

The Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank and the regional banks

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

The Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank, founded in 1864 with its head office in Liestal, is older than its counterpart in the city. It was created three decades after the separation of the two half-cantons, as the new rural canton sought a bank of its own to finance agriculture, trade and the early industries of the Ergolz and Birs valleys. Like the Basler Kantonalbank, it benefits from a full cantonal guarantee and is subject to a cantonal law that defines its mandate. Its certificates, which carry a share of the profit without voting rights, are traded on the Swiss stock exchange, while the canton holds the endowment capital.¹

The bank has a strong position in mortgage lending in the suburban communities of Basel-Landschaft, where many residents own their homes. Its balance sheet is correspondingly concentrated in residential real estate, a structure typical of Swiss cantonal banks and one that FINMA and the Swiss National Bank observe closely because of the risk of a correction in property prices. The bank also finances small and medium-sized enterprises in the canton, many of which supply the pharmaceutical and chemical industries.²

In 2021 and 2022 the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank set up radicant, a digital bank with its own FINMA licence and a focus on sustainable investment and banking. The project was among the most ambitious digital initiatives of any Swiss cantonal bank. Because its growth fell short of the original plans, the parent bank had to recognise losses and write-downs before reorganising the subsidiary. The episode illustrates how difficult it has become for regional banks to build digital businesses that reach sufficient scale in a crowded Swiss market.³

Alongside the two cantonal banks, the Raiffeisen group maintains several cooperative banks in the region. Each local Raiffeisen bank is legally independent and owned by its members, while the central organisation

Raiffeisen Schweiz in St. Gallen provides risk management, information technology and liquidity. The Raiffeisen banks serve households and small businesses, particularly in the rural parts of Basel-Landschaft, and have gained market share in the city as well.⁴ Migros Bank, PostFinance and the branches of the large bank complete the retail market.

One institution of the region has no equivalent elsewhere. The WIR Bank, a cooperative with its head office in Basel, grew out of the Wirtschaftsring founded in 1934, during the depression, by small entrepreneurs who wanted to trade with one another in a complementary currency when credit in Swiss francs was scarce. The WIR system still allows participating firms to settle part of their mutual payments in WIR units, while the bank, now known as Bank WIR, also offers ordinary banking services in Swiss francs.⁵ Economists have studied the WIR system as an example of a countercyclical credit network, since its use tends to rise when the economy weakens.

1 Notes

1. On the foundation of the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank in 1864, its seat in Liestal, the cantonal guarantee and its listed certificates, see the cantonal law on the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank and the annual reports of the bank. To be verified. ↩
2. On the business model of the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank (share of mortgage lending, lending to SMEs) and the attention of FINMA and the SNB to mortgage and real estate risks at domestically focused banks, see the annual reports of the bank and the Financial Stability Reports of the SNB. To be verified. ↩
3. On the foundation of radicant bank ag by the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank, its banking licence, its losses and the subsequent write-downs and reorganisation, see the annual reports and press releases of the Basellandschaftliche Kantonalbank. Status and figures to be verified. ↩
4. On the Raiffeisen banks in the Basel region and the structure of the Raiffeisen group (local cooperative banks, Raiffeisen Schweiz Genossenschaft in St. Gallen), see the publications of Raiffeisen Schweiz. To be verified. ↩

5. On the foundation of the WIR Wirtschaftsring-Genossenschaft in 1934, the WIR complementary currency and the present Bank WIR with its head office in Basel, see the publications of Bank WIR. Dates to be verified. ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/basel-the-basellandschaftliche-kantonalbank-and-the-regional-banks