



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Street names as a reflection of the
industrial history of the Minett

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Impressum

The Minett Stories virtual exhibition explores the history and identity of the Minett, the industrial region in southern Luxembourg, in 21 chapters. For a century (approx. 1870-1970) the Minett was shaped by iron ore mining and the iron and steel industry. Rapid economic and population growth, urbanisation and labour migration had a major impact on the history of the region, which has also been shaped by economic crises, environmental pollution and precarious housing and living conditions.

The exhibition is part of the Remixing Industrial Past in the Digital Age (“Remix”) project coordinated by the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH), which was launched in autumn 2019 and is funded by the European Capital of Culture Esch2022 asbl.

The exhibition has been designed to appeal to a wide range of users with different interests and levels of prior knowledge. The purpose of this dossier is to encourage active and critical engagement with local history, providing a variety of teaching and learning activities, digital tools and solutions developed to facilitate teaching and enrich learning experiences.

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Preliminary comments on relevance

The original meaning of street names disappears over time. It often takes only a generation for the honourable commemoration of people and events to dwindle into a meaningless place name.

The everyday use of street and place names gradually dissipates the meanings once associated with them, turning them into banal signifiers merely used to work out where you are.

The significance of toponyms is also incorporated into the concept of “places of memory” in history. The central terms in this discourse are those relating to communicative and cultural memory, cultural heritage and historical myths and legends.

The “historical interpretation from above” often incorporated into place names more or less reflects the desired identity components that are best deconstructed in lessons on “Life and society” and “History and geography” using systemic-constructivist learning tools. At a time when school lessons in Luxembourg history are going through a period of change, casting a critical eye over historical toponyms is a good addition to previous learning content. At the same time, linking the content of the dossier to the content of the virtual exhibition “*Minett Stories*” offers an opportunity to combine this content with the use of tablets in history lessons, which could be expanded according to the current *Luxembourg educational report (2020/2021)*

Background: This dossier offers teaching instructions and materials for teachers and students when discussing the industrial history of the Minett region in lessons, best deconstructed in lessons on “Life and society” (years 7-13) and “History and geography” using systemic-constructivist learning tools. Like the virtual exhibition “*Minett Stories*”, the teaching dossier is the result of the research project “*Remixing Industrial Pasts in the Digital Ages*”, carried out with the support of Esch2022 asbl. between 2019 and 2023 at the Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C2DH) at the University of Luxembourg.

This dossier looks at the names of streets and buildings associated with the industrial past. The names of the landscape in the south, such as Minett, Bassin Minier, Land der roten Erde, Terres Rouges and many others, are discussed in a separate story in the virtual exhibition [Link: <https://minett-stories.lu/de/story/naming-and-renaming-of-the-luxembourg-southern-region>]. This approach will be followed here within the scope of the town as a whole. This is particularly interesting because, as Luxembourg’s second largest city, Esch-sur-Alzette is the traditional centre of the Minett region and was referred to as the “Metropole du fer” or “rote Stadt” [red town] in the 20th century.

If you look at the Esch-sur-Alzette street directory published on the *national geoportal*, you will find more than twenty such names. These are names with various references: general names (e.g. Rue de l’Acier, Rue de l’Industrie, Rue de l’Usine), former steelworks and mines (e.g. An der Schmelz, Avenue des Haut-Fourneaux, Ennert den Héchiwien, Gaalgebierg, Rue des Mines), job titles (e.g. Avenue des Sidérurgistes, Rue des Fondeurs, Rue des Mineurs) and the names of inventors and industrialists (e.g. Rue Henry Bessemer, Place Norbert Metz, Rue Émile Mayrisch, Rue Léon Metz, Rue Sidney Thomas). All these names refer to the multiple facets of the *industrial history* of the Minett Region and its centre, Esch-sur-Alzette.

This also applies to other towns and locations in the southern region such as Pétange, Differdange, Dudelange, Bettembourg, Rumelange.



