

About the History of the Fair

Legitimate Trade and Extraordinary Entertainment

In the course of the Middle Ages, sovereigns allowed annually recurring markets in their towns. From the 17th century onwards, travelling showmen increasingly took part in the markets, earning money by offering entertainment. Since the beginning of the 20th century, fairgrounds have been dominated by rides, amusements and skill-based games.

Fairs originally served as supra-regional sales platforms and social meeting places. They were an important source of income for the local population. One of the oldest fairs in the Rhineland is the "Simon-Juda-Markt" in Euskirchen, which dates back to 1322.

Over the centuries, showmanship and entertainment have played an increasingly important role in the markets. "Throwing booths", merry-go-rounds and artistic performances enjoyed great popularity, while the actual trade slowly receded into the background. The fairs gradually developed from pure sales fairs into entertaining folk festivals.

Since 1869, fairs in the Rhineland have been subject to the Trade Regulation Act. With a special permit, they may take place under the legal protection of market freedom. Vendors can offer their goods and services free of most administrative regulations. This may include aspects such as customs privileges, protection against confiscation of the merchandise or permission to sell limited goods.

Nowadays, fairs in German-speaking countries are also called "Kirmes", "Kerwe" or "Kerbe". The terms are derived from the religious terms "Kirchweih" or "Kirchmesse" (parish fair). The name "Kirmes" has been used more and more for all popular festivals, whether church festivals or funfairs.