

Ministry for Justice, Culture and
Local Government
Directorate for Culture



Ministeru għall-Ġustizzja, Kultura u
Gvern Lokali
Direttorat għall-Kultura

Reċu CLT / CIH / ITH

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National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage

In March, 2017, following a Government decision, the Parliament of Malta ratified the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As a first step, the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government assigned the implementation of the Convention in Malta to the Culture Directorate. An advisory group was created to advise on its implementation, including the creation of a National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

To assist in approving proposals of elements for inclusion on the inventory, a National Board on Intangible Cultural Heritage was appointed with representatives from Heritage Malta, the Cultural Superintendance, the Culture Directorate and two representatives from the community.

Please find below a list of elements of our intangible cultural heritage included on Malta's National Inventory that will be regularly updated.

Mario Azzopardi
Director Culture

ELEMENTS INCLUDED ON THE NATIONAL INVENTORY

Element	Date of Inscription	Reference	Short Description
<p><i>Il-Ftira: the culinary art and culture of flattened sourdough bread in Malta"</i></p>	<p>20 June 2018</p>	<p>01/2018</p>	<p>Ftira is a small sourdough bread commonly consumed in the Maltese archipelago. Maltese people eat filled ftira regularly as a daily snack or light meal, or as an appetiser in band clubs, restaurants or bars. Bread plays a fundamental role in Maltese historical consciousness and forms an integral part of the Maltese cultural tradition. Despite the modern changing eating habits and a drop in the local per capita consumption of bread; the Maltese still consider themselves to be mainly 'bread eaters'.</p>
<p><i>Gold Embroidery: The art of embroidery using metal threads and the conservation of existing artefacts</i></p>	<p>28 June 2018</p>	<p>02/2018</p>	<p>Gold embroidery originated in Asia and has been used for many centuries and it is widespread in many countries. In Malta, there is a tradition that gold embroidery is used on religious artefacts and emblems of various societies prominent in different communities across the two islands. Today, there are a few highly skilled individuals spread throughout the Maltese Islands who still know, practice and (on a very small scale) teach this craft.</p>
<p><i>Għana – Malta's Folksong</i></p>	<p>28 June 2018</p>	<p>03/2018</p>	<p>Għana is a performative art, transmitted through generations in Maltese archipelago, including sung poetry and music. The origin of għana is still unknown and, hence, subject to ongoing debate. The folklore researcher Ġużè Cassar Pullicino found an early form of għana dating back to 1792, that is, towards the end of occupation of the Maltese islands by the Knights of Malta. Some local music scholars have attributed the origin of this singing to the presence of Arabs in Malta.</p>
<p><i>Maltese Lace Making - Bizzilla</i></p>	<p>28 June 2018</p>	<p>04/2018</p>	<p>The art of lace making is popular in both Malta and Gozo, although Gozo. Its roots can be traced from the cotton trade of the Maltese Islands along the maritime trade route with Genoa, since 1530. It was first promoted in the old nuns convents at Mdina, the old capital of Malta, and in the Borgo cities developed around the Grand Harbour after the coming of the Knights of Malta in 1530. This craft has passed down through different generations and many lace makers, mainly women practice this craft in their own homes or private space. Few women can be seen making lace outdoors nowadays.</p>

<i>Brilli</i>	18 October 2018	05/2018	Bocci and brilli are two traditional games played in Gozo, which continue to draw interest from locals. Research conducted through participant observation and informal interviews informs the ethnographic accounts of how these games are conceived of and integrated into the space of leisure, work and social memory
<i>Għażżiela</i>	18 October 2018	06/2018	The making and faith in the 'Għażżiela' (oven baked dough with the initials of the name of Our Lady) is traditionally used as a protection against thunderstorms. Its origins are unknown, but records show that Zebbug's first parish priest bequeathed in his will back in 1737 a trust fund to permit the residents to buy flour to make għażżiela and protects the place from thunderstorms.
<i>Falconry: A Living Cultural Heritage</i>	11 March 2019	01/2019	The practice of falconry was already well established in 1239 and this ties in with the issue of bird names and language. Semitic origin for birds of prey, as well as expressions in Maltese involving birds of prey, continues to prove that a strong bond with these birds existed for a very long time. Falconers in the Middle Ages in Malta were well paid and enjoyed several privileges. This tradition was revived by falconers communities in the recent years.

