Exploring and understanding attachment to intangible cultural heritage practices: the cases of Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an in-depth examination of how attachment to intangible cultural heritage (hereafter 'ICH') is initiated and sustained. By examining two case studies – Silvesterchlausen in the rural region of Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Switzerland, and Constance Carnival in the urban border area of southern Germany – the study investigates practitioners' perspectives, examining how individual and collective attachment to these traditions emerges, evolves and is sustained over time. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research is based on semi-structured and episodic interviews with 44 practitioners. The analysis identifies five key themes that elucidate how these traditions function not merely as cultural representations but as dynamic, performative and civic practices. The findings provide a multidimensional and comprehensive perspective on attachment to ICH, suggesting that the strong attachment experienced by practitioners is not attributable to a single element, such as the initial childhood attachment process. Instead, it is suggested that it is the interplay of various components, identified as themes in our research, that fosters the profound attachment observed among ICH practitioners within these two traditions.

Keywords

Attachment, Silvesterchlausen, Constance Carnival, alps, performance, practices, ritual, transmission, participation

Introduction

The practices of intangible cultural heritage are shaped by decades, and often centuries, of continuity in practice. The transmission of ICH across generations and its continual re-creation by communities and groups constitute a central aspect of the ICH definition as outlined in the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Some scholars (Adell et al. 2015) have emphasised Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice as a theoretical mechanism for the transmission of ICH, while others have underscored the significance of place-based, relatively stable social networks for the continuity of ICH (Kaufman 2013). In addition to those perspectives, the authors of this paper argue that ICH is sustained through deep-rooted forms of attachment.

The specific elements, however, of how attachment is initiated and maintained – particularly in the context of performative traditions – remain underexplored. Therefore, the research study aims to deepen the understanding of attachment to ICH practices by examining two communities near Lake Constance in Central Europe. These communities, centred around living traditions, possess centuries-old knowledge of how a deep sense of participation and belonging emerges through collective action and is continuously developed through practice. They have endured profound crises – not only recently during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also historically through wars, political and economic upheavals, prohibitions and censorship. Often operating without written rules, they navigate a rapidly changing society, time and again succeeding in integrating differing opinions into shared performances.

This study sheds light on the elements and practices that foster attachment to ICH and contributes to the documentation, preservation and deeper understanding of two specific traditions: the Silvesterchlausen, in the rural region of Appenzell Ausserrhoden, Switzerland; and Constance Carnival, in Baden-Württemberg, on the German–Swiss border.

Empirical context

Both the Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival fall clearly within UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO 2003). The two traditions encompass a rich array of practices, expressions, knowledge and skills. They manifest across several ICH domains, including performing arts and traditional craftsmanship, as well as in social practices, rituals and festive events that are central to their enactment and transmission. In terms of community involvement, both traditions are characterised by bottom-up participation. External authorities or institutions do not impose them; rather, they are actively shaped, maintained and renewed by the people who engage in them.

Constance Carnival

Constance Carnival, known in the vernacular as *Fastnacht* or *Fasnet*,[1] has been celebrated since the 13th century. Its date follows the ecclesiastical calendar and therefore varies each year (Mezger, 1991). Carnival season in Constance begins at Epiphany (6 January), after which a number of carnival gatherings of various groups and associations take place. However, it is on *Schmutziger Dunschtig* (Fat Thursday) that Carnival really begins. In this narrower sense, the carnival period spans six days, from Thursday to the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday.

From the very beginning, Constance Carnival was a city festival. It was first maintained by the guilds and is still organised today by various urban carnival associations.[2] What began as a celebration centred around indulgent eating and drinking before Lent gradually evolved to include music, dance and theatrical–mimetic performances. Over time, the complete concealment and masking of the participants became a defining feature of the festivities.[3] At Constance Carnival, costumes and masks, known as *Häs* and *Larve*, remain to this day central objects of the tradition.

The individuals who actively participate in these performances are commonly referred to as *Narren* (carnival fools), *Fasnachtler* (carnival participants) or *Mäschkerle* (a regional term for masked figures). In addition, various intangible elements also shape the carnival experience. Practices such as *Strählen*, a playful ritual in which participants symbolically comb spectators' hair or brush their clothing, and *Schnurren*, the performative recitation of local anecdotes and humorous social critiques, underscore the interactive and community-oriented character of the tradition.

The oldest carnival associations still in existence in Constance were founded in the 1880s. Today, there are approximately 70 registered associations that maintain their own rules while also working collaboratively, as seen in the Association of Constance Fools' Societies. In addition, there are many unregistered carnival groups – so-called free groups. Constance Carnival plays an important role in shaping the city's identity, with thousands of people participating every year in the various parades and sessions. In 2014, Constance Carnival was included in the nationwide register of Germany's ICH as part of the Swabian–Alemannic Carnival (Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission 2023).

Silvesterchlausen in Appenzell Ausserrhoden

In the Hinterland of the Swiss canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden, New Year's Eve is celebrated twice. The reason for this is the Gregorian calendar reform enacted by Pope Gregory XIII in the 16th century, which the Protestant population of Ausserrhoden initially refused to recognise (Hürlemann 2006). Still today, these communities

