

***Exploring the Spatial Dynamics of Aruban Verandas: A Study
from Spatial Theory Perspectives***

by

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the Aruban veranda as both an architectural element and a socio-cultural space, employing Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and Martina Löw's relational theory to analyse its dual role as a physical threshold and a site of social interaction. While existing scholarship on Caribbean architecture has focused on climatic function or colonial influences, this study addresses a critical gap by examining how verandas mediate between private and public life in Aruba. Through a mixed-methods approach, including archival photography, contemporary photographic documentation, and mental mapping, the research reveals how verandas are dynamically constructed through everyday practices, cultural traditions like dande, and performative self-staging. The findings demonstrate that verandas, though architecturally diverse, consistently function as liminal spaces: they facilitate circulation, host gatherings, and embody contradictions (open yet enclosed, private yet performative). Mental maps highlight their emotional significance, with "family" emerging as a central theme. The study challenges static typologies by positioning verandas as relational constructs. This interdisciplinary framework deepens our understanding of the social role of vernacular architecture, providing a model for exploring how design and culture interact within transitional spaces across different contexts.

Keywords: spatial theory, Aruba, veranda, Caribbean architecture

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean home is often more than a private retreat. It is a stage for everyday life, where the boundaries between inside and outside, private and public, blur beneath the sun and breeze. On the island of Aruba, one architectural element captures this dynamic especially well: the veranda. Referenced in local music, memories, and daily routines, the veranda is not just a shaded space at the front of the house, but a place where stories are shared, neighbours are greeted, and cultural traditions unfold.

Building on the developments in spatial theory, and arguing that space is both a social product and a shaping force of social action, this thesis investigates how the veranda as a specific Aruban architectural element functions, not only as a physical space, but also as a site of social interaction and cultural expression. To structure the analysis, the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre¹ and Martina Löw² serve as critical frameworks, offering insights into the relationship between space, society, and lived experience. Through this approach, the research aims to uncover the deeper socio-spatial dynamics that shape the use and perception of the Aruban veranda as a domestic threshold.

The existing scholarship on Caribbean architecture mainly covers climatic aspects or colonial architecture. Raymond speaks of how colonial influences shaped Caribbean islands their architecture, and how the region still struggles to develop a cohesive architectural identity due to economic constraints, weakened planning systems, and a lack of advocacy for architecture's cultural and societal role.³ Ruiz-Valero et al. speak of vernacular housing, namely the thermal and lighting performance of a traditional Dominican *bohio* through simulations, yet their analysis stops short of exploring how these designs facilitate social interaction.⁴ Green also speaks of the *bohio*, but through the lens of architectural syncretism, where she

¹ Henri Lefebvre, "La Production De L'espace," *L Homme Et La Société* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 1974): 15–32, <https://doi.org/10.3406/homso.1974.1855>.

² Martin G Fuller and Martina Löw, "Introduction: An Invitation To Spatial Sociology," *Current Sociology* 65, no. 4 (March 27, 2017): 469–91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392117697461>.

³ Mark Raymond, "Architecture, Independence, and Identity in the Commonwealth Caribbean," Small Axe Project, February 2012, accessed February 19, 2025, <https://smallaxe.net/sxsalon/discussions/architecture-independence-and-identity-commonwealth-caribbean>.

⁴ Letzai Ruiz-Valero, Virginia Flores-Sasso, Esteban Prieto-Vicioso, Gabriela Fernández-Flores, "Assessment of Vernacular Housing in the Dominican Republic Using Simulations," *Buildings* 14, no. 11 (October 24, 2024): 3365, <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings14113365>.

discusses how the convergence of indigenous, European, and African influences created a distinct Caribbean cultural and architectural landscape. She further traces its impact on modern architecture and its relevance for sustainable development today.⁵ While these studies cover functional and historical aspects of Caribbean architecture, they highlight a notable gap: the social and cultural significance of the veranda as an architectural element, in particularly the Aruban veranda, remains underexplored.

This oversight is notable, as the veranda serves not merely as a climatic buffer but as a liminal space where private and communal life converge, a theme documented within the regional context. A study from Jamaica examines the veranda as a space that mediates between public and private life, serving as a site for social interaction and reflecting Caribbean identity.⁶ Hudson's approach, combining architectural and literary analysis, offers a better understanding of social and cultural roles of outdoor domestic spaces. Emery's analysis of verandas in Jean Rhys's novels similarly explores the symbolic significance of these spaces and also focuses on fiction rather than real-life spatial practices.⁷ While Emery does not explore how the veranda exists in the minds of the general public, she does analyse its psychological role in the Rhys's fictional characters. This thesis examines a similar concept but shifts the focus from literature to lived experience, specifically investigating the veranda's significance in the real world context of Aruba, a Caribbean island with its own unique cultural and spatial identity. Hudson's approach is in line with this research on Aruban verandas as they both function as transitional spaces that foster informal socialisation and cultural expression. Still, Hudson's focus on Jamaica limits direct application to Aruban verandas; for this reason, this thesis adapts his framework through alternative methodology to investigate a comparable Caribbean architectural threshold, examples of which are shown in figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. An example of an Aruban veranda as viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author,

⁵ Patricia Elaine Green, "Creole and Vernacular Architecture: Embryonic Syncretism in Caribbean Cultural Landscape," *The Journal of Architecture* 27, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 21–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2022.2047761>.

⁶ Brian Hudson, "The Caribbean Veranda: A Study of Its Function as Revealed in Jamaican Literature," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 23, no. 2 (2006): 147–59, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/19090/>.

⁷ Mary Lou Emery, *On The Veranda: Jean Rhys's Material Modernism*, Online (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

December 30, 2024.



Figure 2. An example of an Aruban veranda as viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.

Existing scholarship has yet to fully explore the intersection of Caribbean architecture and the socio-cultural role of verandas in Aruba. While existing studies touch on architectural aspects in combination with social aspects to some extent, they do not apply spatial theory to these spaces. As a result, verandas remain reduced to static typologies rather than dynamic social spaces. This lack of scholarly attention limits the understanding of how these spaces contribute to the everyday social and cultural life of Arubans, leaving their social significance understudied.

This thesis aims to serve as a starting point for investigating domestic outdoor spaces in Caribbean architecture, with a focus on the Aruban veranda. By examining how verandas function within households, facilitate social interactions, and reflect broader cultural dynamics, this research lays the groundwork for future studies in the field and inspire further academic interest in the significance of similar transitional spaces in the Caribbean, thereby contributing to discussions on architecture, space, and identity in the region.

For this research, the social aspects of verandas are examined using the theoretical perspectives of Lefebvre and Löw to understand the production, perception, and relational construction of space. Both Löw and Lefebvre reject the idea that space is merely a physical container where social life happens. They argue that space is actively produced through human interactions and social practices. Lefebvre speaks of a triad of space consisting of perceived space, conceived space and lived space.⁸ These respectively represent the material and functional aspects of space, the planned, designed, and officially structured space, and the

⁸ Lefebvre, "La Production De L'espace."

emotional and symbolic meanings attached to space.

Löw's contrasts this by taking on a more relational, process-oriented approach. This is to say that while Lefebvre emphasizes the production of space through political, economic, and historical influences, Löw takes a smaller sociological approach, focusing on how people continuously create and perceive space in everyday life. Her main concepts are spacing and synthesizing. Spacing is the physical and social placement of objects and people. Synthesizing is how individuals and groups interpret and give meaning to space.⁹ So while Lefebvre sees space as shaped by larger macro structures (capitalism, state power), Löw focuses more on how people actively construct and negotiate the spaces around them. Differentiating the different works helps analyse the Aruban verandas in different ways. Lefebvre's approach helps analyse how verandas are historically shaped, while Löw's approach focuses on how verandas are experienced and socially structured in daily life. These theories serve as a guiding framework throughout the thesis, providing a lens to analyse the spatiality of the Aruban veranda. This study also employs secondary sources grounded in socio-spatial theory, particularly works building upon Lefebvre and Löw's frameworks, to gain a deeper understanding of the role of how Aruban verandas not only function as a physical space but also as a site of social interaction and cultural expression.

