
The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route (Azerbaijan)

No 1696

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route

Location

Guba District, Gusar District, Shamakhi District, Gobustan District, Absheron District, and Hajigabul District
Azerbaijan

Brief description

The nominated property is a continuing cultural landscape comprised of the high-mountain Khinalig village in the Guba District of northern Azerbaijan, high-altitude summer pastures and agricultural terraces in the Greater Caucasus Mountains, winter pastures in the lowland plains in central Azerbaijan, and the connecting 200-kilometre-long seasonal transhumance route called Köç Yolu (“Migration Route”). The village of Khinalig is home to the semi-nomadic Khinalig people, whose culture and lifestyle are defined by the seasonal vertical migration between summer and winter pastures, and who retain the ancient way of long-distance vertical transhumance. The organically evolved network of ancient routes, land-use features, temporary pastures and camping sites, irrigation systems, springs and wells, mausoleums, mosques, cemeteries, bridges, and infrastructure for animal husbandry illustrate a sustainable eco-social system adapted to extreme and diverse environmental conditions that has served to build and retain transhumance as the dominant economy.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

In terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (2021), paragraph 47, it has also been nominated as a *cultural landscape*.

Included in the Tentative List

15 June 2020 as “Khinalig – medieval mountainous village”

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

Comments on the natural attributes of this nominated property, their conservation, and their management were received from IUCN on 8 December 2022 and have been incorporated into relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 21 to 29 August 2022.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 3 October 2022 requesting further information about the description of the nominated property, comparative analysis, factors affecting the nominated property, protection, and management.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 7 November 2022.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 21 December 2022 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the Interim Report, including the comparative analysis, documentation, boundaries, management, legal protection, and conservation.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 28 February 2023.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2023

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

The nominated property is a continuing cultural landscape associated with the semi-nomadic Khinalig people. It embraces three key areas: the mountain village of Khinalig and high-altitude summer pastures (*yaylaqs*) in the Greater Caucasus Mountains; winter pastures (*qishlaqs*) in the lowland plains of central Azerbaijan; and the connecting transhumance route, called Köç Yolu (“Migration Route”).

The culture, language, belief system, and lifestyle of the Khinalig people are closely tied to and defined by their living environment. This is manifested through their deeply embedded local transhumant customs and traditions, their

micro-toponyms and division of pastures, and their profound knowledge of natural resources.

Animal husbandry has historically been the main economic activity of the Khinalig people. The traditional model of Khinalig transhumance involves four to six families forming a small production unit and together herding their flocks within the defined borders of ancestral pasture plots. Summer pastures (*yaylaqs*) occupy 8,783 hectares of alpine and subalpine meadows, in addition to communal pastures surrounding the village of Khinalig. When at these pastures, the shepherds and their families live in temporary tents (*alaçiq*) organised around an animal resting area (*arxac*) at the core of each pasture. The winter pastures occupy more than 22,000 hectares across the districts of Hajigabul and Absheron in central Azerbaijan. Here, the shepherd families live from autumn to spring in partially underground *qazma* houses and organise production in *yataqs*, areas within winter pastures where the residential and supporting buildings of various purposes are concentrated.

The 200-kilometre-long Kõç Yolu route connects the summer and winter pastures. Notable for its climatic and ecosystem diversity, the route crosses the administrative districts of Guba, Shamakhi, Gobustan, Absheron, and Hajigabul. The width of the path varies from several hundred metres to about fifty metres, depending on the geographical features. There are numerous cultural monuments along the route, including ancient cemeteries, shrines, caravanserais, bridges, and mosques, as well as natural features, some of which are considered sacred. Together, they illustrate the uses of the territory by these semi-nomadic people and the traditional knowledge associated with movement and the route, all of which are deeply embedded in their ethnocultural identity. As the main pathway used by the transhumant people of Azerbaijan today, Kõç Yolu brings together shepherds and flocks from Khinalig as well as neighbouring villages, and bears great significance for the transmission of knowledge, values, and social norms, in addition to material goods.

Agricultural activities such as growing crops on the terraced mountain slopes (about 160 hectares) had once also played a vital role in the Khinalig subsistence economy. Modernisation has enabled access to imported agricultural products and has rendered this labour-intensive local agriculture obsolete, leading to new uses for the traditional agricultural terraces such as growing fodder and beekeeping. However, the terraces as well as the gravity-fed irrigation systems for pastures and hayfields remain important evidence of adaptation to the local natural conditions.

The village of Khinalig is the main architectural component of the nominated property. Erected on steep terrain, the layout of the village, planning, and tiered architecture are well-adapted to extreme slopes. The morphology of the medieval village represents the efficient use of scarce local resources. The traditional Khinalig houses are built with local stone; the flat roofs, covered with a layer of earth, are used as social spaces. Characteristic of the residential

houses are wooden verandas, which once were open but have been enclosed over time with modern glass windows. The interiors are simple and functional, with niches in the walls for storage, small openings (*muroqs*) in the roof for light and ventilation, handmade carpets for decoration, and clay and straw plastering being the traditional elements.

The village remains the core of Khinalig social and cultural organisation and a vital cultural space for the survival of their ethnocultural identity, the transmission of the Khinalig language, as well as the ancient knowledge of transhumance. The Council of Elders, an informal decision-making body representing the ancient way of collective self-governance, still plays an important part in organising community affairs. Its role is particularly important in determining the fair use of communal pastures, planning and organising the seasonal process of transhumance, organising shared access to winter pastures, and managing village affairs.

The original boundaries of the nominated property as proposed in the nomination dossier had an area of 40,443.255 ha, and a buffer zone of 100,491.845 ha.

