

## Paramaribo (Suriname)

No 940rev

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Inner City of Paramaribo
<i>Location</i>	District of Paramaribo
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Suriname
<i>Date</i>	First nomination received 1 July 1998, revised nomination received 18 May 2001

### Justification by State Party

The nominated cultural property represents a former Dutch colonial town from the 17th and 18th centuries with an original street plan. It is composed of wooden buildings with a plain and symmetrical architectural style, the interaction of different European and North American influences, and the craftsmanship of the Creole people (descendants of African slaves). The historic urban structure is the setting for over 250 monuments, authentic in design, material, and craftsmanship. A recently developed integrated conservation and development scheme (*Plan for the Inner City of Paramaribo*) is part of the overall planning legislation of Paramaribo. This scheme creates favourable conditions for the development of the historic urban centre and the conservation and reuse of the protected monuments.

**Criteria ii, iii, and iv**

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*

### History and Description

#### *History*

The first voyages of discovery to the so-called "Wild Coast" of South America were made in 1499 by the Spaniards Alonso and Juan de la Cosa, accompanied by Amerigo Vespucci. Rumours soon circulated about an Inca "City of Gold" (*El Dorado*) at Lake Parima in the interior of modern Guyana, and many adventurers were attracted to this coast, but Eldorado remained a legend.

From the beginning of the 17th century colonization of the Wild Coast was directed towards the cultivation of sugarcane and tobacco. European governments encouraged settlers to establish plantations in order to exploit the region to meet the

increasing demand for tropical products in Europe. English planters from Barbados arrived in the mid 17th century. The Dutch, who had a trading patent, also came to the coast around this time in search of tobacco and hardwoods; Dutch trading posts existed as early as 1614 on the Corantijn river and near the Indian village of *Parmarbo* or *Parmurbo* on the banks of the Suriname river. The English were driven out by a Dutch fleet commanded by Abraham Crijnsen during the Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665–67), and Suriname remained a Dutch possession for the next three centuries.

By the end of the 18th century there were some six hundred plantations in operation. In the second half of the century the owners, who had hitherto lived on their plantations, began to migrate to Paramaribo, leaving the running of the plantations to managers. As a result, the plantations began to decline, but the town grew, with many fine houses built along tree-lined streets.

The economic situation of Suriname worsened as the plantations declined, with beet being replaced as the source of sugar, and the situation deteriorated further when slavery was abolished in 1863. Fewer than a hundred plantations survived, and their owners and the freed slaves moved to Paramaribo, which expanded rapidly.

To replace the slaves, the government brought in labourers to work the remaining plantations, first from China and the West Indies and later from India and Java. Between 1873 and 1939 34,000 Indians and 33,000 Javanese immigrated to Suriname, increasing its cultural and ethnic diversity and this is reflected in the present-day appearance of Paramaribo, which developed from an administrative centre and port into a city with multifarious activities existing side by side.

Paramaribo began when Fort Zeelandia was built in 1667 on a promontory on the left bank of the Suriname river, but early civil development was low-quality and random. When Van Sommelsdijck, the first governor and joint owner of the colony, took over in 1683 he laid out a planned town. It began on the shell ridges to the west, which offered a naturally drained hard base for building. In the mid 18th century it expanded southwards to the sandy land along the river, and finally at the end of the century to the north, where Dutch civil engineers used their skills to drain the area.

In addition to Fort Zeelandia, Paramaribo was also protected by the Nieuw-Amsterdam Fortress at the confluence of the Suriname and Commewijne rivers, near the coast. Because of these strong defensive works, it was not necessary for the town to be fortified, which allowed it to be laid out in spacious lots along wide streets.

There were disastrous fires in 1821 and again in 1832, when much of the existing town was destroyed.

