

Why do young working people find Luxembourg attractive?

Internationalisation and youth mobility in Europe

The article focuses on the role of English as one among other aspects that young employees find attractive in Luxembourg. By providing a brief overview of the place of English from a viewpoint of young people who currently work in the country, this analysis invites for a further discussion of the English language as an increasingly growing phenomenon in the country.

To supply the needs of its growing economy, Luxembourg has positioned itself as an attractive country in the centre of the EU by profiting, on one hand, from an advantageous geographic position in the centre of the European Union and the major cross-border economic player, and from the crossroads of Germanic-French cultures and traditions on the other hand (Chauvel 2017). Therefore, the country successfully attracts young educated people. The country's high salaries may be an attractive aspect to young people, but this is not the only pull-factor that leads them to Luxembourg, as results of the MOVE¹ project show.

This article is based on the analysis of 15 semi-structured interviews with young persons (18-29), possessing different skills and various years of working

experience, who came to Luxembourg for work. This group of young people is particularly interesting as they are part of a generation living global lives, they grew up in countries with fluid borders, their parents are of diverse nationalities and have often been mobile for a long time, and they have been mobile themselves. This article investigates the question of why they chose Luxembourg as their country of destination.

International means multilingual, multicultural

The young people we interviewed tend to associate Luxembourg with specific aspects such as multilingualism and multiculturalism; they connect this international environment with the English language. Young people who come to Luxembourg for work generally evaluate the country very positively due to these aspects. Most of the young people employed in Luxembourg emphasise the importance of being able to learn, improve, and speak different languages in various contexts: i.e. in their professional, everyday, and private lives. Even young French people, who rely on their mother tongue in professional and private contexts in Luxembourg, emphasise the importance of the country's international environment.

Birte Nienaber
Volha Vysotskaya
Emilia Kmiotek-Meier

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Prof. Dr. Birte Nienaber is a professor at the University of Luxembourg in the department of Geography and Social Planning.

Volha Vysotskaya is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Luxembourg since 2015.

Emilia Kmiotek-Meier is a PhD Candidate at the University of Luxembourg since June 2015 and works for the MOVE project.

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For an immigrant with many objectives for the future, Luxembourg can, above all, be perceived as a training playground.

To them, Luxembourg is the perfect place for developing international, global skills while being able to use other languages, such as English, on a more regular basis:

“Actually I had to go to [city B in Switzerland]², but I needed English ... before coming to [city B in Switzerland], because in [city B in Switzerland] the working conditions are harsh. That is, if ever tested, even English, they can actually fire you. Like that: since you don't have English, we cannot keep you. And as I had to have international experience, close to [city A in France] to keep the roots with home, so, it was Luxembourg. Luxembourg was really perfect from all the places I had applied for. There was also [city A in the UK], I applied to [city A in the UK] for my internships.” (Maria, 25, French, working in the financial sector).

Many young people who speak several foreign languages also share this fascination with the multicultural environment. The Luxembourgish environment is particularly valorised because it nourishes language diversity, providing the possibility of using several languages in various social contexts – sometimes throughout the same day.

“So yeah, that is why I am very lucky with Luxembourg, because on top of being abroad it is very European, and I can speak four languages in one day. It is amazing. Every day I speak four languages, because I work in Spanish and Italian, with my colleagues I speak either English or French, or Spanish again, because some of them are from Spain. So it is really good. I really like it.” (Leonardo, 29, Italian, working in a private company in advertising).

Thus, young people tend to embrace the opportunity to take their foreign languages outside the classrooms to use them in daily communication.

“International” means “English”

Young people widely relate an international environment to the possibility of using the English language; those who come to Luxembourg for work emphasise the importance of the language in this context. The usage of English in so many everyday situations gives it an international flair, which is highly valued among young people:

“Mmm, mostly I was attracted by this job because it was in English, that was different from home, where I would be working in French or in Dutch, so that what attracted me and also, may be international environment of Luxembourg, when I visited a couple of times, it was pretty international. And there is also

a littttle biiit higher salary of what I would get in Belgium.” (Thomas, 27, Belgian, working in the financial sector).

