

THE NETHERLANDS – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Registration, protection and preservation of monuments and historic sites in the Netherlands are in accordance with international standards. There are no serious shortcomings or failures, although there are many aspects for which special attention should be requested. These concern the backlog in maintenance and management and the protection of complex structures – such as lines of fortifications and historic parks – in urban and rural areas. Problems of this kind arise even at large-scale World Heritage sites, such as the Defence Line of Amsterdam and the New Dutch Waterline (tentative list).

Also, the legal frameworks are of concern; the high degree of urbanisation requires effective legislation. In this respect, the Dutch legislation contains failings, especially in the protection of areas whose significance is based on combined cultural and natural values.

Especially alarming is the situation for heritage conservation in the Netherlands Antilles. Due to the economic crisis of Curaçao, heritage restoration has practically stopped. We fear that essential parts of World Heritage in Willemstad, especially the neighbourhoods containing public housing, will continue to decay.

Dutch conservation policy consists of several aspects, such

as the identification and listing of heritage places and of townscapes and rural sites, legislation for restoration and maintenance and their financing, historic urbanism, town and country planning, and international affairs. The Historic Buildings and Monuments Act (Monumentenwet) of 1988 forms the framework for further legislation. The Netherlands Department for Conservation (Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg, RDMZ), is the main player in this field, responsible for upholding these laws. Because many of the heritage places are privately owned, private initiative is vital. Nationwide, some 1000 private organisations (NGOs) deal with cultural heritage places, or with special categories or sectors of them.

In the Netherlands, there are more than 45,000 monuments listed by the State, of which the majority dates to before 1850, and more than 300 protected townscapes and rural sites. Apart from this number, many heritage places profit from municipal (30,000) or provincial protection. After fifteen years of work, in 2001 we expect to finish a project of recording inventories, selecting and registering examples of modern town-planning and architecture of the period from 1850 to 1940. The result will be an extension of the list with some 12,000 newly chosen heritage places.

Willemstad, Curaçao (Netherlands Antilles), historic area of Willemstad (on the World Heritage List since 1997): There is a great contrast between residential areas and commercial areas. Both are part of the World Heritage site. Cutbacks to finances and an administrative crisis put practically all conservation programs to a stop.



Willemstad, the neighbourhood of Scharloo. The monuments, used by banking and cultural institutions, have been restored.

In the field of heritage restoration, the Netherlands has begun to diminish its arrears in financial terms. After years of decreasing budgets for restoration and maintenance, the policy has changed. In the last couple of years, the governmental budget for restoration and maintenance has increased. Only the restoration of very large and complicated buildings is not always guaranteed, because the allocation of the government budget is decentralised. In 1999, one million guilder have been reallocated to a hundred of these large-scale restorations.

During recent years, strategies have been developed to preserve the whole context of a heritage place, both in space and time. One could think of valuable structures such as rural estates, fortifications, lines of defence, canal zones and (post-war reconstruction) architecture in their context of urban planning. A number of Dutch World Heritage sites, such as the Defence Line of Amsterdam and the Mill Network at Kinderdijk, Schokland, and the Beemster Polder can be rated among these complex structures. The protection and dynamic development of these large scale sites is a severe challenge. Their size and complexity require an integrated approach of maintaining the whole area, with respect to content and financial aspects. This method of undertaking conservation related to urban and landscape planning is a new challenge which has to find its place in the ongoing process of spatial planning.

A review and the amendment of the Monument Act 1988 has

been wanted for a long time. Aspects to be evaluated are the policy of decentralisation that began a few years ago, the mutual co-operation of architectural analysis and archaeology, the incorporation of heritage conservation concerns in town and country planning, and sufficient legal frameworks in connection with other legislation (the law on Town and Country Planning, the law on Protection of Nature, the law on Housing). The RDMZ is trying to formulate a more consistent policy on restoration and maintenance. The wish and necessity of such an integrated policy has existed for a long time.

Cultural heritage places are part of the everyday environment, many people even live and work in them. For this reason they are an accessible form of heritage for a large number of people. They are in fact good examples of cultural heritage sites in which the limits of notions as "high culture" and "low culture" tend to disappear. The success of National Heritage Day proves year after year how accessible heritage is.

In the scope of international affairs, special attention has to be drawn to the overseas heritage of the West Indian Company, which is in an alarming state. Following the work undertaken for the heritage of the VOC (Dutch East-India Company), additional efforts are a prerequisite.

ICOMOS Netherlands



Willemstad, the neighbourhood of Otrobanda. Only a part of the area has been restored; many others are still very run down and impoverished.