

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Willemstad (The Netherlands)

No 819

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	The Historic Area of Willemstad, inner city and harbour
<i>Location</i>	The Island Territory of Curaçao, The Netherlands Antilles
<i>State Party</i>	The Netherlands
<i>Date</i>	11 July 1996

Justification by State Party

The Historic Area of Willemstad stands out for the diversity in the historical morphology of its four historic 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 often quite luxurious dwellings, whilst Otrobanda features both an open compound layout and a dense alley structure.

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 stems not only from its town planning and architectural qualities as an historic port town, but is also manifest beyond the local level.

Within the Caribbean region, the inner city and harbour of Willemstad share a common cultural history with other cities such as Old Havana, the San Juan Historic Site, Cartagena de Indias, the Colonial City of Santo Domingo, and other cities of English and French origin. This common history of colonial European origin, seemingly strange, is expressed in an astonishing diversity of cultural heritage within the region. Together with the historic cities and sites mentioned above and already on the World Heritage List, Willemstad belongs to a distinct category of cities which form a regional system 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 an historic port town of outstanding universal value.

The unique setting in a natural harbour makes Willemstad an historic port town of great distinction. This 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 facades along stretches of lively quays, and even a "water plaza" (Plaza Brion). This setting qualifies the Historic Area of Willemstad as a rare example of an 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 the 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 the course of centuries through an authentic historic urban structure and architecture.

[**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers the property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.]

Category of property

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

History and Description

History

The island society on Curaçao (which covers some 450km²) owes its origin to the expansion of Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. After Spain had encroached upon the island in 1499 at the expense of its indigenous inhabitants, the Arawak Indians, the

Dutch took possession of it in 1634, in the period of Dutch domination of trade and the seas, and the settlement was created by the Dutch West India Company (*West-Indische Compagnie* - WIC). Apart from two brief British occupations (1800-3 and 1807-16), the island remained Dutch colonial territory until 1955, when the Netherlands Antilles acquired self-government within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Willemstad is a typical port town, but one without a hinterland, which focused on the neighbouring Spanish, English, and French colonies on the mainland of South America and in the Caribbean. Frequent trade with South America (the Spanish Main) led not only to an exchange of goods but also the reciprocal adoption of cultural elements. Curaçao therefore has an Iberian tinge, not least as a result of the settlement of Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal, who came there in the 17th century by way of Amsterdam. By 1730 the Jewish community represented 50% of the white population of Curaçao. African influences also entered the island, since Curaçao was a centre of the slave trade at one period.

The city developed on both banks of Sint Anna Bay, which forms the narrow entrance to the sheltered inland bay of Schottegat; both are excellent deep-water harbours. Settlement started on the eastern side, known as Punda, in the 17th century. Otrobanda, on the western side, developed at the beginning of the 18th century and a little later around Waagat, the inner bay behind an elongated peninsula facing the Caribbean.

There was some decline in the condition of the historic city in the second half of the 20th century, with the departure of many of the more prosperous members of the community, but this has now been halted and is being reversed.

Description

The Historic Area of Willemstad proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List features a townscape of four historic urban districts - Punda, Pietermaai, Otrobanda, and Scharloo - separated by the open waters of a natural harbour. It covers an area of 190ha, including the buffer zones which both link and set the boundaries of the four historic districts. Each of these districts has its own distinct urban morphology resulting from successive planning concepts, but they share a unique "tropicalized" historical architecture of Dutch origin.

The nominated area consists of a *core area*, consisting of Sint Anna Bay and part of the Caribbean Sea, Punda, and most of Otrobanda, and two *transmission areas*, consisting of the urban districts of Pietermaai, Scharloo, and Kortijn. There are also two buffer zones (see below, "Management").

In the *core area* the entrance to Sint Anna Bay is protected by fortifications on both sides - the Water Fort on the Punda side and the Rif Fort on the Otrobanda side. These defensive works are important and relatively well preserved examples of contemporary fortifications, especially when taken with other surviving defensive works that lie outside the nominated area.

Within each of the settlements flanking the Bay there is a waterfront square (Gouvernementsplein in Punda, Plaza Brion in Otrobanda), and they are linked by the famous pontoon bridge erected in 1888, officially known as the Queen Emma Bridge but better known to the inhabitants as "the Swinging Old Lady."