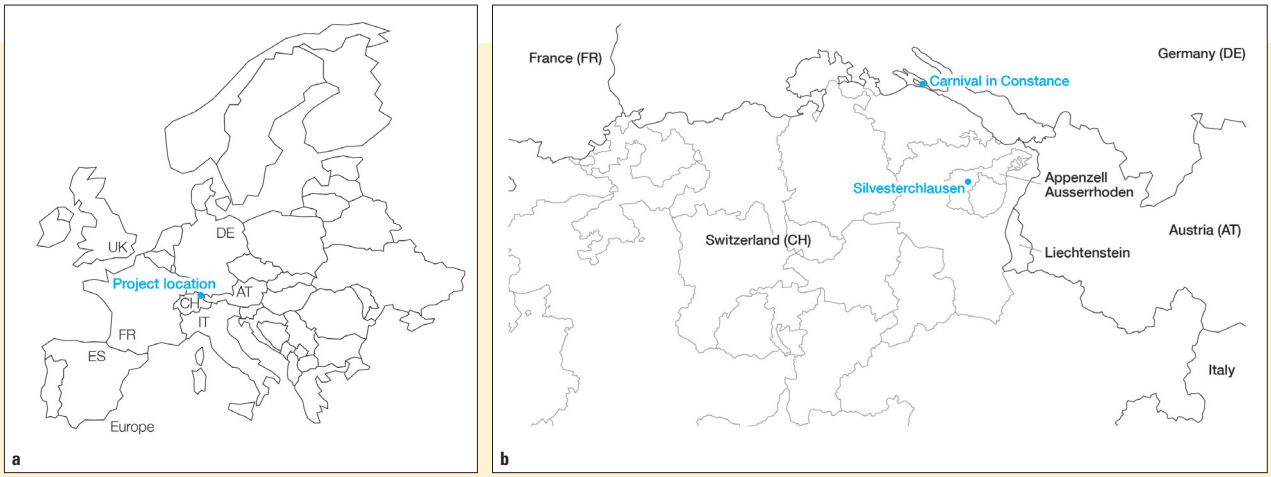


Figure 1
Maps of the research project location and the Lake Constance region in Central Europe, with the location of the two traditions.
Source: Maps by Brian Switzer.

celebrate the turn of the year twice: once on 31 December (New Year's Eve) and once on 13 January (Old New Year's Eve), according to the older Julian calendar.

On New Year's Eve, the *Schuppel* (groups of between five and 14 men dressed as *Chläuse*) progress from farm to farm, announcing their arrival at each house by performing a kind of hopped dance during which they shake their *Rollen* (up to 14 round, slitted bells worn on the body), twist their upper body and ring their *Schellen* (pot-bellied dairy bells). They then stand together in a circle and sing several *Zäuerli,* a wordless polyphonic yodel. After accepting a sip of mulled wine, white wine or mineral water, usually served by the lady of the house, and a monetary gift, they wish everyone a happy new year with a handshake and move on.

In contemporary practice, three types of *Chläuse* (a traditional masked person taking part in the Silvesterchlausen) can be distinguished: the *Wüeschte* (ugly), the *Schöne* (beautiful) and the *Schö-Wüeschte* (beautiful–ugly). The *Wüeschte* can be recognised by their bulky cloaks and headgear made of branches, roots, straw, hay, fur, and colourfully painted masks equipped with animal teeth and horns. The *Schöne* stand out with their artistically crafted bonnets and hats featuring themed scenes, while the *Schö-wüeschte* wear heavy costumes made of decoratively arranged natural materials.

This case study focuses on Urnäsch in the Hinterland and Teufen in the Mittelland of Appenzell Ausserrhoden. Silvesterchlausen is an integral part of the lives of the *Chläuse* and their families. In these communities, the *Chläuse* are usually between 15 and 60 years old. Preparations for *Chlausen* are very time-consuming, especially for the beautiful *Chläuse*, and usually take all year. The themes depicted on the bonnets and hats,[4] as well as the *Strech* (the *Chläuse*'s route from house to house), are discussed and decided upon in the *Schuppel*. Elderly former *Chläuse*, who no longer want to walk the *Strech*, go to the '*Frühchlausen*' in the village square at 5am (Bendix and Nef 1984). Women welcome the *Chläuse* into their homes and provide food and support to the children, who sometimes start as a little *Chläuse* when as young as four years old. Girls are also to be found in the numerous children's *Schuppel*, which they usually leave when they reach puberty.[5] The number of *Schuppel* varies from year to year, and members organise themselves without written rules. Silvesterchlausen was included in the Swiss Inventory of Living Traditions, published in 2012.[6]

Methodology

The authors' research design employs an exploratory case study (Yin 2003) focusing on two prominent ICH traditions in the Lake Constance region. These cases were chosen owing to their cultural similarities, while also presenting a degree of variation. Notably, Silvesterchlausen takes place in a rural context, whereas Constance Carnival is urban. The primary unit of analysis in the case study is the individual practitioners of both traditions, focusing on their lived experiences and perspectives.

Data collection

The researchers adopted a realist approach (Emmel 2013; Maxwell 2013) that privileges the reality, subjective perspectives and experiences of practitioners to explore their attachment to ICH. In conducting the study, the authors approached the experiences of the people they studied with kindness, rather than taking a critical perspective. Practitioners from the two traditions were selected through purposeful sampling (Patton 2010), utilising the logic of intensity sampling. This method aims to identify rich examples of the phenomenon of interest without specifically seeking highly unusual cases. Practitioners were identified through personal networks and snowball sampling. In total, 44 individuals were interviewed, 27 from the Silvesterchlausen and 17 from Constance Carnival. The interviews had an average duration of approximately 45 minutes, corresponding to a mean length of 5790 transcribed words per interview.

Data collection occurred over several months in two research phases: 2021–2022 and 2023–2024. To enhance the validity of the field research, multiple voices from the field were used (Denzin and Lincoln 2018), and several types of data were triangulated (Eisenhardt 1989). While semi-structured and episodic interviews (Flick 2000) served as the primary method for capturing subjective experiences and perspectives related to attachment, additional empirical material was gathered through photo documentation, observation and document analysis, enriching the case study approach. The interviews were conducted in German, with questions primarily serving as prompts for interviewee narration. Examples of such questions include: Can you describe how you became involved in the tradition? Can you recall a particularly memorable experience? What does it mean to you to be a practitioner of the tradition? To further enhance rigour in the research, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed in the source language. Only at a later stage were the relevant quotes translated into English, the target language of publication (Regmi et al. 2010).

Data analysis

An inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was performed using the qualitative data software MAXQDA. At a preliminary stage of analysis, previous research and theoretical works were not consulted, so as to avoid bias, allowing the data to guide the findings. The analytical procedure started with coding the data and continued with the development of themes and subthemes, alongside the creation of case and thematic summaries to synthesise key findings across cases. For the refinement of themes and subthemes, Patton's (2010) criteria of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity were employed. The data analysis indicated that data saturation was achieved with the 44 individuals interviewed (Guest et al. 2006), as no new relevant themes or subthemes emerged. The themes and subthemes were further validated through feedback loops with small focus groups of knowledgeable practitioners and experts in the context of each studied case. Finally, five principal themes were retained, each encompassing four to nine subthemes.

