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Fasnacht Basel & 2008

moorgestraich

drummler

glyggekäller

laarve

guggemuusig

pfyffer

waageglygge

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The Economics of Fasnacht: How is the Fasnacht Financed?

By Corinne Bölle

Historic documents indicate that Old Lady Fasnacht has visited Basel for more than 600 years. Since the early 19th century the Basler Fasnacht has been celebrated in the similar form we know today – 72 hours of rollicking mayhem (for more information on the history and traditions see last year's February issue of the *RT* or the official committee site¹). Over the decades lanterns, floats, costumes and masks became fancier – what was once produced only with scraps is today fashioned by professionals with high grade materials. The handed-out goodies, too, have become more abundant and of greater variety.

This progressive change has made the Basler Fasnacht one of the most attractive cultural events in Switzerland, with thousands of visitors flocking to see it, but also a strong factor in Basel's economy. What many visitors and even some locals fail to realize is that the city of Basel does not finance the Fasnacht. So where does the money come from and why is the Basler Fasnacht an important economic factor in the region?

All members of carnival groups know how they finance their display, but just how important an economic factor the Fasnacht is has been speculated about for years. Until 2005, that is, when the Fasnacht *Comité* disclosed the findings of a commissioned study undertaken by the *Fachhochschule beider Basel* to answer that question. The investigators' research reached the conclusion that more than 28 million CHF are spent on the Fasnacht every year – this number is the result of a very conservative calculation, thus leading the *Comité* to believe that the actual spending is even higher.

How could the Basler Fasnacht generate 28 million Franks annually? One third of this amount, 9.3 million Franks, is being spent by all **official** carnival groups in their preparations for carnival (masks, costumes, lanterns, floats, etc.). 4.8 million Franks are spent for visits to the various pre-carnival shows every year, and 13.1 million Franks get spent on food and drink in town during those 72 hours. Hotels in and around Basel also are quite happy with the economic consequences of Fasnacht, as they make about 480,000 Franks with over 2,500 overnight stays. To top it all off, add the approx. 0.5 million Franks the various media pay for their coverage of the Basler Fasnacht, the 476,100 Franks Basel-Stadt budgets for clean-up and security, and the almost 500,000 Franks the public transport invests to offer increased services into Basel².

Those figures probably shocked you, but you are still wondering how 9.3 million Franks can be spent on carnival preparations every year. Based on the replies from more than 200 carnival groups, the students calculated that 3.9 million Franks alone get spent on costumes every year (fabric, accessories, manufacturing). The masks are the second most expensive item with 2.1 million Franks spent on their creation – most groups have them made by professionals. The lanterns so many of you are fond of cost just over 1 million Franks a year to build, paint and transport. The float and carriage groups spend over 400'000 Franks on renting, building and decorating their vehicles, while they also spend about 560'000 Franks on the material they hand out to visitors (including confetti). The members of the musical groups spend more than 540'000 Franks on the upkeep and repair of their instruments, and another 230'000 Franks on music lessons. A comparatively minor 140'000 Franks is spent by all parade groups on the printing of the verses. Lastly, the verse singers spend an average of 260'000 Franks a year on their costumes, masks, paintings, accessories or lanterns, as well as verses³.

Still somewhat dazed by those numbers? Let me give you some detail as to the costs I expect to incur this year for **my stuff**. For all those of you who don't already know, I am an active member on a float. That means a new costume, new mask and new "throw" material every year. Some of the items get tallied per person, others get bought by the group and the cost split among all active members - in my group that includes the printed verses and fruit, as well as the building material for the float. The cost of the costume and mask is what the agreed upon design comes to, but I decide on the amount of my throw materials (except fruit and verses), and pay for my part of the total order. So my expenses for this year currently look as follows:

Costume	275 Franks (average)	275.00
Mask	300 Franks (slightly more than usual)	300.00
Confetti	27 Franks per 10kg bag (2)	54.00
Mimosas	33 Franks per carton (6)	198.00
Bonbons	10 Franks per 2,5kg bag (8)	<u>80.00</u>
TOTAL so far		907.00

③Additionally I will have to cover my 1/12 of all group costs incurred for this year's materials.