The Khinalig people, who speak a unique language, Khinalug, comprise a small but distinct group within the rich ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Caucasus. There are various hypotheses as to when the Khinalig people settled in the area. The structure of settling different clans in separate neighbourhoods (*məhəllə*) of the same village, local legends, and linguistic specificities suggest that the Khinalig people, who refer to themselves as *Kəttid*, once resettled here from their original (unknown) habitat. There is no information, however, on whether the village of Khinalig had been founded, named, and inhabited by a different ethnocultural group prior to the arrival of Khinalig people.

Archaeological excavations reveal that the area of the village has been occupied since the Early Bronze Age. The typology of burial places and discovered artefacts at archaeological sites near the village of Khinalig are characteristic of this period. One of these sites is considered to be the first kurgan burial mound and settlement types discovered in this part of the Greater Caucasus, and thus they are important testimonies to the cultural and socio-political links with the wider region. The network of mountain paths used by the transhumant herders today also illustrates the historical connections of the village of Khinalig to other parts of the Greater Caucasus Mountains.

Under this name, written sources first mention the village of Khinalig in the 13th century. They point to its important role as a centre of Islamic education and literacy in the region. Throughout the political and administrative transformations in the Middle Ages, the Khinalig people maintained relative social and political autonomy, thanks to their remote highland location. At the same time, they had to negotiate with different political powers to maintain access to winter pastures. The changing political and socio-economic situation as well as the sedentarisation policies imposed by

the Russian Empire in the 19th century forced many peoples in Azerbaijan to abandon their traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle. The Khinalig people are one of the few ethnocultural groups in the region to have maintained the ancient semi-nomadic way of life and still practice transhumance today.

State of conservation

The nominated property suffers from the negative effects of development and neglect. Many of the key architectural, infrastructural, and landscape elements of the nominated property are in a poor state of conservation. The buildings, morphology, street network, and public spaces in the village of Khinalig are in severe need of maintenance, conservation, and restoration. State-funded restoration actions have been implemented in Khinalig village in recent years, but they are not considered suitable for traditional masonry structures since these interventions are based on the use of reinforced concrete and other inappropriate modern materials.

Interventions with modern materials, additions to buildings, and changes to roofs are common throughout the village to improve austere living conditions. A modern development in the valley immediately below the medieval village stands out through its contrasting morphological, architectural, and design character.

The infrastructural and architectural elements along the Kõç Yolu route require restoration and conservation, including springs and wells, cemeteries, mausoleums, camping places, places for washing and vaccinating animals, and drystone walls dividing grazing areas. The historical access routes, which have largely been replaced by modern roads, need careful documentation and marking. Landscape features such as water management systems, summer and winter pastures, and agricultural terraces also require comprehensive conservation measures to reduce or prevent land erosion caused by over-irrigation and overgrazing.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation of the nominated property is fair and fragile, though it recognises and appreciates the ongoing efforts made by the State Party to improve this situation.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are climate change, natural hazards, and anthropogenic pressures. Floods, flash floods, and earthquakes are common in the area. The State Party acknowledges that the nominated property is vulnerable to and unprepared for natural disasters.

In terms of climate change, a lengthening dry season, declining water sources, land erosion, and desertification adversely affect both summer and winter pastures, which

are vital elements for continuing transhumance by the Khinalig people. The output of the Khanjar spring that provides water to the village Khinalig has been gradually decreasing. Pirsaat River, which is the main water source for the winter pastures, has been drying up in summer during the last few years. Potable water in the wells is becoming saline or drying up. The Khinalig shepherds buy water for animals as well as for themselves during the drought season.

The deterioration of pastures is attributed to intensified animal husbandry and the neglect of traditional grazing techniques. Overgrazing and over-irrigation accelerate surface erosion, salinisation, the collapse of the soil layer, landslides, and desertification.

As confirmed by the State Party, the process of sedentarisation among the Khinalig community has been going on for years and continues today. Twelve Khinalig families are reported to have abandoned transhumance in 2021. Emigration is another trend reported by the State Party that impacts the community. The unlawful private cultivation of parts of the state-owned route adds difficulties to the seasonal migration and forces the transhumant shepherds to transport their flocks by truck over disputed segments of the route. Increased tourism may also adversely impact local culture and lifestyle.

In response to a request for additional information sent by ICOMOS in October 2022, the State Party provided clarifications in November on its plans to address some of these issues. Improving the legal framework is a key strategy to support communal semi-nomadic animal husbandry. Participatory land-use monitoring and planning measures are also being considered, as well as improvement of the water infrastructure, construction of a forty-five-kilometre-long water supply system in the winter pastures, provision of agrarian insurance and financial assistance for transhumant herders, and prevention of desertification of the pastures by planting drought-resistant fodder. Most of these actions remain at the initial stage of planning and would require comprehensive implementation mechanisms and multi-stakeholder commitments to be effective in the long run.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is fair and fragile, and that factors affecting the nominated property are significant.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The nominated property is an exceptional living testimony to a transhumance cultural tradition practised from medieval times to the present by the Khinalig semi-nomadic people, as demonstrated by

the medieval Khinalig village, the 200-kilometre-long Kōç Yolu transhumance route, and winter and summer pastures with their temporary dwellings.

- The cultural landscape is an outstanding example of land use representing the continuous semi-nomadic Khinalig culture and its uninterrupted human interaction with the environment. It bears witness to a sustainable eco-social system and resilient economy adapted to extreme environmental conditions that have been developed through accumulated knowledge and insights about semi-nomadic animal husbandry as well as the geography of the landscape, vegetation, climate, and water resources.