Findings

Five key themes emerged from the case study research that offer a deeper understanding of how attachment to ICH is initiated and sustained: (1) initial attachment; (2) sustaining attachment; (3) objects of attachment; (4) place attachment; and (5) attachment reduction and conflict culture. The network map in Figure 2 depicts these themes, along with their respective subthemes and codes, synthesising the complete interview material and illustrating the structural components of attachment to the two traditions. Themes and subthemes are highlighted in bold, while codes are presented in plain text. At the code level, a selection is provided to exemplify the content from which the subthemes were derived.

Initial attachment

One of the research objectives of the authors was to gain a deeper understanding of the initial attachment of practitioners to the two traditions in question. A prominent subtheme that emerged from the interviews in this respect was the significance of childhood socialisation. Many practitioners reported participating from a very young age, sometimes even as infants. This early exposure to the traditions – whether through active participation or observation – shaped their subsequent identification with the tradition.

> *I still draw on my early childhood experiences with my family, especially the feelings and the stories from the past. My mother always tells me that I rocked against the wall of her belly to the rhythm of the carnival music before I was even born.* (Interview partner 40)

Families serve as a crucial link in establishing an initial attachment to the traditions. The active involvement of

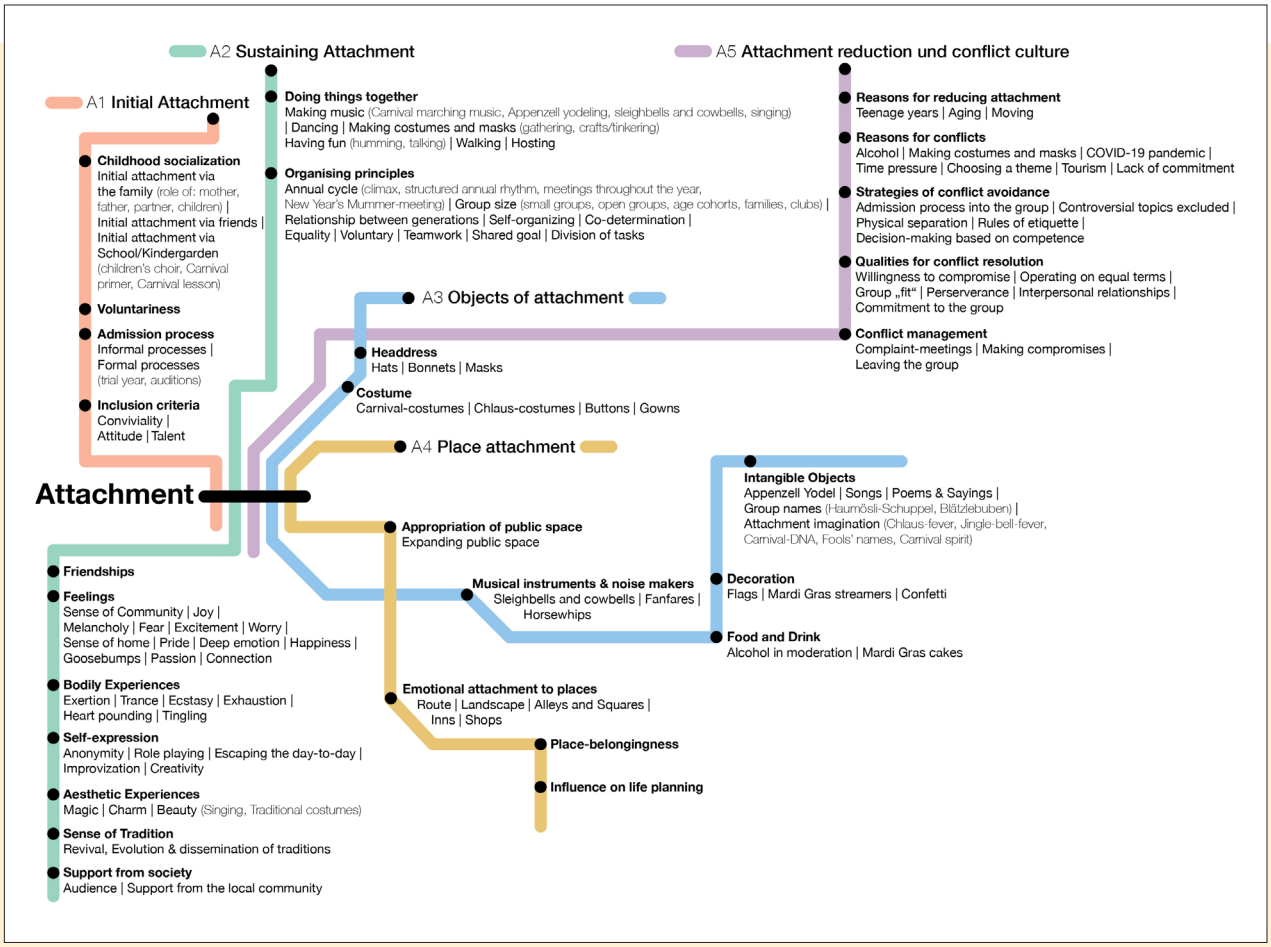


Figure 2
Network map visualisation of the themes, subthemes and codes related to attachment to Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival.
Source: Brian Switzer.

parents in these traditions inspires children to participate as well. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, it is often the fathers, themselves *Chläuse*, who initiate their children. Parents, particularly mothers, assist children in creating costumes and masks and accompany them on their first outings as *Chläuse*. Similarly, in the case of Constance Carnival, parents act as role models and influence children through their own involvement.

For adults who did not grow up in the regions where the traditions are practised but relocated there later in life, their initial attachment to the tradition often occurs through their partners or children who are practitioners. This frequently leads them to participate in and enjoy the tradition, albeit with potentially less emotional involvement, as they lack the strong childhood memories associated with the traditions.

In addition to families, friends also play a significant role in sparking an individual's initial interest in the traditions. For instance, in the case of Silvesterchlausen, children might be invited to practise with friends whose father is a *Chlaus*.

In the case of Constance Carnival, kindergartens and schools also contribute to the childhood socialisation process, alongside family and friends. Practitioners of the tradition volunteer in these places, providing children with accessible lessons on the carnival tradition. They achieve this by appearing in costumes and employing a blend of playful and informative teaching methods.

A second significant subtheme concerning initial attachment is the emphasis on voluntariness. Nearly all the practitioners stressed that, within their own socialisation and the way they and their families transmit



Figure 3
Constance Carnival: Those who are enthusiastic about the carnival will find their place in it – driven by curiosity, enthusiasm and the special atmosphere.
Source: Meike Rieper, LieblingsLicht Fotografie, Constance, 2019.