With approx. 12'000 registered participants at the parades, the investigative group actually calculated that each spends an average of 775 Franks a year on carnival related expenses => 9.3 million Franks total. Being a member of a float group is slightly more expensive as there is usually a smaller number of active participants to defray the overall costs, but the throwing materials are among the most costly items – especially as you cannot reuse them, like a costume or mask.

Another amazing fact the study uncovered was that the members of all officially registered groups spend more than 500'000 honorary hours working for the carnival. About 100'000 hours alone are being spent on training and working with the youth, which can be seen as very beneficial social and preventative work – the city would have to hire at least 60 full time social workers to be able to offer the same amount of opportunities for young people².

Besides the economic aspects, the teaching of cultural heritage to all members and the work with youth, the 2005 study also managed to establish two further important benefits of Fasnacht. For some time the Basler Fasnacht has been thought of as a major tourist attraction for the region; the study found that indeed more than ¼ of the 200'000 visitors (again a conservative estimate based only on public transport figures) were from other regions in Switzerland and abroad. The study also showed that with an average of 137 hours spent at social activities within the group, the more than 500 officially registered carnival groups provide a very valuable socio-cultural network to their members. This is even more important when considering that only 46% of all active *Fasnächtler* live in Basel².

In light of all these extra benefits, it does not seem exactly fair that the people who work so many hours towards making carnival a success every year, should also pay so much money for their work. That's why they **don't exactly**. The Fasnacht *Comité* recognized this disadvantage many decades ago and has instituted two ways to help defray the group's costs. The bigger one of the two is the official *Blaggedde* (badge). Each year a new design gets published, which is in lieu of an admission ticket. The *Blaggedde* get distributed to the carnival groups, who in turn sell them to the public (as does the *Comité*). The groups get to keep 30% of the price of every *Blaggedde* sold and put the money towards their expenses (see the Guide up front for more information on the badge). There are some con artists who manage to get their hands on badges to sell, but their profits go into their own pockets – so please buy your badge from a person you know is affiliated with a group⁴!

The remaining profit from the sale of the badges, as well as the profit from the sale of the *Rädäbäng* (the official guide), *Drummeli* tickets (the official pre-carnival production), the collected verses, as well as donations, build the basis of the *Comité*'s subsidy fund. Every year the committee calculates a per head subsidy which goes to every participant via his group. Additionally, as an incentive, the best groups in each of the nine recognized categories (*Stammvereine*, *Alte Garden*, *Junge Garden*, *Pfeifer- & Tambourengruppen*, *Guggemuusigen*, *Wagen*, *Chaisen*, *Fasnachtsgrüppli*, and *Einzelmasken*) get an extra bonus stipend from the fund⁴.

In my group the 30% from the badge sales, the subsidies we get from the *Comité*, and the membership fees get tallied and divided by 12. The resulting amount is

then subtracted from each member's expenses, and we are left to pay for whatever remains. If we get more than 200 Franks of deductions per active member, it has been a good year indeed!

SO... You now know that the Fasnacht gets financed by the individuals and groups who pay their way to participate in it, and also through visitors LIKE YOU who buy the official badge, go to pre-carnival productions and buy the occasional carnival souvenir to send to friends and family. Please keep it up, as we could not do it without your support, and without either of us – the participants and the viewers – there would be no Basler Fasnacht!

I hope you enjoy this year's carnival and if you have any questions about it, I would be happy to answer them provided I have the time, so send me an email to bollecc@bluewin.ch. Or you can catch me and get an insider's sneak peek into my group's life at either the float christening on Sunday, February 10th, the float's departure points on Monday & Wednesday at 1 pm, or Mon-Wed evenings at our cellar (detailed information can be found at <http://www.kloschtterraebe.ch/mekaisdraeffe/index.html>).

ENJOY and hope to see you there!

Corinne



Further Information

¹ <http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/english.html>

² For more details, see the official Comité site <http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/publikum.html> (German) or the online news summary <http://fasnacht.ch/?MSGID=1152> (German)

³ See pg. 4 of the official report (online at http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/aktive/pdfs/fhbb_zusammenfassung.pdf) or pg. 12 of the statistics bundle (online at http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/aktive/pdfs/fhbb_zahlen-tabellen.pdf) for more details (German)

⁴ For more information on subsidies, see the Comité's info page at <http://www.fasnachts-comite.ch/aktive.html> (German)