change of mind, moving away from a jacobinistic conception of administration, started with the school programs (projet d'établissement) in the 1990's. The act of 2004 extended pedagogical, financial and administrative autonomy of the secondary schools so far that each school can now set up its profile and undertake specific actions. The act of 2009 introduces the school program for school success in fundamental education. Sometimes the procedure leading to the program (analysis of the specific situation of the school, working out of the program, finding consensus among the concerned, learning project management) may be as important as the program itself.

However, the profile and programs are of no influence upon the enrolment conditions or the certifications issued by the school.

Secondary schools are not allowed to issue diplomas or certifications other than those official which are awarded after centralized examinations, held by commissions established by Government.

From the beginning, a rather narrow discretion was given to private schools in following the official syllabus. Actually, since the law of 2003 established limited autonomy in public secondary schools, it has become obsolete. Education in these schools aims for the diplomas of the public schools; their student's exam papers are read by commissions comprising exclusively public school teachers.

These schools have to apply the same enrolment and passing criteria as do public schools. They are subjected to state supervision and parents can report concerns to the ministry.

Other private schools under contract with State which do not follow official syllabus must however target diplomas that the Luxembourgish State does recognize, in this case the international baccalaureate under certain conditions (Waldorf, International school) or the French baccalaureate (lycée Vauban).

Except the European school, there are only very few non-contractual private schools. They operate in the field of vocational education and their diplomas are not officially recognized. The law points out in particular publicity made by private schools must not lead astray about the nature of the qualifications they deliver. Actually they encounter difficulties to survive.

All non-public schools must respect the same principles as public schools. The law concerning compulsory school (2009) sets the general principles for education in Luxembourg and the law organizing fundamental school (2009) sets the standards for fundamental education and extends them expressis verbis to education in private schools or education at home. Actually, to this day, Luxembourgish schools had not to face conflicts with religious or philosophical teachings raising doubts about their conformity to these principles. Questions about Islamistic, sectarian or creationistic teachings have not been raised.

## *Decisions about admitting pupils*

Giving schools authority to select the pupils they enroll is contrary to Luxembourgish spirit which remains somehow egalitarian. Actually, the unique school being officially allowed to do so is a public experimental school. By reason of experiment its school population must reflect exactly the socio-economic composition of Luxembourgish society.

Public secondary schools are obliged to enroll each resident applicant who satisfies study conditions. Law merely obliges a school to give pupils and parents who want to enroll information about the disciplinary regulations, the school profile, and the school charter. An exception is provided for older students: they can be obliged to declare by signature their adherence to the charter. Also school can refuse to enroll an older student who has been expelled from another school.

Concerning denominational schools, the law stipulates they must apply the same admission and passing criteria as public schools. A school belonging to a Catholic congregation could thus not be allowed to refuse enrolment to a non-Catholic pupil. As a matter of fact, parents who enroll their child, religious or not, agree that the school demands a belief commitment. Moreover, these schools accept young Muslim girls. Today denominational schools maintain firmly their ethos of social integration.

It is obvious that high fees demanded by international schools canalize enrolment of pupils towards socially homogenous composition. During the last years several new organizations have put on the market an alternative offer to public school in pre-primary and primary school addressing directly expatriates, not immigrants. However no case taken to court by parents against a school for not enrolling their child is known either for an ideological or social reason is known

Concerning the European school, enrolment is restricted to children of EU officials. However, if seats remain free, also Luxembourgish children may be enrolled.



## *Decisions about staff*

Public schools are not allowed to select their staff. The government operates a centralized enrolment of teachers for fundamental schools as well as for lycées . Applicants who have been ranked according to their examination result may indicate to which school they want to be posted. Appointment could only be refused to applicants who refuse to abstain from showing pointedly their adherence to a religious or political doctrine. It is considered that someone who wants to teach must set aside his personal convictions in order to respect the pupil's right to an impartial education. At this time no case of conflict in this regard is known.

Private schools demand agreement with the mission of the school. Sometimes, this agreement is specified in the employment contract. It is not absolutely sure that Court would consider such stipulations in accordance with labor regulations. However, no case law on this issue exists.