Figure 4
Silvesterchlausen: Almost all *Chläuse* say they first encountered the tradition as children.
Source: Höttlischuppel, Teufen, 2024.

the traditions to subsequent generations, there is no place for coercion. It is further underscored that children's motivation must be intrinsic, as enforced participation contradicts the essence of the tradition. While individual choice is paramount, some interviews provide a nuanced understanding of voluntariness by incorporating social dimensions. Longstanding relationships, a shared understanding of the tradition, and the social desirability of belonging to such a group all play a role. The decision is, therefore, not solely individual but is also shaped by social factors.

The pathway into a Silvesterchlausen *Schuppel* – or carnival group – and the corresponding inclusion process to become a practitioner varies across groups. Generally, for the *Schuppel*, this is an informal arrangement. Participation in a *Schuppel* is typically based on an invitation from existing members or the formation of a new *Schuppel* by a group of friends. However, carnival groups may employ more formal processes, where interested individuals are granted applicant status for a year before membership is confirmed.

Formal inclusion criteria, such as the payment of a membership fee, are rare in both traditions and typically only apply to larger carnival associations. Instead, implicit criteria prevail, arising from a complex interplay of factors such as social networks, conviviality, attitude, commitment and enthusiasm. Additionally, for the Silvesterchlausen, physical fitness and vocal ability are relevant considerations.

In summary, the initial attachment to both traditions is a process shaped by the interaction of familial and social factors, with early involvement and family support playing a crucial role.

Sustaining attachment

Numerous practitioners within the two traditions engage with their respective practices over several decades, demonstrating a high degree of personal commitment and investment of time, energy and, occasionally, financial resources. A central question of interest for the researchers was to discern the elements that sustain participants' long-term attachment to these traditions. Responses to this question constituted the most substantial portion of the interviews, and the authors' analysis categorised them into nine subthemes pertinent to sustaining attachment.

A pivotal subtheme in maintaining attachment to the two traditions is 'doing things together'. The

simple act of engaging in shared activities takes various forms, including collaborative music-making, dancing, creating costumes and masks, or simply enjoying shared experiences. For instance, the Silvesterchlausen *Schuppel* dedicate numerous hours to the collaborative crafting of intricate costumes, masks, bonnets and hats. Throughout this process, members learn from one another, assume roles matching their skills, and cultivate a sense of community. Collective yodelling without words (*zauren*), whereby members attentively coordinate with one another during practice and performances on New Year's Eve, binds individual practitioners to the group and the tradition. This sentiment is echoed by practitioners at Constance Carnival, who emphasised in their interviews the importance of collaborating in the preparation and execution of events and parades. The interviews from both traditions clearly highlight the social dimension of 'doing things together', which transcends mere instrumental rationality and plays a crucial role in identity formation and community building for these groups.

An essential subtheme pertains to the organising principles that enable groups to conduct their diverse activities entirely voluntarily over extended periods. The analysis of the interviews indicates that both traditions are characterised by various, often similar, organising principles. In both traditions, social relationships and friendships are central elements around which groups self-organise.

In the case of Silvesterchlausen, the *Schuppel* organises itself independently and is typically small, comprising between five and 14 members. Critical issues are discussed several times, and if no consensus emerges, decisions are generally made democratically through voting, with the minority accepting the majority's decision. There is no hierarchy within the group, and members regard one another as equals, regardless of their social status outside the group. The division of labour according to skills and abilities is another key organising principle. Members meet regularly to plan the design of their costumes and work together to craft them. The intensive preparation period is usually during November and December.

Carnival groups in Constance are highly diverse, ranging from large, registered associations to informal groups and small family-based gatherings. Many groups place great importance on intergenerational participation and a sense of togetherness, akin to a family. The researchers' interviews reveal a variety of organising principles for Constance Carnival. While large, established guilds or associations feature formal structures with hierarchical decision-making processes (such as boards and councils), smaller groups and informal associations are characterised by flexible, often consensus-based forms of organisation. Decision-making ranges from formal voting procedures in larger associations to informal consensus-building in smaller groups. Additionally, Constance Carnival participants emphasise the equality of the members in their groups and during Carnival.

> It makes no difference who I am, where I come from, what I know or don't know, what I can or can't do, or what position I hold. Carnival is a time when we are all equal, and we address everyone informally, regardless of who we are talking to. For once, we are all the same, and I really like that aspect. (Interview Partner 41)

The organising principles and equality among participants are closely linked to the role of friendships in sustaining attachment. Members are frequently recruited from existing social circles, and many practitioners underscore the significance of friendships in organising and maintaining social cohesion within these groups. However, the intensity of these friendships varies. Some describe close, almost familial bonds, while others emphasise more collegial cooperation and a general sense of community.

Feelings are central to sustaining attachment to these traditions. Practitioners consistently report strong feelings, ranging from anticipation and deep connectedness to a sense of community and joy, as well as sadness when the event concludes. The predominant feeling associated with the practice is joy, both the joy experienced by the practitioners and the joy they impart to spectators.

Closely related to these feelings are intense bodily experiences associated with the practices. This intensity of emotion is often expressed through physical reactions, such as tears, goosebumps or a trance-like state. The physical exertion of practising, particularly in the case of Silvesterchlausen – walking long distances, wearing heavy costumes and ringing bells – is described as integral and is not perceived negatively. Owing to the intense physical exertion, some practitioners enter a trance-like state in which performances seem to occur almost automatically.



Figure 5
Constance Carnival: It's all about togetherness – sharing experiences and creating memories that bring people of all ages together.
Source: MTK, Chris Danneffel, Constance, 2021.



Figure 6
Silvesterchlausen: Some speak of the deep connection they feel when they hear the characteristic sound of the bells.
Source: Liliana Heimberg, Urnäsch, 2025.

Self-expression plays a significant role in both traditions. Participants in Silvesterchlausen use the event to break from everyday norms, to express their creativity and individuality, and to engage in artistic practices such as yodelling and dancing. The elaborate crafting of the bonnets, which often tell old village stories, is another form of self-expression. Constance Carnival enables role-play and anonymity, allowing individuals to behave differently, to form new social connections, and to temporarily suspend daily constraints. In both instances, the ritualised context provides a protected space for creative and sometimes transgressive self-expression.

