



12 March 2021

### **National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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

The Culture Directorate was entrusted with the implementation of the Convention in Malta. To assist in approving proposals of elements for inclusion on the national inventory, the National Board on Intangible Cultural Heritage was appointed with representatives from Heritage Malta, the Cultural Superintendence, the Culture Directorate and representatives from the community.

Please find below a list of elements of our intangible cultural heritage included on Malta's National Inventory as of 12 March 2021. This is regularly updated with elements approved on the website [www.ichmalta.org](http://www.ichmalta.org).



Mario Azzopardi  
Director Culture

ELEMENTS INCLUDED ON THE NATIONAL INVENTORY

Element	Date of Inscription	Reference	Short Description
<i>Il-Ftira: the culinary art and culture of flattened sourdough bread in Malta</i>	20 June 2018	01/2018	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'.
<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.
<i>Maltese Lace Making – Bizzilla</i>	28 June 2018	04/2018	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.
<i>L-Għana : Leġen il-Poplu Malti</i>	28 June 2018	03/2018	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.
<b>Gold Embroidery: The art of embroidery using metal threads and the conservation of existing artefacts</b>	28 June 2018	02/2018	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.
<b>Brilli</b>	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
<b>Għażżiela</b>	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.
<b>The practical Implementation of STEREOTOMY principles to load bearing structural members in various buildings using local construction materials and expert craftsmanship.</b>	20 May 2019	02/2019	From the earliest times in history, people have always built, sometimes small constructions but sometimes great buildings, using huge blocks of stone. Each great period in history has required different types of buildings. Like the architects of today, while designing their buildings, the architects and the master masons of the past needed to consider all the aspects of their architectural design.The most important aspects of an architectural design are:  -The practical aspects, that is the utility of the building,what to provide and how this may be arranged and the method of its construction.

			- The aesthetic aspect, that is the consideration taken to design the building with a view to aesthetic appeal.
<i>The Traditional Maltese Village Feast</i>	25 September 2019	03/2019	The Traditional Maltese Festa in its present form emerged from the 19th century through the fusion of a number of existing traditions that harked back to many years. 400 years ago, the Festa had been a small affair with a rustic character organized mainly through benefactors who distributed wine and food among the people attending the religious ceremonies or to the poor people of the village. By the 18th century, small mortars (known as maskli) were being fired and flags were hired to decorate the festive areas. Music was provided by small groups of musicians who enlivened the festive atmosphere. Church services had by now developed into a grander affair with musicians and singers being part of the celebrations. By the 19th and early 20th centuries, most individual parishes had their own Church music written especially for the annual feast celebrations.
<i>Nicknames in Maltese Villages - Zejtun</i>	25 September 2019	04/2019	Nicknames are an oral practice, sometimes are given by friends or relatives, however, some of them are passed on by generations. Families in Żejtun have acquire their respective nickname by the trade they practice, to be precisely with their breadwinner. Practice is involved directly in everyday life. Nicknames can be a descriptor of a physical characteristic as well or the opposite of a physical characteristic. Such nicknames are often considered offensive or derogatory, unless the nickname is based on a trait that is viewed positively.
<i>Ephemeral Art with Natural Materials</i>	25 September 2019	05/2019	Ephemeral art is often connected to traditional rituals aimed at marking the passage of time, celebrating the succession of seasons and religious holidays. Flower petals, salt and sawdust are used to create horizontal and vertical arts; designed carpets and designed salt plates. This tradition dates back to hundreds of years mainly used to be a carpet for the Corpus Christi and salt plates for Easter period.