In this research, archival photographic research, mental mapping and photographic analysis is applied. The thesis applies archival photography research to provide insights on how verandas are depicted and photographed in archived photography, also revealing what is deemed to hold enough relevance to be archived. The photographs are retrieved from the online repository of the *Archivo Nacional Aruba* (ANA). Approximately 20,000 out of the 84,921 photographs that are available online in the Archivo Nacional Aruba have been reviewed. This limited scope was necessitated by the restricted access and inadequate filtering capabilities of the archive's website. From this selection, photographs depicting houses with verandas were identified and subsequently analysed. These photographs relevant for this thesis date from 1933 to 1982. In addition, the research employs mental maps on current Aruban residents to generate an understanding on how they view the verandas and what thoughts, memories and emotions are associated with verandas. The mental maps are collected from a group of seven participants, ranging from the ages of 18 to 72, both male and female, and from different regions on the island. Lastly, this thesis utilizes original photographic analysis to share knowledge on architecturally defining the veranda. This is done by documenting 30 verandas across Aruba and subsequently applying a systematic analysis on these images to identify the Aruban veranda's defining spatial and architectural features.

This thesis is structured in three sections. In the first section, the Aruban veranda is defined spatially. In the following section, the representation of the veranda from various perspectives is discussed by applying the proposed theoretical framework. In this section, the archival depiction is discussed, followed by tradition, and lastly the veranda through the minds of Arubans. In the last section is discussed how Aruban verandas not only function as a physical space but also as a site of social interaction and cultural expression is discussed.

DEFINING THE ARUBAN VERANDA

This section takes Lefebvre's conceptualisation of the conceived space to systematically analyse the

⁹ Fuller and Löw, "Introduction: An Invitation To Spatial Sociology."

documented photography. It aims to define how the veranda is created and imagined by urban planners, architects, and other professionals.

The photographic documentation includes 30 verandas captured across various regions of Aruba over one month. Each image was taken with the explicit purpose of analysing the veranda as a spatial and architectural feature. Although this section discusses only select examples, all photographs underwent the same systematic analysis to ensure methodological consistency.



Figure 3. An Aruban veranda with a combination of a wall and a decorative balustrade, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure 4. Aruban veranda with round arches viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.

The images reveal a variety of colours and architectural elements across the verandas (Figs. 1–4, 8). While each example differs in form and detail, they collectively suggest an underlying typology. The diversity of features, from structural configurations to decorative touches, also reveals significant formal differentiation within the Aruban veranda typology. The analysis of photographic documentation indicates that the majority of Aruban houses are detached and situated on individual plots, thus verandas of neighbours are not close to each other. For this research, the veranda is defined as being situated on the front of the house and, in some cases, partially along the side of the house towards the back. This typology has also been observed in other examples from the Caribbean like in Jamaica¹⁰ and Grenada (Fig. 5). The front door of the home is often on the veranda, making it a necessary passageway to enter the home. In cases where the house is elevated, the veranda is typically raised as well.

¹⁰ Hudson, “The Caribbean Veranda: A Study of Its Function as Revealed in Jamaican Literature.”



Figure 5. Similar spatial and architectural definition of Aruban veranda, Grenada. Photograph by Robert Rasmijn, *Foto-Collectie Robert Rasmijn, doos-dia # 3-27*, 1960-1965, Archivo Nacional Aruba.

The terrain the house stands on is frequently surrounded by a low parapet, that is either a full wall, a decorated balustrade, a fence, or a combination of these (Fig. 3). This boundary sometimes obstructs the view of the veranda from the street. This border creates a visual filter that mediates visibility without total blocking while marking the boundary between the street and the residence. The entrance in this boundary is almost always directly across from the veranda, with a pathway leading from the entrance to the veranda (Figs. 1, 2, 4 and 8). The area between the veranda and the parapet, the front yard, is often scattered with trees and plants, sometimes in pots. In certain cases the abundance of greenery is such that it obstructs the view from the street to the veranda.

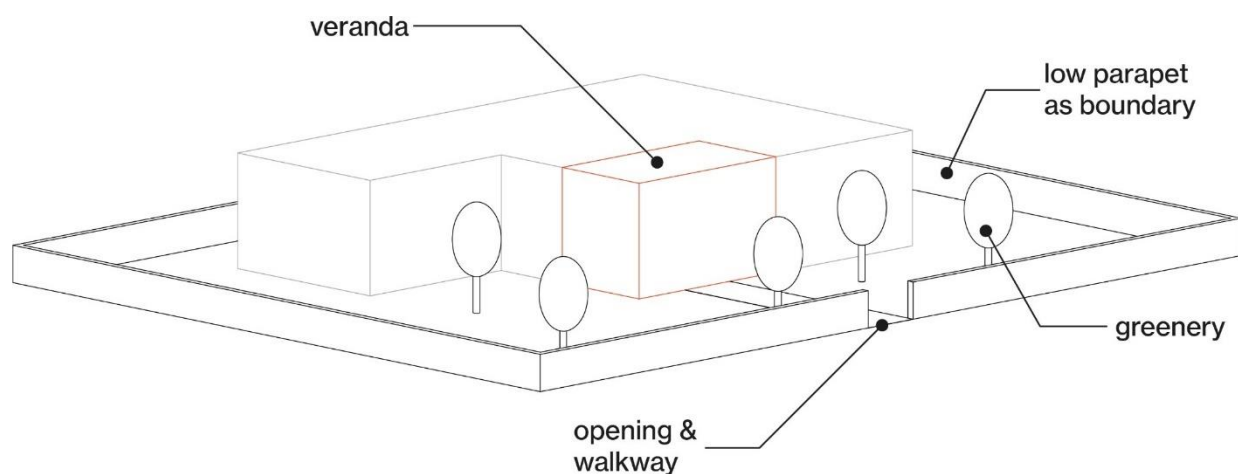


Figure 6. Diagrammatic drawing of the characterising elements of the Aruban veranda. Image by author, March 10, 2025.

The veranda is often either framed by round arches or a more rectangular version, creating a private and darker environment not very visible from the street, almost like a loggia (Fig. 4). Other times it is created by an overhang that is supported by one or more defining columns. This overhang and column often clearly differentiate themselves from the rest of the architectural language of the house, stating their presence clearly as shown in figure 2. These two types are represented in a conceptualized diagram in figure 7. The veranda can thus be described as a semi-outdoor space.

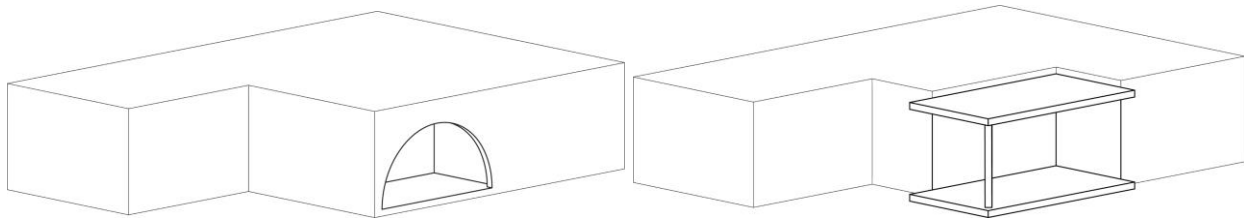


Figure 7. Diagrammatic drawing of two main framing types of Aruban verandas; left is the arch type, right is the overhang type. Image by author, March 10, 2025.

Not all verandas strictly conform to one category or the other. While many do, others occupy an intermediate position, such as the example in figure 8. This particular veranda protrudes from the main structure with notable columns, yet lacks pronounced architectural distinction. Shielded by rectangular arches that echo the form (though not the curvature) of rounded arches, it synthesizes elements from both typologies.



Figure 8. A hybrid veranda intermediate to two typologies, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2025.