Lesson objectives

There is a huge range of objectives, questions, tasks and discussions that could be related to street and building names in school lessons. Guided independent research into the meanings and background behind place and street names reveals a lot about local history and the cultural shaping of the communities in the towns and regions.

What understanding of history, culture and identity lies behind such names? What is remembered, what has been hidden or suppressed? In which places in the city were certain names used? Why there? Who was responsible for assigning a street name and when, and how did it happen? What were the reasons behind it? Were discussions in city committees amicable or heated?

In general, this is about gaining skills in experience, interpretation and information. Local history and the cultural shaping of communities in towns and regions allow you to pursue the following history learning objectives:

- **How old are the street names?**
And what came before?
- **Awareness of reality (real - fictional)**
How much of reality is reflected in the street names?
- **Awareness of change (static - variable)**
Industrial plants as global “shifting sands”.
- **Awareness of identity (we - I)**
Why does my family live here? Where do my fellow students come from?
- **Political awareness (top - bottom)**
Who names streets?
- **Socio-economic awareness (poor - rich)**
Who “earns or earned” the riches of industry?
- **Moral awareness (right - wrong)**
Who earned the honour of a “street name”?

The focus for the newer subject of “Life and society” should be: Each community and generation has its own cultural and communicative memories of the past. This also applies to communities within Luxembourg society, which is well known to be strongly influenced by migration. For example, in this context, you could address the critical question of why little to no consideration was given to naming places and streets after the workers from Italy and Portugal who immigrated during the industrial age and contributed so significantly to the development of Luxembourg industry and the country’s prosperity. The same applies to women, while the “big men” were included in naming as a matter of course. In the subject “Life and society”, this can be related to the “identity question” and the issue of “diversity” in society (learning areas of economic ethics, technology: past - today - tomorrow, etc.).

The subject particularly benefits from being able to link classroom work with learning locations outside the classroom. This would be particularly interesting for “History and geography” as a subject.

In Lessons

Place and street names are highly suitable for school lessons, because they offer students the opportunity to find out more about the history and culture of their country, region and town and its residents. Each name has its own meaning and history just waiting to be discovered. Students can turn into local history time detectives with the instructions and materials presented here and take their first steps in engaging with the working practice of historians.

The subject of industrialisation and de-industrialisation naturally has numerous factors connecting it to present-day Luxembourg. Industrialisation was an age of the modern era that went far beyond individual regions and cities. It was international and was based on a complex network of various areas in politics, economics and society. Local and regional history acts as a magnifying glass for this tumultuous modern age governed by economic cycles. In Luxembourg, industrial history was very closely associated with the further evolution of modern financial capitalism, expanding urbanisation and transportation and the emergence of a national and regional identity. This identity formation was shaped by the myth of industry as the driver of progress, the worker as a modern hero and the rapid rise of Luxembourg among the ranks of prosperous industrial nations. These mythical constructs were generated in the cultural field of literature and art and transferred into the public consciousness in a variety of ways. They found their way into national history and Luxembourg school books and were rarely critically questioned.

Researching street and place names can be a way to have a nuanced debate about the prevalent national historical pictures and stories. The working materials and practical exercise on offer here can be used for a more in-depth discussion of industrialisation in school lessons. They also provide concrete examples of thinking about the cultural shaping and configuration of the public space of a town, forms of the culture of remembrance and the influence of historical figures and social narratives on cultural inheritance. Working through the questions and research should boost the independence, competence and creativity of students and trigger critical debates about the industrial age and how to handle their heritage. It should also help them develop their skills in finding appropriate information, coming up with opinions and presenting them in a constructive way. Different perspectives and individual questions should be expressly allowed and encouraged.



Use in lessons

Place name research gives students the opportunity to work through concrete tasks and carry out independent research under the supervision of their teachers. This research can be carried out using documents in archives and libraries, digital collections of newspapers and publications in [eLuxemburgensia](#), short excursions and site visits, interviews of students' own families or targeted Internet searches.