The development of Punda began with the construction of Fort Amsterdam (1634-38), designed according to the Old Dutch fortification system (*Oud-Nederlands Stelsel*). The 1.5ha fort with its five bastions was a self-contained settlement, with its own church and water-supply as well as the residence of the governor and barracks for the garrison. The southern bastion was demolished in 1639, its materials being used to build a wall from the eastern bastion to the Waagat, thereby isolating the tip of land on the peninsula from its hinterland and laying the basis for the establishment of a fortified town. The Fort Church, originally wooden, was rebuilt in limestone in 1745. The Fort retains its administrative function as the centre of the national government and residence of the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles.

The walled town of Willemstad was laid out around 1650 adjacent to the Fort on an orthogonal grid pattern. It was enlarged in 1674 by filling part of the Waagat. By the beginning of the 18th century there were over two hundred dwellings within the ramparts: two- and three-storey buildings with balconies on long narrow plots. The ramparts survived until 1866, when they were demolished following changes in military strategy. Within the district one of the most striking buildings is the 1732 synagogue, Mikvé Israël-Emanuel. The sober and impressive interior of this building, the oldest of its type in the New World, was inspired by Esnoga, the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam.

The development of Otrobanda, on the opposite (western) side of Sint Anna Bay, did not begin until 1707. Initially the buildings there could not exceed one storey, so as not to mask the field of fire from Fort Amsterdam. Not being enclosed by defences, Otrobanda developed differently from Punda. The earliest buildings are laid out as detached structures on spacious lots, and with their central core surrounded by a gallery resemble plantation houses outside the city. In the southern section there is a sharp increase in density, since this developed as a working-class neighbourhood with craft workshops and dwellings on a maze of small alleys.

The first of the *transmission areas*, Pietermaai, which lies to the east of Punda, developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was settled by rich shipmasters and traders and, after 1816, by high-ranking Dutch administrators. Its character is therefore that of a linear development along the Caribbean coast of stately, colourful mansions.

To the north of the Waagat, Scharloo was a plantation area in the 18th century, but around the mid 19th century it was transformed into a residential quarter, favoured by wealthy Jewish merchants. A number of extensive and luxurious estates resulted, especially after 1870. Kortijn was a late 19th century expansion to the north-west of Otrobanda into another

plantation (the main house of which still survives). The buildings are modest in scale compared with those in the other transmission areas, but they are considerable interest, since they include some excellent examples of early 20th century popular dwellings.

The *architecture* of Willemstad began historically with the direct importation of the Dutch styles of the 16th and 17th centuries. However, climatic influences led gradually to the development of a local architectural style, using local materials and craftsmanship. The 17th century houses in Punda were in traditional Dutch style - two- or three-storey buildings on a narrow frontage, the ground floor being used as a shop or warehouse and the upper floors for living quarters. They were built in brick of Dutch origin, plastered externally, and with steeply pitched roofs. They have typically high facades with triangular gables. Wooden or stone galleries were introduced in the 18th century as protection against the sun. Following a government order in 1817 the facades, hitherto lime-washed, were brightly coloured in red, blue, and yellow ochre, and later in various shades of green. A number of fine examples of this type of house survive in Punda.

In the 18th century the so-called Curaçao Baroque architecture evolved, with facades in a wide variety of forms, the curved gable being the unifying feature. The best known example is the Penha Building, a three-storey structure at the harbour entrance. There are also good examples of Curaçao Baroque in Otrobanda and Scharloo; however, since there was much more space in these districts and many of the buildings were detached, there are facades on all four sides of a number of these.

The 19th century saw a more restrained style being adopted, with straight gables replacing elaborate curved gables and the galleries incorporated into the house fronts. This type of architecture is to be found especially in Otrobanda and Pietermaai, along with Classicist buildings, this style having been introduced in the 19th century and having found special favour with house-owners in Scharloo and the northern part of Otrobanda. A particularly fine example is the Villa Belvedere in Otrobanda.

Management and Protection

Legal status

An interlocking system of laws and ordinances constitute a formal policy for individual properties, groups, and the townscape as a whole:

- The National Monuments Ordinance (1977), followed by the current 1989 update, which provides the legal framework for;
- The Island Monuments Ordinance for Curaçao (1990) and the Register of Monuments;
- The National Ordinance Principles for Urban and Regional Development (1976), which provide the legal framework for:

- The Island Ordinance for Urban and Regional Development for Curaçao (1980);
- The Island Development Plan for Curaçao 1995;
- The Monuments Plan 1990.

Under the first of these over 750 individual monuments were designated. The 1995 Island Development Plan provides the legal framework for evaluating plans for new building and rehabilitation in the historic inner city. Specific guidelines are laid down for planning and design within the protected zone.