The size of verandas vary according to the size of the house, but they typically occupy $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the front view of the house with a depth of no more than 3 meters. On larger verandas, tables and chairs are placed, but on smaller verandas, this is often not the case. This is possibly due to their limited size, which restrict their use and position them primarily as transitional circulation zones leading to the front entrance, rather than as true living spaces.

This introduction provides an architectural definition of the Aruban veranda, looking at its position, volume, and other architectural elements that define it. The next section expands on this foundation by analysing archival photographs through the theoretical frameworks, aiming to uncover how these features reflect broader cultural and social practices.

ARCHIVAL DEPICTION

This section analyses archival photography through the proposed theoretical frameworks to uncover how veranda features reflect broader cultural and social practices in Aruba. The archival photography of Aruban verandas captures a diverse range of subjects, including social activities, historical time periods, people from various social classes, surrounding landscapes, and differing levels of formality, all of which contextualize the veranda's role in Aruban life. A majority of these photos do not depict the veranda separately, but it shows them as part of a larger frame with a myriad of activities happening on the veranda, such as formal receptions for the Queen's Year celebration at the governor's house (Fig. 9), getting dressed (Fig. 10), or to simply looking at the surroundings from the veranda (Fig. 11).



Figure 9. Queen's Year celebration, Aruba. Photograph by BUVO, *Celebracion Ana di La Reina Cas di Gezaghebber*, Image # 4, 1977, Archivo Nacional Aruba.

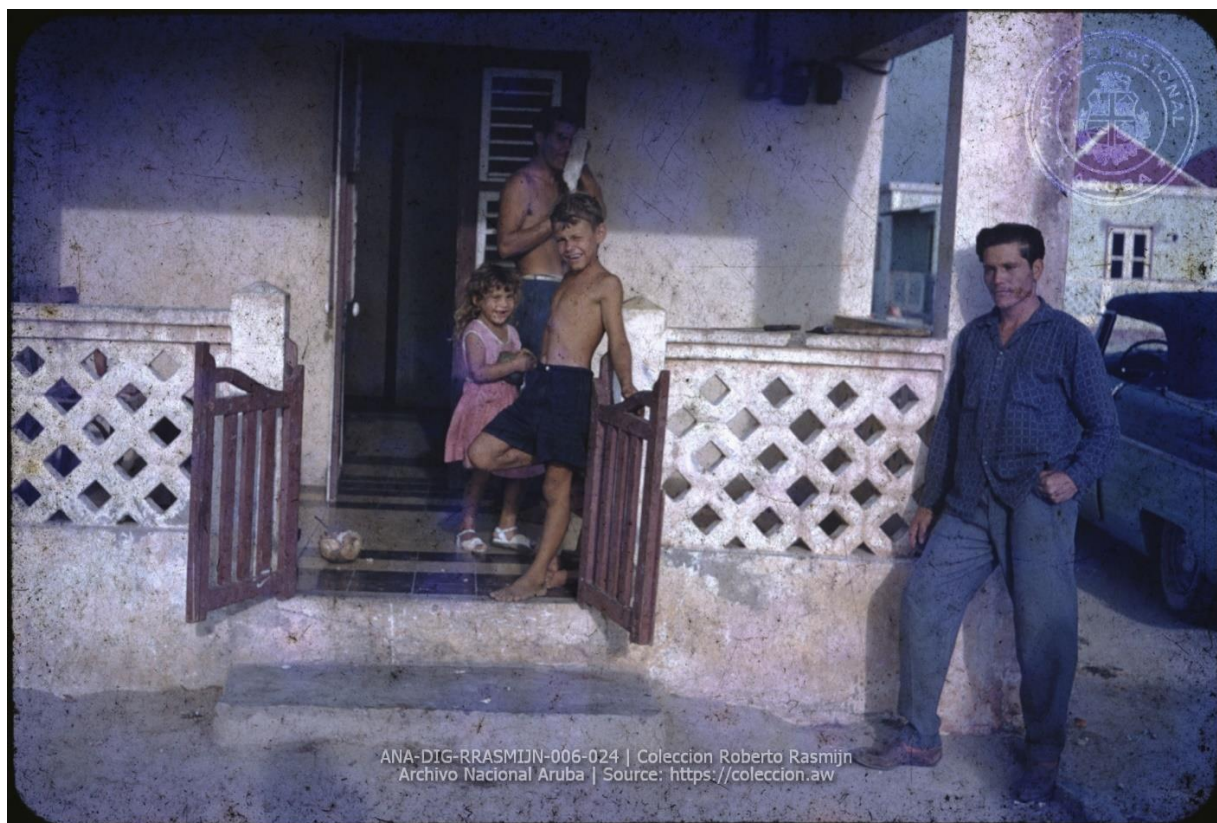


Figure 10. Getting dressed, Aruba. Photograph by Robert Rasmijn, *Foto-Collectie Robert Rasmijn*, doos-dia # 6-24, 1960-1965, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure 11. Children on the veranda, Aruba. Photograph by Dr. Johan Hartog, *Landschappen - Aruba* (Dr.

Johan Hartog Collection), n.d., Archivo Nacional Aruba.

Reading these activities through Lefebvre's perceived space reveals the veranda's multifunctional nature, accommodating events with varying degrees of formality. Applying Löw's concept of synthesis further demonstrates how spatial practices adapt to context: the veranda's social rules, including behavioural expectations, hierarchies, and manners, shift dynamically depending on the occasion (e.g., formal receptions versus casual daily activities). This flexibility confirms that the veranda is not architecturally deterministic; rather, its meaning is continually renegotiated through use, transcending a single prescribed function.

Furthermore, the photograph of the governor's house veranda during a formal reception exemplifies Lefebvre's lived space, as it reveals how this architectural threshold serves as a semi-public area of social reception. It reinforces their function as a social buffer between the home and the outside world. Several images show people standing, sitting, or observing from the veranda, highlighting how the verandas were used for both active engagement (hosting guests and watching street life) and passive presence (simply being visible in the community). We also see this transition phenomenon in the Aruban movie '*Abo So*', where guests are awaited, received and greeted on the veranda before further entering inside the house.¹¹ Besides being a functional space, the veranda is also often used as a performative space, which once again leans on the concept of the lived space. Many photographs show individuals often of higher status positioning themselves on the veranda to be seen (Fig. 12). On the other hand, individuals of lower status position themselves on the veranda to see, instead of being seen (Fig. 11).



¹¹ "Abo So," October 15, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVQx2p_XSKc.

Figure 12. Marine posing on a veranda, Aruba. Photograph by Gerardus Hubertus Delnoij, *Foto-collectie Delnoij*, image # 196, 1964-1966, Archivo Nacional Aruba.

Additionally, figures 10, 12, and 13 demonstrate, when analysed through Löw's concept of synthesis, that verandas transcend social stratification, appearing across all classes and cultural groups in Aruba. This inclusivity persists even in historically segregated contexts, such as the oil refinery era, where wealthy American workers had verandas incorporated into their homes (Fig. 13), paralleling their use in simpler F.C.C.A. social housing (Fig. 14). While verandas vary in scale and ornamentation, their universal presence in domestic architecture suggests a shared cultural valuation: an idea that resonates with Lefebvre's conceived space as a planned ideal from top-down.¹² When read through lived space, however, the veranda's island-wide prevalence reveals its deeper role as a site of daily practice and collective identity.

Moreover, many of the images highlight the placement of the veranda on the front corner of the house, directly connected to the front door. This reinforces the idea that verandas are not just for leisure but also for circulation and transition between indoor and outdoor spaces. This configuration reflects Löw's notion of spacing, and through her synthesizing perspective, we can interpret it as expressing a conscious attempt to connect the veranda and the public streetscape. However, the greenery and plants obstructing the visibility of the veranda from the street reveals that verandas are designed not only as socially open areas but also as spaces where a degree of privacy could be controlled through environmental elements like plants, walls, or balustrades, relating to Löw's notion of spacing.

¹² Lefebvre, "La Production De L'espace."



