

XVII International Congress on Dry Stone

“Dry stone perspectives: challenges after the UNESCO inscription”

Cavtat, Croatia, October 1-2 2021

Agustín Petschen (Text). apzmenorca@gmail.com

Angel Roca (Plans and Photos). angrovid@gmail.com

Societat Històrico-Arqueològica Martí i Bella. shamartibella@gmail.com

Punta Nati: A Heritage Saved Thanks To The Action Of Civil Society

After 7 years of struggle, on 25 February 2020, The Consell Insular de Menorca and SHAMB (Martí i Bella Historic and Archaeological Society) signed an agreement that manages to safeguard, and definitively promote, the most important dry stone cultural landscape in Menorca: the agricultural plains to the northwest of Ciutadella, an area known as Punta Nati.

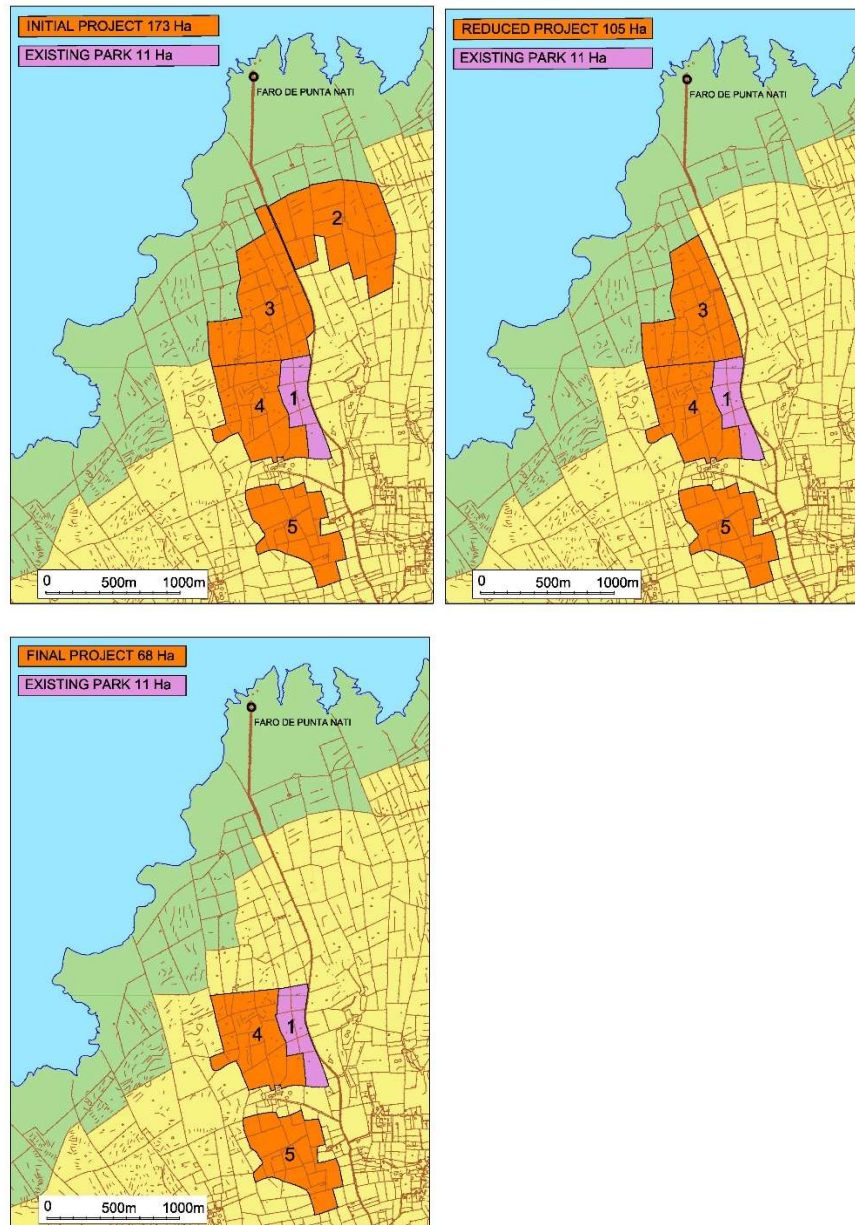
The disagreement had to do with the BAD PRAXIS with which the administration, after authorising all the petitions presented over the years, managed the request for the extension of the existing photovoltaic park in the Son Salomó estate, where the highest density of great quality of ethnological Menorcan elements can be found. This 173-hectares extension, which represents the third largest solar park in the country and the largest in the Balearic Islands, was designed for a plot of land which was classified in the island's territorial plan (PTI) as an Area of Landscape Interest. This decision was applauded by politicians, the administration and part of society, all who did not hesitate to perpetrate this attack on this cultural landscape in favour of a solar park. The verdict was that this heritage, in the name of (misunderstood) progress, had to be sacrificed.