Management

Most of the buildings and plots in the Historic Area of Willemstad are privately owned. An exception is Fort Amsterdam, which is government-owned. In Scharloo-Ost there is a number of monumental buildings that are owned by the island government or institutes connected with it.

The island government began acquiring historic buildings in the 1980s as part of the implementation of its Inner City Action Plan, and this work is being carried on by the Curaçao Foundation for Preservation, the Willemstad Rehabilitation Corporation, and the Curaçao Housing Foundation.

In 1988 the inter-regional committee "Action Willemstad" was set up jointly by the governments of the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, and the Island Territory of Curaçao, to stimulate and promote preservation activities in the Historic Area and to prepare its nomination to the World Heritage List.

Island official bodies involved in the protection and conservation of the Historic Area are the Curaçao Monuments Council (an advisory body with certain executive powers), the Monuments Bureau (a division of the Department of Urban and Regional Development Planning and Housing), the Urban Renewal Secretariat, and the Steering Committee for Urban Redevelopment.

A number of voluntary bodies are active in this field. They include the Curaçao Foundation for Preservation, the Curaçao Housing Foundation, the Curaçao Monuments Fund Foundation, and the Willemstad Rehabilitation Corporation.

Coordination of the activities and strategies of this large number of bodies is the role of the Monuments Bureau.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The national government took its first hesitant steps towards the development of a policy for monument preservation in 1913, but nothing positive resulted. Several efforts were made in subsequent decades: an initial inventory of monuments was compiled shortly after World War II, and in 1944 a Monuments Commission was set up, which produced an extensive report with recommendations for a monuments

policy. A draft ordinance was launched in 1954, but failed to obtain approval.

The situation began to change with the publication in 1959 of *The Monuments of Curaçao in Text and Illustrations* by M D Ozinga, whose work while in progress had encouraged the creation of the Curaçao Foundation for Preservation. The inventory of monuments drawn up by C L Temminck Groll in 1966 formed the basis for the preliminary Monuments Plan for the Netherlands Antilles in 1976.

Following the implementation of the National Monuments Ordinance in 1979, a comprehensive survey was carried out in the 1980s, resulting in the 1986 Inventory of Monuments on Curaçao and a Memorandum for Initial Actions for a Monuments Policy. A series of legal instruments (see "Legal status" above) were set in place, culminating in the 1995 Island Development Plan for Curaçao. There is now a very strong will on the part both of government and of the local population to preserve the historic character of Willemstad, which is manifested on the one hand by the effective legislative framework that has been created and on the other by the number of voluntary bodies now in existence, working alongside the official institutions.

It would be wrong to deny, however, that the island has undergone some drastic changes in its economic development during the 20th century, which have affected the historic urban structure of Willemstad.

The first, and most profound, was the establishment of the Shell oil refinery at Schottegat in 1916, which changed the traditional function of Sint Anna Bay as a harbour for local trade to a busy passage from the open sea to Schottegat. This led to infilling of open areas of Otrobanda and a general expansion of the town beyond its traditional limits.

The access roads for the Queen Juliana Bridge, built in 1974, cut through the historic districts of Otrobanda and Scharloo. Although they have deeply scarred the townscape, they have not significantly affected the urban fabric at major points.

Destructive fires in Punda and Otrobanda during a popular uprising in May 1969 damaged some key historic areas, notably the waterfront Plaza Brion. Fortunately, this area escaped unsympathetic urban development in the years that followed and is now covered by an Area Development Plan designed to maintain its historic form and make it once again a lively waterfront square.

Elsewhere, only in the buffer zones has there been modern development (such as the ABN Bank building in Pietermaai, the high-rise hotel on part of the Water Fort, or the filling of part of the Waaigat to make a car-park) that is not wholly consistent with the townscape. Redevelopment plans from the 1980s onwards have resulted in successful projects such as the rehabilitation of the Rif Fort, restoration of the dense network of alleys in Otrobanda, and redesign of the Matthey wharf as a waterfront promenade.

It is worthy of note that the topographical situation of the town is such that the semi-circular ring of high ground to the north very effectively masks the 20th

industrial installations, such as the oil refinery, and modern housing developments, from the Historic Area. Only the electricity generating station behind the Rif Fort obtrudes, and this is scheduled for demolition within the next year.

Authenticity

Most of the historic urban structure of Willemstad dating from 1650-1800 is still extant and is the authentic setting for many monuments that are authentic in design, materials, and craftsmanship. Given that this has been an active port and administrative centre for three centuries, it may be deemed to have retained a substantial level of authenticity.

