

S4.3 WORK, LEISURE AND CELEBRATIONS

S4.3.3 Let us compare modern leisure activities with those of the past.

A. Read the following:

It's not easy to imagine life in the past. Sometimes it is really difficult to picture how different life was then. We have to think really hard to be able to step into our ancestors' shoes. Imagine a world without electricity, television and computers.

Let us watch this video about life in Malta in the thirties, that is, about 80 years ago.

Video: <http://youtu.be/5IIVnjAcQrk>

After you watch the video, answer the following questions:

1. Which means of transport did the Maltese rich people use in those days, instead of cars?

2. What did most Maltese women wear then?

3. What did the majority of men wear?

4. How did they make sure that the milk they bought was fresh?

5. Which animals were seen most on the streets in those days?

B. Let's read the following together.

N.B. This text is not to be studied by heart. Let's enjoy reading it and learning about our past.

How was life a long time ago?

What hobbies did people have? Why did people have those hobbies?

Let's compare old and modern hobbies.

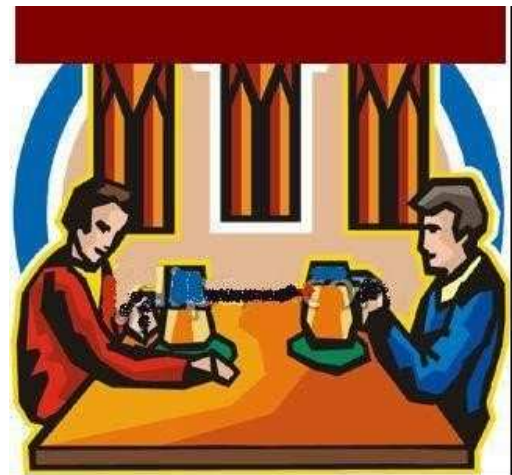


Man has always tried to find different ways of spending his leisure time. In olden days, people had a lot of hobbies, amongst which were folk singing, horse racing, feasts, fishing, hunting, going to the local bars, tombola (indoor hobbies, outdoor ones and seaside hobbies), etc.

People used to have these hobbies because, in the past, there wasn't any television, or cinema, or radio, or computer to play with. There weren't even certain types of modern sports like for example, car racing. However, today, one can still find some of the old hobbies, even though we now have these other modern pastimes. Some hobbies have remained the same whilst others, like for example, the way we celebrate feasts, have changed slightly.

LOCAL BARS

In the evening, in those days, people would go down to the local bar, or sit outside on their doorsteps, and pass the evening talking about anything that came to mind. Naturally sometimes they would also end up folk singing. Someone would bring out a guitar and the traditional 'żafżafa' (one of the instruments that was so popular with Maltese folk singers) and on they'd go. The folk singer used to attract the most attention.



Today, we still find places where we can while away the time. A lot of people go to different types of clubs. Nowadays, it's not only the men who go out to have fun and socialise. Women go out too.

Traditional singing, modern music.

Singing can be both a way of having fun and a way of getting information. Folk singing used to be about day to day life, or about a local or national historical event



or about a local legend. Singing would make the story more enjoyable. Apart from singing about actual happenings, some folk singers used to invent impromptu songs, that is, someone would suggest a topic and they would invent rhyming songs about it there and then, without any previous preparation.

Though nowadays we listen mostly to modern music, folk singing is still popular in some Maltese villages. In the past, folk singing was the showcase of life in Malta. In certain villages there used to be a lot of folk singing on the eve of the village feast. At Mellieħa, for example, on the eve of the feast of our Lady of Victory, the singing used to carry on into the early hours of the following morning. Today, folk singers are not so easily found in our streets and clubs. However, there is still a good sized group of enthusiasts. It's a really good thing that this type of music and folk singing is once again gaining in popularity and respect.

The Department of Culture is now organising a folk song festival. People's interest is growing, and when we see children and youths competing, we are encouraged to continue practising these traditions which have become part of our cultural heritage.