## *Accountability for school quality*

Since its beginnings, the Luxembourgish school was ruled according to the classical model of State administration: the State allocates resources, sets action programs and guidelines, and controls whether instructions have been respected. In fundamental schools this oversight rested with inspectors, in secondary schools with heads of lycées. At the end of the year, they were supposed to report to the minister.

Since the school population and number of schools have increased and diversified tremendously, this practice has been given up. On the other hand as from the 1960's relations between administration and citizen have evolved towards more participation and transparency; parents, students and teachers have yearned to be recognized as local actors and partners. The *education committee* created by the act of May 10<sup>th</sup> 1968 constituted a forum for dialogue on all school matters and had particular responsibility limited to extra-curricular activities. Meanwhile as the school population became more and more heterogeneous and education management more and more complicated, it became obvious that administration could no longer regulate the least detail to specific questions which can anyway be solved by the school itself in a better way.

The committee's responsibility was somewhat extended in 1990 with the advent of the school workplan requirement, which introduces a substantial degree of decentralization. The act of 2004 organizing lycées and lycées techniques increases attributions of the committee. As autonomy given to schools must not be considered as autonomy of one body (head or teachers) the committee representing school community has its say in defining pedagogical and budgeting priorities, profile and projects of the lycée.

The 2009 act extends autonomy to fundamental schools.

On the other hand, input given by State is more and more limited to guidelines. This concerns school programs, time tables, and organization (each school receives a contingent of lessons which varies with the socio-economic composition of its school population).

After so many years of ruling by decisions taken at the central level, it was not easy to convey that more autonomy for schools meant more responsibility and accountability for teachers. At the same time the poor performance of Luxembourgish schools in the PISA results had strong repercussion in public opinion and in schools. However, it was clear that taking part in these large international evaluations was of no great effect if evaluation remained limited to sporadic assessments. Hence particular attention was given to internal evaluation combined with regular

individual evaluation of schools. In order to implement this new approach a Quality agency was founded by the Act of 2009. Its task consists not only in evaluation of individual schools and the school system as a whole but above all in accompanying schools in implementing their programs for school success.

Accountability is considered to be more precious by the fact of its sole existence than by effects it could have on salary or career of involved teachers or heads.

However, after a long period of conflicts and negotiations, the principle of evaluation has been recently introduced in civil service. At this moment it is not known how it will be implemented in schools, since teachers work in a career which has no gradations.

## *Teaching of values*

The Constitution of Luxembourg is silent upon teaching religion or ethics in schools. At the time it was written, it was unthinkable that a child would not be educated in the spirit of Catholic religion. Until 1912, the primary school law referred to Christian education and teaching religion was in forefront of the subject matters. Changes have slowly occurred, more often after long and bitter fights opposing clericals and anti-clericals and provoking deep rifts in society. Since the beginning, Jewish parents had been authorized to ask dispensation for their children. In 1912 this possibility was extended to non-believing parents. However things lasted until the sixties, the period when states were forced to give response to the aspirations to more liberal societies. In 1968, secular courses were introduced in secondary school. This possibility was extended to primary school in 1998, thirty years later!

As both courses, religious and secular, were from the beginning considered as equal, lawgivers had made provision for a dispensation from both. After several years it appeared almost 30 percent of the students did not follow any ethical course and this third possibility was abolished in 2002, boosted by a decision of the Human Rights Court stipulating that obligation to enroll in a secular ethic course could not be considered as an unacceptable constraint for parents.

Since 2004 a new concept of “education in values” has been experimented with in one school. The course includes three aspects: ethics, education to citizenship, and knowledge about most representative religions in Luxembourg. Implementation was surveyed by representatives of the religious and secular communities.

The necessity to transmit to young people fact knowledge about religions results not only from the pressing need to safeguard cultural heritage but also to contribute to social cohesion by mutual cultural comprehension.

Meanwhile the concept of education in values has been graded in law (2009); the experience has been evaluated positively. However implementation in other schools will be discussed for a time, each party being very careful to avoid a new ideological war in school.

As for both religious and secular courses, topics of programs are established by state in government bylaws. Those concerning referring to Catholic religious courses are of course settled according to proposal by the archbishop.

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