National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Malta

Entry number:

01/2018

Recommendation of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Board:

NICH Board recommended that “Ftira: the culinary art and culture of flattened sourdough bread in Malta” is inscribed on the National Inventory during the meeting of 1st June 2018

Authorisation of the Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government (Culture Directorate):

Approved by the Culture Directorate on 15th June 2018

Date of entry into the Inventory:

20th June 2018



Director Culture
Culture Directorate
Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government

National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Malta

1. Name of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Tradition, Activity or Practice.

Il-Ftira: the culinary art and culture of flattened sourdough bread in Malta

2. Category or Domain of Intangible Cultural Heritage

- Festivities and Community Events
- Music and Dance
- Performing Arts
- Oral Traditions
- Crafts
- Food Traditions
- Games and Playing
- Nature and the Universe

Category

- Good safeguarding practice
- Viable safeguarding status
- In need of urgent safeguarding

3. Practitioners and communities related to the Tradition, Activity or Practice

Specialist groups of bakers, numbering approximately 200 practitioners in Malta at this time, and their apprentices, make ftira, shaping the dough by hand for baking in wood-fired or electric ovens in family-run artisan bakeries or larger enterprises. Bakers are not organized into any formal associations. Family members usually help to run small bakeries and deliver bread. Students in schools and vocational institutions also learn how to make and prepare ftira.

Master bakers and apprentices are usually men. Family-run artisan bakeries using wood ovens demand long hours of skilled work preparing the dough, and experience in using the oven effectively. Female family members usually manage the sale and delivery of bread, cleaning of the premises and tools, and receiving deliveries of flour and wood. In larger bakeries using mixing machinery and electric ovens, skilled bakers are still needed to create recipes, supervise the preparation of the dough, and cut and shape the loaves by hand.

Master bakers develop their own variations on the basic recipe and teach their apprentices (usually younger family members) on the job. They make the dough by mixing a piece of 'motherdough' saved from the previous day, as a starter ("tinsila") with the fresh batch of dough ("għaġna") and kneading it. The dough is then covered with a cloth ("mindil") and allowed to rest for three to four hours in a warm place. The baker cuts the dough into measured portions, which are shaped ("issawwar") and placed on a wooden tray ("tavla") to rise again before baking.

Ftira is enjoyed by most people in Malta, both locals and visitors, especially as a snack in summer after the heat of the beach or as a finger food when unwinding. They experiment with creating the tastiest fillings. They help to organize and enjoy communal activities that teach young people how to fill ftira and maintain its value in Maltese society today.

4. Location of practice and transmission

Malta is densely populated, with 68 Local Councils of which 14 are in Gozo. Each town has at least one bakery, generally a family-run artisan bakery providing fresh daily ftira loaves, where apprentices are also trained. Ftira is also produced by five larger bakeries with a nationwide distribution, four in Malta and one in Gozo. The highest concentration of bakeries today is in Qormi at the centre of Malta, known as Casal Fornaro – The Town of Bakers. On Gozo, family-run artisan bakeries are located in places such as Xewkija, Nadur and Qala. Ftira is also produced in the bakery of the Corradino Correctional Facility in Paola, where prisoners are trained as bakers' apprentices.

Ftira is eaten in private homes, schools and workplaces, as well as in community organisations such as band clubs; restaurants; snack bars; and cafes located in all towns and villages on Malta and Gozo islands.

5. General Description of the Tradition, Activity or Practice and its meaning and value to the communities, groups and individuals concerned

Ftira is a small sourdough bread commonly consumed in the Maltese archipelago. Maltese people eat filled ftira regularly as a daily snack or light meal, or as an appetiser in band clubs, restaurants or bars. This bread is best celebrated during the Lejl f'Casal Fornaro, the bread festival in Qormi.