Figure 13. American oil refinery workers neighbourhood Lago Colony, Aruba. Photograph by Nelson Morris, *Bungalows in Lago Colony* (#5157, *Lago* , *Aruba*, *April-May 1944*), May 1944, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure 14. F.C.C.A. social housing, Aruba. Photograph by BUVO, *Casnan di F.C.C.A.- Lantamento di Sushi - Auto wrakken den cura*, Image # 14, 1982, Archivo Nacional Aruba.

Building upon our earlier analysis of the marine posing on the veranda in figure 12 in regards to the veranda's relation to social classes, the image shows how verandas could also be linked to identity and self-expression. The act of posing deliberately in front of the house can be understood through the lens of *self-staging*, a concept by Erving Goffman explored in social and spatial theory as the conscious performance of identity within a particular setting.¹³ The veranda, through this theory, is not a neutral backdrop, rather it becomes a curated space of representation. As Löw argues, space is synthesized not only through physical arrangements but also through actions and perceptions. The marine's decision to pose on the veranda, in uniform, suggests an intentional alignment of personal identity with the architectural language of the home, expressing both belonging and social position. This act parallels Lefebvre's concept of lived space. The marine's pose transforms the veranda into a stage for asserting social status.

Further building on the notion that the veranda functions as a social stage, Gernot Böhme's concept of atmosphere as the emotional and spatial interplay that emerges from the interaction between people and their environment, is exemplified by the image of the governor on his veranda (Fig. 9). According to Böhme, architecture is not merely about physical structures, but about how these structures are staged to produce effects, which he refers to as the *aesthetic of appearing*.¹⁴ In this sense, the veranda becomes a

¹³ Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.," *American Sociological Review* 21, no. 5 (October 1, 1956): 631, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089106>.

¹⁴ Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, trans. Jean-Paul Thibaud, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538181>.

curated environment where social power and public identity are communicated.

The use of the veranda for receptions and ceremonial presence instils the space with a particular atmospheric charge. It becomes a threshold not only between inside and outside, but between the domestic and the symbolic. Its scale and openness all contribute to the staging of authority and hospitality, illustrating Böhme's idea that space itself can be orchestrated to influence perception and mood. Thus, the Governor's veranda exemplifies how the spatial and the social are combined into a curated atmosphere, reinforcing the veranda's role as a medium of both self-staging and social meaning.

This section has examined the veranda's spatial and social dynamics through archival photography, revealing its role as a multifunctional threshold that mediates between public and private life in Aruba. With the use of theoretical frameworks, the section discusses how verandas are socially constructed spaces, shaped by and shaping cultural practices across different classes and contexts. The following section builds upon these insights by exploring the veranda's representation in Aruban traditions, further investigating how its symbolic and functional dimensions are maintained through cultural narratives.

TRADITION AS A MEDIUM

Building upon the archival findings presented earlier, this section demonstrates how Aruban cultural practices articulate the veranda's hybrid identity as both a performative social stage and a spatial boundary. The analysis draws upon the frameworks of Lefebvre and Löw, while integrating developments by Sturm and Low that extend these theories. This interpretive framework, established through both documentary evidence and cultural expressions, sets the foundation for the subsequent investigation of the mental maps in the following section.

While there are many Aruban traditions like *carnival*, *gaita* music, *Dia di San Juan*, and more, the tradition of *dande* takes place on the veranda. Before analysing *dande* through the frameworks of Lefebvre and Löw, this section will first explore the tradition itself and its spatial implications.

Dande is an annual Aruban New Year's tradition where musicians (a *paranda*) visit homes singing blessings. Traditionally, they announce their arrival outdoors, awaiting invitation inside. The lead singer removes his hat only upon entering, marking the transition from semi-public, the veranda, to private space. While modern *parandas* may enter directly, some still observe the traditional veranda threshold ritual, reinforcing the veranda's role as a socio-spatial threshold.

The *paranda* singer's awaiting presence on the veranda with his hat still on materializes what Lefebvre terms lived space: a socially produced zone where spatial hierarchies become visible. This ritual performance aligns with Gabriele Sturm's concept of *iterative spacing*, where repeated practices (in this case the annual *dande* visits) reinforce the veranda's identity as a relational threshold.¹⁵ The hat's removal only upon entering the home marks a symbolic transition from public (veranda) to private (interior), resonates with Setha Low's analysis of how *embodied gestures*, such as dress codes and

¹⁵ Sturm, Gabriele. "Sozialraum & Sozialer Raum." *CORAX - Fachmagazin Für Kinder- Und Jugendarbeit in Sachsen*, no. 6 (2020): 16–18. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-73042-3>.

posture, actively construct and reinforce spatial boundaries.¹⁶ Reading the tradition through Low's concepts reveals that veranda is more than just an architectural transition zone, but also a 'bodily'-transitional zone, in which the visiting group (in this case the paranda) negotiate spatial power through culturally coded movements.

The veranda's dual role, as both a space of hospitality and a gatekeeping mechanism, reflects Sturm's argument that spacing is dialectical.¹⁷ Its front-facing placement and the paranda's house-to-house movement illustrate what she calls *tactical circulations*: routines that maintain the veranda's function as an interface between private and public. Low's socio-spatial theory further clarifies this dynamic. The Governor's formal receptions (Fig. 9) and dande's rituals, though differing in formality, both utilise the veranda as what Low describes as a *staged encounter zone*, where social worth is assessed before granting fuller access.

Reading through Löw's lens of synthesizing, similar to Low's process of meaning-making, the veranda gains meaning through the practices associated with it. Watching passersby, greeting friends and family, and hosting celebrations transform the veranda into a socially constructed space of interaction. The fact that some parandas are expected and thus let inside, while others stay on the veranda, shows that the veranda is both a welcoming space and a place where social norms and expectations are negotiated.

The tradition of dande is so strongly tied to the veranda that it has become a symbol of this tradition in Aruban culture. This is reflected in the song *Den Veranda*, which translates to *In the Veranda*, by the emblematic Aruban folklore band *Grupo di Betico*.¹⁸ The song describes sitting on the veranda, watching others, being watched, seeing friends and family pass by, and celebrating on the veranda. Moreover, in the music video the paranda visits a house and holds a dande in the veranda while members of the household celebrate, visually anchoring this tradition to this space. Through such representations, the veranda acquires new layers of meaning, functioning in a double relation: it is both a product of social action (shaped by rituals like dande and daily interactions) and a shaping force (structuring how these social practices unfold). As Löw's concept of synthesizing suggests, the veranda is not merely a passive backdrop but an active participant in cultural production. Its design enables certain behaviours, while its use continually redefines its role in Aruban life.

This section has analysed how Aruban cultural traditions reveal the veranda's dual role as both a social stage and spatial threshold. The examination has employed Lefebvre's and Löw's foundational theories while incorporating extensions by Sturm and Low, who have developed these spatial concepts further. Through musical and visual representations, these traditions reinforce the theoretical perspectives established here. The subsequent section explores documented mental maps to investigate how the veranda is conceptualized in the Aruban imagination, applying these same theoretical frameworks to understand its cognitive and cultural significance

¹⁶ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, 1st ed. (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), https://openlibrary.org/books/OL28839515M/Spatializing_Culture.

¹⁷ Sturm, "Sozialraum & Sozialer Raum."

¹⁸ "GRUPO DI BETICO DEN VERANDA," December 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EgpK7w6fz0>.

VERANDAS IN THE ARUBAN MIND

This section analyses veranda perceptions through mental maps, applying Lefebvre's and Löw's framework, expanded with Goffman's performative theory. The method reveals how residents transform architectural structures into meaningful social spaces, documenting the dynamic relationship between design and lived experience within Aruban domestic environments.

In this research, mental mapping is employed as a tool to gain deeper insight into how the veranda is perceived and experienced by Arubans. The subjects are asked to draw their conceptions of the veranda and write down associated words, which allows for a qualitative exploration of their mental representations of this space. The process of drawing and labelling offers a unique way to capture individual perceptions, social functions, and emotional connections to the veranda, going beyond mere physical descriptions of the space. Participants are provided with minimal contextual information about the research's focus, to avoid influencing their responses, thereby ensuring the authenticity of their spatial perceptions.