Nowadays, one can even buy videos and cassettes with Maltese folk singing. Maltese people send these videos and cassettes to their relatives who are living abroad. Maltese people sing by the seaside, in halls, on the radio, on

television, on the feast of St. Gregory, the Ascension, on the eve of the feast of Our Lady of Victory and under the trees at Buskett on the eve of 'L-Imnarja'. Traditionally, these songs were sung during boring work: by farmers during harvest time, at sea during fishing and by the washer women whilst scrubbing away at their clothes.

Music today is still very popular. Whilst a lot of youths learn how to play the piano, or a musical instrument at the local band club, others take singing lessons. There are many more children's song festivals now.

ANIMAL RACES

On the 29th June we celebrate the feast of 'L-Imnarja'. Even nowadays, people enjoy going to Buskett near Ir-Rabat. Animal races used to be held, in the afternoon, among



other things. There used to be races with donkeys, mules, mares, horses (galloping and trotting). The winners used to be given the famous 'palju', about 2 and a half metres long, hung with damask. At Victoria, in Gozo, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, animal races are held too.

The following are some of the customs commonly related to Maltese feasts and which form part of our folklore:

- ❖ **The Regatta** - a boat race held at the Grand Harbour on the 8th of September, the feast of our Lady of Victory.
- ❖ **Village Feasts:** with valances, ornamental flags, bands, band stands, fireworks, nougat stands, the translocation (a procession held on the feast's eve), the panegyric (a long sermon on the morning of the feast), band marches, merry-making, ground and air fireworks, church and street decorations.
- ❖ Wine and merry-making on 'L-Imnarja', especially at Buskett.
- ❖ **Processions** and pageants on Good Friday and Christmas.
- ❖ All of this used to take place in the past and still does today, maybe in a more professional way.



FISHING

Fishing can be, either a person's occupation or just a hobby. People who take up fishing as a hobby are called amateurs. They spend long hours fishing with their fishing rods, especially in summer. Others go out in small motorised boats to fish with a rod or with a line and feather.



Maltese fishermen live mostly in seaside villages, like Marsaxlokk. Now there are also divers who catch big fish such as perch.

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

Due to the Maltese Islands' location in the middle of the Mediterranean, between Europe and Africa, bird migration has always interested us. Maltese people have



always liked and shown an interest in birds. Their appearance and disappearance, depending on the season, has fascinated people since ancient times. One cannot but mention bird hunting and trapping as one of the most popular hobbies among Maltese men.



Before, there weren't any regulations about hunting and trapping. Everyone used to go hunting or trapping according to the amount of free time that they had. However, nowadays we have a lot of rules about hunting and trapping because many birds and

fowl are becoming harder to find.

For example:

- ❖ The robin and a lot of other birds are protected, that is, they cannot be caught;
- ❖ Bird trapping and hunting isn't allowed outside the hunting season;
- ❖ A lot of birds of prey are protected by law, that is, they cannot be shot; like for example, the eagle and the barn owl;

- ❖ Trapping and hunting isn't allowed in public areas or in bird sanctuaries like Buskett and Salina;
- ❖ Trapping and hunting after 13:00 isn't allowed on Sundays or public holidays.

A hobby which is quite modern, that is which didn't exist in the past, is birdwatching. Everyone can take up this hobby, anywhere and all year round. Just by watching them, one can note every action, every tiny movement, every birdsong, without actually harming the birds. Through observation, one can learn about bird behaviour, their favourite food, their nests, how they feed and raise their nestlings, how they fly and migrate, when and where they can be seen, their habitat and a lot of other interesting facts about different birds.



Children and free time



In olden days, children had their own games. Since there was no electricity, most activity used to stop at sunset. Children used to spend a lot of time playing outdoors. They used to play with marbles and beads, hide and seek, hopscotch, and 'xixu'. In summer they used to fly their kite, also known as 'the pigeon'. They also used to make boats out of prickly pear leaves.

CONCLUSION - we can say that nowadays, there are many new hobbies which never existed in the past. For example there are the large amounts of games that children play on their computer. Other hobbies have changed and are practised differently today. It is however a fact, that hobbies help people relax.