Ftira is made from the same dough as other Maltese breads but is the last one to be shaped from the resting dough mix. The flattening and shaping of the dough is always done by hand. In bakeries using wood burning ovens, the ftira loaves are baked first every morning to avoid wasting heat from the oven as it cools. While other kinds of Maltese bread are baked in low oven temperatures and require at least 90 minutes of baking time, the ftira bakes in less than 20 minutes at 450 degrees Celsius. The ftira thus develops a thick crust relatively quickly, maintaining its flat shape, but trapping gases within the bread to give it a light texture with large, irregular holes (an open crumb). Once baked, the ftira reaches the thickness of approximately 5cm, with either a 15cm or 25cm diameter, the latter with a hole in the middle. While bakers only use imported wheat, the bread itself is baked in Malta and much of the flour used by artisan bakers is also milled and mixed locally.

The loaf is cut in half with olive oil and tomato (tomato paste or Maltese *kunserva*), as well as tuna, capers, olives, broad beans, pickled onions, peppered sheep's cheese and mint, or with seasonal variants and inventive additions such as egg or bacon added. The element connects the culinary culture of ftira to the very specific mix of Mediterranean heritage that characterizes Malta's history, and its North African, Italian, French and British influences.

The ftira has similarities to both Italian ciabatta and North African flatbreads such as the Egyptian 'fytir' or 'fatir'. As a daily staple in Malta, bread carries important cultural meanings, including social status (signaled by the type of bread consumed), fertility and survival. In 1919, concern about the price of flour brought people together in national protests called Sette Giugno, which presaged Malta's self-government, and was a first step in Malta's struggle for independence. This day has been celebrated as a public holiday since 1989. Essential Maltese food imports have sometimes been disrupted, so when people say "Malta never refused wheat" they mean that all gifts are welcome. Maltese people remember well that wasting bread was taboo in the past: crumbs were saved for later use, bread dropped on the ground was picked up and kissed; loaves were broken with bare hands rather than a knife.

Ftira has some particular meanings in Maltese which underline its accessibility. The verb from

ftira (“tfattar”, to flatten) connotes impromptu actions performed in haste, “quick and easy”. The idiom “il-ftira shuna tajba” (“ftira is good while it is warm”) means “seize the moment”.

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6. Viability of the element, and threats and risks to its practice and transmission

The art of ftira is viable in both Malta and Gozo, as demand for the bread is high and bakers still produce it. Recognition of the element as part of the cultural heritage of Malta will support greater appreciation of the culinary art and its value in society, and ensure continued demand for bakers’ services.

There are a few risks to its continued viability in the future:

1. Fewer young people are interested to engage as apprentices in the bakery trade.
2. Increased competition for bakers from larger producers and from supermarkets selling imported breads. Artificial additives are thus sometimes used in the flour in some cases; not all bakers use motherdough as a leavening agent.

These threats and opportunities are addressed in section 9 below.

7. Transmission of the Tradition, Activity or Practice from one generation to the next

The culinary art of ftira baking is usually learned through informal apprenticeship training. In the bakery, apprentices progress from doing basic tasks, such as carrying flour sacks, to learning by watching and helping experienced bakers on different stations of work. After gaining experience and establishing deeper relationships of trust with their masters, they

learn recipe variations, how to mix ingredients or to decide when the dough is ready to be cut and shaped into loaves.

Students and hobbyists can attend workshops in some bakeries. They can learn some aspects of the art through formal vocational training at, for example, the Institute of Tourism Studies' Food Preparation and Production programmes. In Malta's Correctional Facility, inmates can choose to be trained in baking ftira in the in-house bakery, facilitating their re-integration into Maltese society.

Schools and other social organisations may raise funds (sometimes through Ftira Days), by selling prepared ftira. Through ftira-related events in schools, community gatherings, festivals, religious celebrations, and on social media, young people in Malta learn about the importance of ftira in Maltese society.

8. Related tools, cultural spaces, natural resources, etc

Wood and electric ovens are used to make ftira in artisan family-run bakeries. Larger bakeries use electric ovens. The bakers have developed bread-making and -baking terminology, referring to specific tools and parts of the old cast iron facades of the wood-burning oven. Wood is scarce on Malta; and burning wood can create environmental problems in built-up areas, so wood-burning ovens are slowly being replaced by electric ovens.