ELEMENTS INCLUDED ON THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST LIST

Element	Date of Inscription	Reference	Short Description
<i>Maltese Proverbs</i>	20 May 2019		There are hundreds of proverbs in the Maltese language reflecting the beliefs, customs and traditions of past generations of Maltese speakers from all walks of life that are in danger of being lost because of lack of use. They include gems of practical wisdom expressed in a language that can be strongly satirical or strikingly poetic. Because of their rich vocabulary and clever turn of phrase, these proverbs have lost none of their freshness despite their age. Their inclusion in the National Inventory of Culture might stimulate fresh interest in them among educators and lead to concrete measures being taken for their dissemination and preservation, especially among the young.
<i>The drafting and making of a Maltese traditional wooden boat</i>	22 August 2019		Until few deacade ago, this traditional boat was used for transportation of goods and to embark and disembark pilots from larger vessels in the harbour. Nowadays, they are used for transportation within the harbour and Sliema area (Balklori). Also used for fishing and for sports activities such as the 'Regatta'. The Maltese Traditional Boat is made from different types of wood and the normal size of the boat is 21 feet (6.4 metres). Making of a traditional boat includes the drafting of a sketch according to the requirements and wooden parts cut according to sketch. An old-style method of wood bending is used, using traditional tools as 'Majjieri' and 'Stamnari' with the help of steam. Traditional methods are used to assemble the boat completely.
<i>Sea Salt Harvesting</i>	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020		Salt harvesting is a seasonal activity carried out between June and September and it is very independent on weather conditions especially on the wind directions. Process stars <b>by</b> pumping sea salt water in large pans. <b>This</b> is left to be absorbed by the sun leaving less <b>w</b> ater but higher salinity levels. Crystallization <b>n</b> and salt flakes start forming. Salt is formed <b>and</b> is swept and packed in small stacks.
<i>Ganutell</i>	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020		This craft goes back to our heritage <b>w</b> here nuns worked such flowers in their monastery <b>y</b> and with

			these beautiful flowers use to decorate our religious statues in churches. Now a days we are practising this craft in our communities.
<b>The making of Flags and Pavillions</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020		This tradition involves that pieces of fabric are sewn together with one another so that form the requested design. Sometimes the pattern is nuanced to give a three-dimensional, while there are those who request for hand paintings code of arms or other designs to complement the requested pavillions or flags. This type of tradition is requested from different entities and communities such as band clubs, churches and even individuals. Normally they are used during the festa period on balconies and flagpoles.
<b>The art of Crib Making</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020		The crib building tradition in Malta was also kept alive by a few enthusiasts who built cribs and exhibited them to the public. Nativity cribs are made up of recycled polysterene, XPS material or papier maché. Pieces of polyesterene are glued together by means of PVA glue and toothpics. A mixtre of glue, water, tissue paper and french chalk is applied on the polyesterne. When the mixture is dried pigment powder paint is used to paint the nativity crib. After the nativity figures is positioned in the crib.
<b>The process of Liedna</b>	29 <sup>th</sup> May 2020		The material used for Liedna is plastic where different colors shapes and sizes are used depending on the occasion/feast. The process begins by cutting a large quantity of plastic in a box shape . A string wrapped around a piece of wood is used to mount the plastic one after the other with special knots on the main string called mamma. It is important after some time the konts is well tightened so that the Liedna looks thicker and more professional. A knot must be made for each piece of plastic. Liedna is stored vertically so that the original shape remains the same.
<b>Marquetry</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2020		Although wood is the most material used with inlays, there are other materials used in this trade/tradtion such as bones, mother of pearl, ivory and other metals. The most common metal used are copper, pewter, and precious metals such as silver and semi-precious stones. Fine wood called veneer is used on which the paper pattern is attached, and then the pattern is cut with a very thin saw bow. The pieces are then

			<p>put together in place, like a jigsaw puzzle. When all the pieces are in place they are joined together and everything is glued on a base of wood, which forms the requested pattern. After the pattern is refined and polished.</p>
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# National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Malta

Entry number:

**03/2019**

Recommendation of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Board:

**NICH Board recommended that “Il-Festa Maltija: Ċelebrazzjoni Komunitarja Annwali (The Maltese Village Festa: an annual community celebration)” is inscribed on the National Inventory during the meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2018**

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

**Approved by the Culture Directorate on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

Date of entry into the Inventory:

**10<sup>th</sup> November 2019**



Director Culture  
Culture Directorate

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

Il-Festa Maltija: Ċelebrazzjoni Komunitarja Annwali  
(The Maltese Village Festa: An Annual Community Celebration)

