

Housing the industrial city

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The rapid growth of the population in the second half of the nineteenth century created a housing crisis. Workers who came to Basel to work in the chemical factories, the railways and the workshops lived in crowded and often unsanitary conditions in the old town and the new working-class districts. Epidemics of cholera and typhoid, which struck Basel in the 1850s and 1860s, were connected with the poor quality of housing and water supply.¹

The responses to the housing crisis came from several directions. The canton improved the water supply and built a sewer system, which reduced epidemics. Employers, among them the chemical companies, built housing for their workers. Philanthropic societies, among them the GGG founded by Isaak Iselin, built model housing. And from the early twentieth century, housing cooperatives, financed by their members, by loans from banks and by public support, built large estates of affordable housing in Basel and its suburbs.

The housing cooperatives remain an important part of the Basel housing market today. Owning a significant share of the rental housing in the city, they provide affordable housing that is withdrawn from the speculative market. Their financing depends on mortgage loans from banks, among them the cantonal banks, and on public guarantees and loans. The canton of Basel-Stadt has promoted cooperative housing through the provision of land on long-term leases, under the building rights system known as *Baurecht*, under which the canton retains the ownership of the land and the cooperative owns the buildings for a period of decades.² The Christoph Merian Foundation also grants building rights on its land for cooperative housing.

1 Notes

1. On the cholera epidemic of 1855 and the typhoid epidemics in Basel in the 1860s and their connection with housing and water supply, see the literature on the social and medical history of Basel. To be verified. ↩
2. On the promotion of cooperative housing in Basel-Stadt through building rights (Baurecht, Art. 779 ff. Swiss Civil Code) on cantonal land and through the Christoph Merian Stiftung, see the cantonal housing policy publications. To be verified. ↩

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