Figure 15. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

Additionally, the subjects are asked to provide information about their age, place of residence on Aruba, and the country of origin they most identify with (Fig. 15). This demographic information is included in the study to explore whether cultural background or regional differences within Aruba might influence how the veranda is understood and represented. By correlating the subjects' depictions of the veranda with their cultural identity and place of residence, the research aims to determine if there were any significant patterns or variations in how different groups conceptualise the veranda. This approach helps reveal whether the veranda's role as a social, transitional, or private space is influenced by factors such as age, social

background, or local cultural practices. In this way, the mental maps serve not only as a reflective tool for understanding individual spatial practices but also as a means of exploring how cultural and social contexts shape the way Arubans perceive and interact with the space of the veranda.

The maps' emphasis on everyday rituals (drinking coffee, reading the morning paper, and sitting in the morning) and environmental features (trees, plants, flowers, greenery, sun, and fresh breeze), for example in figure 16, reveals the veranda as a place of habit. Framing this according to Löw's conceptual model, the residents give meaning to the veranda's conceived climatic function for cooling by pairing it with social acts, like the aforementioned daily activities. Lefebvre's concept of *appropriation* reveals a similar concept, where residents reclaim the space from its conceived space.¹⁹

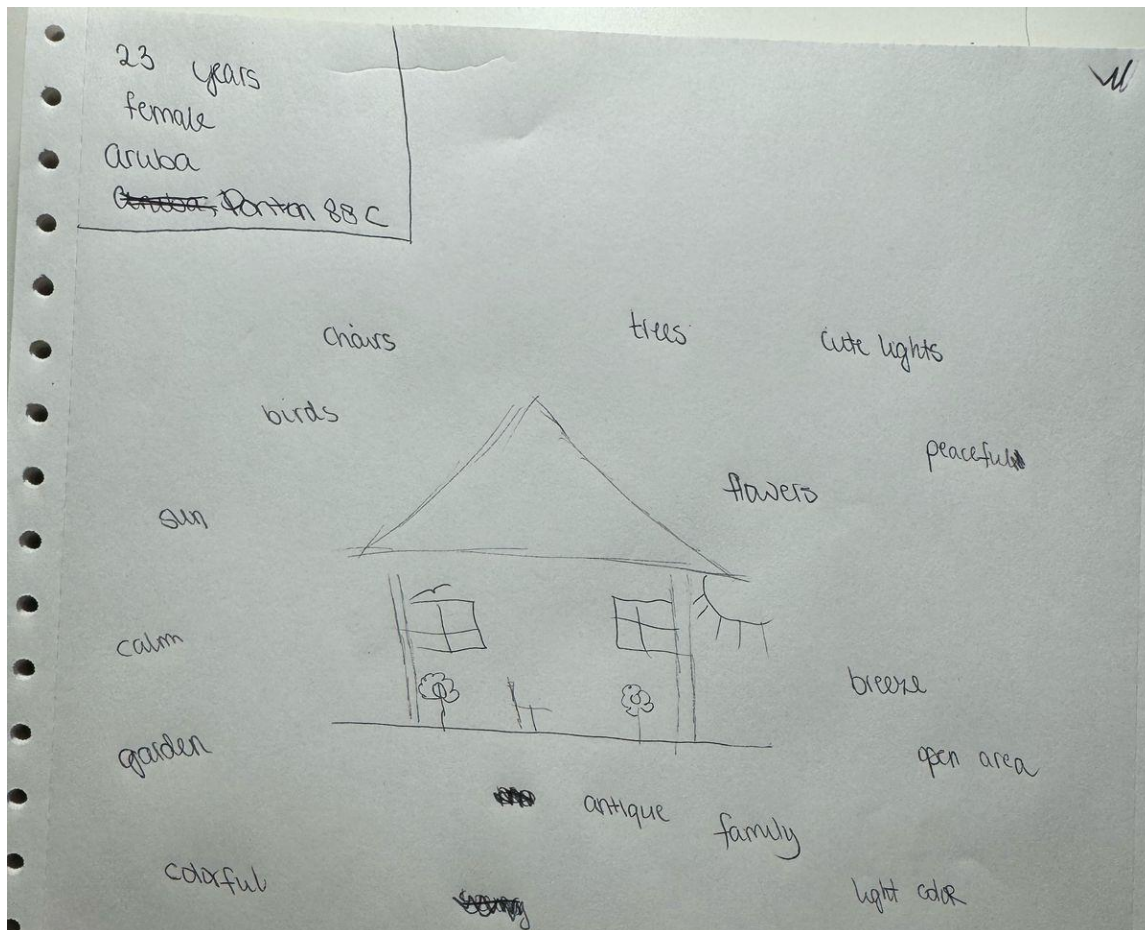


Figure 16. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

The two mental maps, one drawing the street (Fig. 15) and the other writing “showcase to the street” (Fig. 17), can be understood through Goffman’s self-staging with Lefebvre and Löw’s frameworks. The phrase “showcase to the street” frames the veranda as a deliberate frontstage to the street, as a conceived space shaped by residents to curate visibility. This exists in dialogue with the lived space they create through unscripted activities like drinking coffee or reading the news, where the veranda becomes a backstage for private daily life. Moreover, the phrase suggests an implied audience, reflecting Löw’s synthesizing, where

¹⁹ Lefebvre, “La Production De L’espace.”

the veranda's physical positioning (spacing) is given meaning through performance, like reading the newspaper in the morning. Goffman describes these deliberate displays *impression management*, as it transforms the veranda into a stage for visibility.²⁰ The veranda is shown by these layers as a contentious socio-spatial barrier where lived practice, performance, and design converge.