#### *Description*

The layout of the Inner City, which is nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, consists of a main axis stretching north-west from the Onafhankelijkheids-plein behind Fort Zeelandia (the group of public buildings here is the central ensemble in the town plan), with streets crossing at right-angles. It is defined by the Sommelsdijkse Kreek to the north and the Viottekreek to the south. To the north of Fort Zeelandia is the large public park known as the Garden of Palms (*Palmentuin*). The nominated property covers an area of 60ha. The wide streets and the public open spaces are tree-lined, giving a serene and spacious townscape.

The larger public buildings in Paramaribo, such as Fort Zeelandia (1667), the Presidential Palace (1730), the Ministry of Finance (1841), the Reformed Church (1837), and the Roman Catholic Cathedral (1885), were built in stone and brick in traditional Dutch style but increasingly incorporating native elements. Thus, the ground floor of the Presidential Palace is built in stone but its upper storeys are in wood. The Ministry of Finance, by contrast, is a monumental brick structure with a classical portico and a clock tower which dominates the Onafhankelĳheidsplein, the main open space of the city, situated behind Fort Zeelandia. Interestingly, the Neo-Classical Reformed Church is built in brick but the Neo-Gothic Roman Catholic Cathedral is entirely of wood.

Most of the buildings in Paramaribo, both commercial and residential, are built entirely in wood, the majority of them following the 1821 and 1832 fires, in which some 450 houses were destroyed. The work was carried out by local craftsmen. They all conform with a general layout: they are rectangular and symmetrical in plan with steep roofs (mostly of corrugated iron sheets) and brick substructures. Both these and the public buildings are generally painted white, the brick elements being highlighted in red. Doors and window shutters are in dark green.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

In 2001 the Council of Ministers gave its approval to a new Monuments Bill, which replaced an earlier law of 1963, and this has been approved by the National Assembly. This statute provides for the designation of protected historic quarters. There are controls over interventions that may affect the state of buildings and townscapes as recorded during the process of designation. There is also provision for low-interest loans to owners for essential conservation and restoration works. The state also has powers of compulsory purchase of monuments in certain circumstances and priority rights when such properties are offered for sale.

The 1973 Planning Act (*Planwet*) assigns the responsibility for a comprehensive and sustainable policy for spatial, ecological, and socio-economic in the whole country to the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation. Regional and local plans are covered by the Regional Bodies Act (*Wet Regionale Organen*), administered by the Ministry of Regional Development, whilst the Ministry of Public Works covers the Town Planning Act (*Stedebouwkundige Wet*). The two latter Acts and the responsible ministries operate in a collaborative fashion in the formulation of Structure and Land Use Plans.

Finally, the Building Act (*Bouwwet*) and the Building Resolution (*Bouwebesluit*) control the issue of licences for new constructions and residential areas.

### *Management*

About one-fifth of the buildings and open spaces within the nominated area are owned by the national government or government agencies and institutions. The remainder are in private ownership.

In 1997 the Suriname Urban Heritage Foundation (*Stichting Gebouwd Erfgoed Suriname*) was set up as an interim measure for one year, pending the establishment of the Surinam Heritage Management Corporation Limited (*NV Surinaamse Monumenten Beheermaatschappij*), which was created in 2001 by Government Decree. It is a commercially based non-governmental organization to control development in the city and function as an intermediary between the various planning bodies and other institutions listed above. It also has powers to acquire and manage sites and monuments in order to restore and renovate them and to oversee the maintenance and restoration of properties on a contractual basis. The Urban Heritage Foundation has designed an integrated urban conservation and development Plan for the Inner City of Paramaribo and a management plan.

This Plan consists of a development scheme and land-use plan for the historic inner city, together with a detailed conservation plan. It is based on an analysis of the historical development of the city and an up-to-date inventory of the architectural and technical condition of the existing building stock.

A sum of US\$ 500,000 has been allocated for the conservation of Paramaribo as part of the agreement between the Dutch and Surinamese Governments. In addition, a trust fund has been set up, financed by the Dutch Ministry of External Affairs and Development Coordination (for the so-called mutual heritage), the European Commission, the Getty Fund, and additional levies on commercially profitable projects within the city. This will be used primarily for making low-interest loans.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Conservation has been largely unsystematic until recent years in Paramaribo, although the major public buildings have been maintained on a regular basis. However, appreciation of and support for their heritage is strong among the citizens and there is a long tradition of conservation of individual buildings using traditional techniques and materials. The foundations have now been laid for a systematic and comprehensive programme.