Based on the nomination dossier, the key attributes of the nominated property can be grouped as follows:

The village of Khinalig and the surrounding landscape of summer pastures and agricultural terraces; the socio-spatial organisation of the medieval village in neighbourhoods (*məhəllə*), its steep-slope morphology, tiered architecture, and public spaces; land-use features such as patterns of division, sharing, and spatial organisation of pastures and related infrastructure (*arxac*, *alaçiq*, etc.); the network of ancient routes; traditional irrigation systems; places of worship and shrines; and archaeological sites.

The architectural and infrastructural elements of the Kōç Yolu route, including springs and wells, temporary pastures and camping sites, cemeteries, mausoleums, bridges, and mosques.

The winter pastures and their infrastructure, including land-use features, the pattern of division of plots, and grazing areas with respective infrastructure for animal husbandry.

Important intangible attributes of the nominated property are the collective planning, organisation, and implementation of transhumance practices led by the Council of Elders, as manifested in the architectural, infrastructural, and landscape elements of the nominated property.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed on the grounds of traditional tiered architecture, roofs as shared public spaces and temporary stay areas; eco-social systems, including traditions ensuring optimal use of scarce land and water and adaptation to steep landscapes and extreme climates; transhumance as a living communal practice; living traditions, ethnographic and linguistic features; and profound knowledge of the territory, climate, and nature. It has examined properties within the country, the region, and throughout the world inscribed on the World Heritage List as well as other properties. The geo-cultural region is implied to be the Caucasus.

A brief examination of the area inhabited by the Shahdagh peoples, who include the Khinalig people, is followed by

an analysis of transhumance sites in north, north-west, west, central, and south Azerbaijan. Four high-mountain Caucasian villages in the Republic of Dagestan are subjected to more detailed comparisons. The State Party concludes that the compared sites within the Caucasus region have been damaged to a greater extent than the nominated property and do not demonstrate an equivalent continuity and complexity.

An analysis is also undertaken of transhumance sites in Central Asia. Several key differences are described between them and sites in the Caucasus.

Seven properties inscribed on the World Heritage List are then compared: Cultural Landscape of Hawraman/Uramanat (Islamic Republic of Iran, 2021, criteria (iii) and (v)); The Causses and the Cévennes, Mediterranean agro-pastoral Cultural Landscape (France, 2011, criteria (iii) and (v)); Cultural Landscape of the Serra de Tramuntana (Spain, 2011, criteria (ii), (iv) and (v)); Madriu-Perafita-Claror Valley (Andorra, 2004, criterion (v)); Laponian Area (Sweden, 1996, criteria (iii), (v), (vii), (viii) and (ix)); Orkhon Valley Cultural Landscape (Mongolia, 2004, criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv)); and Upper Svaneti (Georgia, 1996, criteria (iv) and (v)). None are considered by the State Party to have the combination of a complete and continuous communal transhumance practice, adaptation to harsh high-altitude natural conditions, traditional built heritage, continuity of eco-social system, and continuity of unique cultural traditions as in the nominated property.

ICOMOS observed in October 2022 that information from the Tentative Lists of other States Parties could possibly clarify ways in which the nominated property might stand out. In response, the State Party submitted a revised comparative analysis in November 2022 with additional cultural and mixed properties from the Tentative Lists: Apatani Cultural Landscape (India); Mardin Cultural Landscape (Türkiye); Mesta Livestock trails (Spain); Mta-Tusheti (Georgia); Shatili (Georgia); The Historical City of Masouleh (Islamic Republic of Iran); The Historical Village of Abyaneh (Islamic Republic of Iran); and Cultural Landscape of Ulytau (Kazakhstan).

In response to the ICOMOS Interim Report, the State Party, in February 2023, submitted an extended comparative analysis that included similar surviving vertical transhumance systems located in Dagestan and Georgia. Focusing on aspects such as communal management, the role of shepherd families, and the mainly subsistence character of transhumance, as well as the degree of preservation of predominantly pastoral land use, the Khinalig transhumance culture and living landscape was shown to stand out.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (iii) and (v).

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property bears exceptional living testimony to the long-distance vertical transhumance cultural tradition of the Khinalig people. The range of physical features across a great diversity of landscapes illustrates an adaptation to extreme climatic conditions and the resilience of semi-nomadic socio-economic structures based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property provides important evidence of the Khinalig cultural tradition of transhumance. A large number of physical elements have been transformed or altered or constructed over the last century. The traditional communal organisation of labour also changed during and after the Soviet period. The nominated property nevertheless demonstrates a significant degree of preservation of the ancestral semi-nomadic eco-social system and represents an exceptional living testimony to a cultural tradition of communal transhumance in the Caucasus geo-cultural region.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (iii) has been demonstrated.

Criterion (v): *be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property represents an outstanding example of sustainable land use reflecting the continuous semi-nomadic Khinalig transhumance culture. Animal husbandry has been formed as the dominant, resilient economy of the Khinalig people through their adaptation to diverse and extreme natural conditions.

The morphology of the medieval Khinalig village and the agricultural terraces testify to the efficient use of scarce land and other natural resources. The regular alternation of grazing plots in the summer and winter pastures allows optimal use of fodder resources while keeping the environmental risk factors such as erosion and overgrazing largely under control. The ancient water management techniques have provided access to drinking water for people and livestock as well as efficient irrigation of pastures.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property exhibits significant evidence of the traditional semi-nomadic transhumance culture and lifestyle of the Khinalig people.

The range of physical features across a great diversity of landscapes illustrates an adaptation to extreme environmental conditions and the resilience of semi-nomadic socio-economic structures based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (v) has thus been demonstrated.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (iii) and (v).