This is intended to awaken the students' curiosity and develop their powers of observation. It's about discovering the urban space in town, seeing it in its historical dimension with different eyes and from historical, geographical or social points of view, researching, presenting the results in lessons, taking a critical look at this in subsequent discussion and ultimately writing it all down. Individual roles and views should be reflected and differing opinions should be allowed and discussed.

The learning objectives are therefore historical research and reflection on the background of street or building names, introduction to historical studies and constructive work and discussion culture in small teams and as a class.

To start with, you can use street name directories and digital maps to identify the relevant places in the town.

1) Select names with industrial references and discuss these as a class. Use analogue and digital maps and mark the places for subsequent research. Students should choose a street or place name to study and work in small groups where possible (2-5 students).

2) The next step (depending on the age group) could be to visit the places with the selected street signs and building names with the aim of familiarising yourselves with the site and its surroundings. Students could take photos on their mobile phones and prepare short excursion reports describing the locality and their own impressions. They could also carry out a short spontaneous survey of passers-by (*what do you associate with the name of this street?*). *The site visits could be carried out as a class as part of an excursion or "memory walk". Research could also be carried out in the aforementioned small groups.*

3) The next step is then for students to carry out initial research in libraries and on the Internet, e.g. in digital collections, to help record compact information on the names in text and picture form.

This will teach students how to use search engines on the Internet and give them practice at this. This includes finding old photos of the site and comparing them to the photos the students took during their visit. Small dossiers could also be prepared. Hold joint discussions about the selection and content of information.

Discussions can then be held during lessons to formulate new questions to find out more and explore further research options.

4) Next, coordinated inquiries about the street and place names can be sent to local archives and authorities, such as the town archives and municipal building authorities. Students can use this to collect further information and images and clarify the background of the names. The aim of this part of the exercise is to teach the students how to handle

historical sources and archive work and spark their curiosity, to pose more in-depth questions and generate new knowledge. This includes a critical review of the sources and their own insights.

Encouraging the students to ask their own families questions and carry out oral history interviews is a special part of in-depth research. They should discuss these questions with teachers in advance and be taught basic interviewing methods. The first steps towards the academic methods of “Oral history” could also be taught, depending on the age of the students. The aim of the interviews is to find out more information and discover unknown personal histories relating to the places of memory and their names. The students’ new findings about the places in their personal surroundings could be linked to further questions about subjects such as origins, occupation, living situation, leisure and environment. This will place the street and place names in a personal/familial context and put them into historical perspective.

Writing the results of this work down will then turn these historical studies into documentation. This is essential and will offer further opportunities for engaging with the academic work of historians. Students should incorporate direct citations and create a list of all the sources, tools and literature they have used.

Example 1: Rue Émile Mayrisch (Esch-sur-Alzette):

Rue Émile Mayrisch is a street almost 600 metres long to the east of the town centre of Esch-sur-Alzette. It meets Rue Jean-Pierre Michels to the north and Rue du Fossé to the south. The side roads leading from it are Rue Wurth-Paquet, Rue Dellhéicht and Rue Mathias Koener. Rue Émile Mayrisch is the location of the hospital named after Émile Mayrisch in 2004 [Link: <https://www.chem.lu/>], Escher Bibliothéik [library] and the Lycée des Garçons in the building formerly used by the industrial school. You can find the location of the street online on the national [geoportal website](#). You can also find it on [OpenStreetMap](#).

At the north end of the street you will find Square Émile Mayrisch, a small park with a playground and a monument to Émile Mayrisch. The square was named at a town council meeting on 8 July 1930. The street, the square with its monument and the surrounding buildings are an exciting and informative learning location for a visit and further research. The monument was dedicated on 15 August 1933 in the presence of the mayor of Esch-sur-Alzette at the time, Victor Wilhelm, the president of ARBED Gaston Barbanson and Émile Mayrisch’s widow Aline Mayrisch de Saint-Hubert. Created by the architects Auguste and Gustave Perret, the monument consists of a vertical concrete pillar topped by a bronze bust of the industrialist and two wings with industrial motifs – the Belval and Schifflange steelworks – in the bronze relief panels created by the sculptor Louis Dejean.