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Fortunately, another part of the civil society raised its voice against this outrage. This voice was channelled by SHAMB (Martí i Bella Historic and Archaeological Society) which, in 2013, still in time to stop this project, urged the Consell Insular de Menorca (Menorcan Government) to appoint the area of Punta Nati as a B.I.C. (Asset of Cultural Interest) for its ethnological interest. Faced with the silence of the Consell Insular in 2017, the association SHAMB took, as a last resort, the case to court.

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SHAMB applied for a BIC status in the understanding that the protection of these landscape assets affects both the archaeological and ethnological elements: the knowledge (intangible cultural heritage) and the natural environment in which they are located. Thus, the architectural elements and the natural landscape must be protected together from interventions that could affect the perception of the site. The ideal instrument for this, provided for by the legislation of the Balearic Islands, is the "Site of Ethnological Interest".

In 2015, Fundació Lithica-Pedrerres de s'Hostal and SHAMB organized a photographic competition in Ciutadella, which took the form of an exhibition about the ethnological and landscape heritage of Punta Nati, with the title: "Punta Nati, A Stone Landscape. A Cultural Landscape In Danger?", where for the first time, the danger of destruction of the heritage is exposed to society.

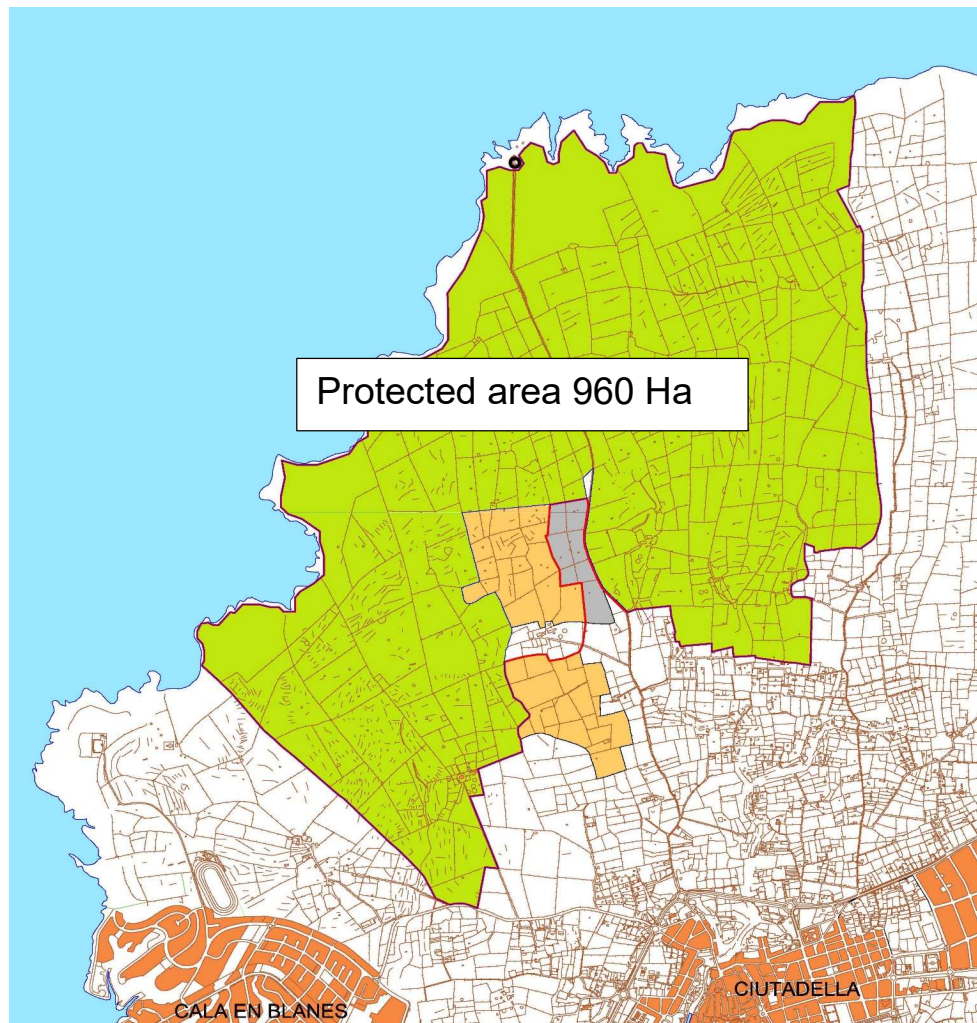
Faced with the insistence of the administration to continue with this project, which meant that the claim could last long, SHAMB and Lithica created Amics de Punta Nati (Friends of Punta Nati), as a specific association for the defence of this cultural landscape by making the public aware of its heritage values.

