

The History of the Carnival, a short translation!

Carnival has been celebrated in the City of Cologne since time immemorial. However, after the French Revolutionary troops left Cologne in 1814 and the Prussians took over, it was high time to "organise" the street carnival which, the new authority felt, was getting out of hand. Thus, in 1823 the "Festordnendes Komitee" was founded, the predecessor of today's Festive Committee.

On February 10, 1823 Cologne celebrated the first Rose Monday ("Rosenmontag") with the motto "Inthronisation of the Carnival Hero".

Over the years, decades and centuries certain traditions and customs emerged, which are still the hallmark of the traditional Cologne Carnival: the indoor festivities (sessions and balls) and, of course, the street carnival, culminating in the grand parade on Rose Monday. It is the task of the Festive Committee, the umbrella organisation representing well over 100 Cologne carnival associations, traditional corps, etc., to coordinate, set common standards, and preserve the tradition of the "fifth season". No doubt, the Cologne "Karneval" plays in the Champions League together with the Carnaval in Rio de Janeiro and Carnival in Venice!

The Carnival Season

Given its Christian roots, the date of Rose Monday is determined by the Church calendar: It takes place on the Monday before Ash Wednesday, which in turn marks the beginning of Lent leading up to Good Friday and Easter. Traditionally, the fifth season is declared open at 11 minutes past eleven on the eleventh of November! The Carnival spirit is then temporarily suspended by the Advent and Christmas period, and picks up again "in earnest" in the New Year. Street carnival, also called "the crazy days", takes place between Thursday (Women's Carnival Day) before Rose Monday and ends on Ash Wednesday.

Cologne Carnival owes its social importance to four functions:

- Maintaining traditions: Cologne Carnival has a very long tradition, the oldest evidence of its existence dates back to the 14th century. In this context, one should point out the strong roots of Cologne Carnival in Christianity. Until

this very day the schedule of the carnival season follows the Christian calendar and its most important rule is: “*Am Aschermittwoch ist alles vorbei*” (“On Ash Wednesday it’s all over”). In addition, carnival symbolises the peaceful resistance of the people of Cologne against the authoritarian Prussian regime. Today, the tradition of Cologne Carnival is primarily maintained and continued by the Rose Monday Procession, the Cologne Trifolium (*Kölner Dreigestirn*) and the 160 carnival societies (including 110 organisation committee societies) in Cologne. In total, around 20,000 people (i.e. 2% of Cologne’s population) are involved in the organised carnival festivities and another 10,000 people in societies and clubs that are not associated with the organisation committee. So the maintaining the tradition is the backbone function of Cologne Carnival.

- Social function: The social importance of Cologne Carnival is mirrored on the one hand by annual donations to the carnival societies of around 1.5m euros. And on the other, citizens who are involved in organising carnival show a commitment to social institutions like old people’s homes and the preservation of historic monuments in many different ways. Free events in facilities for the disabled or like the *Volkssitzung* (people’s session) at Neumarkt enable people to participate in the fun of carnival who would normally get little chance to do so. In addition, carnival has an important integration function in today’s multi-cultural society. With its multi-faceted platforms carnival offers an integration opportunity for various social groups and plays a major role in fostering the development of young people, e. g. by supporting activities in schools.

- Networking function: Cologne Carnival plays a major role in Cologne’s economic life. Due to the many social contacts during the year in the societies and especially during the season, carnival is an ideal place for making contacts, which is often used especially by one-man companies and SMEs to establish business contacts. Joint visits of carnival events with staff or customers serve to motivate teams and intensify customer relations. Many companies see an active commitment to carnival as an element of their corporate social responsibility today.

- Ambassador function of Cologne Carnival: Cologne Carnival is an essential branding element of the city of Cologne. Many local companies use carnival to associate their products and services with the positive attributes of carnival. However, one should add that despite comprehensive TV coverage the importance of carnival beyond the region and especially

outside Germany is much smaller than is often assumed. Other folk festivals like carnival in Rio and the Oktoberfest in Munich have a much stronger presence abroad.

All in all, one can say that Cologne Carnival is an important pillar in the social life of the city of Cologne and enjoys a great popularity both with the people of Cologne and in the region.