Both traditions also offer profound aesthetic experiences. A recurring element in the interviews in both cases was the visual aesthetics of the costumes and masks. The elaborately crafted *Chlausenhauben* (bonnets) were particularly noted for their high aesthetic value. In addition to visual aspects, auditory aesthetics also play a crucial role. The sound of the *Zäuerli* (traditional polyphonic yodelling) in Silvesterchlausen or the early morning sounds of fanfares and drums on *Schmutziger Dunschtig* (Fat Thursday) of carnival bands marching through Constance were described as deeply moving and emotionally resonant.

A sense of tradition constitutes a fundamental element that sustains attachment. While the preservation of tradition is significant, practitioners recognise that this is subject to continual change and adaptation to new circumstances. Many emphasise that the objective is not to preserve tradition at all costs, but to maintain its vitality and authenticity. The younger generation is perceived as the driving force that carries traditions into the future and facilitates their evolution; therefore, practitioners consciously endeavour to transmit these traditions to subsequent generations.

> The custom must live on. You can be a part of it, carrying on this tradition. At some point, children come along, and they are integrated. In this way, we ensure the practice does not die out. It would be a terrible shame if it did. (Interview Partner 23)

Furthermore, societal support plays a crucial role in sustaining attachment. The backing of the local village is essential for Silvesterchlausen, as the tradition can only take place if residents open their doors to the *Chläuse*. Similarly, in the case of Constance Carnival, the audience is an integral component of the tradition, as practitioners can only fully perform their antics through direct interaction with spectators. Institutional support from public bodies plays a far less significant role in sustaining these traditions.

In summary, the key to sustaining both traditions is doing things together. To ensure the continuity of joint undertakings over time, groups predominantly adhere to informal organising principles and reliance on friendships. Engaging in these traditions evokes profound feelings and physical sensations. Additionally, the traditions provide aesthetic experiences and rich opportunities for self-expression. Finally, a sense of the importance of tradition

and the positive involvement of community or audience are also crucial elements in sustaining attachment to these traditions in the long term.

Objects of attachment

The creation and utilisation of headdresses, such as masks, hats and bonnets, are integral to both traditions. Practitioners frequently wear masks that serve as a means of group identification, enabling wearers to assume other roles. For Silvesterchlausen, the bonnets and hats hold particular significance, as they are meticulously handcrafted by the practitioners themselves, and are often adorned with motifs and symbols from the past to emphasise historical references. For the practitioners, the headdress has profound emotional significance and is worn with great pride.

Similar to the headdresses, costumes also play a central role in both traditions. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, the *Chläuse* don various types of costumes, and the decision to appear as a beautiful, ugly or beautiful–ugly *Chlaus* is of considerable importance for the *Schuppel*. The creation of these costumes is intricate, and many practitioners develop a strong connection to their self-made costumes, although each outfit (headdress and costume) is typically worn for only four years – and even then, only on one or two days per year, depending on weather conditions. After that, the *Schuppel* create new outfits.

Similarly, at Constance Carnival, the costumes – referred to as *Häs* – are central and serve as a key element of identity and emotional expression. These are typically custom-made and tailored to the wearer, necessitating considerable effort. The outfits consisting of masks and costumes are usually worn for many carnival seasons, sometimes for a lifetime. Additionally, for carnival revellers in Constance, accessories such as buttons and medals are significant, as they symbolise group affiliation and enable interaction with other carnival groups and the public.

Musical instruments and noise-makers are crucial in both traditions. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, *Schellen* (pot-bellied dairy bells) and *Rollen* (smaller, round, slitted bells) are central elements that produce a distinctive rhythm and acoustic atmosphere. Participants wear the *Schellen* and *Rollen* throughout the entire day, which can be physically exhausting. In the case of Constance Carnival, both fanfare bands and *Guggenmusik* (a type of carnival brass band) groups play a central role. Some fanfare bands march through the streets in the early morning hours during Carnival to awaken people with their music. In addition, noise-makers such as bells and *Karbatschen* – whips that produce loud cracking sounds – are also employed at Carnival.

Food and drink are an important part of the traditions. In the context of Silvesterchlausen, beverages – particularly mulled or white wine – are frequently associated with the custom, although practitioners increasingly drink water during their performance. The communal sharing of meals and drinks in restaurants following the *Chlausen* performance, the offering of drinks at doorsteps, and the preparation of food and beverages within family settings for practitioners underscore the social importance of eating and drinking. During Constance Carnival, traditional foods such as pretzels, *Berliner* (jam doughnuts) and *Fasnachtsküchle* (fried carnival pastries) are integral to the celebrations. Sweets, particularly candies, are especially favoured by children and are distributed by practitioners or offered in shops during carnival season. Alcohol also plays a significant role in carnival festivities; however, interviewees emphasised that within their groups, alcohol consumption was moderate.

Decorations are a crucial aspect of Constance Carnival, manifesting at both individual and collective levels. The forms of decoration are varied, ranging from ribbons and ornaments in private spaces to public decorations such as banners and signs. Many shops participate by adorning their display windows and storefronts with costumed figures, flags or confetti. Conversely, for Silvesterchlausen, decorations are not emphasised, even though occasionally disused bonnets or stylised *Chläuse* are displayed in shop windows and private houses.

Finally, there is a wide range of intangible objects that play a crucial role in connecting practitioners to these traditions. The polyphonic yodelling melodies (*Zäuerli*) are the central intangible object of attachment in Silvesterchlausen. Almost all interviewees emphasised their importance. While some highlighted the emotional impact of the *Zäuerli* – such as their archaic, primal quality and ability to move people – others focus on their qualitative aspects, such as the polyphonic delivery. In the case of Constance Carnival, intangible objects such as *Narrensprüche* (carnival sayings) and *Heischeverse* (begging rhymes) have an integral function. Children learn these rhymes at an early age, and many carnival groups



Figure 7
Constance Carnival: The masks – often made of wood or cardboard – are an expression not only of the character, but also of craftsmanship and personal connection.
Source: MTK, Aurelia Scherrer, Constance, 2021.



Figure 8
Silvesterchlausen: The headdress is one of the most important distinguishing features of the beautiful *Chläuse*.
Source: Liliana Heimberg, Urnäsch, 2024.

maintain their own sayings, which they pass down to younger generations.

