

20-TROISVIERGES

The Vennbahn turns Troisvierges station into a rail junction

With the extension of the rail connection Luxembourg – Ettelbrück to the north, Troisvierges became part of the rail network in 1866. This completed and terminated the Luxembourg northern line. But in 1889, Troisvierges became a rail junction, when its station became connected via the Vennbahn with Aachen-Rothe Erde. The regional newspaper “Kreisblatt für den Kreis Malmedy” reported on 5th November 1889, that the atmosphere at the station that day was cool, to say the least: “In Ulflingen (Troisvierges) there was no sign of any celebration, no flags, no flowers, no one stood on the platform to officially welcome the first train on the new link. The polished and decorated engine took its place among the other soot-black monsters, like an exotic among crows, strange and curious.” A year later in 1890, the connection to the Belgian city of Liege was significantly shortened by the opening of the section Rivage – Trois Ponts. Trains no longer had to be routed over Spa to Liege. This connection, especially the first few kilometres after Troisvierges, would play an important role for the German military, 25 years later, at the opening of hostilities in World War I.

A new era dawned for Troisvierges with the arrival of the railway

The Vennbahn brought prosperity to Troisvierges. The station quickly developed into an important trans-shipment point for the north of Luxembourg. The years 1913 and 1919 were especially profitable for rail freight transport. Until the First World War, there was also a customs office at the Belgian border. Railway and customs brought employment and income for many. By 1924, there were 265 people in Luxembourg’s northernmost locality employed by the railways. And passenger services were also expanding. The journey from Troisvierges to Aachen only needed four hours! The former farming village and pilgrimage locality of Ösling had become a flourishing little railway town. Because of its close ties to the socialist workers party, Troisvierges was known regionally as “La Rouge”.

From yesterday’s railway town to the economic hub of today

With the transfer of iron ore and pig-iron transport to other lines from the mid 1930s, the freight transit through Troisvierges lost importance. From 1945 to 1950, there were only three trains daily from Troisvierges to Wilwerdange, since most of the Vennbahn infrastructure had been destroyed in the war. After this, there was only occasional freight movement, if and when required. The customs house had already been closed in 1919. In 1983, the line was decommissioned and the land sold to the Troisvierges local authority. For almost a century, rail and customs duties had built the wealth of this town and the locals on both sides of the border. Workers and staff were well and regularly paid, and farms and businesses profited. Today, the romance of the rail is long forgotten. But after a demographic low point at the end of the 70s, the population here is rising again. Today, Troisvierges has 3,038 residents. Of these, 58 % are originally from Luxembourg, the rest hail from 39 different nations.

The First World War began a day early in Troisvierges ...

Luxembourg was the first country to be invaded by German troops in 1914. This was a shock, as they believed their act of neutrality from 1867 would protect them. Troisvierges served as a gateway to France and was the site of a curious incident, as Joseph Heinen, a witness of those days and former director of the Luxembourg Atheneum recalls. “It was Saturday, 1st August 1914. For some days prior to this, all the Vennbahn trains from Aachen had been stopping at the frontier in Lengeler. That couldn’t mean anything good. Suddenly, around 18:00 someone shouted on the platform: “D’Preise sënn do!” (The Prussians are coming!). Apparently, five military vehicles had hurtled down the road from Wemperhardt, clear through the village and on towards Biwisch. At the tunnel they slowed, drove through and halted, seeming to wait for orders. As soon as the order had been received, they began to dismantle the tracks. The idea was to prevent the traditionally powerful Belgian military from using the line between Liege and Luxembourg. Additional drama was provided by a music festival being held in Clervaux, not far away, which was opened with drumming and fireworks. The

noise could be heard across the peak of the Ösling as far as Troisvierges. The Germans couldn't believe their ears, thinking that they were under attack from canon. An officer of the German advance guard phoned Clervaux from Troisvierges station to order the immediate cessation of fire on the German Imperial Army. Of course, the assembled musicians, singers and good people of Clervaux could only heartily laugh over the misunderstanding. At 20:00 a further car came speeding up, carrying Station Chief Jakob von Lenger. He ordered the military out of his station. According to newspaper reports, his arrival had been immediately preceded by a phone call of similar tenor from the German consulate in Luxembourg.