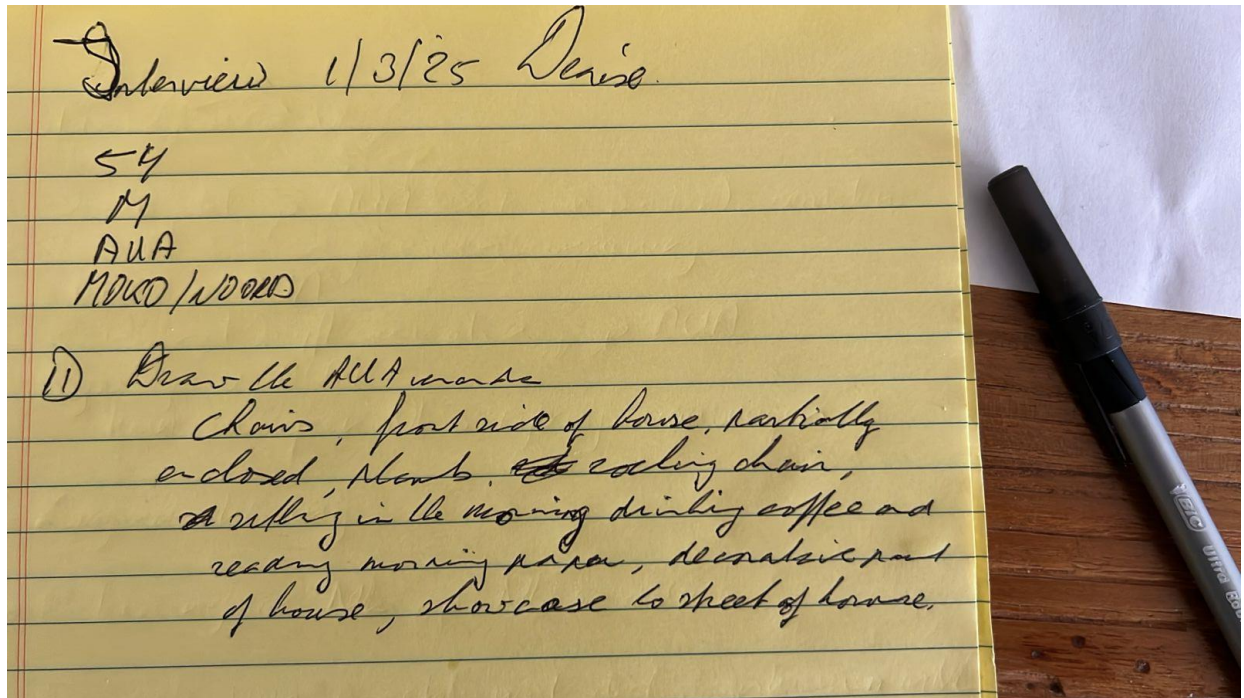


Figure 17. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

The prominence of front doors (Fig. 20), windows, and annotations like “movement” in the maps (Fig. 15) reveals how residents perceive and interact with verandas as spaces of circulation—a concept that gains deeper meaning when analysed through Löw’s and Lefebvre’s theories. The deliberate placement of the front door on the veranda can be understood as an intentional choreography of movement, as perceived through Lefebvre’s conceived space. The frequent inclusion of doors and windows in subject’ drawings may reflect a mental construction, which is a way of assembling the veranda’s meaning through daily practices. It is noteworthy that architectural elements like arches and balustrades, which consistently appear in the photographic analysis, appear only in one mental map (Fig. 19). The persistent emphasis on front doors and windows suggests they are not just structural features, but are synthesized as gateways. At the same time, the recurring presence of chairs (Löw’s spacing of chairs), for example in figures 15, 16, 17 and 18, in these mental maps frames the veranda as a living space. Together, these elements, doors as thresholds and chairs as symbols of a living space, reveal the veranda’s dual character as a space of both transition and dwelling.

²⁰ Goffman, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.”

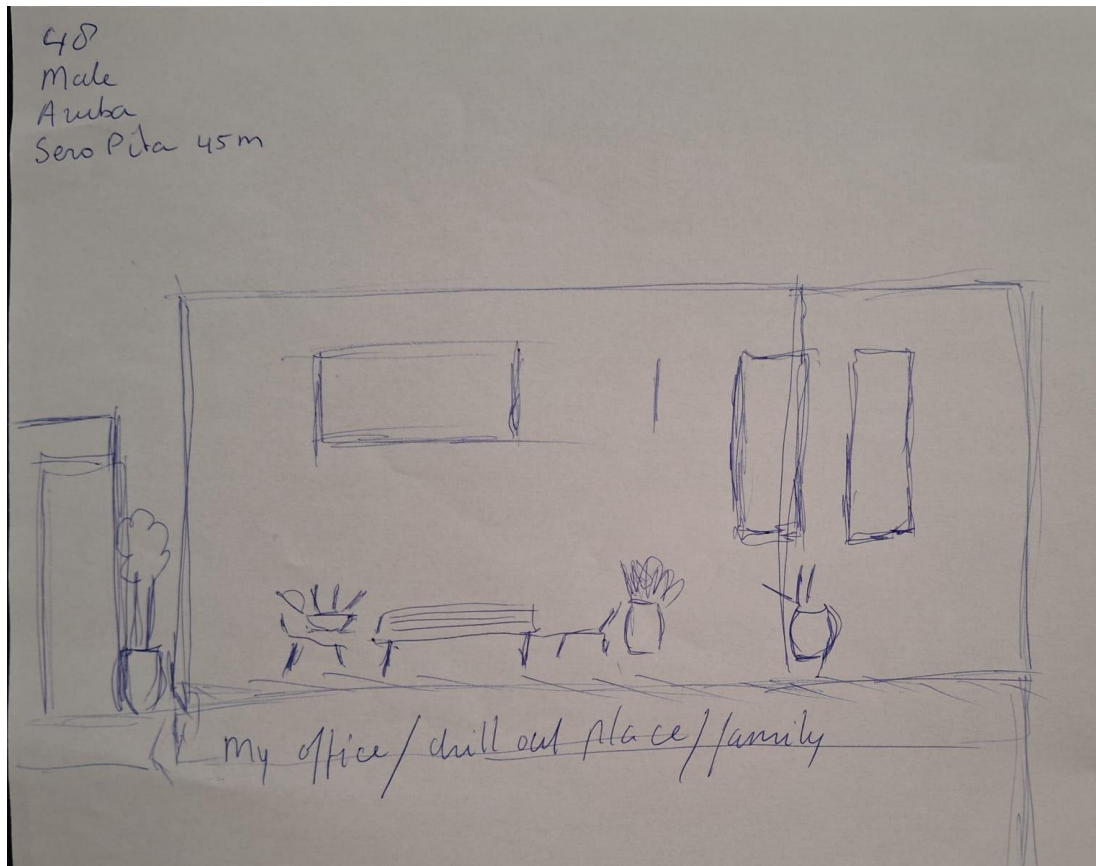


Figure 18. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

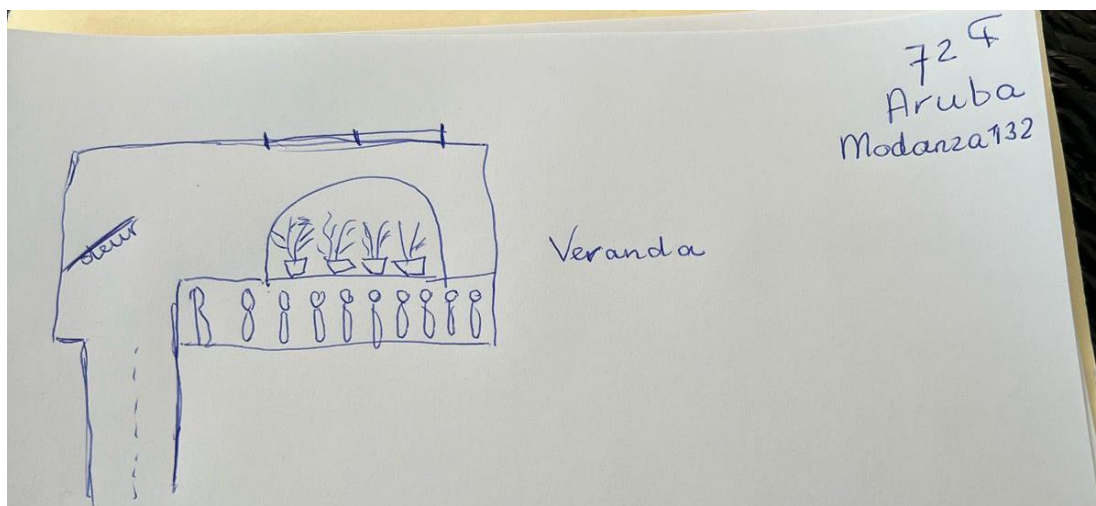


Figure 19. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 3, 2025.

This dual nature does not go unnoticed by subjects, as semi-contradictory statements are written by different subjects, such as “partially enclosed” (Fig. 17) and “open area” (Fig. 16). This reveals once more that the veranda holds contradictory spatial logics simultaneously, which is a feature of relational space.