Since then, a large number of people and entities have raised their voices joining SHAMB, Lithica and Amics de Punta Nati, showing their commitment in defence of the treasure that represents this cultural landscape with exceptional characteristics, and demanding the maximum protection in the figure of BIC.

It is incomprehensible that it should be the civil society the one that had to resort to justice as the only means of protecting and exercising its rights in the face of an all-powerful administration that does not respect its own heritage protection laws.

<p>SITE OF CULTURAL INTEREST (BIC) area with the highest level of protection</p>

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This problem should have been solved granting a balance between heritage and the search for alternative energies. But we have only noted the lack of ability of an administration that has neither its own policy nor the resources to design a public energy policy. An administration that feels obliged to accept that it is private initiative, together with international investment funds which decides how and where to produce energy. An administration that justifies, with the discourse on global warming, the sacrifice of heritage, and not its defence; in this case, against this unique dry stone site that identifies us as Menorcan.

It is incomprehensible that Spain signed the European Landscape Convention in 2000 and ratified it in 2007, when to date no specific law has been created to protect our landscapes. It is still incomprehensible that in 2015, the Menorcan Culture

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Authority included the Cultural Landscape of Punta Nati in a selection of 100 cultural landscapes, and that this designation was not used to stop this macro solar park, “blessed” by the different administrations (Central Government, Government of the Balearic Islands, Menorcan Government, and Ciutadella Town Hall).

It is incomprehensible that they ignored the detailed report of ICOMOS Spain, recommending the protection of the site.

All this time, the three entities, SHAMB, Amics de Punta Nati, and Lithica, with different lines of action and the same objective, have carried out a multitude of actions to defend this Cultural Landscape, demanding the declaration of BIC for the area of Punta Nati, participating in round tables, organizing specific conferences, meetings with musicians, poets, and the projection of videos about this Landscape. We highlight the celebration, in 2018, of the XVI International Congress of Dry Stone, organised by SHAMB together with MSF; intervening in as many forums as we have been requested (with Hispania Nostra, in the XXVIth Meeting of Associations in September 2018).

But what really forced the administration and the association to reach an agreement was the admission of three lawsuits filed by SHAMB, two against the Consell Insular de Menorca (Menorcan Government) and one against the Government of the Balearic Islands. The association and the omnipotent administration (proud of its flagship energy project) would not have done so if it were not for the visible trial on the horizon. And at this stage, it was necessary for the civil society to set an example by signing, generously, this framework agreement that reconciles the implementation of this solar park with the heritage.