... but on 2nd August 1914, it all began again, this time in earnest

The easing of the situation didn't last long, not even enough for a decent night's sleep. Because the next morning at 5 o'clock on 2nd August 1914, the Germans "officially" marched into Luxembourg. Troisvierges was the first town in Luxembourg to be occupied. The soldiers were led to believe that they would be freeing the nation from French troops. But they found none in Troisvierges. On the same evening, they reached the capital. In the bars and restaurants around the Place d'Armes, not only Luxembourg citizens but also German artillery men were to be seen that night, still looking out for French soldiers, no doubt. Questions to the locals on the whereabouts of the French met with bewilderment. In the night from 2nd to 3rd August, more than 13,000 German soldiers marched through Luxembourg towards France and Belgium. The Luxembourg army was under strict orders not to engage them, as the Grand Duchy had been a neutral power since 1867. The government protested against this breach of their neutrality. The German chancellor Hollweg insisted that this was in no wise a military action directed against Luxembourg. Yet Luxembourg still remained occupied by the Germans until the end of the war. A special euphemism "occupation amicale" (friendly occupation) was coined to cover the obvious insult.

The language of the Luxembourger - Troisvierges, an example for language variants and interpretations on the origin of names of Luxembourg localities

Street signs are a first indication of the multilingual aspect of life in Luxembourg for anyone just travelling through. Alongside French, the name of a town is also given in the local language "Lëtzebuergesch". In addition, German is the third language in Luxembourg. Troisvierges is called Ulflingen in German and Èlwen in Luxembourgish. Behind this diversity lies a story of three different origins: "Troisvierges" first appeared in the 17th century, as the former pilgrimage centre of Ulflingen began to gather visitors from neighbouring Wallonia. The new name referred to the "Three Graces" [apparently virgin, ergo 'Trois Vierges']: Fides, Spes et Caritas (Faith, Hope and Charity), saints and martyrs of early Christian legend. These resulted from the recycling of the celto-Germanic female trinity a thousand years before, during the time of christianisation under Pope Gregory I. Troisvierges was formerly known as Ulflingen, first appearing in a manuscript from 1353 as Ulvelingen. From the root of this - Ulven, Elven or Alven meaning Elves - came the Luxembourgish name Èlwen. According to persistent local myth, these were the original founders of the town. The suffix "ing" suggests a Germanic settlement, probably Frankish. This indicates the connection to the west-Mosel-Frankish dialect, the root of Luxembourgish German: "Lëtzebuergescher Däitsch".

How the people of Luxembourg use their languages in everyday life and officially

The first official written form of the Luxembourgish language dates back only to 1946. This early attempt failed to really catch on. Today, a written form exists that has undergone several reforms over the last few decades. With the Language Laws of 1984, Luxembourgish became the national language of the Grand Duchy. However, "Lëtzebuergesch", as it is known, is generally used only as an oral communicator, much less as a written school language. German and French are also official languages of Luxembourg. Laws and regulations are drawn up and published in French. Translations of court proceedings are only valid in French. Local authorities and public institutions are free to draw up documents in any of the three languages, whereby the original language version is legally binding. In administrative matters or in legal disputes, French, German or Luxembourgish may be used. In earlier times, it was not unusual for a simple farm lad from the north of the Grand Duchy to

be fluent in four languages: Lëtzebuergesch was his mother tongue, he'd gone to school in German, spoken Walloon at work on some Belgian farm and learnt French during his military service.

The Second World War brought out the people's love of Lëtzebuergesch in the face of Nazi might

Up to the Second World War, Lëtzebuergesch was both mother-tongue and colloquial idiom in Luxembourg. This was to change dramatically when, on the 2nd August 1940 the Gauleiter of Trier-Koblenz and later of the Mosel land, Gustav Simon, was appointed Head of the Luxembourg Civil Administration (CdZ) by edict of the Führer. Four days later, he introduced the first measures in the "Germanisation of Luxembourg", by prohibiting the use of the French language. All public announcements, documents and letters now had to be in the High German official language, German became compulsory in schools. The use of French street and locality names was prohibited. Given names and family names were "Germanised": Henri became Heinrich, Louis became Ludwig and Jean Dupont became Hans Brückner. Yet Lëtzebuergesch, as a Mosel dialect, could not so easily be prohibited. By continuing to use their mother tongue, the people of Luxembourg gave voice to their resistance and dislike of their national-socialist rulers. Among the more or less subtle forms of resistance were teasing and jeering, disobedience to orders and the submergence into the underground of young men forced into uniform. Some of these were smuggled across the border to Belgium in 1943. A small fraction of the population collaborated with the Germans, another small fraction engaged in active resistance. In the winter of 1944/45, the north of the Grand Duchy was heavily damaged by the Ardennes offensive (Battle of the Bulge). But the winner of the Second World War in Luxembourg was Lëtzebuergesch, which emerged intact and strengthened.

