C’est Carnaval!

The politics and policy of Carnival

International Conference
Charleroi, Belgium, 16-18 February 2022
Call for papers

The interdisciplinary research unit TRANSFO (Université libre de Bruxelles) organizes a two-day conference that aims to shed light on the political dynamics of contemporary carnivals. The conference welcomes both junior and senior scholars, in the following disciplines: political sociology, especially in the fields of social movement study and artivism; political anthropology; festive studies; urban studies; public policy; history and social geography.

The conference will take place in the city of Charleroi, 16th-18th February 2022, in the weeks preceding the city’s carnival. The conference program will mix scientific panels with meetings with the local authorities, as well as with socio-cultural actors involved in the organization of Charleroi’s carnival. These exchanges will help to highlight the peculiar history and characteristics of Charleroi’s carnival, and to observe this case considering the socio-political issues raised during the conference.

Proposals (250 words) need to be sent to transf@ulb.be by November 10th 2021 at the latest. Participants will be notified of their acceptance by November 20th 2021. Contributions can be submitted and presented in English or French.
Objectives

This conference aims to shed light on the political dynamics of carnivals. It takes roots in a longer tradition of interdisciplinary exchanges addressing the links between carnival and politics (Biringanine, 2010; Godet, 2020). More specifically, this conference wishes to deepen our understanding of carnival as ‘politics’ on the one hand, and as ‘policy’ on the other hand. The conference’s ambition is also to draw attention towards the interconnection between the politics and policy dimensions of carnivals, across contexts.

The first dimension, carnival as politics, refers to bottom-up processes through which individuals and collectivities use carnivals as modes of politicization, political expression, or political action. This dimension of carnival partly relates to the foundational work of Bakhtine (Bakhtine, 1982) and subsequent interpretations (Godet, 2020, pp. 6–9) according to which carnivals and carnavalesque constitute potential sources of, or tools for, rebellion, subversion or resistance. Hence, carnavalesque strategies would be mobilized in order to mock, defy, or contest dominant norms and power, as well as to assert a distinctive collective identity (Arnaud, 2020; Arnaud and Sala Pala, 2005; Baldini, 2016; Deharbe and Maccagnan, 2008; Mathieu and Balasinski, 2006; Sombatpoonsiri, 2016). Carnivals would also be used as a resource allowing minorities to shed light on and politicize a latent conflict (Salzbrunn, 2011; Sergidou, 2020). Yet, what specific aspects of the carnavalesque do produce mobilization and reaction? To what extent and in which circumstances do carnivals (and carnavalesque) truly lead to political changes? How much carnivals affect in the long run participants, as individuals and as collectivities?

The second dimension, carnival as policy, refers to top-down processes through which public (or private) authorities use carnivals as a mode of governance, with diverse objectives that can be more or less stated explicitly: controlling and containing contestation, enforcing social cohesion, building or preserving a collective memory, or promoting the city’s culture (Arnaud, 2010; Delorme, 2020; Ferdinand and Williams, 2018; Raziano, 2019; Sabev, 2003). This conception is partly entrenched in Gluckman’s (Gluckman, 1954) approach of public rituals, which may serve as a ‘safety valve’ for the social and political elites (Godet, 2020, p. 9). But what is the reality of carnivals as public policy instruments? How much elites’ discourses, public actions and their effects do corroborate or differ? What are the consequences of (different types of) carnival on a city’s development and reputation, but also on the public’s perception of (regulated) festivities?

Ultimately, the conference aims to provide insights on the interconnection between the micro politics and macro policies of carnival. This relationship may take multiple forms (Arnaud, 2008; Chouitem, 2017; Cunegatto, 2020), such as mediation, negotiation, contention or clash. But to what extent does the nature of this interplay vary across time and space? How much does this relationship depend on the social, economic, political, or institutional contexts? How much values intervene in the definition and dynamics of this relationship? The recent withdrawal of the Aalst Carnival (Belgium) from the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO) due to antisemitism (Fournier and Giancristofaro, 2020) illustrates well some of these issues.

The conference aims to gather contributions discussing carnival as politics and/or as policy, as well as contributions addressing the articulation of both. The conference welcomes case studies as much as comparative examinations, from various disciplinary perspectives and methodological angles. The conference will give preference to empirical research and field works, although advanced conceptual and theoretical papers will also be considered. Finally, this conference wishes to gather contributions that reflect as much as possible the diversity of contemporary carnivals and festive events, without any specific geographical scope.
The program will combine scientific activities and exchanges with field actors. The preferred language for scientific exchanges will be English, but French may be used during exchanges with city representatives and Carnival practitioners.

**DAY 1 (16/02) – WELCOMING EVENING: Politics, images and carnivals, a love story?**

**TRANSFO in partnership with Quai 10.**

- **18-18.30**: Welcome address
- **18.30-20.30**: Screening of documentaries on contemporary carnivals
- **20.30**: Walking dinner

**DAY 2 (17/02): Carnival’s practitioners: a claim for the city?**

**TRANSFO in partnership with Cultural Centre Eden.**

- **9.30-10**: Welcome address
- **10-11.15**: Panel Session 1
- **11.15-11.30**: Coffee BREAK
- **11.30 – 12.45**: Panel Session 2
- **12.45-13.45**: Lunch
- **14 – 15.15**: General address “Charleroi Carnival: between politics and policy?”
- **15.15-15.30**: Coffee BREAK
- **16-18**: Afternoon visit “La Grande Fabrique du Carnaval” followed by a workshop with founders, practitioners and actors of contemporary Carnivals on “Carnivals and citizenship”
- **18.30-20**: Welcome reception at the City Hall
- **20**: Dinner

**DAY 3 (18/02): The politics and policies of confettis**

**TRANSFO**

- **9.30-10.45**: Panel Session 3
- **10.45-11**: Coffee BREAK
- **11 – 12.15**: Panel Session 4
- **12.15-13.15**: Lunch
- **13.15 – 14.30**: Panel Session 5
- **14.30-14.45**: Coffee BREAK
- **14.45-16**: Panel Session 6
TRANSFO – Research Center for Social Change is an interdisciplinary research unit affiliated with the Université libre de Bruxelles. The unit gathers senior and junior scholars from various disciplines of the social and human sciences (sociology, economy, political science, architecture, etc.). TRANSFO research projects and thematic axes aim to develop scientific knowledge on social change, by encouraging empirical research integrating the perspectives of field actors, and by developing collaborative research with social, cultural, economic, and political sectors.

**Organising committee**

- Fanny Arnulf, Université libre de Bruxelles
- Caroline Close, Université libre de Bruxelles
- Manon Istasse, Centre Culturel Eden & Université libre de Bruxelles
- Maité Maskens, Université libre de Bruxelles
- Marco Martiniello, Université de Liège
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