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The integrity of the nominated property is based on landscapes and cultural spaces of vital importance for the traditional practice of transhumance by the Khinalig people, including the village of Khinalig and its surrounding landscape, the summer and winter pastures, and the Köç Yolu route, as well as the supporting transhumance infrastructure. These constitute all the attributes necessary to convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

There are several issues, however, that negatively affect the integrity of the nominated property, particularly the intactness of the attributes that convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. Recent developments, public buildings, and infrastructure projects in the nominated property and buffer zone have been designed and built without adequate consideration of the cultural values of the nominated property. Changes in traditional land use, encroachment of land for farming along the migration route, residential developments, and architectural interventions in the village of Khinalig using modern materials have an impact on the integrity of the nominated property. The nominated property has nevertheless maintained its overall integrity to an adequate degree, though ICOMOS considers that it is highly vulnerable.

ICOMOS considers that the integrity of the nominated property has been demonstrated.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the nominated property is based on the general organisation of the winter and summer pastures with their seasonal camps, their spatial relationship to the village of Khinalig, and the route of seasonal migration with its key infrastructural elements. These remain generally authentic in terms of their forms and designs, materials and substance, uses and functions, locations and settings, traditions and management systems, and language and other forms of intangible heritage. Some changes, however, have had an impact on the authenticity of the nominated property, including new building extensions and roofs of modern materials in the medieval village; modern residential and infrastructural developments; new uses for traditional agricultural

terraces; and illegal cultivation of land by sedentary farmers along the migration route.

The provision of an improved access road in the 1960s and a new asphalt road in 2008 facilitated the widespread use of modern materials in all aspects of everyday life and seasonal transhumance. Modern means of transportation have also altered the role of women and related rituals along the migration route.

According to additional information sent in February 2023, in response to concerns raised by ICOMOS over the inappropriate restoration approach that has been adopted, the State Party launched an international cooperation project to develop and implement a model restoration project in 2023 following international best practices. It will serve as a local training opportunity and also guide planned legal amendments.

In additional information provided in November 2022, the State Party indicated that the present socio-spatial organisation of communal transhumance remains authentic despite the Soviet and post-Soviet era socio-economic reorganisation. Traditions of semi-nomadic communal life remain effective, and the Council of Elders continues to act as an informal self-governing body in charge of collective affairs such as the seasonal migration, turns for grazing, and shared use of water and pastures.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the nominated property, though vulnerable, has been demonstrated.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met, though they are highly vulnerable.

Boundaries

The estimated population of the nominated property is 1,357, and the buffer zone is 17,054. These figures do not take into account the changes that the revised boundaries might have generated.

The proposed boundaries of the nominated property enclose all the key attributes and diverse landscapes of the semi-nomadic life and the seasonal transhumance of the Khinalig people, including the medieval Khinalig village, the summer and winter pastures, and the Kōç Yolu route.

The boundaries of the buffer zone include the ethnically diverse mountain communities of Kryz, Haput, Alik, Jek, and Galaykhudat, as well as Adur, Qarkhun, Rük, Zeyid, and the Buduq Administrative Territorial Unit (comprised of Buduq, Daghestu, and Yalavaj), which were added by the State Party during the process of clarifying and extending the boundaries of the buffer zone in February 2023. All these villages share cultural values and practices with the Khinalig people and traditionally partner with them to migrate flocks to the winter pastures. Similar to the village of Khinalig, Kryz, Haput, Alik, Jek, Buduq, and Daghestu are each the ancient village of a single

minority of semi-nomadic people with unique ethnocultural and linguistic characteristics, although transhumance is now practised by them in a relatively sporadic manner.

The buffer zone also includes the villages along the Kōç Yolu route (Sohub, Gayadali, Yerfi, Nohurduzu, Gonagkend, Jimi, Garavulustu, Khaltan, Pirbayli, Khillilli, Garajuzlu, and Jeyrankechmaz) and around the winter pastures (Ranjbar, Gubalibaloghlan, Pirsaaatchay, and Pirsaat). Most of these are ancient villages that have historically had a close socio-economic connection with the transhumant peoples, resulting in cultural exchanges of belief systems, gastronomy, design, and crafts.

The boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone logically follow the key geomorphological features of the landscape – watersheds, rivers, and valleys – and are presented on topographical maps with coordinates. Additional cadastral maps provided by the State Party in February 2023 have indicated that, in some cases, the boundaries are inconsistent with cadastral plots. Also, the boundaries are not marked on the ground. This generates conflicts over land use along the migration route. The effective enforcement of the boundaries remains an issue yet to be resolved.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of the nominated property for the World Heritage List. The nominated property meets criteria (iii) and (v), and despite some specific concerns, overall the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

The inventory and documentation of the nominated property are partial. Only the buildings that have been selected for restoration are documented. Some information on the buildings in the village of Khinalig is documented on a map, submitted in the nomination dossier, that analyses their current condition.

There is no precise and detailed inventory and documentation of the attributes along the migration route and in the pastures, such as springs and wells, cemeteries, mausoleums, religious buildings, places for washing and vaccinating animals, overnight camping places, and dry-stone walls that divide grazing areas. Some of these attributes are presented on a general map, but only the most important are described in the nomination dossier.

In February 2023, the State Party presented additional documentation on ancient gravestone inscriptions and forty-three monuments within the nominated property and

buffer zone, although the documentation remains to be completed and updated for all the attributes.

The available inventory, records, and archives are held in Baku in the Reserves Management Center of the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Conservation measures

The State Party has provided limited information on a comprehensive conservation strategy for the built heritage and landscape features of the nominated property. A Restoration and Conservation Action Plan submitted to ICOMOS in August 2022 demonstrates the intention of the State Party to improve the state of conservation of the buildings in the village of Khinalig and to inventory, legally protect, and conserve the built heritage of the nominated property. The first stage of rehabilitation work (2019-2024) aims to restore sixty houses in the village of Khinalig. Restoration of the sixteen most severely damaged houses has been completed and eleven others are being finalised. The thirty-three remaining first-stage houses will be restored in 2023-2024; the remaining houses are scheduled for restoration in subsequent stages by 2030. The plan also includes the restoration and provision of the water and sewage system, and the reorganisation of electricity lines, and beautification of the façades of the public buildings in the village of Khinalig in 2023-2025.