However, the ICOMOS expert mission observed a number of buildings in a ruinous condition or urgently in need of conservation. The new conservation plan is giving priority to these buildings.

### *Authenticity*

Over 250 listed buildings of historic interest are also still extant in the historic city, and many of these exhibit high authenticity because of the use of traditional techniques and materials in repair and rehabilitation works. There has been considerable restoration work on a number of other, non-listed, buildings; this has preserved the traditional style but has made use of contemporary materials, such as concrete simulating wood. Nevertheless, the overall urban fabric of Paramaribo, which dates from 1680–1800, still survives virtually intact and the authenticity of the townscape is exceptionally high.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Paramaribo in February 1999. ICOMOS was also advised on the cultural significance of the city by its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

### *Qualities*

Paramaribo is a unique example of a Dutch town planted on the coast of tropical South America. It has retained its original street plan untouched, and there is a range of buildings which demonstrate the gradual fusion of Dutch architectural design with traditional local techniques and materials.

### *Comparative analysis*

Although situated in South America, Paramaribo is historically and culturally more closely linked with the Caribbean. Comparison should therefore be made with European colonial towns in that region.

All of those already on the World Heritage List, with the exception of Willemstad (Netherlands Antilles), are Spanish in origin, and they conform rigidly to the checkerboard town plan that was developed at Alcalá de Henares and imposed upon the New World by its Spanish rulers.

Willemstad was also a Dutch foundation. It differs significantly from Paramaribo, however, in two respects. First, its situation and subsequent growth are radically different from those of Paramaribo, and secondly in its architecture and townscape it shows marked Spanish influence.

### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

In 1999, whilst accepting the cultural value of Paramaribo, ICOMOS recommended the following action on the part of the State Party:

1. Creation of a central governmental body responsible for the protection and presentation of the historic heritage;
2. Extension of the legislation so as to include guidelines for interventions in town centres and on monuments;
3. Provide legislative protection for the entire centre of Paramaribo, as defined in the nomination dossier;
4. Define the area of 18th century expansion, plus the area to the north of Van Roosenvaldkade, as the buffer zone for the proposed World Heritage site;
5. Organize, with the assistance of ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre, an International Workshop on the Conservation and Protection of Historic Towns;
6. Encourage architects and engineers to specialize in architectural conservation and restoration.

At its 23rd Session in Paris in June 1999 the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee deferred further consideration of this nomination, requesting the State Party to take account of the recommendations of ICOMOS and resubmit the nomination.

Since that time, the State Party has acted on the most important of these recommendations (1–4): the current situation is presented in the relevant sections above. ICOMOS therefore believes that the requirements of the Committee with regard to protection and management have been met and accordingly is recommending inscription on the World Heritage List.

## Brief description

Paramaribo is a Dutch town planted on the coast of tropical South America which has retained its original street plan intact. Its buildings illustrate the gradual fusion of Dutch architectural design with traditional local techniques and materials.

## Statement of significance

The only wholly Dutch town planted in South America is Paramaribo. The historic centre retains its highly characteristic street layout intact. The considerable amount of buildings from earlier historical periods that survive graphically demonstrate the creation of an authentic local architectural style with elements of both European and indigenous forms, motifs, materials, and techniques.

## Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

*Criterion ii* Paramaribo is an exceptional example of the gradual fusion of European architecture and construction techniques with indigenous South America materials and crafts to create a new architectural idiom.

*Criterion iv* Paramaribo is a unique example of the contact between the European culture of the Netherlands and the indigenous cultures and environment of South America in the years of intensive colonization of this region in the 16th and 17th centuries.

ICOMOS, April 2002