Specially praiseworthy is the strict observance of rule relating to the replacement of imported materials in restoration and conservation projects. Bricks and tiles are obtained directly from The Netherlands. The Dutch Monuments Service (*Monumentenzorg*) maintains stocks of such materials on Curaçao, and also has a laboratory devoted to restoration and building research.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Willemstad in December 1996.

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.

Comparative analysis

Willemstad is one of a number of administrative and trading settlements set up by the Dutch during the 16th- 18th centuries in many parts of the world. The most significant of those created by the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* - VOC) were Cape Town (Kaapstad) in South Africa, Cochin in Kerala (India), Galle, Colombo, and Jaffna in Sri Lanka, and Jakarta (Batavia) in Indonesia. The WIC founded settlements in New York (Nieuw-Amsterdam) in the USA, Paramaribo in Surinam, Recife (Mauritstad) in Brazil, and Willemstad.

They had certain elements in common, notably the exportation of Dutch town-planning and architectural traditions, but differ as a result of the local influences that made themselves felt as time passed. There are also other significant differences, depending upon whether military or civil authorities were responsible

for town layouts and whether they were fortified or undefended.

For these reasons Galle, which is already on the World Heritage List, differs significantly from Willemstad. The latter is also of especial interest in that it preserves excellent examples of both walled (Willemstad) and undefended (Otrobanda) settlements. It has also preserved its original fabric to a much greater extent than any of the other towns, apart from Galle: over half of the buildings are protected monuments, and there are other authentic survivals from the town's three centuries of history.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

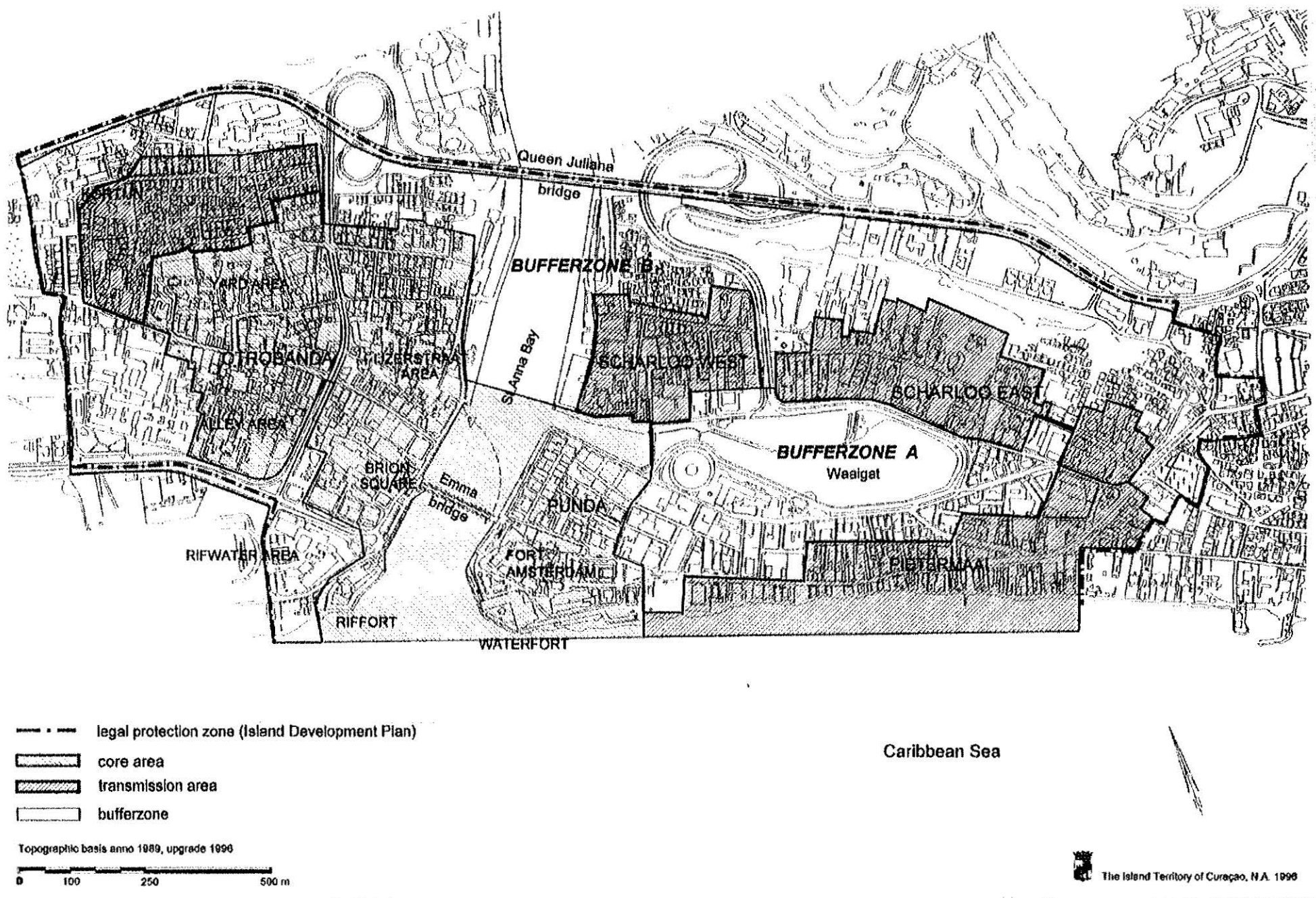
ICOMOS wishes to draw the attention of the competent authorities to the desirability of improving the tourist facilities at the forts defending the harbour and Fort Amsterdam. These would be better defined and presented if some of the extraneous construction in front of them could be removed; floodlighting would also improve their attractiveness.