The conservation measures are funded by the State Party and carried out by external contractors following the Restoration Manual that was adopted in 2022, under the supervision of the Khinalig State Historical-Architectural and Ethnographic Reserve team.

ICOMOS observes that the approach adopted in the Restoration Manual does not fully comply with international scientific principles. It aims to reconstruct historic houses to their "original" appearance but relies heavily on the use of cement and reinforced concrete. The ongoing works also expose the village to new types of modernisation pressure by bringing in external contractor companies and demonstrating the use of inappropriate modern materials and techniques in restoration. Apart from the physical impact, such an approach, along with the State strategy for tourism promotion, may have adverse long-term effects on the seasonal transhumance as the dominant local economy.

According to additional information sent in February 2023, in response to ICOMOS' observation, the State Party has launched an international partnership to design and implement a model restoration project in 2023 that will showcase international best practices in restoration and train local masters in suitable techniques.

The State Party indicated in additional information provided in February 2023 that conservation plans for each monument will be prepared, and that the Final Conservation Master Plan for the whole nominated property will be submitted in 2024. The State Party also intends to harmonise local standards with international

restoration principles through a legislative amendment in 2023. Conservation recommendations will also address social, land use, and environmental issues.

The State Party further clarified the general conservation principles to be used for natural features and key landscape attributes of the nominated property, such as sacred forests, mud volcanoes, water sources, irrigation systems, and agricultural terraces. Reducing the number of sheep per hectare and improving the water management system are proposed to lessen overgrazing and its negative impact. IUCN considers that threatened species and freshwater biodiversity in the rivers along the transhumance route also need to be monitored.

And finally, the State Party noted that the transhumance landscape is ever-changing, and that the impermanence of individual structures constitutes a key characteristic which allows for the integration of visually suitable and sustainable modern materials into traditional uses.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the nominated property is the responsibility of the State Tourism Agency and its subordinate bodies. The Khinalig State Historical-Architectural and Ethnographic Reserve staff conduct periodic field inspections based on the Annual Work Plan and report to the Reserves Management Center of the State Tourism Agency.

The State Party plans to develop a more holistic approach to monitoring the nominated property. The monitoring indicators for different tangible and intangible features of the cultural landscape will include built heritage, archaeological sites, seasonal transhumance infrastructure, pastures, irrigation systems, forests, language, and craftsmanship. The indicators will include social and economic factors such as demography, employment, gender balance, transhumance, and tourism. The monitoring is planned to address all aspects: management, conservation and restoration, tourism and visitor management, risk management, education and awareness, and finance.

The majority of monitoring activities are planned to be implemented annually by the State Tourism Agency and the Reserves Management Center. The Khinalig State Historical-Architectural and Ethnographic Reserve will continue to be in charge of monitoring the conservation-restoration activities. The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources will be involved in monitoring the mixed and natural features of the nominated property, and the Ministry of Education will assist in monitoring the language component. A monitoring committee is proposed to be established within the new Reserve management structure based on the Khinalig State Historical-Architectural and Ethnographic Reserve. The members of Local Executive Authorities of the six administrative districts will form part of the monitoring system.

In additional information provided in November 2022, the State Party outlined its plan to improve community involvement in monitoring through the establishment of a Community Management Group that will assist in monitoring and managing land use and work closely with state institutions.

The proposed monitoring system may prove adequate for the complex features of the nominated property. However, there is limited information as to how the monitoring of various elements of the nominated property, apart from certain cultural heritage features, is currently taking place. A more detailed roadmap is needed to achieve the effective monitoring of the state of conservation of all the different cultural and natural attributes of the nominated property. In light of the complexity of the cultural landscape and the diversity of disciplines required for the monitoring process, the responsibilities and roles of the different contributing organisations should be determined and described in much more detail.

ICOMOS considers that the Restoration Manual adopted in 2022 requires revisions to make it fully compatible with international scientific principles and practices. The proposed monitoring system requires further elaboration, and needs to be supported by thorough documentation. It would be advisable as well that it encompasses all the attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value, and is conceived for easy integration of its outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

Numerous laws, codes, and regulations cover the different parts of the nominated property and its buffer zone. At the highest level, the nominated property is protected under the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its normative laws such as the Law on Culture, the Law on Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments, and the Law on the Veterinary Control (for animal herding). Presidential Decrees and Decisions by the Cabinet of Ministers also play a role in protecting cultural and natural heritage. Laws and codes related to land use, environment, and urban planning also come into play, as do regulations related to pastures and hayfields. Not all attributes of the nominated property benefit from the highest level of protection, as it is not listed as a single entity.

The main heritage features of the nominated property and the buffer zone are protected by the national cultural heritage legislation. The village of Khinalig is listed by the State Party as a cultural landscape of universal importance, and six architectural monuments in it are listed individually as monuments of local importance. A revised list showing the protection status of monuments was provided in February 2023 by the State Party.

The additional information and maps provided by the State Party at that time highlight that sectoral instruments ensure the continued use of the key attributes of the nominated property, namely the village of Khinalig, the summer and winter pastures, and the migration route. Additional information provided by the State Party in November 2022 confirms that the current legislative basis needs to be adapted to the cultural values of the semi-nomadic communal transhumance. ICOMOS considers that this shortcoming requires improvement to create favourable conditions for the continued practice of this long-standing tradition.