9. Safeguarding measures: past, present and future

Ftira remains widely made and collectively consumed in Malta, in homes and at various collective gatherings and events, so extensive safeguarding measures, aside from general awareness-raising, are not required to support the element. However, small family-run artisan bakeries have faced a few particular threats, namely shortages of apprentices and increased competition from larger producers and from supermarkets selling imported breads.

The production technique for ftira always requires flattening by hand, which ensures the use of skilled bakers even in larger commercial bakeries. Ftira cannot be imported frozen because freezing destroys the hardness of the crust, which protects local bakeries against imports. Nevertheless, artisan bakeries continue to face some problems of competition and apprenticeship recruitment, so they require more specific safeguarding measures, including assistance to ensure the supply of ingredients.

To maintain artisanal production, smaller bakeries have been distributing more ftira through shops and supermarkets, and diversified products sold in bakery shops. Some reduced salt to attract health-conscious customers. Bakers also started employing more migrants to address the shortage of apprentices, and to pass on their skills. In promoting bread baking as an artisanal craft with strong local roots, local bakers, such as Carmelo Debono (Nenu), have published books and videos, and organized a conference and other events, have also highlighted the cultural aspects of the ftira culinary art in Malta. Bakers promote social ties at the local level by providing reduced-cost bread to schools and inviting school children to their bakeries to support the curriculum.

Bakers and members of the public have emphasized the importance of promoting the use of healthy Mediterranean ingredients, supporting, promoting and recognizing the work of artisan bakers, encouraging formal training programmes for apprentices, developing ways to

guarantee the quality of traditional ftira (for example through quality schemes), and continuing a dialogue about environmental impacts.

Many bakers no longer use older Maltese terminology for ovens, kneading methods and different types of bread. Several dissertations in the Maltese Language Department and the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta have thus recorded the linguistic history and culture of breadmaking (including ftira), documenting the element to create a resource for future generations who wish to revitalize the use of these terms in baking. The University Department of Anthropological Sciences has developed study units on ICH which, starting in February 2020, will include a practical component that will assist communities compiling and updating ICH inventory entries, such as that for ftira. The Department is also in the process of developing a postgraduate diploma level course designed to train prospective ethnographers to work within the ICH sector, which could support community-based safeguarding of ftira.

The Ta' Kola Windmill Museum in Gozo, managed by Heritage Malta, has committed to include additional information about ftira in their exhibition on breadmaking. This could make a stronger link between the tangible heritage associated with making of ftira, such as the network of mills, bakeries and ovens, and the culture of ftira. The Institute of Tourism Studies and Heritage Malta are expanding an existing taste history project, investigating heirloom grains and wholemeal flours once used by ftira bakers. This could increase awareness of the long history and changing nature of the ftira loaf.

The Ministry for Education and Employment has supported secondary and primary schools raising awareness and teaching ftira preparation, and prisoners have been apprenticed in the correctional facility bakery since 1990. Since 1993, the Institute of Tourism Studies, under the Ministry for Tourism, has trained students to make ftira as part of its Food Preparation and Production courses. Ongoing education activity in these institutions will continue to encourage young people to enter the profession.

Research and education activity in the Institute of Tourism Studies can encourage some students to acquire advanced skills on making ftira by entering the artisan bakery trade as apprentices. The course will extend its offering on bread baking when it sets up a wood-burning oven as it moves to new premises in a few years' time. The Directorate of Culture plans to assist in the identification and restoration of disused wood-burning ovens, some of which could be used for training. The Directorate will negotiate with the National Commission for Further and Higher Education to extend the scope of the JobsPlus skills card to recognize informal learning, giving accreditation to apprentices who have learned on the job in bakeries.

10. NGOs or other organizations assisting communities, groups and individuals concerned to safeguard the Tradition, Activity or Practice

Heritage Malta provides a platform for information about bread culture in Malta, and particularly the ftira, to be disseminated to a wider audience. Since 2014, public lectures have been organised to inform but also raise awareness about the culture and practice of bread making and consumption in Malta, including the role of the ftira.