## 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

The festa relies almost entirely on the efforts of volunteers throughout the year. Community members are organised through various formal and informal associations and organizations,



namely band clubs, lay confraternities, street decorations groups and fireworks groups which include:

- Members of lay confraternities help with the decoration of the church, rituals and sometimes also the carrying of the statue;
- Musicians and choir singers (members of band clubs);
- Volunteer artisans including carpenters, steel-workers, painters, tailors, pyrotechnicians and electricians working under the voluntary associations and organizations

People of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds including parish residents, visitors from other towns, foreign residents and tourists attend the *festa* celebrations.

#### 4. Location of practice and transmission

The Maltese village Festa is found in a large number of towns and villages around Malta and Gozo. While the festi are intrinsically bound to local and sub-local identities it is also a focal point of identification for Maltese overseas and attracts a large number of visitors. The festi are wholly organised by local volunteer members of the community including firework manufacturers, band club musicians, street decoration artisans and members of lay confraternities .

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

Festas are held mainly between the months of June and October, although there are a few exceptions. Every town and village has at least one patron saint, and this serves as the basis for the feast. On the appointed time of the year, that town or village will festoon the streets with statues and banners dedicated to the saint, and throughout the entire week, locals and visitors turn up in droves to enjoy the festivities including a mixture of solemn religious rituals as well as processions and forms of joyous street celebrations.

Band marches are an integral part of the celebration. The local band performs festa favourites, many of which will be composed by local maestros. As they march through the streets and towards the church, the crowds follow behind.

The ceremonial highlight of any festa is the carrying of the statue. Festa devotees vie for the privilege of hoisting the statue out of the church and onto a prominent place in the town or village square. This is usually accompanied by a roaring crowd cheering them on. The *festa* is also the central event for local pyrotechnic enthusiasts. A number of firework 'shows' are organised for the festa. These normally involve petards (*murtali*), colourful fireworks that light up the night sky, and *ġigġifogu* or ground fireworks – elaborate structures that produce dazzling spinning displays of sound and colour.

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

Although in the 1960s some feared that public enthusiasm for the *festa* would decline, efforts of community members have kept it vibrant, assisted by the rise of the tourist economy and a decline in Maltese out-migration. In spite of the popularity of the festa a number of risks or challenges are currently present and need to be tackled for safeguarding purposes. These include:

(a) Meeting environmental, health, access and safety requirements as the popularity of festa increases.

(b) The decline in popularity of certain instruments integral to festa music.

(c) Higher costs associated with the organisation of the festa.

(d) Attracting new generations of volunteers.

(e) Increasing urban development has meant that less public space has become available for the setting up of street decorations and the spaces for the safe detonation of fireworks.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in the cancellation of most *festi*, music lessons and fundraising activities. This had many repercussions for the community. People spoke of a certain 'void' and 'emptiness' in community life that without the 'festa season' it feels like Summer had not even taken place.

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

The musical aspects of the festa are largely transmitted through the free teaching provided by means of the band clubs. Band clubs provide free classes to musicians and choir singers. They also provide the musical instrument for tuition and performance purposes. Aspiring musicians will then join in the festa with the marching bands. Other aspects of the tradition such as the craftwork behind street decorations are generally transmitted from one generation to the next through informal learning as volunteers learn the associated crafts as they prepare for the festa assisting more experienced members.

Licensed pyrotechnicians take on apprentices in the fireworks factories who learn the techniques, formulas and safety procedures for the production and controlled explosion of fireworks under strict supervision. This includes the production and choreography of static fireworks (*nar ta' l-art*) as well as spectacular aerial displays (*nar ta' l-ajru*).

In some instances involvement in festa organisation and preparation is transmitted along familial lines with the presence and activity of the same family members going back decades and decades, if not centuries. Lay members of confraternities and statue carriers also learn on the job through informal apprenticeship (often within families). The young tend to follow the example set by the senior members of the family and most of them readily follow in their footsteps. Such activities tend to become a part and parcel of the family activity. In large part this is all non-remunerative activity and relies on the enthusiasm of the community members. The involvement of youths in all festas is essential in guaranteeing a future for this tradition. Youths are present in the actual organisation of the yearly event, and through their diverse skills especially in media and technology. Nowadays the introduction of kids' clubs and the children's festa has created a better understanding of how to instil voluntary commitment amongst all ages.

