

WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION – IUCN COMMENTS TO ICOMOS

TALAYOTIC MENORCA, A CYCLOPEAN ISLAND ODYSSEY (SPAIN)

IUCN considered this cultural landscape nomination based on a desk review of the nomination dossier and a wide range of studies to provide inputs to ICOMOS on the site's natural values. The nominated property is located on the island of Menorca, the eastern most island in the Balearic archipelago, and contains nine components parts totalling 3,527 ha. The component parts are embedded within two buffer zones covering almost one third of the entire island.

The cultural landscape of the nominated property combines cultural, spiritual, aesthetic and natural values. The mosaic landscape of prehistoric times is relatively similar to the landscape that nowadays includes the cyclopean buildings. Menorca hosts a rich bio- and geodiversity, including 35 geo-sites. It is marked by two distinct geological and geomorphological regions – the Tramuntana in the north shaped by predominantly siliceous rock, the oldest bedrock in the Balearic archipelago, showing a high geodiversity; and the Migjorn in the south, with a relatively flat topographical layout that slopes gradually toward the coast. According to the nomination dossier, the different geological formations of the area and its geomorphological and edaphic configuration provide keys to understanding the process of occupation and selective use of the territory, as well as the organisation of the system of settlements throughout the island's prehistory. Ravines in the south have served as reservoirs for biodiversity due to their limited accessibility.

The nominated property overlaps with the Menorca Biosphere Reserve (MBR), which was designated in 1993. Except for one component part the nominated property is located inside the Reserve's buffer and transition zones. The Menorca Biosphere Reserve is part of one of the primary hotspots for biodiversity in the Mediterranean, and as an insular ecosystem, some of this biodiversity is exclusive to the island. Menorca boasts over 1,400 taxa of vascular plants, out of which 89 are endemics. These include the Critically Endangered Vessa (*Vicia bifoliolata*) the Endangered *Halictus microcardia* and Dafne menorquí (*Daphne rodriguezii*), as well as the Vulnerable *Thymelaea velutina*. The Endangered Lilford's wall lizard (*Podarcis lilfordi*) went extinct on the main island due to introduced species. It has only survived on the islets that surround Menorca, undergoing a process of evolutionary radiation that has divided the species into several subspecies. Important insects include the Critically Endangered Apid den Bermejo (*Apium bermejoii*), the Endangered *Neoascia balearensis*, and the Vulnerable Balearic Saddle Bush-cricket (*Parasteropleurus balearicus*). The Biosphere Reserve also hosts substantial populations of birds of prey, seabirds and waterbirds, as well as a wide variety of passerine bird species. Consequently, three Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are located on Menorca Island hosting the Critically Endangered Balearic Shearwater (*Puffinus mauretanicus*) the Endangered Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), and the Audouin's Gull (*Larus audouinii*).

The two most common types of permanent forests on Menorca are holm oak and wild olive. Balearic holm oak forest (*Cyclamini-Quercetum ilicis*) is considered an endemic variation. The holm oak forests on Menorca show singular characteristics due to the presence of certain endemisms (*Cyclamen balearicum*, *Paeonia cambessedesii*) and the frequency of other species that are rare in other regions. Permanent forests of wild olive (*Olea europaea* var. *sylvestris*) have developed their own variant (*Prasio-Oleetum sylvestris*). The nomination dossier sees the survival of wild olive forests in Menorca is a top priority on both an ecological and a landscape level, given that these forest communities have been destroyed in large parts of the European Mediterranean.

Most of the monumental structures and archaeological sites on Menorca have been declared Properties of Cultural Interest (BIC) which is the highest level of protection under Spanish national and regional legislation. Most of the archaeological sites included in the nominated property are privately owned. 65% of the nominated property overlap with various designations for nature conservation, such as Natural Parks, Nature Areas of Special Interest (ANEI) and the Natura 2000 Network. Apart from protected areas, the land of the nominated property (both components and buffer zones) is classified as rural or undeveloped, and therefore new residential, tourist, industrial, logistics and urban facilities and services are prohibited. Nevertheless, threats to IBAs include human intrusions and disturbance, invasive species, and residential and commercial developments, besides general threats to the property posed by climate change, increasing tourism and livestock grazing.

The nominated property appears to benefit from an effective Management Plan and Management System, consolidated through the nomination process. A Monitoring program has also been implemented for the Menorca Biosphere Reserve.