"Eis Sprooch ass eis Identitéit" (our language, that's our identity)

Today, most inhabitants of Luxembourg change with ease between the three languages, gaining the respect of their monolingual neighbours. But their heart lies with their mother tongue, Lëtzebuergesch, increasingly so, particularly in cultural activities. The mother tongue is heard more and more in the liturgy of the church, while plays and films are ever more likely to be written in Lëtzebuergesch. However, the level of understanding in the mother tongue is not always equal to all situations. In hospitals and retirement homes, for example, senior citizens often find the staff out of their depth, especially since doctors and nurses frequently come from abroad and the preferred language of their patients is a closed book to them. A study carried out by the Interdisciplinary Research Unit of the University of Luxembourg (IPSE) found that, to a considerable degree, the people of Luxembourg define their identity in terms of their language, considering it a vital element of national cohesion. However, Monique Goldschmit, from the Luxembourg travel agency "velosophie", doesn't feel that their identity is uniquely defined by language, preferring to say that: "Perhaps our identity is more marked by the fact that we live in a country where *many* languages are spoken." And that brings us to another characteristic of the Grand Duchy, its cultural diversity.

The Luxembourg of immigration - Luxembourg, the country with the highest percentage of foreigners

Luxembourg is, by far, the nation with the highest proportion of foreigners in its population. In 2012, they accounted for 44% of its citizens. Behind this abstract statistic stand 229,900 people who have found work and built lives in the Grand Duchy. In neighbouring Belgium, the proportion is 10%, in Germany 9%. In Luxembourg City the share of foreigners is even higher at a staggering 65%. In the north of the country, around Troisvierges, the proportion of foreign citizens lies between 20 and 30%. In the 19th century, there was already a lack of labour; immigrants were urgently sought. Around the turn of the century, the first Italian and German industrial workers moved into what had previously been a very rural Luxembourg. At that time, 60% of steelworkers came from abroad. Up to the First World War, the government did a great deal to integrate migrants into society. Then, a more restrictive course began to be taken. By the time of the depression of the 1930s, Germans were about half of the foreign workers in Luxembourg. After the war, this flow from their eastern neighbour came to a halt. In the post-war years, workers were especially sought for the building and construction industries. After the widespread destruction of the Ardennes offensive, the need for

reconstruction was greatest in the north. By the mid 1960s, a significant flow of immigrants began to arrive from Portugal. And in the decades since, the upper tiers of European and financial institutions have been stocked with foreign nationals as more and more expertise is required.

The Portuguese are the strongest immigrant culture in Luxembourg

Portuguese represent more than a third of the total foreign population of Luxembourg, and are thus by far the largest single group. In 2012, they numbered 85,300 of a total population of 524,900. Some way behind them come the Italians, French and Belgians. The reasons why people from a country on Europe's southwestern seaboard were looking for work in a landlocked northern nation in the 1960s were both political and economic, having also to do with military service and a colonial war in Angola. By 1970, a working agreement between Luxembourg and Portugal already envisaged the possibility for families of immigrants to be reunited. The Portuguese were particularly employable in construction, house carpentry and as domestic workers.

The people of Luxembourg: Europe's "Europeans" - In times of necessity, openness to others is a major virtue

In 1986, the entire population of Luxembourg found itself honoured with the prestigious International Charlemagne Prize. This collective recognition was based on the belief that every people gets the government it deserves, and that the people of the smallest country in the EU must therefore be among the most passionately convinced of the European ideal for their political leadership to contribute in such an exemplary fashion to its unity! Grand Duke Jean stressed, in his acceptance speech on their behalf in Aachen, that the country, in the course of its history, had "suffered greatly from inhabiting the zone of fracture between Germany and France. Only the European Community had given it real security". He further pointed out that Luxembourg, at the height of its power, was four times larger than today's Grand Duchy. It was broken up into a Walloon and a German-speaking part: "Our country had to suffer division three times in its history. That it exists at all today is almost a miracle". But necessity is the mother of invention and has resulted in an intellectual and economic opening-up to all sides. In 2012, the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen was awarded to the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, a "man from the frontier", having been born on the French border and living so much of his life there. On that occasion, Jean Claude Juncker, who had been Luxembourg's Prime Minister since 1995, remarked in his introductory speech, that the citizens of Luxembourg very soon bump into their borders, and are thus more or less coerced by this reality into a better comprehension of what it means to be European, particularly with regard to getting on with their neighbours.

The people of Luxembourg – convinced Europeans

The Eurobarometer opinion survey, which is carried out at regular intervals on behalf of the EU, is designed to take the temperature of public opinion with regard to the 'European project'. The people of Luxembourg invariably come in at the top of the chart. When asked in 2009 whether they considered the EU "a good thing", 74% answered with yes. The average across the EU was 52%. In general they are proud that their little country is home to important European Institutions, such as the General Secretariat of the European Parliament, European Court of Auditors, European Court of Justice and the European Investment Bank. If you ask the Luxemburger what they are proud of, the answer will most likely be: "Our language!" If you were to ask one of their Belgian neighbours what the Luxemburger are proud of, you would probably get the answer: "Of themselves!" But this is not meant in the sense of nationalistic self-satisfaction, but rather refers to their boundless self confidence.