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

Churches, Warehouses (mħażen), Band Clubs, Firework Factories

## 9. Safeguarding measures: past, present and future

In the last twenty years, 'Children's *festi*' and kid's clubs were established to attract more young participants. *Festa* associations set up over 20 community radio stations promoting *festa* music and events. In 2018, band clubs partnered with the University of Malta to provide

avenues for formal accreditation through the creation of a Diploma in Wind Band Studies. Historical scores using less popular musical instruments (e.g. Euphonium, oboe) were adapted so that musicians can continue to play local bandmasters' compositions.

*Festa* associations now face rising costs in maintaining premises, meeting new operational requirements, and supporting voluntary activities. In addition to their other fundraising activities (see 1(ii)), they license local businesses to supply food and drink on their premises. This promotes the link between traditional local foods (such as nougat) and the *festa*.

*Festa* organisations have adapted their traditions where needed to guarantee environmental sustainability and public safety and reduce disturbance in increasingly populous locations. They have also drafted agreements to reduce conflicts between rival *festa* groups.

The Maltese Pyrotechnics Association helped to develop state regulations prohibiting the use of Ammonium Perchlorate, thus reducing accidents.

Organisations have highlighted the increased financial challenges they face as a result of the restrictions resulting from the pandemic in 2020. Organisations carried out as much of their activities as possible while respecting health authority regulations. These included virtual music lessons by band clubs, the maintenance of older street decorations from the homes of individual artisans as well as virtual fundraising events. The state has launched a number of schemes in order to assist *festa* organizations affected by the pandemic closures.

*Festa* organizations have agreed to work with the planned ICH Directorate for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and with other ICH communities in discussions about mitigating the impact of inscription and COVID-19 on the *festa* and other ICH in Malta. A few safeguarding activities may be postponed to 2022 because of the impact of the pandemic.

As a result of the community consultation exercise carried out over the file the need for a greater promotion and dissemination of locally composed band club music was highlighted as well as the emphasis that locally produced nougat continues to be available during the *festa*.

The following safeguarding measures have been agreed:

In 2021 through a Public Relations Campaign the National Band Clubs Association will encourage individual band clubs to promote the playing of traditional band club music on their premises, rather than popular music.

In March 2021 the National Band Club Association together with the Kottonera Foundation will be launching a national band music competition to encourage new local composers to compose band club marches using traditional instruments to be played during the *festa*.

In May 2021, in compliance with COVID-19 regulations, the National Association of Band Clubs in collaboration with the Kottonera Foundation, will hold a 'National Band Festival'. The Festival will include various paid performances by band clubs in a number of public squares in the Kottonera area outside the *festa* season, to support these clubs. Participants will be selected through an open call among band clubs that participate in the *festa*.

*Festa* organisations and local councils have agreed to coordinate planning work on policing, bye-laws or public works that affect *festa* street decorations or routes. Band clubs and street decoration associations have planned a series of meetings in 2021 with the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, in order to discuss ways to enable better access to people with disabilities in accordance with Chapter 413 Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disabilities) Act and the implementation of the 2016 United Nations Convention on the Rights

of Persons with Disability.

In 2022, through a collaboration with the Malta Arts School, band clubs will be promoting musical education in less popular instruments including the provision for funds to support teaching and learning with them.

In 2022 the National Band Club Association, with support from the Ministry of Culture and the University of Malta, will hold a National Conference on the 'Safeguarding of the Maltese *Festa*'. The aim of the conference is to promote research on the safeguarding of the *festa* across a variety of sectors. Panellists will present research assessing the impact of inscription in the National Inventory identifying challenges and providing recommendations to stakeholders on the safeguarding of the *festa*.