The key institutions responsible for the implementation of the legal framework are the State Tourism Agency and its subordinate Reserves Management Center, along with the Khinalig Reserve, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education, the State Service on Property Issues, and the Local Executive Authorities of the six administrative districts of Guba, Gusar, Shamakhi, Gobustan, Absheron, and Hajigabul.

The State Party plans to designate the entire nominated property as a single protected Reserve. A Presidential Order has been prepared in this regard and is currently under consideration. The additional information provided by the State Party in February 2023 confirms its intention to implement the proposed protected Reserve in 2023.

In addition to the legal protection instruments, traditional mechanisms for protecting and safeguarding the tangible and intangible aspects of the nominated property include the customs and traditions related to grazing, water management, and seasonal migration. These protection mechanisms enforced by the community as a whole are vital for the preservation of the Khinalig culture of transhumance and its cultural landscape.

Management system

The nominated property and its buffer zone are under the ownership of a diverse group of public and private entities. The village of Khinalig is composed of houses under private ownership and public buildings under municipal or State ownership. Public spaces, religious sites, cemeteries, intra-village roads, hayland, and some summer pastures are municipal properties. The majority of the summer pastures, all the winter pastures, and the Kõç Yolu transhumance route are owned by the State.

The management system is centred on the cultural heritage authorities, namely the Ministry of Culture, the State Tourism Agency and its subordinate Reserves Management Center, and the Khinalig Reserve. The system also allows for coordination and collaboration across sectors and government tiers. Involved in the management of the territory within their fields of authority are the Local Executive Authorities of the six administrative districts where the nominated property is located, the State Service on Property Issues, as well as other sectoral institutions such as the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Ministry of Culture, the State Tourism Agency and its subordinate Reserves Management Center, and the Khinalig Reserve provide the framework for the management of cultural assets and elements within the boundaries of the nominated property, such as the Khinalig Reserve with all its elements (houses, mosques, museums, intangible heritage, archaeological sites, etc.) and the cultural monuments along the Kôç Yolu route and in the winter pastures. According to the legislation, the State Tourism Agency is also responsible for granting permits for new construction within the Reserve.

A new management entity for the nominated property and its buffer zone is planned to be established in 2023, based on an enlargement of the boundaries of the Khinalig Reserve. It will incorporate relevant sectoral government agencies, local governments, and local communities within a single participatory, cross-sectoral management framework. It will also include a Coordination Committee and a Technical Committee. The conservation of the attributes that support the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property is intended to be the primary objective of this new structure, which also promises to provide the necessary human and financial resources and the skills base for the conservation of the nominated property.

A cross-sectoral Working Group was formed by the State Tourism Agency in 2022 to develop an action plan for the management of the nominated property. This is an interim solution until the new management structure and permanent coordination mechanisms are established.

The management plan submitted with the nomination dossier is proposed as the operational instrument for the future management entity. It has not yet been implemented. Its objectives and action plan are structured around the key aspects of the nominated property, namely the transhumance, land use, and intangible heritage. It outlines a set of actions to mitigate the factors affecting the nominated property, improve the state of conservation of the tangible attributes, support the continuity of traditional language and crafts, and develop sustainable cultural and ecotourism initiatives as an alternative source of income for the local people. Income diversification is an integral part of the new management concept, where income generation adds to the Reserve management tasks, as a means to a more efficient use of public funds.

The effective management of the nominated property is planned to be achieved by improving the management of conservation activities, development, land use, public infrastructure, and risks. The management plan provides schemes for coordination in each of these areas of action.

Additional information provided by the State Party in February 2023 included general land-use maps, although ICOMOS considers that the nominated property would benefit from further detailed spatial planning and decision-making tools such as local/regional land-use plans, Environmental Impact Assessment mechanisms, and Heritage Impact Assessment mechanisms.

While the State Tourism Agency is assigned the responsibility of approving construction within the Reserve, authority for land-use management rests with the local governments. The informal communal management through the Council of Elders remains vital and is respected by the government authorities. It is planned to be integrated within the new management and coordination framework.

ICOMOS considers that an operating management system is required for the nominated property and its buffer zone. The principal focus should be on the attributes that convey the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property, and the principal aim should be to ensure that the value, authenticity, and integrity of the nominated property are sustained.

Visitor management

The State Party considers cultural tourism and ecotourism as ways to improve local livelihoods. Currently, visitor numbers are low, although there has been an upward trend since 2016.

Infrastructure for the interpretation and presentation of the nominated property is limited. The Khinalig Reserve manages a small ethnographic museum, and another museum in the village is privately-owned. They both present collections of traditional objects as well as archaeological finds and historic manuscripts. No information, signage, or interpretation exists for the migration route, pastures or temporary transhumance structures, although the management plan includes actions to fill this gap. A visitor management plan is being prepared.

Two small private eco-lodges in the village of Khinalig offer accommodation for visitors. Homestays are the preferred form of visitor accommodation and are encouraged by the management plan, as they offer direct interaction with the local culture as well as revenue for the local community.

Several State-sponsored programmes and projects support tourism development in the region, aiming to develop the village of Khinalig as a priority tourism destination.

ICOMOS considers that the emphasis on tourism development raises concerns about the possible increase in development pressures and their potentially negative impacts on the nominated property. ICOMOS further considers that the State Party should determine scientifically the carrying capacity of the nominated property to guide and manage the limits for tourism and to help sustain the livelihoods of the Khinalig people.

Community involvement

The Khinalig community is an essential element of the cultural landscape, as the bearer of the semi-nomadic transhumant culture. Nevertheless, its role in the preparation of the nomination dossier was limited to consultations with the Council of Elders and the

involvement of the Khinalig Reserve team members who are from the Khinalig community. According to additional information submitted by the State Party in November 2022 and February 2023, communal management will be reinforced through the establishment of a Community Management Group at the Khinalig Reserve, as well as by the inclusion of the Council of Elders as a non-governmental organisation within the Coordination Committee. Thus, community integration in decision-making is expected to improve by acquiring formal status.

