

The Successful Promotion of Intangible Heritage in the Hamlet of Santa Luċija in Kerċem, Gozo

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Introduction

The hamlet of Santa Luċija lies to the west of Victoria, the capital city of Gozo just 2.25 kilometres away from It-Tokk, the centre of the city. This hamlet encompasses within its confines what is probably the first human settlement in Malta and Gozo. Truly, the establishment of the first settlements around 5000 B.C. makes this village a pioneer in civilisation and social development in the Maltese Islands.

Location

The place has a host of unique natural and historic attractions. In a 1667 Census, Santa Luċija (then known as Santa Caterina) is documented as a major district under which there were the smaller principalities of Dwejra, Għajn Abdun, Għar Ilma, ta' Kerċem and San Lawrenz. Moreover, the first water aqueduct in 1843 serving the capital Rabat originated from Santa Luċija's own natural springs of Għajn Abdun and Għar Ilma. Also one should mention the *Banda Tad-Dudi*, which is regarded as Malta's first organised string band. In addition, contrastingly to current urban growth and development, Santa Luċija still remains a hamlet, having its own Chapel. Yet, it forms part of the Kerċem Parish and falls under the jurisdiction of the Kerċem Local Council.

Traditional Culture

Traditional culture is still predominant at the village of Santa Luċija. Traces of farming and lace-making are still highly evident. During the past years, farming involved young and old, males and females. Males usually worked out in the fields, while females were in charge of the farm animals that roamed in the yard or the fields at the back of the farmhouses. Families were self sufficient and produced all their vegetables, milk, cheese and meat all year round. In addition, from the 1850s

onwards, an increasing number of females engaged themselves in lace making. Lace, sold both locally and abroad, provided the family with a little extra income that proved to be providential when winter crops failed.



A traditional horse cart in the main village square of St. Luċija

Population Growth

Presently, Santa Luċija is experiencing a growth in population, brought about by a number of people taking up residence in the village. Moreover, it has become a popular location with foreigners who take up permanent residence there. In fact, a substantial amount of farmhouses have been converted in luxurious residences for both Maltese and foreign visitors.

Religious and Historical Heritage

To preserve and conserve the traditional and historical elements of the hamlet of Santa Luċija from the threats of the present population and urban growth, a foundation was setup to identify and promote past traditions of this locality. Since its inception in 2005, the Fondazzjoni Folkloristika Ta' Klula established itself with the sole purpose of revalorising and promoting the area of Santa Luċija through its intangible heritage. To achieve this objective three main activities are being organised on an annual basis, namely:

- *Bis-Saħħa* (A toast to Good Health), a wine festival with local wine, food and traditional dancing and music.
- *Ikla tan-Nanna* (Grandma's Dinner). This is a main event and consists of a 7-course meal of traditional ingredients, cooked locally and accompanied with local wine, folkloristic music, dancing and re-enactments of scenes from the past. The village piazza is decorated in the style of bygone years.
- *The Light Festival*. This is a winter festival that celebrates the Patron Saint of the Hamlet – Santa Luċija – Saint of Light. Young girls with garlands of lit candles on their head light the bonfire in the square. Brass Bands entertain the visitors who can also sample traditional food and local wine. The famous Santa Luċija Buns are distributed to people as they leave the church after the Service.

The events held in the hamlet attract a great number of visitors, both local and from overseas. The success of these activities encourages the foundation to continue in its endeavour to constantly seek assistance of historians and anthropologists and



The logo of the village of Kercem (*left*) and the hamlet of Santa Lucija (*right*).

other experts in local traditions and culture in order to keep these traditions authentic and alive.

Multiplier effects

Besides the organisation of events, Santa Luċija is proving to be a centre of preservation of its intangible heritage in other ways. Local elders of the village, through the promotion of traditional heritage by the Fondazzjoni Folkloristika Ta' Klula, have now been provided with an incentive to keep alive their culture and traditions of bygone years as they are encouraged to teach the younger generations their traditional recipes and cooking methods, and their local crafts. These traditional components are then promoted again during the activities held by the Foundation. The typical way of life is also being re-lived through various social and religious gatherings that are being organised, thus safeguarding the locality's heritage and traditional elements including rural wedding ceremonies, the *Vjalku* (Holy Communion) procession and traditional games.

The rural dimension has been enhanced thanks to the utilisation of products that belong to the Maltese eno-gastronomic identity. The presentation of those products takes place in a typical rural scenario such as that of the streets of the locality. Participants in the events live a wholesome and comprehensive experience of rural life. The organisation of these events has created positive effects on the local farming community. Farmers are appreciating the benefits of multi-functionality of agriculture in that it, apart from the production of crops, may serve as a tourist attraction or as an environmental asset.

Truly, the high assortment of activities, which this hamlet presents, together with its unique historical legacy, has presented a picture, which various





The logos in connection with the European Destinations of Excellence project for Tourism and Intangible Heritage.

visitors to Santa Luċija would never forget. In addition, the involvement of the majority of residents of Santa Luċija has brought about a very positive social impact. The population now has common objectives, activities and missions to achieve. They share more than what they previously used to share and new elements have been brought to the social dynamics of the village. The risk of isolation and exclusion is limited because the events are always organised in the village and all the people make a useful contribution to the events.

Such initiatives also contribute to sustainable development since they serve to preserve Santa Luċija's traditional assets for present and future generations. Truly, Santa Luċija integrates perfectly with the perception of the Gozitan Island as an Eco Island, as it is unique from ecological and traditional points of views.

A European Destination of Excellence for Tourism and Intangible Heritage

In July 2008 the hamlet of Santa Luċija in Kerċem was selected as one of the European Destinations of Excellence for Tourism and Intangible Heritage through a project co-financed by the European Commission. This year's project rewarded localities that through the years ably succeed in promoting intangible heritage and in attracting tourists interested in history and culture. The success in winning this prestigious award is seen as a stepping stone for Santa Luċija itself to establish its locality on the European map.

The award also confirms the Fondazzjoni's professionalism in planning and organising events to help conserve traditions and to involve the people of the hamlet in participating in these activities thus passing on traditions to the younger generation. Thanks to its efforts and those of the local population, it has succeeded in expanding the knowledge of the locality's authentic intangible heritage both locally and abroad. This has helped to enhance the quality of life for the older and younger generations alike and has promoted the hamlet of Santa Luċija as an attractive destination.

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