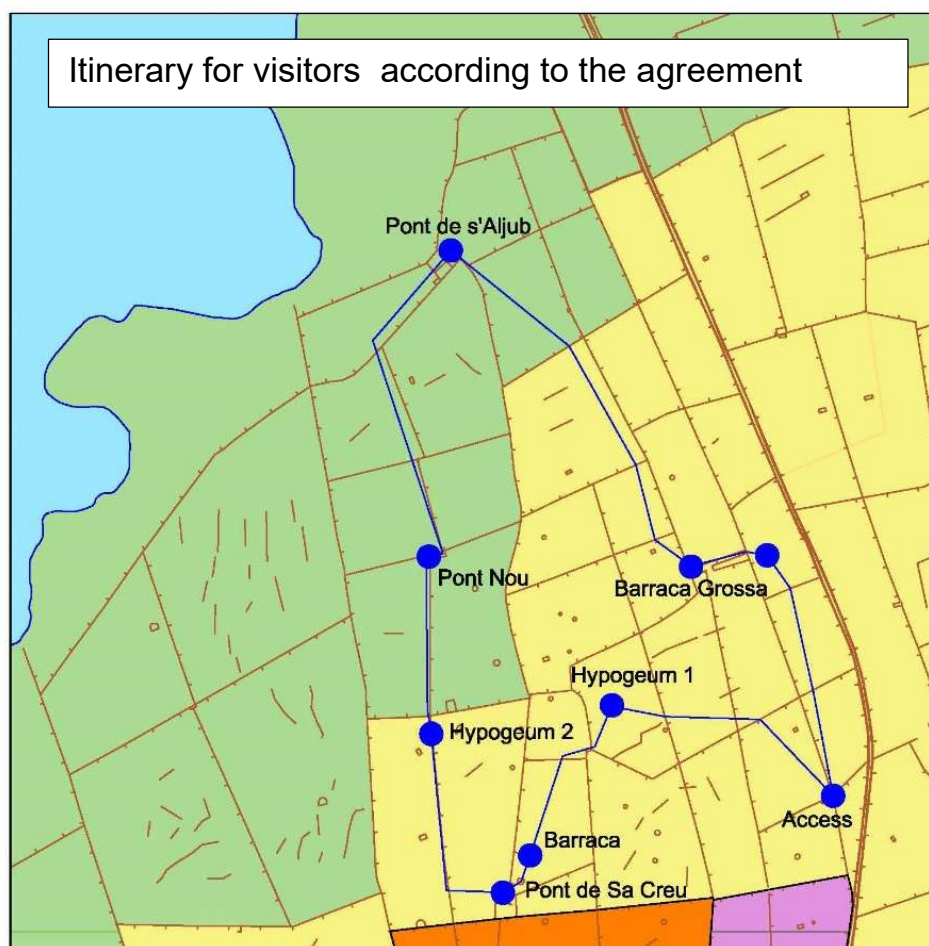
But the agreement also provides for the definition of a visitable route within the solar park, the restoration of two of the most spectacular ethnological constructions: the S'Aljub Bridge and the Sa Creu Bridge, hitherto inaccessible to

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the public, and the creation of an elevated viewpoint from which to contemplate the grandeur of this place.

In short, after the signing of the agreement, we will have a site of 960 Ha, definitively protected by the legal figure of B.I.C.; a reduction in the surface area of the photovoltaic park of 105 Ha (from 173 Ha to 68 Ha); a visitable route within the park, to admire the most relevant ethnological and archaeological elements, and an elevated viewpoint from which the grandeur of the site can be admired.

The part that SHAMB has given up, with its 68 Ha, will be covered with photovoltaic panels, in an Area of Landscape Interest that SHOULD NEVER have been authorised in this place.



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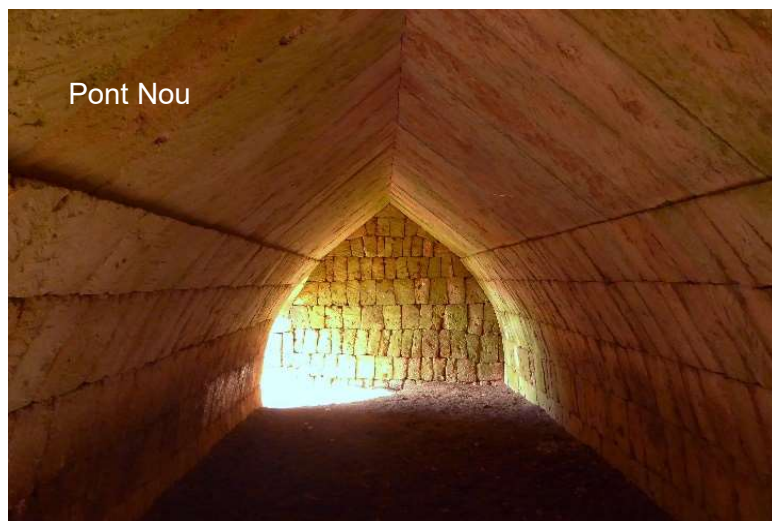
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