

NETHERLANDS

Historic Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Netherlands Antilles

Brief description

The people of the Netherlands established a trading settlement at a fine natural harbour on the Caribbean island of Curaçao in 1634. The town developed continuously over the following centuries. The modern town consists of several distinct historic districts whose architecture reflects not only European urban-planning concepts but also styles from the Netherlands and from the Spanish and Portuguese colonial towns with which Willemstad engaged in trade.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1997

Agency responsible for site management

- The Government of the Island Territory of Curaçao (in cooperation with the Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg (RDMZ – Netherlands Department for Conservation Broederplein
- (since 1st November 2006: Netherlands Department for Archaeology Cultural Landscape and Monuments – RACM (Rijksdienst voor Archeologie Cultuurlandschap en Monumenten) Broederplein 41 3703 CD Zeist) The Netherlands e-mail: R.deJong@racm.nl website: www.curacaomonuments.org

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (ii), (iv), (v)

Justification provided by the State Party

The Historic Area of Willemstad stands out for the diversity in the historical morphology of its four historic urban districts (Punda, Otrobanda, Pietermaai and Scharloo). The city's historical architecture is of a strikingly genuine and colourful European origin set in a tropical environment. Its

like cannot be found elsewhere in the Dutch West or East Indies. Punda represents a dense and compact historical urban structure, reflecting its origin as a fortified town surrounded by ramparts. Pietermaai and Scharloo enjoy the relative freedom of space resulting in an open layout of streets lined by detached and quite often luxurious dwellings, while Otrobanda features both an open compound layout and a dense alley structure alike.

The urban structure and architecture of the Historic Area of Willemstad are both authentic examples of colonial town planning and architecture of the period of Dutch expansion. Its cultural and historical significance not only stems from its town planning and architectural qualities as a historic port town, but is manifest even beyond the local level.

Within the Caribbean Region, the inner city and harbour of Willemstad share a common cultural history with other counterpart cities in the region, such as Old Havana, San Juan Historic Site, Carthagena Port town, the Colonial City of Santo Domingo, and other cities of French and English origin. This common history of colonial European origin, seemingly strange, is expressed in an astonishing diversity in cultural heritage within the region. Together with the historic cities and sites mentioned above and already included in the World Heritage List, Willemstad belongs to a distinct category of cities which form a regional system of cities linked by the cords of a common cultural history, each with a distinct expression of its own.

Apart from its other qualities, this particular aspect of the nominated area is testimony to the confirmation of the Caribbean Region as a cultural and historical entity. This is just one of the aspects that identifies its position as a historic port town of outstanding universal value.

The unique setting in a natural harbour makes Willemstad a historic port town of great distinction. The character is enhanced by the fact that its four historic urban districts were established on different flat and sloping sites separated by the natural waters of Sint Anna Bay and Waaigat. Rather than being elements of separation, these natural waters link the historic urban districts of Punda, Otrobanda, Pietermaai and Scharloo and integrate them into an exciting townscape of colourful façades along stretches of lively quays, and even a "water plaza" (Plaza Brion). This setting distinctly qualifies the Historic Area of Willemstad as a rare example of a historic port town laid out in a setting of natural waters.

The strength of this complex of cultural properties - core area, transmission areas and buffer zones - is

that its urban structure and architecture conspicuously reflect the subsequent stages of historical development over the course of centuries. The city can be easily read and used as a textbook for its historical and cultural development. With Punda, Sint Anna Bay and Otrobanda forming the historic core area, Pietermaai, Scharloo and Kortijn represent historic transmission areas expressing the historical continuity of Willemstad.

Both the historical urban fabric and the historical architecture have proved to be durable elements over more than three centuries. These have been able to survive the effects of continuous social and economic development.

With this, the Historic Area of Willemstad universally stands out as a type of city which genuinely demonstrates continuity in historical and social-cultural development over a course of centuries through an authentic historical urban structure and architecture.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

Qualities: the Historic Area of Willemstad is an exceptionally well preserved example of a Dutch fortified colonial trading and administrative centre. It is an admirable illustration of the transfer of European urban and architectural traditions into the New World, and distinct in the evidence that it provides of its Dutch ancestry from contemporary Spanish, Portuguese, English, or French settlements around the Caribbean.

It does not contain any outstanding individual buildings or structures. Its importance resides in the urban fabric and the townscape, with their blending of European and Caribbean elements to create a colourful and culturally dynamic whole.

Recommendation: that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria ii, iv, and v:

The Historic Area of Willemstad is a European colonial ensemble in the Caribbean of outstanding value and integrity, which illustrates the organic growth of a multicultural community over three centuries and preserves to a high degree significant elements of the many strands that came together to create it.