Various local councils promote ftira-making and consumption when holding major public events, particularly in Qormi. Since 2006, the organisers of Casal Fornaro festival have promoted Maltese bread including ftira through their annual event.

Primary and Secondary schools located in the different towns and villages are encouraged to organise the annual Ftira Day, in a bid to promote healthy eating while learning about the production and consumption of this intangible cultural heritage. The Institute of

Tourism Studies provides training about bread making in general, including the ftira. Hospitality and Home Economics courses at Secondary Level Education also include information about the culinary art and culture of Ftira in Malta. The University of Malta supports through academic research various aspects of ftira production and consumption.

11. Additional information.

The knowledge of the bakers regarding the recipe for ftira, and some of the dough-making skills, are a trade secret in some cases, to be shared only with trusted apprentices. The inventory will therefore not divulge these specificities, which give each bakery its special place within the tradition of making ftira.

12. Persons responsible for compiling the inventory form with the assistance of the communities, groups and individuals concerned.

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13. Communities, groups and individuals involved in preparing the inventory form

On 3 February 2018, at a public meeting in Valletta, 60 members of the public from Malta and Gozo were introduced to the Convention, including the role of inventorying in safeguarding ICH. Further information on the Convention and inventorying processes was provided in the national media ((e.g. the television programmes TVAM on Television Malta and on Pjazza on One TV), and engagement on social media (e.g. Facebook) showed a lot of interest in putting Maltese bread (including ftira) on the National Inventory.

The Culture Directorate launched a call for submissions to a community-based inventory in May 2018. Bakers formally requested a meeting on 18 May 2018 at Qormi Local Council. Following public suggestions to the Directorate as early as March 2018, at a meeting on 18 May 2018, the bakers agreed on the development of the inventory entry for the making and consumption of ftira on the National Inventory of ICH in Malta, assisted by Dr Noel Buttigieg. The Expression of Interest form submitted in May was approved by the ICH Board on 1 June and by the Culture Directorate on 20 June 2018 for inclusion on the Inventory.

Following its inclusion on the National Inventory, the ftira inventory entry was discussed in a public meeting on 17 July 2018. The second meeting generated more media attention and was covered in the news on the three television stations. There were also reports and suggestions on national newspapers. Facebook page received several hits and comment for support and with suggestions.

Further consultations were later held with bakers, apprentices, bakery workers, prisoner-apprentices, and school and college students, on Malta and Gozo (October-December 2018), and the general public (October-November 2018), as part of a process of further consultation on the safeguarding measures, aligned to the development of the nomination file for the UNESCO Representative List. Additional meetings were held with the Consumer Society; Heritage Malta (Malta's agency entrusted with the safeguarding of local heritage); Federated Mills plc, retailers selling Il-Ftira; Qormi Local Council which organizes the annual Bread Festival; Education Officers responsible for VET courses in Hospitality; Students' Association at the Institute of Tourism Studies; and Master Baker at the Corradino Correctional Facilities where inmates are offered the opportunity to train as bakers.

A Public Meeting was organized on 24 January 2019 at the Ethnographic Museum in Il-Birgu whereby the public approved the nomination form. A meeting for bakers was organized at the Peace Band Club in in-Naxxar on 27 January 2019 whereby even the bakers also approved the nomination. In both meetings, the safeguarding measures were discussed.

14. Role of other stakeholders in identifying the element and preparing the inventory form

Dr. Noel Buttigieg, a researcher on Maltese bread based at the Institute for Tourism, Travel & Culture of the University of Malta, assisted in developing the National Inventory Form, relying on prior research for his PhD thesis and on consultations with active and retired bakers, shop assistants working in bakeries, members of bakers' families and consumers.

15. Dates of updating and details updated

More information was provided on the social meaning and value of the ftira after consultations (indicated above) in the period after 20 June 2018. The inventory entry was updated in January 2019.

These amendments were put to public review as part of the process of obtaining community consent for the nomination of the element to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As part of this process, community members underlined the importance of maintaining use of healthy Mediterranean ingredients, supporting, promoting and recognizing the work of artisan bakers, encouraging formal training programmes, developing ways to guarantee the quality of traditional ftira, and continuing a dialogue about environmental impacts.



Signature of Applicant: