

# Climate Justice in Basel

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## A SUMMARY BY LAURA VON SALIS

Basel is located at the heart of one of the world's most CO<sub>2</sub>-consuming societies. Although much of the environmental damage tied to Swiss consumption is outsourced through global production chains, this does not mean Basel itself is free of locally produced emissions—its environmental impacts are very real. This highlights the importance of acting locally while remaining mindful of global consequences. Aware of this situation, there is a broad commitment to climate action, supported by an engaged community. Activists, businesses, residents, and political actors work collaboratively toward a more climate-just future. Together, they raise a fundamental question: how can local policies and community initiatives shape an urban future that is both sustainable and socially inclusive?

Basel is known as a green city and often serves as a testing ground for innovative climate solutions. Concepts such as the 2000-Watt Society and Positive Energy Districts (PEDs), both piloted in Basel, aim to drastically reduce energy consumption while maintaining a high quality of life. Yet, as highlighted in the reading “Innovative but unjust? Analysing the opportunities and justice issues within Positive Energy Districts in Europe”, such innovations are not without risks. PEDs, while technologically advanced, can increase rents, contribute to gentrification, and exclude lower-income residents. These dynamics emphasize a critical principle: a climate-neutral city must also be a socially inclusive one.

Addressing these challenges requires integrating justice directly into sustainable urban planning. The reading “Urban Ecological Futures: Five Eco-Community Strategies for More Sustainable and Equitable Cities” outlines several strategies for doing so, including co-creating green spaces with communities, developing affordable and sustainable housing,

and retrofitting neighborhoods without displacing existing residents. Some of these principles are visible in Basel's recently developed **Erlenmattquartier**, home to the community space known as **Erle Perle**. Here, residents of all generations engage in participatory placemaking. This shared space fosters a sense of belonging and political engagement, demonstrating how small-scale, co-created projects can help embed climate action into everyday life. As they are partially funded by the canton, there are some voices critical about their use of tax money. Justice in urban contexts, as described in *The Climate Just City*, must account for procedural justice—who has a voice in decision-making. Erle Perle offers a working model of how these ideals can be realized at the neighborhood level, contributing to a more equitable urban transformation.

Food-related initiatives in Basel also promote low-threshold participation. Projects like **Backwaren Outlet**, **Ässbar**, and **Foodsharing Schweiz** reduce food waste by redistributing surplus goods that would otherwise be thrown away by shops and bakeries. Their biggest enemy is the „best before date“ which causes many still edible products to be destroyed. These efforts reduce environmental impact while simultaneously improving food access and offering job opportunities, especially for vulnerable groups. In doing so, they align with *Urban Ecological Futures'* call for circular economies and local resilience. They also demonstrate that sustainability can be practical and rooted in daily life—directly benefiting communities and encouraging broader participation.

Effective transformation depends on making change accessible, inclusive, and rewarding. Initiatives that offer co-benefits—like safer bicycle infrastructure, affordable food, and more livable streets—are more likely to gain

support and be sustained over time

Social movements remain a powerful force in Basel's climate politics. Groups like **Climate Justice Basel** organize protest camps, educational events, and awareness campaigns. They call for more ambitious, systemic responses to the climate crisis. Their approach is consistent with insights from "What Makes a Protest Movement Successful?" by the Social Change Lab, which identifies moral clarity, coalition-building, and sustained institutional pressure as key drivers of success. These elements are clearly visible in Basel's local climate movement landscape. Another example of inclusive climate action is **Basel 2030**, a citizen-led climate initiative that gained outreach through door-to-door engagement, public participation, and inclusive organizing. This process reflects how grassroots action and formal governance can work together. Basel's political landscape includes both institutional players—such as the progressive Basta party in the municipal parliament—and informal networks that foster awareness and participation. Their political opponent would be more conservative or right wing parties.

This mix of actors contributes to a rich and dynamic climate governance model. It represents the framework presented in *The Climate Just City*, which highlights the importance of empowering diverse actors and scaling up small interventions into meaningful structural change. These efforts led to the parliamentary adoption of **Basel 2037**, a strategic plan that now shapes the city's climate agenda.

What emerges from all these efforts is the understanding that effective climate action must be intersectional. It cannot be limited to technological innovation or carbon accounting. It must also address deeply rooted social and economic inequalities and increase the general awareness of the urgent need to act towards a greener future. Through grassroots activism, inclusive governance, and community-led experimentation, action is already happening.

Basel's evolving climate landscape illustrates how a city can realize its environmental ambitions with social inclusion. Its diverse actors, engaged citizens, and willingness to test new approaches show that a more sustainable and just urban future is possible—one built on participation, equity, and shared responsibility.

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