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.

ICOMOS, September 1997



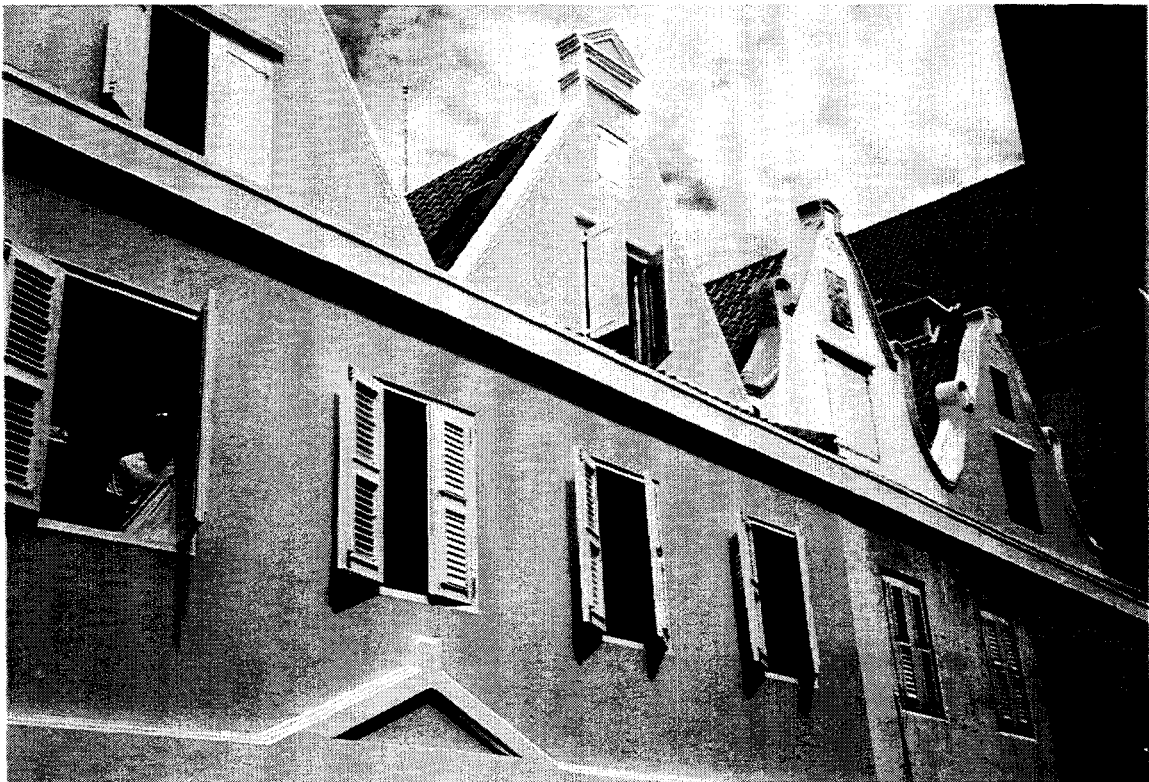
Willemstad :
Carte indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon /
Map showing nominated area and buffer zone



Willemstad :

**Entrée de Sint Anna Bay avec le Fort Rif au premier plan, les quais en face,
Punda et Waaigat derrière /**

**Entrance to Sint Anna Bay, with the Rif Fort in the foreground, the Water Front
opposite, and Punda and the Waaigat beyond**



Willemstad :

**Maisons de marchands juifs dans la Herenstraat, Punda (1706) /
Jewish merchants houses in Herenstraat, Punda (1706)**