Both traditions embody profound notions of attachment, which manifest on a corporeal level and can be understood as intangible elements. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, practitioners often refer to the so-called *Chlausenfieber* (Chlausen fever) – a blend of anticipation and joyful excitement described as an essential aspect of the custom. The intensity of this feeling is linked to physical reactions, such as sleeplessness and even tears, among both young and experienced practitioners. In the case of Constance Carnival, several interviewees mentioned the concept of the *Narrensamen* ('fool's seed'). This term refers to the younger generation and the future of the carnival groups, expressing the hope that children and youth within the groups will carry on the 'seed' and perpetuate the tradition.

In summary, masks, clothing, instruments, and other tangible and intangible objects are far more than just traditional objects; they are vital components of the two traditions and hold significant emotional meaning for practitioners, fostering their attachment to the traditions.

Place attachment

The interviews consistently reveal that both Silvesterchlausen in Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Constance Carnival significantly influence the sense of place attachment. Long-term active participation, often initiated in childhood, is identified as a crucial factor in reinforcing this bond.

A contributing element to place attachment is the appropriation of public and private spaces during performances. The appropriation of public space during the street carnival is a central aspect of the Constance Carnival tradition. Participants adorn the city's streets and symbolically claim them during the festivities, actively shaping and renaming public spaces – for instance, by temporarily installing new street signs. Public space is also extended to businesses such as bakeries, where participants engage in playful interactions. In contrast, for Silvesterchlausen, gatherings in village centres and the appropriation of public spaces are less significant, as this custom is primarily practised in private settings, with *Chläuse* visiting the homes of community members.

Practitioner performances in public and private places imbue these locations with intense emotion and meaning. The significance of specific locations was emphasised throughout the interviews, although the exact places mentioned vary. While some participants describe narrow streets and public places as central settings for emotional



Figure 9
Constance Carnival: During carnival season, the squares and alleys of the Old Town are transformed into a large stage.
Source: MTK, Chris Danneffel, Constance, 2015.

experiences, others focus on the landscape and the routes they traverse. Individual experiences strongly shape the emotional resonance of these places.

The appropriation of public and private places, along with the emotional charging of these locations, leads to a heightened sense of place-belongingness, conceptualised as the subjective aspect of geographical belonging (Mohseni et al. 2024). For most, these traditions, as well as their villages or towns, have become a core part of their identity – a cherished heritage they wish to pass on to their children.

> *Yes, it's the love for* Fasnacht*, the love for our city. Take a look at how many people are tattooed and how many of them have the city coat of arms and the carnival in their tattoos.* (Interview partner 44)



Figure 10
Silvesterchlausen: *Chläuse* make their way to farms around the village. The sound of bells can be heard near and far, filling the air with their music.
Source: Angélique Kellenberger, Urnäsch, 2024.

The place-belongingness, strengthened by these traditions, influences the life planning of many practitioners. The tradition has top priority, and other personal commitments are scheduled to avoid falling on these days. Many interviewees had lived outside their villages for extended periods but eventually returned, with Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival often being a deciding factor.

In summary, both traditions are lived out in open and public spaces in the heart of the community. Through practising these traditions over many years, practitioners develop a strong emotional, affective and social attachment to the specific geographic locations where they perform the traditions.

Attachment reduction and conflict culture

This article discussed above the processes by which attachment to traditions is established and maintained over time. This section examines what may lead practitioners to reduce their attachment to these traditions, and how the groups that uphold these traditions manage conflict.

The interviewees in the study did not report any instances of complete withdrawal from involvement. Instead, they cited cases of reduced involvement, the two most common reasons for this being adolescence and retirement. Many adolescents perceive traditional activities as outdated or unappealing. However, a significant number return as young adults and remain engaged into old age, until physical constraints may cause them to stop. The cessation of active participation due to age is often a profoundly emotional event for practitioners, marking the conclusion of a significant life chapter and serving as a reminder of life's transience.

As both traditions are collective endeavours, another potential cause for reduced attachment may be related to social or group dynamics. Interviewees mentioned various reasons for conflict within their groups; however, these did not result in reduced involvement, suggesting that an effective conflict management culture was present within the groups. Causes of conflict included disagreements over performance themes, excessive alcohol consumption, or tensions arising when individual members failed to meet group expectations.

The *Schuppel* and Carnival groups have developed both informal and formal strategies for avoiding conflict. The delineation of roles and collective decision-making are recognised as pivotal strategies across both traditions. An informal strategy reported by Silvesterchlausen *Schuppel* involves members intentionally avoiding contentious topics and instead concentrating on shared interests and activities. At Constance Carnival, there is a pronounced emphasis on preventing harm or injury. The carnival's motto, *'Well-being for all and harm to none'*, is adhered to rigorously, ensuring that no individual is subjected to harassment or abuse. Many carnival groups in Constance have established explicit rules, and there are, for example, guidelines regarding alcohol consumption. Conversely, Silvesterchlausen *Schuppel* do not have written rules or guidelines regulating member behaviour.

To address conflicts as they arise, groups exhibit certain qualities that facilitate resolution. Several interviewees highlighted how years of collaboration foster a stable group climate and a high level of trust. A willingness to compromise was identified as a crucial quality for successful collaboration, and even in the absence of unanimous agreement, members typically achieve consensus through discussion and mutual concession.



Figure 11
Constance Carnival: The transition to adolescence is particularly challenging when the younger generation questions the meaning of Carnival.
Source: MTK, Joy Abdulahovic, Constance, 2024.



Figure 12
Silvesterchlausen: Disagreements may arise about the type of *Chlausen* to be represented, the theme or the route, or how much free time should be devoted to preparation.
Source: Liliana Heimberg, Urnäsch, 2025.

> *You have to find common ground somehow because that's the only way it works. That's why everyone is prepared to make compromises.* (Interview partner 24)

Ultimately, groups have developed both formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution and management. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, groups generally rely on democratic decision-making, where the minority accepts the majority's decision. Members who disagree with the group's decisions often voluntarily leave the group. They may then attempt to join another group or establish a new one. In the case of Constance Carnival, most interviewees mentioned that open discussions about problems and constructive collaboration were essential. Some carnival groups conduct dedicated *Motzer-Sitzungen* (complaint meetings) after the carnival season, providing members the opportunity to address conflicts and disagreements openly. Overall, the groups actively strive to enhance cooperation and to ensure a positive experience for all.