Fireworks associations are investigating different kinds of fireworks in order to ensure that they can be detonated safely in more urbanized areas. In order to support the firework organisations the Malta Police Force will be escorting the fireworks from the warehouses to the detonation sites in order to meet health and safety regulations as of 2021.

*Festa* organisations and local councils have agreed to promote traditional food vendors, such as nougat sellers, in allocating the best spots closest to band clubs and the church

The State allocated funding in the 2021 budget for measures supporting the *festa* including funding to *festa* organisations, including funding for the purchase of musical instruments particularly the less popular ones, health and safety upgrades for fireworks factories and the upgrading and restoration of band club premises.

The Ministry will establish a Directorate for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage as part of its 2021 programme. The Directorate will help to monitor and evaluate the impact of inscription of *festa* and other ICH elements and provide a platform for stakeholder consultation. The Directorate will also provide a consultative organ for any future projects which may impact the *festa* and monitor the impact of safeguarding measures on *festa* and other ICH elements.

The Directorate will work with educational institutions to develop formal learning opportunities and accreditation for *festa* related arts and crafts. The draft Cultural Policy supports musical education in band clubs, including less popular instruments.

The State will assist *festa* organizations in developing sustainable solutions for the continued use of their existing premises, in the face of rising property prices and uncertain property title claims. It is currently engaged in discussion with stakeholders to find an equitable solution to this problem.

Local councils will facilitate greater coordination among street decoration associations and any public works contractors to help protect street decoration practices.

The Valletta Culture Agency will include band club performances in events promoting the regeneration of Valletta outside the *festa* season

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

Għaqda Nazzjonali Każini tal-Banda (National Organization of Band Clubs), Malta Pyrotechnics Association, Malta Council of the Arts, street decoration associations informal volunteer organisations setting up street decorations, lay confraternities, Local Councils,

**11. Additional information.**

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Grima, J.F. (2019) "Band Clubs in Malta; Origins and Development" and "List of Band Clubs in the Maltese Islands", in Bonello G. & Borg Cardona A. (Eds), *Music in Malta – from Prehistory to Vinyl*, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti [Foundation of Maltese Heritage], Progress Press: Malta.

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Vella Bondin, J. (2016) *The Great Maltese Composers – Historical Context, Lives and Works*, APS Bank Publication: Malta

**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**

During 2019, community involvement in the preparation of the inventory file provided information for the nomination process.

In February 2019 the National Organization of Band Clubs (GĦNKB) established an ad-hoc committee (10 men, 1 woman) to define the element for the inventory. The committee met on 15/2/2019, 8/3/2019, 26/4/2019, 31/5/2019, 13/9/2019, 16/12/2019. They incorporated feedback from band club members, festa decoration artisans, members of confraternities, pyrotechnicians and the general public. On 25/4/2019 Mr Mario Coleiro, chairman of the 'Committee of the External *Festa*' of St Venera, submitted an expression of interest for inclusion of *festa* on the National Inventory.

Following these consultations, the GĦNKB submitted a National Inventory application on 25/09/2019. The application was circulated to male and female members of confraternities, firework producers and street decoration associations.

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

The *festa* community was one of the first groups pressing the Ministry of Culture in 2014 to ratify the UNESCO convention, and inscribe *festa* on the UNESCO Representative List. In response, the Minister appointed a committee to evaluate this idea, comprising 6 people (3 men and 3 women) from academia and state agencies. A national conference was then held to promote research and understanding about the Maltese *festa*, at which community members gave presentations about various aspects of the *festa* including fireworks, decorations, music and cultural significance. On 3 February 2018, the Culture Directorate began a broader public awareness campaign on the implementation of the UNESCO 2003 convention, where the nomination of *festa* was further discussed. A meeting on inventorying and nominations from 16-19 July 2018 included *festa* organisations and experts, staff from the Cultural Directorate and academics from the University of Malta.

**15. Dates of updating and details updated****File updated on:**

10/11/2019 File was updated with further ethnographic detail.

15/01/2021 File was updated with further information on the safeguarding section of the element following community consultations and the impact of the cancellation of the *festi* in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic including proposed safeguarding measures (See 8).