Limited information has been provided on the involvement of the local community in planning and implementing restoration projects. Some of the local inhabitants are involved as employees of the Khinalig Reserve.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS considers that the protection and management of the nominated property as a whole will be enhanced by the adoption of an umbrella protection and integrated management through the establishment of a single protected Reserve in 2023. It will also activate the management plan. Information on land use and spatial planning is insufficient, and so is the infrastructure for interpretation and presentation. Community involvement, although planned to be enhanced in the future, has been limited to general consultations.

6 Conclusion

The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route, composed of the village of Khinalig, the summer and winter pastures, and the 200-kilometre-long Köç Yolu route, is notable for the diversity of its landscapes. The culture and lifestyle of the Khinalig people are closely tied to and defined by this continuing cultural landscape, as manifested by their long-standing transhumance customs and traditions. Planning and organising the seasonal process of transhumance is still undertaken by the Khinalig Council of Elders, who also organises shared access to winter pastures and manages village affairs.

ICOMOS appreciates the efforts made by the State Party in elaborating the nomination dossier for this large and complex cultural landscape, and also appreciates the work carried out by the State Party to produce additional information.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List. Cultural criteria (iii) and (v) have been demonstrated, and the conditions of integrity and authenticity, although highly vulnerable, have been met. The boundaries of the nominated property enclose the full range of the diverse transhumance landscapes of the Khinalig people.

Nonetheless, ICOMOS observes that many of the key architectural, infrastructural, and landscape elements of the

nominated property are in a fragile state of conservation, and notes that information on land use and spatial planning within this vast cultural landscape should be collected.

Umbrella protection and integrated management of the nominated property is to be achieved in 2023 through the establishment of a single protected Reserve by means of a Presidential Order. This will enhance the protection and management of the property as a whole.

The management plan will be activated with the establishment of the new Reserve administration and its Coordination Committee. The planned management actions will improve interpretation and presentation and facilitate community involvement. The State Party has also demonstrated its commitment to improving the legal framework, conservation planning, and skills base of the nominated property by pursuing international cooperation and expertise.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route, Azerbaijan, be inscribed, as a cultural landscape, on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iii) and (v)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route is a continuing cultural landscape comprised of the high-mountain Khinalig village in northern Azerbaijan, high-altitude summer pastures and agricultural terraces in the Greater Caucasus Mountains, winter pastures in the lowland plains in central Azerbaijan, and the connecting 200-kilometre-long seasonal transhumance route called Köç Yolu (“Migration Route”). The village of Khinalig is home to the semi-nomadic Khinalig people, whose culture and lifestyle are defined by the seasonal vertical migration between summer (*yaylaqs*) and winter (*qishlaqs*) pastures, and who retain the ancient way of long-distance vertical transhumance. The organically evolved network of ancient routes, land-use features, temporary pastures and camping sites, irrigation systems, springs and wells, mausoleums, mosques, cemeteries, bridges, and infrastructure for animal husbandry illustrate a sustainable eco-social system adapted to extreme and diverse environmental conditions that has served to build and retain transhumance as the dominant economy.

Criterion (iii): The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route is an exceptional living testimony to the long-distance vertical transhumance cultural tradition of the Khinalig people, a tradition of communal transhumance in the Caucasus geo-cultural region. The property demonstrates a significant degree of

preservation of its ancestral semi-nomadic eco-social system.

Criterion (v): The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route is an outstanding example of a long-standing traditional and sustainable land use that reflects the semi-nomadic Khinalig transhumance culture and lifestyle. Animal husbandry remains the dominant economy, though a highly vulnerable one. The range of physical features across a great diversity of landscapes illustrates an adaptation to extreme environmental conditions and the resilience of semi-nomadic socio-economic structures based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

Integrity

All the attributes necessary to convey the Outstanding Universal Value of the property are located within its boundaries. These attributes include the village of Khinalig, its surrounding landscape of summer pastures, agricultural terraces, and related infrastructure, and the network of ancient routes, traditional irrigation systems, places of worship, and archaeological sites. The attributes also include the architectural and infrastructural elements of the Köç Yolu route, the winter pastures and their infrastructure, and intangible attributes such as the collective planning, organisation, and implementation of transhumance practices, as manifested in architectural, infrastructural, and landscape elements, that are of vital importance for the practice of transhumance by the Khinalig people. The property is of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the features and processes that convey its significance. It is highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of development and neglect.

Authenticity

The Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and “Köç Yolu” Transhumance Route is authentic in terms of its forms and designs, materials and substance, uses and functions, locations and settings, traditions and management systems, and language and other forms of intangible heritage. While some changes have had an impact on the authenticity of the forms and designs, materials and substance, and uses and functions of some parts of the property, the key attributes are largely authentic and convey the Outstanding Universal Value of the property. The socio-spatial organisation of communal transhumance remains authentic despite a previous socio-economic reorganisation; traditions of semi-nomadic communal life remain effective, and the Council of Elders continues to act as an informal self-governing body in charge of collective affairs such as the seasonal migration, turns for grazing, and shared use of water and pastures.

Protection and management requirements

Most of the property is protected at the highest level under the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its normative laws such as the Law on Culture, the Law on Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments, and

the Law on the Veterinary Control (for animal herding). Presidential Decrees and Decisions by the Cabinet of Ministers also play a role in protecting the cultural and natural heritage. A protective designation for the entire property through a single protected Reserve is being achieved by means of a Presidential Order. In addition to the legal protection instruments, there are traditional mechanisms for protecting and safeguarding the tangible and intangible aspects of the property.