In summary, the interviews reveal that adult practitioners typically continue their traditions into old age. An essential factor for lifelong involvement is a high level

of cohesion in the groups and a well-developed conflict-resolution culture.

Discussion

This section of the paper presents a detailed examination of the similarities and differences across the two case studies. It then explores the potential for generalisability by situating the findings within broader theoretical frameworks.

Similarities and differences

In both traditions, the initial attachment is typically formed at early stages, as the practices are transmitted among family members, such as parents introducing their offspring to these forms of cultural expression. A distinguishing factor between the traditions is the role of the institutional setting. In the case of Silvesterchlausen, transmission occurs organically within families, peer groups and the community, but without institutional involvement. In the case of Constance Carnival, kindergarten and school, alongside families, play a significant – albeit variable – role. These institutions offer dedicated carnival lessons conducted by practitioners, thereby contributing to the socialisation process and facilitating the transmission of cultural heritage.

The elements essential for sustaining attachment are consistent across both traditions, although they differ in their specific details and relative importance. Practitioners from both traditions emphasise the importance of lived experience, engaging in activities together, experiencing strong emotions, a sense of community and social cohesion.

Notable differences arise in the performative aspects of each tradition. Silvesterchlausen is more closely associated with traditional elements such as yodelling and dancing with bells and costumes. Performances conducted in front of the homes of neighbours, friends and the community are poignant and profound. While both traditions foster bonding among participants and with their audiences, Silvesterchlausen tends to evoke a more contemplative, meditative and ritualistic atmosphere. In contrast, Constance Carnival is characterised by a joyful, playful and entertaining spirit. Performances at indoor events, street parades and in processions aim to entertain and amuse.

Other differences between the two traditions concerning sustaining attachment are evident in the level of organisation, rules and hierarchies within groups. Silvesterchlausen is practised in informal, self-organised, unaffiliated groups of up to 14 members. Typically, the groups disappear when their members reach retirement age. Conversely, Constance Carnival exhibits greater diversity in organisational forms, ranging from small informal groups to large associations. The larger size of the carnival groups and their intergenerational continuity, with some dating back to the 19th century, necessitates more rules and hierarchical structures.

Headdresses and costumes are essential objects of attachment in both traditions. A notable distinction, however, can be observed regarding the relative importance of the processes involved in creating these artifacts. While some craft their own masks or costumes for Constance Carnival, it is also common for these to be made by others, purchased, borrowed, or passed down within families. For the Silvesterchlausen, the bonnets, hats and masks are crafted by the practitioners themselves, neither hired nor purchased. This is noteworthy, given that producing a *Chlausen* outfit is highly time-consuming, yet it is only used on a maximum of eight occasions. This striking feature of the Silvesterchlausen tradition suggests that the value of the attachment objects is derived from the time invested in their production. Consequently, they also confer on practitioners the value of being a member of the *Schuppel*.

Both traditions are intrinsically linked to specific places. Silvesterchlausen is deeply embedded in the villages of the Canton of Appenzell Ausserrhoden, while Constance Carnival is inextricably associated with the city of Constance. These traditions significantly contribute to the practitioners' sense of place and belonging, and in some instances, are a predominant factor in making significant life choices. A notable difference lies in the way these traditions appropriate public space. In Silvesterchlausen, although the *Chläuse* traverse villages and gather on village squares, the primary venues for the tradition are private forecourts. Conversely, the appropriation of public spaces is more central to Constance Carnival, where practitioners transform everyday spaces into stages for celebration and play, thereby expanding public space.

Additionally, decorations play a significant role in the

appropriation of public spaces during Constance Carnival. Carnival groups themselves undertake the considerable effort and expense of adorning the city with ribbons and flags. Many shops also participate by decorating their windows and displays with costumed figures, banners or confetti, contributing to the carnival atmosphere throughout the town.

Both Constance and Appenzell Ausserrhoden are popular tourist destinations, and the Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival represent locally embedded intangible cultural heritage, providing these destinations with a unique selling point in international tourism (Kim et al. 2019). However, from the practitioners' perspective, tourism plays a minor role in their attachment to the traditions. Safeguarding the subjective authenticity (Su 2018) of their traditions from the adverse effects of tourism, such as commercialisation and commodification, is a concern for practitioners of both traditions. Nonetheless, apprehensions about the potentially negative impact of tourism and the fear of commodification are more pronounced in the case of Silvesterchlausen.

In both traditions, a reduction in attachment predominantly occurs during adolescence or in old age, when adherence to the tradition becomes too strenuous. There is relatively little conflict within the groups, and when it does arise, it is typically resolved by the group at eye level. A difference is that some carnival groups in Constance employ more formal strategies and mechanisms, whereas Silvesterchlausen groups rely more on informal strategies and mechanisms in their conflict resolution.

Examining both traditions through the lens of inclusion and exclusion processes, including gender, reveals both similarities and differences. Place-belongingness is a significant feature of both traditions and can serve as a foundation for practices of inclusion and exclusion (Mohseni et al. 2024). Practitioners of both traditions emphasise the openness of their groups to new members from other backgrounds. However, in practice, it is easier to join a carnival group than a Silvesterchlausen group, where inclusion relies on personal invitation and access to social networks. Additionally, the role of women in both traditions was depicted differently by the interviewees. Constance Carnival exhibits no overt gendered aspect in its performances. Silvesterchlausen, however, is traditionally performed by men, with women assuming significant supportive roles in the background.

Theoretical contextualisation of findings

The primary objective of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of both individual and collective attachment to Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival, and of how these attachments are sustained over time. The study presents a multidimensional perspective that offers a deeper understanding of attachment to ICH resulting from childhood socialisation, various practices for maintaining attachment, the significance of objects and places, and a constructive culture of conflict-resolution.

While the empirical study is explorative in nature, each of the key themes identified can be theoretically substantiated. Owing to space and scope constraints, an in-depth elaboration is not feasible; however, the following section outlines key conceptual links between the researchers' empirical findings and relevant theoretical perspectives as an attempt to facilitate the analytical generalisation of their results and to position them within broader scholarly discourses on ICH, attachment, ritual and performative community practice.