The starting point for finding out about Émile (German form Emil) Mayrisch could be the Wikipedia article. [Émile Mayrisch](#) (1862-1928) came from Esch-sur-Alzette and was a Luxembourg industrialist and President of the Board of Directors at the major steel company [ARBED](#), founded in 1911. His father was the doctor Edouard Mayrisch and he was related to the well-known industrial family Metz through his mother Mathilde. Émile Mayrisch was not only an active businessman and powerful company boss, but was also considered to be a pioneer of the later economic unification of

Europe thanks to his role in the foundation of the International Steel Cartel in 1926. The role attributed to him has been subject to critical review in academic debate, claiming that he primarily pursued the interest of his own company.

His wife Aline Mayrisch de Saint Hubert, a Luxembourg suffragette, was also honoured with a street name in *Esch-sur-Alzette*. The same applies to members of the Metz dynasty related to him: *Léon Metz* or Émile's great-uncle *Norbert Metz*. Émile and Aline Mayrisch were patrons of the arts in Esch-sur-Alzette and beyond, which may well be one reason for them being honoured with street names. The lesson should look at the reasons for this, as well as the use of the French version of his name, i.e. Émile instead of Emil.

Another useful resource for further research is the website *industrie.lu*, which is dedicated to Luxembourg industrial history and also contains references to *Émile Mayrisch*. It also offers historical images and references indicating that streets are also named after Émile Mayrisch in the neighbouring towns of Audun-le-Tiche (France) and Dudelange.

Example 2: Avenue des Haut-Fourneaux (Belval)

Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux is a street around 220 metres long in the Belval quarter in the west of Esch-sur-Alzette. It lies at the heart of an urban development area on the site of the former blast furnace plant, *Adolf-Emil-Hütte*, built between 1909 and 1912. Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux is a connecting axis for road traffic running parallel to the pedestrian zone within the ultra-modern Belval suburban quarter. Most of the industrial complex was torn down from 1998 onwards and the new-build area we see today was gradually developed, including the University of Luxembourg, bank and administrative buildings, homes, restaurants and a shopping centre.

The street runs from the Belval-Université train station from the right-hand section of Avenue du Rock'n'Roll with the *Agora administrative building* to Rue de la Fonte and Place de l'Université on the university campus. The neighbouring streets also bear names referencing the industrial heritage of the town: Avenue des Sidérurgistes and Ennert den Héchiwien.

The unmistakable remains of the former Belval blast furnace plant can be found on the left-hand side of Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux: the Massenoire industrial hall built in 1965 and the mighty A and B blast furnaces built between 1963 and 1970, as well as the foundations and outbuildings of blast furnace C built between 1977 and 1979, which was disassembled in 1996 and taken to China. Blast furnace B remained in operation until 1997. Overall, Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux is a significant industrial place of memory and the blast furnaces still found there to this day have been part of national industrial heritage since 2000. The historic references of the street name of Avenue des Hauts-Fourneaux are therefore an exciting topic for historical detective work by students.

Worksheet

1. Get into small groups of 2 to 5 students.

2. Use the street name directory on the geoportal
[Link: <https://map.geoportail.lu/addresses/Esch-sur-Alzette?lang=de>] to look for street names that are associated with the subject of industry. Make a note of the names and research their location on OpenStreetMap or Google Maps.

3. Discuss the names within your groups and make a note of your questions and anything else relevant that you can think of.

4. Visit the places and familiarise yourself with the location and surroundings. Take photos on your phone of the street signs, distinctive houses and other buildings. You could also ask passers-by what they associate with the name of the street.

5. Carry out online research under the supervision of your teacher and collect information and photos about the place name. Prepare short information files about each name.

6. Present your preliminary findings in your lesson and discuss them. Make a note of any corrections and formulate any useful in-depth questions.

7. Send research inquiries to the town archives and building authorities, coordinated by your teacher.

8. Tell your families about your project and find people to interview. Formulate further questions, under the supervision of your teacher.

9. Write down your findings in a final document under the supervision of your teacher.

Literature

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