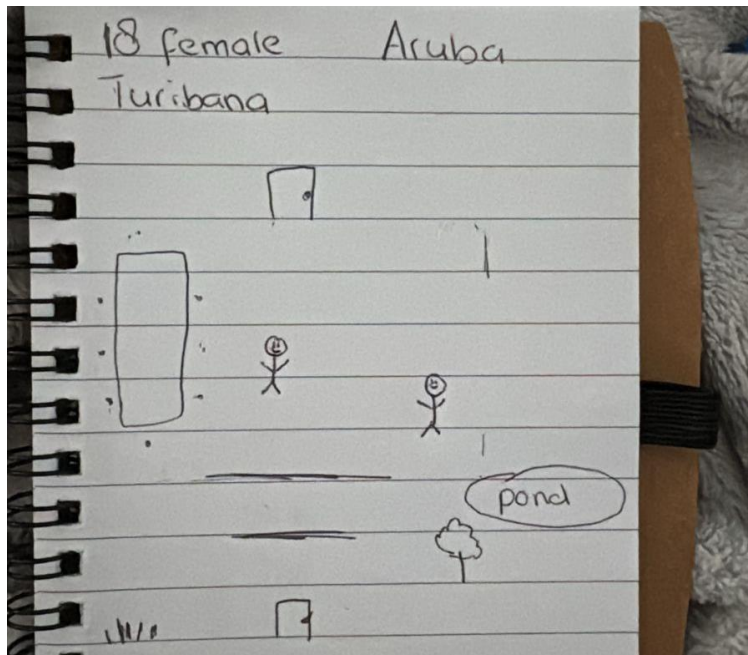


Figure 20. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

The word “family” appears more frequently than any other term in the mental maps, underscoring its significance as the primary association with the veranda. While the exact composition of this family, whether residents or visitors, remains unspecified, its emotional prominence is undeniable. Other recurring terms, including “memories”, “nostalgic”, “gezellig” (cozy), “fun”, “chill”, “quality time”, “colour”, “relaxing”, and “movement”, highlight both the affective ties to the veranda and the diversity of activities it hosts. These patterns reveal that the veranda’s material form is secondary to its emotional gravity, in Lefebvre’s lived space. The veranda emerges as a symbolic anchor for kinship, reinforced by the prevalent mention of “family” and “quality time” (Fig. 21). Its use for both solitary and communal activities illustrates how residents reappropriate the structure beyond its original architectural purpose, transcending Lefebvre’s conceived space.

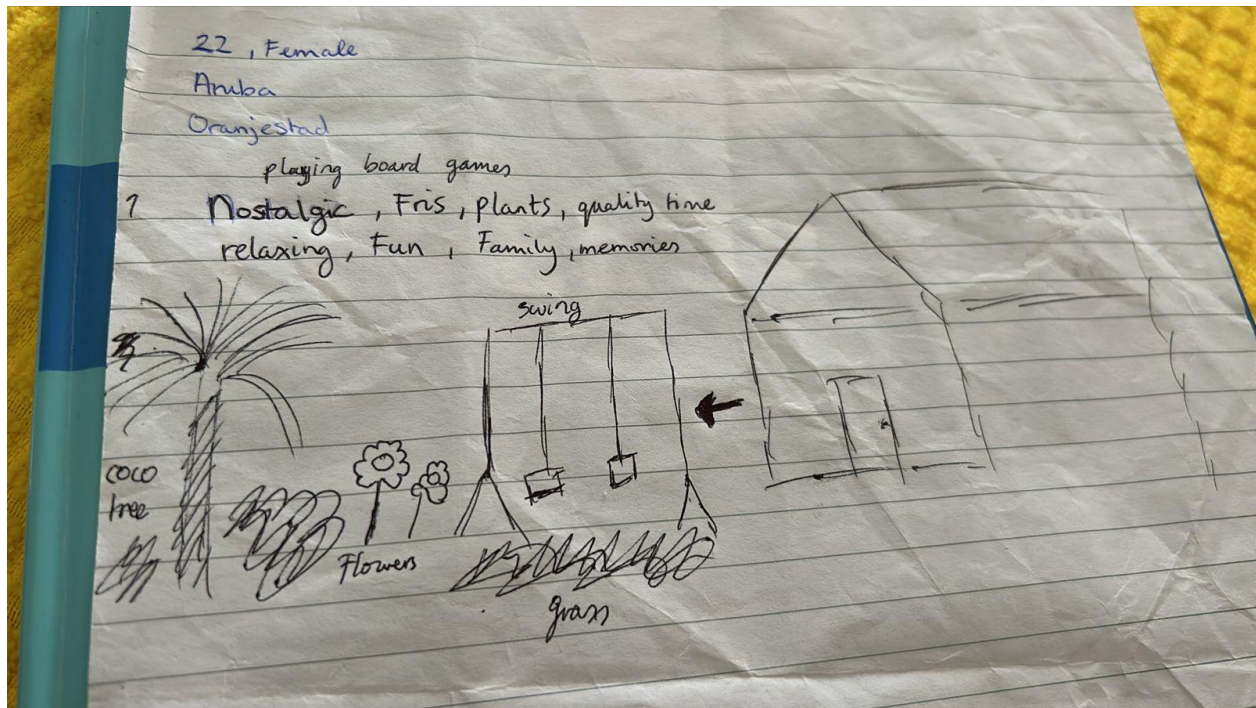


Figure 21. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

Löw's framework builds on this understanding by demonstrating how these emotional and social dimensions take material form. Through spacing, such as the arrangement of chairs that foster a sense of togetherness, and synthesis, as reflected in terms like "family," "chill," "gezellig," "fun," and "relaxing", the veranda is actively constructed as a relational space. The recurring emphasis on these experiences underscores the veranda's emotional and cultural significance within Aruban society, serving as a cherished space that fosters both individual well-being and collective identity.

This section has discussed how the mental maps demonstrate how individuals construct space mentally and socially, reflecting how space is experienced and interpreted rather than just physically occupied. This approach has provided deeper insights into the everyday life associated with verandas compared to the other research methods examined in this thesis. Having established these key findings, the following section explores their implications for understanding the role of how Aruban verandas not only function as a physical space but also as a site of social interaction and cultural expression.

DISCUSSION

This study has shed light on the socio-spatial dynamics of the Aruban veranda through a socio-spatial examination combining archival research, photographic documentation, and mental mapping. Framed within Lefebvre's triad of space and Löw's relational theory, the findings reveal how the veranda operates simultaneously as a transitional threshold and a cultural anchor in Aruban society. The tension between its conceived design (as seen in archival photos) and lived experience (in mental maps) exemplifies Lefebvre's dialectic. The mental maps in particular provided valuable insights into how residents emotionally and socially construct this space, with recurring themes of family, activities, and social performance emerging strongly. However, several methodological limitations must be acknowledged when interpreting these

findings.

The archival research component proved more challenging than anticipated due to technical limitations of the digital repositories, which restricted access to certain materials and made the search process more time-consuming. The mental mapping approach, while productive, may have inadvertently foregrounded the veranda's significance by asking participants to focus specifically on this element. An alternative methodology where participants first drew their complete house before isolating the veranda might have produced more nuanced data about its relative importance in domestic spatial understanding. Additionally, the small participant group, while diverse, prevents definitive demographic analysis, providing no clear patterns of usage by age, gender or region.

Nevertheless, this study advances Caribbean architectural scholarship by demonstrating how the veranda's significance emerges through continual social reinvention rather than static form. Comparative studies could productively examine similar transitional spaces across different Caribbean contexts, potentially revealing regional variations in how such spaces are conceived and used. Another option would be to extend this investigation to verandas in public buildings rather than private homes, which might reveal different socio-spatial dynamics at play. The applied theoretical framework could also be expanded by incorporating additional perspectives that might offer complementary lenses for understanding these spaces, such as postcolonial or feminist spatial theories.

The research makes an important contribution to understanding the veranda's role in Aruban culture, even with its constraints. By combining architectural analysis with resident perspectives, the study moves beyond purely physical descriptions to capture how the veranda functions as a dynamic social space. The findings suggest that the veranda's significance lies not just in its form but in how it is continually reimagined and reinvented through daily practices and social interactions. Future studies building on this foundation could further illuminate how such vernacular spaces sustain cultural identity while adapting to contemporary life.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the socio-spatial dynamics of the Aruban veranda by defining it spatially through photographic documentation and analysing its representation in archival research, cultural traditions, and the mental maps of Aruban residents. Framed by Lefebvre's spatial triad and Löw's relational spatial theory, the study reveals the veranda as a transitional space with a dual nature, deeply embedded in Aruban culture and everyday life.

