

Historical context

Savings banks gradually appeared in the 19th century, and began issuing metal piggy banks in the 20th century. These means of promoting and managing savings supplanted the traditional clay piggy banks or other types of piggy bank, which were fragile and insecure, and were not linked to any institution.

In the 19th century, the British savings bank model was exported to many European countries, including France, not least because of the common social problems of poverty and unemployment. Benjamin Delessert founded the Caisse d'épargne et de prévoyance de Paris in 1818. This philanthropic institution was far removed from the traditional banking model. It was inspired by the English Savings Bank model and focused on the small savings of workers and the working classes.

Run by members of the financial and industrial elite, savings banks were gradually established across France. They were fewer in number than in England, however, and remained fragile in the face of economic ups and downs.