The property and its buffer zone are under the ownership of diverse public and private entities. The majority of the summer pastures, all the winter pastures, and the Köç Yolu transhumance route are owned by the State. The management system involves the Ministry of Culture, the State Tourism Agency and its subordinate Reserves Management Center, and the Khinalig Reserve. A new management entity for the property and its buffer zone will incorporate relevant sectoral government agencies, local governments, and local communities within a single participatory, cross-sectoral management framework. The management plan needs to be implemented. Its objectives and action plan are structured around the key aspects of the property, including the transhumance, land use, and intangible heritage. The existing informal communal management by the Council of Elders is planned to be integrated within the new management and coordination framework.

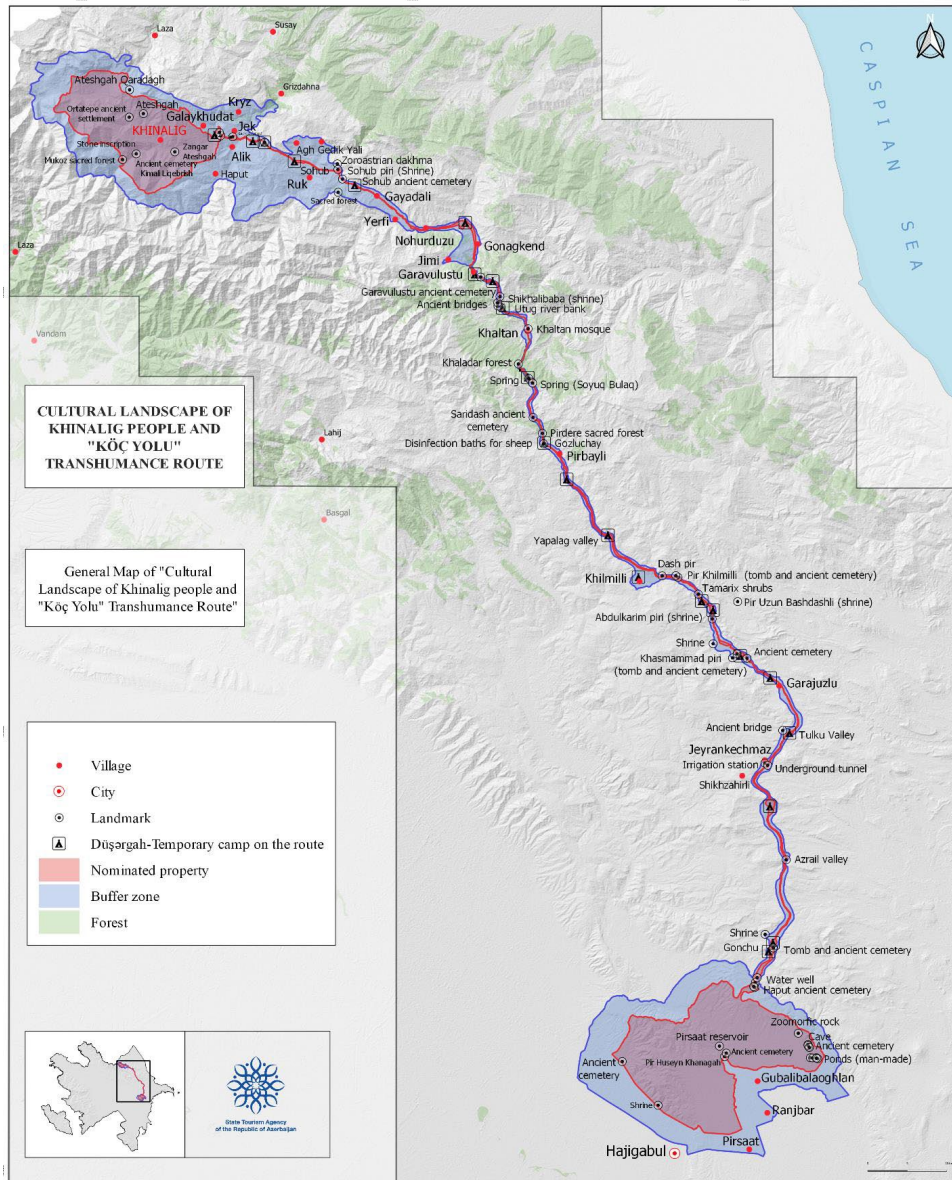
Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Ensuring that all the key attributes of the entire property, including the cultural values of the semi-nomadic communal transhumance, benefit from the highest level of protection, through the implementation of the single protected Reserve,
- b) Approving and making operational the new management entity planned for the property and its buffer zone, and refining, approving, and implementing the management plan,
- c) Revising the Restoration Manual adopted in 2022 to ensure that it properly addresses the authenticity of forms and designs within the property and is fully compatible with international scientific principles and practices,
- d) Completing the elaboration of the Conservation Master Plan for the property as a whole, and the conservation plans for each monument,
- e) Ensuring that new developments and infrastructure projects in the property and buffer zone are designed and built with adequate consideration of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, on the basis of detailed spatial planning and decision-making tools such as local/regional land-use plans, Environmental

Impact Assessments, and Heritage Impact Assessments,

- f) Determining scientifically the carrying capacity of the property in order to guide and manage the limits for tourism and to help sustain the traditional livelihoods of the Khinalig people,
- g) Completing the cadastral information for the entire property and marking the boundaries on the ground,
- h) Completing the inventory and documentation of the property,
- i) Developing a monitoring system that includes adequate assessment of all the key attributes, acknowledgement of key threats, and delivery of outcomes that can inform management,
- j) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1 December 2024, a report on the implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session;



Revised map showing the boundaries of the nominated property (February 2023)