The authors' findings on initial attachment can be linked to psychological attachment theories. The research suggests that most practitioners develop a deeply rooted and enduring emotional bond to the traditions experienced early in their childhood. Similar to how attachment theory (Bowlby 1982; Ainsworth 1989) elucidates the formation of a secure base for future relationships through early caregiver–child interactions, the researchers' findings demonstrate that early exposure to traditions such as Silvesterchlausen and Constance Carnival, often mediated through family, establishes a secure attachment to these traditions. This attachment enables practitioners to remain connected to the tradition throughout their lives, even after periods of disengagement, and to return to it with enthusiasm and commitment. The implication of this research is that attachment to ICH, similar to attachment to individuals, is partially rooted in formative experiences of trust, enjoyment and a sense of belonging.

Sustaining attachment to traditions involves numerous subthemes in the authors' research. Central to practitioners is the act of engaging in activities together and experiencing a strong sense of community. This aligns well with the work of Victor and Edith Turner on rituals and communitas (Turner 1991; Turner, 2012). In their research, the authors of this paper expand the attachment framework beyond dyadic human

relationships, demonstrating that sustained attachment is not a static emotional tie but is actively reinforced through ritualised social experiences. Communitas emerges among the practitioners during the many hours spent preparing for the performance and with the public during the liminal phase of the festival, where everyday rules are suspended and practitioners and audiences can experience a sense of equality, solidarity and shared joy. The experiences of both practitioners and the public during the festivals can also be interpreted through Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque, which emphasises the temporary suspension of social order and collective participation, albeit with varying intensities between the two traditions.

Both traditions are highly performative, with participants embodying and enacting specific roles and behaviours. The interviews reveal the significance of bodily and aesthetic experiences as well as self-expression. Interviewees emphasised the importance of the audience in shaping a performance. Participants describe how they adapt their performances based on the reactions of those they encounter, aiming to create a meaningful and enjoyable experience for both themselves and their audience. The research findings are thus closely connected to ritual and performance theory (Turner 2008; Schechner 2017). Examining the findings through the lens of performance theory highlights the embodied, repeated enactment of tradition, which both reaffirms the attachment and allows for its creative renewal over time.

The authors' findings also underscore the material and spatial dimensions of practitioner attachment to ICH. Objects of attachment, such as masks and costumes, serve as affective anchors for practitioners. Such objects, described by Sarah Ahmed (2010) as 'happy objects', are carriers of positive affect that promise joy and a sense of belonging. The interviews indicate that participation in ICH significantly contributes to place attachment, aligning with existing research on this topic (Altman and Low 1992). The affective connection between practitioners and the objects they utilise, as well as the places where they perform, serves to deepen their attachment to these traditions.

Furthermore, the researchers' analysis of attachment reduction and conflict culture complements attachment theory by illustrating how groups maintain cohesion. A constructive, low-drama approach to internal disagreements preserves trust and prevents fractures, much in the same way that secure attachment relationships tolerate and repair conflict without undermining the bond. This suggests that effective intragroup conflict management is essential for sustaining long-term attachment to ICH, ensuring that tensions become opportunities for reinforcement rather than rupture.

Conclusion

This study has explored attachment to ICH from the perspective of practitioners, offering a nuanced understanding of the compelling nature of these traditions and the lifelong engagement they foster. Drawing on two in-depth case studies – Silvesterchlausen in Appenzell Ausserrhoden and Constance Carnival – the authors' findings, structured around five key themes, reveal that the strong attachment experienced by practitioners cannot be attributed to a single factor such as initial exposure or participation. Instead, it emerges from the dynamic interplay of multiple elements that collectively shape the depth and durability of a practitioner's connection to these traditions.

The exploratory approach used in this study highlights an under-theorised yet promising avenue for future ICH research: the lived experience of practitioners and the affective dimensions of cultural participation. The study highlights the potential of ICH to promote place attachment and to foster a sense of community, providing insights into how cultural practices contribute to social cohesion and intergenerational continuity. A deeper understanding of what makes ICH meaningful to its communities can inform other participatory contexts, such as community development initiatives, where collective engagement and cultural expression play a central role.

Since the findings of the study are based on two traditions in which performative elements are particularly salient, the authors cannot claim direct applicability across all forms of ICH. However, the urban and rural character of the selected cases provides a valuable contrast, highlighting focal dynamics that support conceptual development. The elements identified may offer transferable insights into similar traditions elsewhere.

Finally, the researchers acknowledge the challenges of representing complex cultural practices within academic writing, from word limits to translating embodied and

cross-cultural meanings. Still, the authors hope that this study helps the reader to understand individual and collective attachment to ICH and supports the documentation and preservation of the Silvesterchlausen in Switzerland and the Constance Carnival in Germany.

Credit author statement

Robert Maria Moosbrugger: Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft. Leticia Labaronne: Conceptualisation, Funding acquisition, Supervision, Project administration, Writing – original draft. Fabian Andreas Rebitzer: Methodology, Writing – review and editing. Brian Switzer: Conceptualisation, Visualisation, Editing. Svenia Schneider-Wulf: Investigation, Validation, Visualisation, Writing – review and editing. Liliana Heimberg: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Validation, Visualisation, Writing – review and editing.

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ENDNOTES

1. Swabian–Alemannic Fastnacht distinguishes itself from the Rhenish Carnival. Fastnacht is held in the settlement area of the historic Germanic tribes of the Swabians and Alemanni, where Swabian–Alemannic dialects are spoken.
2. While activities of the Swabian–Alemannic carnival, in general, expanded particularly in urban areas during the 14th century, by 1500 they had developed into organised events within the cities (Mezger 2015, 13). This is also the case in Constance.
3. However, it is hardly possible to speak of a clearly datable origin; instead, one must assume a long process of development spanning extensive periods of time. Modern European ethnology suggests that the rituals of the agrarian natural year, which were eventually structured by the Roman calendar, laid the groundwork for the later development of carnival traditions. However, Constance Carnival only received its decisive character as a liminal festival through its integration into the liturgical calendar (Mezger 2015, 9–11.)
4. For example, depictions of old crafts, scenes from farm life, historical events, bridges and railway stations in the canton, fairs, circuses and proverbs.
5. The reason given for this is the strength and endurance required to practise the custom.
6. https://www.lebendige-traditionen.ch/tradition/en/home/traditionen/silvesterchlausen.html

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