

③
Urban planning
High-rise living

Urban developments in Luxembourg are increasingly aiming for the sky, with projects like the Zenith towers at the Cloche d'Or and the Infinity in Kirchberg offering unprecedented residential heights. But the new scale of living also comes with new challenges.

“We are going through an important period of transition at the moment,” says Markus Miessen, professor of urban regeneration at the University of Luxembourg. “This transition will, by default, introduce changes to our lives.”

Density will have to increase but simply building more isn't a solution for the expert. “Urban growth, and growth in general, needs to be reconsidered.” What Miessen advocates are spaces that meet their residents' daily needs--smaller and self-sufficient urban units that work with and around the communities already in place.

Newly arrived in Luxembourg--he was appointed to the university in January 2021--Miessen has found the country's large-scale developments lacking in diver-



Markus Miessen

Christiane Brassel-Rausch

sity in terms of scale and identity. “What I have seen so far mostly stems from a 1990s understanding of urban planning,” he says, adding that urban planning should not be left in the hands of developers. “Public participation in these large-scale urban projects is difficult as it often simply confronts the general public with ideas.”

For the urban transition to be a success, communities should be involved in shaping projects, and they must understand the benefits--such as shorter commutes--and the necessity to use space differently. “The large scale works if it carries along the small scale of everyday realities that are so important to all of us,” Miessen says.

Vertical neighbourhood

Turning a high-rise into a community will be one of the challenges faced by

the commune of Differdange when the Gravity tower opens in 2023.

A multi-purpose complex, the Gravity project combines flats with shops and offices in a major urban development. The commune bought the residential tower's 80 apartments to sell and rent them at affordable prices. “We, as a commune, share the responsibility for the housing market,” says mayor Christiane Brassel-Rausch (déi Gréng). “It was a social consciousness. We wanted affordable apartments.”

Differdange in a July 2020 Deloitte report was listed among the most expensive cities in Europe to rent (see chart). Brassel-Rausch says there is little alternative to building upwards, given the need to accommodate a growing population on a limited territory. But the city of 27,800 residents doesn't want anonymous living. “It's not a normal high-rise.” Tenants and owners share a common room and rooftop terrace. All occupants commit to participatory living and being part of an association of owners and tenants that decides how the shared spaces are used. The commune wants them to take ownership of the complex in a new form of living together, Brassel-Rausch says.

Several of the apartments are reserved for elderly or disabled residents, with tenants also selected from different income brackets. “The mix was incredibly important for us,” the mayor says. However, the commune isn't involved in a new co-living concept also included in the complex. Occupants have only a bedroom and bathroom to themselves, sharing the kitchen and living spaces. The aim is to attract university students, interns or short-term tenants. And while it fits with the overall idea of a mixed space, the new endeavour is advertised as an “ideal investment product” by developers BPI and Unibra, which could yet counter the commune's efforts for more affordability. ■

LUXEMBOURG CITIES RANK AMONG THE MOST EXPENSIVE IN EUROPE

Source → Deloitte Property Index, July 2020



Words **CORDULA SCHNUR**