Committee Decision

Bureau (June 1997): the Bureau recommended the Committee to inscribe this site on the World Heritage List on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v). The Historic Area of Willemstad is a European colonial ensemble in the Caribbean of

outstanding value and integrity, which illustrates the organic growth of a multicultural community over three centuries and preserves to a high degree significant elements of the many strands that came together to create it.

Session (1997): the Committee decided to inscribe this site on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iv) and (v), considering that the Historic Area of Willemstad is a European colonial ensemble in the Caribbean of outstanding value and integrity, which illustrates the organic growth of a multicultural community over three centuries and preserves to a high degree significant elements of the many strands that came together to create it.

- Statement of Significance does no longer adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- Proposal for text has been made by State Party

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- The site is protected as a 'townscape' within the Island Wide Zoning plan. The monuments within the site are protected by Law (*Island Monuments Ordinance*)
- The protection arrangements are considered sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- A plan has been developed to counter-act the collapse of various protected monuments through lack of maintenance; various bottlenecks (legal, financial, organizational) are being listed and solutions are being presented
- No specific timeframe

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Urban centre

Management/Administrative Body

- No steering group
- No site manager has been appointed but a UNESCO World Heritage working group is in

place since April 2002 that could also function as a 'monitoring group'

- Level of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: local
- The current management system is not effective

Actions proposed:

- Discuss the appointment of a site manager to make a management plan and have overall control of this management plan

5. Management Plan

- No management plan

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- State Budget and Regional budget (Dutch Government and Island Government); funding from private institutions on Curaçao (The Curaçao Monuments Fund Foundation; the Willemstad Urban Rehabilitation Corporation; the Curaçao Foundation; the Curaçao Monuments Foundation)
- Funding is considered insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Staff: 4 (half-time)

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Very good: conservation
- Good: promotion, education
- Average: management, interpretation, visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- No specialized training for staff but possibility to attend oversea conferences once a year
- Training needs identified: definition of quality for and qualitative design of new construction projects; qualification of experts to handle the illegal activities that occur in the inner city; objective evaluation of restoration plans

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: ca. 300,000 cruise visitors p/a; ca. 200,000 stay-over tourists p/a

- Visitor facilities: visitor information centre in the site. These facilities are considered inadequate
- Visitor needs: more information (panels) at the Mega Cruise terminal, the airport and all entrances (when coming by car) to the World Heritage site
- No tourism management plan

10. Scientific Studies

- Monitoring exercises; Impact of World Heritage designation
- Studies used for design of action plan for the preservation of monuments; for criteria defined in the *Island wide Development Plan* to check new infill projects in the historic urban structure

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- Not enough signs referring to World Heritage site but the Curaçao Monuments Fund Foundation is currently working on a 'plaque project'
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on publications
- Inadequate awareness of World Heritage among all stakeholders (visitors, local communities, businesses, local authorities)
- An inventory was made of all the available material. A program was compiled for heritage education on all levels
- A private foundation (Pro Monumento Foundation) organizes an Open Monuments Day once every two years
- No specific web-page for the World Heritage site, but www.curacaomonuments.org
- Interregional Committee Action Willemstad ceased to exist in 2000

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- From 760 protected monuments of the site more than 100 have been restored, about 90 are still in bad condition, 8 have been demolished; the historic urban pattern is still in place; no major changes made to the structure of the building environment
- Present state of conservation: patchy

Threats and Risks to site

- Environmental: no major natural disasters
- Salt water and climate causing rapid deterioration of monuments
- Human made: development pressure

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme in place
- Key indicators: amount of money spent annually on emergency repairs and on subsidies for restoration works
- Future indicators to consider: targets to attribute at least 10 restoration permits per year, and to inform at least 20 monument owners to submit their maintenance plans

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: economic, and overall awareness for cultural heritage
- Strengths: politicians stress WH status when presenting controversial restoration plans or new plans for the inner city; a development plan for the inner city is in place
- Weaknesses: implementation plan for restoration and revitalization of the inner city is moving slowly, thus monuments are lost, plans for new buildings not executed. Not enough people are relocating to the city, the economic function of the inner city losing against smaller malls outside the inner city

Future actions:

- Curaçao Government will put more money
- Development plan for the inner city is the basis for many plans that are to be executed jointly in the inner city (e.g. various infrastructural plans will be executed in 2006/2007). Various public urban places will be redesigned
- Government will facilitate private initiatives such as the construction of a parking garage in the inner city and other economic developments