When Luxembourg is chosen as the destination country, it is not only the country itself that is relevant; rather, it is the cosmopolitan atmosphere that attracts young people to seeking a job in Luxembourg. One of the more important aspects of a destination country is that moving there allows young people to work and live in an international environment. A cosmopolitan environment is one of many aspects that young people emphasise as absent in their country of origin. Consequently, young people closely connect Luxembourg with the idea of being international.

For many, being in Luxembourg is not the first time they experience being in an international context. As they explain, they experienced a multicultural lifestyle during their university studies (for instance through Erasmus exchanges), an internship in another country, working as an au pair, through previous jobs, etc. Having already experienced an international environment, many young people want to continue being part of one.

One young man from Belgium whom we interviewed talks about the times when he was in other countries and thus describes the international practices with which he was involved. Among these were speaking English, studying in English, participating in an Erasmus exchange, doing voluntary service in other countries, travelling and meeting people from different countries. While being away from the country of origin is one major aspect of being international, young people nevertheless aim to recreate the international environment and practices in their habitual location upon coming back home:

“You know, if I can keep on rolling in this kind environment I actually really enjoy, so I came back to [city A in Belgium] after I studied my Bachelor, I also was involved in, emmm, Erasmus world, so I headed the student association for ... we called it the international commission, it was in charge of welcoming and organising events for international students who were coming to my university, so these 4 years, so I was always involved in multicultural environment.” (Thomas, 27, Belgian, working in the financial sector)

In the country of origin, young people are expected to speak the foreign languages in which they trained abroad, particularly English. It is not only about meeting people from different countries, but, more importantly: communicating, working, and per-

forming everyday practices in one of the main languages that is understood and spoken by others from many other corners of the world. This is why young people may associate the English language, as a lingua franca, with an international environment.

Luxembourg as a testing ground

For an immigrant with many objectives for the future, Luxembourg can, above all, be perceived as a training playground. More specifically, young employees see their first jobs in Luxembourg as an excellent opportunity to acquire new skills and develop their professional capabilities and expertise in a “friendly” international environment.

As a result, Luxembourg is a particularly advantageous country of residence for young workers who value the importance of the English language, both for their future mobilities to various destinations across Europe, as well as for their professional path. During their time in Luxembourg they gain the confidence, experience and capital on which they will be able to draw in the future. Many employers in Luxembourg permit staff to work in English, learning and improving their language skills while simultaneously experiencing a multilingual and multinational working environment. The country is thus a global, albeit temporary, stop for those in the highly-educated labour force. Moving to Luxembourg, gaining profitable skills/competencies and (more often than not) leaving Luxembourg after a short- to mid-term experience gives young people highly sought-after soft skills for the international labour market, aiding them even outside of Luxembourg.

Up to now, this strategy has worked well. For the future, the government must ask itself what their priorities are. On the one hand, it would be wise to keep on young well-educated people from other countries as it would be beneficial for them to stay in Luxembourg for a longer term, as they are already trained in and familiar with the national context, its labour market mechanism, and other important aspects. However, on the other hand, Luxembourg also seeks innovation, updated know-how, new skills and fresh ideas to compete with the inter-EU and worldwide knowledge economies. Thus, its cosmopolitan setting may be an asset in attracting the best and brightest, particularly when combined with its high salaries. ♦

Literature:

Chauvel, L. (2016). *Présentation La Spirale du Déclassement – Essai sur la Société des Illusions* (05.12.2016). La Bibliothèque nationale de Luxembourg, Luxembourg.

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2 Personal names, geographical places like cities, locations, etc. (but not countries) have been pseudonymised to guarantee the anonymity of the interviewed participants. They have been changed according to the rules of transcription and are put in square brackets.



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