The veranda's placement at the front of the house, whether enclosed by arches or open with an overhang, reflects its public-facing nature while maintaining a connection to the private interior. This spatial arrangement positions it as a mediator between realms, facilitating activities ranging from morning rituals to formal social receptions. Archival photographs further illustrate this duality, capturing verandas as stages for performative self-presentation, sites of hierarchical negotiation, and everyday gathering spaces. The veranda's prevalence across social strata underscores its cultural significance as a architecturally unifying element that transcends class divisions.

Aruban customs such as *dande*, where the veranda acts as a transitional space for hospitality, further illustrate the veranda's function as a social threshold. The veranda's role as a relational place where social

boundaries are both enacted and negotiated, is reinforced by the custom of taking off one's hat only upon entering the house. Similarly, the veranda is anchored in cultural memory by musical and visual depictions, such *Grupo di Betico's Den Veranda*, which depict it as a place of celebration, observation, and contact.

The mental maps reveal how residents synthesize the veranda's physical structure with lived experience. Participants associate it with familial bonds, daily activities, and leisure, while also highlighting its contradictory logics, as both an "open area" and a "partially enclosed" space. The frequent depiction of chairs and front doors underscores its dual identity as a place of dwelling and transition. These mental constructs align with Löw's notion of synthesizing, where the veranda's meaning emerges through habitual use and emotional attachment, transcending its conceived design.

Theoretical extensions by Sturm, Low, and Goffman deepen this analysis. Sturm's iterative spacing clarifies how annual rituals like *dande* reinforce the veranda's identity as a relational threshold, while Goffman's self-staging explains its role as a curated "showcase to the street". Böhme's atmosphere concept further illuminates how verandas produce social exchanges.

In conclusion, the Aruban veranda is much more than just physical structure, but a socially and culturally constructed transitional space that bridges the home with the rest of Aruban society, serving as a stage for self-presentation, ritual, and everyday interaction. Its dual nature, both physically and symbolically, reflects its role as a unifying architectural element deeply embedded in Aruban identity, where design, tradition, and lived experience converge.

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APPENDIX A: PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION



Figure A1. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A2. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A3. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A4. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A5. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A6. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A7. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A8. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A9. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, January 4, 2024.



Figure A10. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A11. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A12. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A13. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A14. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A15. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A16. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A17. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A18. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A19. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A20. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A21. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A22. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A23. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, December 30, 2024.



Figure A24. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A25. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A26. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A27. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A28. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A29. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.



Figure A30. Aruban veranda viewed from the street, Aruba. Photograph by author, March 5, 2024.

APPENDIX B: MENTAL MAPS

Script for mental maps interview conduction: Thank you for participating in this interview for my thesis. Instead of conducting an interview in a traditional interview, I will be conducting mental mapping which is a more heuristic technique. With this method of interviewing I will try to research what your thoughts are on a space, without influencing your answers with my questions. Please go ahead write in the top left corner of your paper your: your age, gender, country of origin you identify with most and your place of residence on Aruba.

How does mental mapping work and what do you have to do? It's quite simple: I will tell you about the thesis topic and you draw everything that comes up in your head when thinking about the topic: memories, objects, people, feelings, music, smell, events, weather, and so on. Feel free to use the entire page: you can draw, but also use words in whatever language expresses your thoughts best. Please refrain from looking up an example of a mental map, as your own interpretation is what matters, that is also to say: there is no right or wrong. Now for the assignment: draw the Aruban veranda from memory.

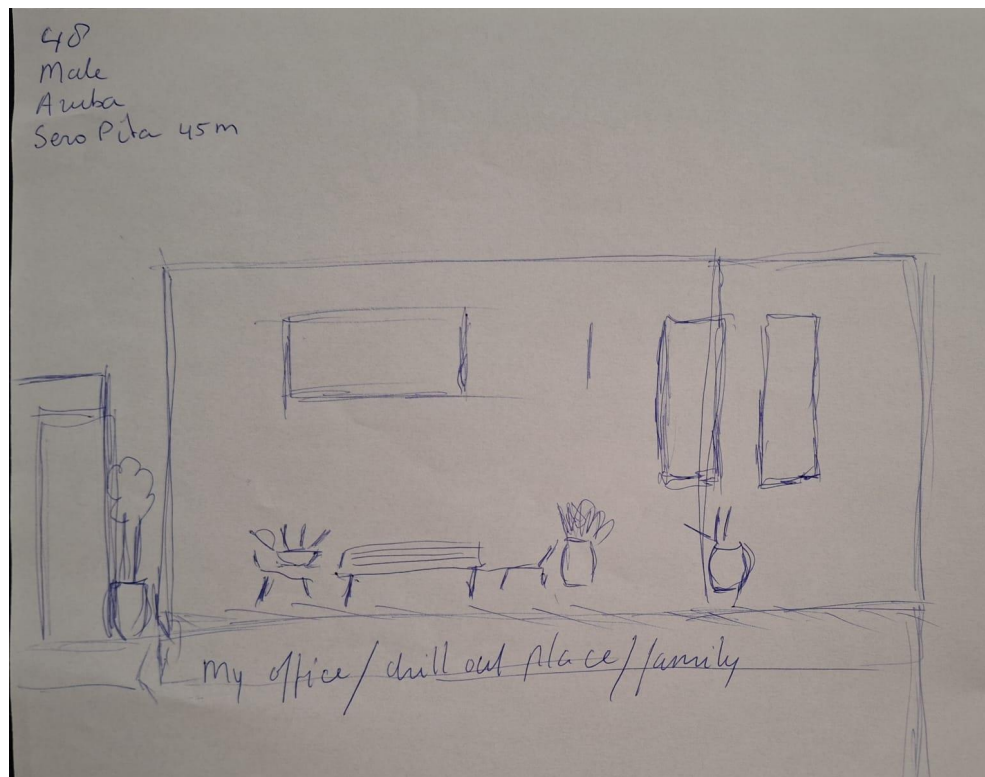


Figure B1. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

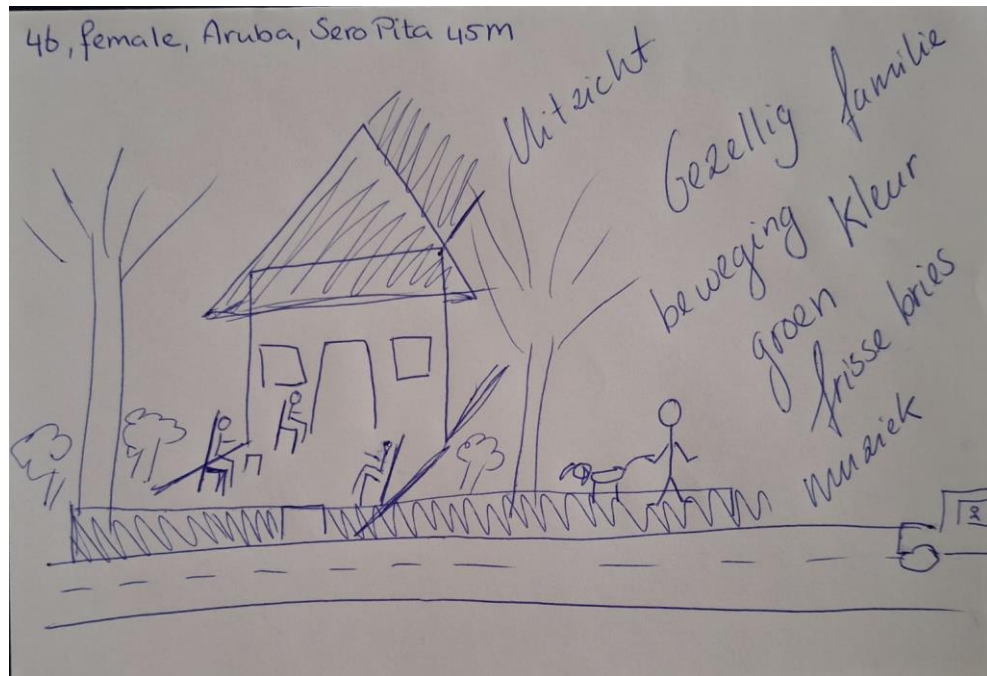


Figure B2. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

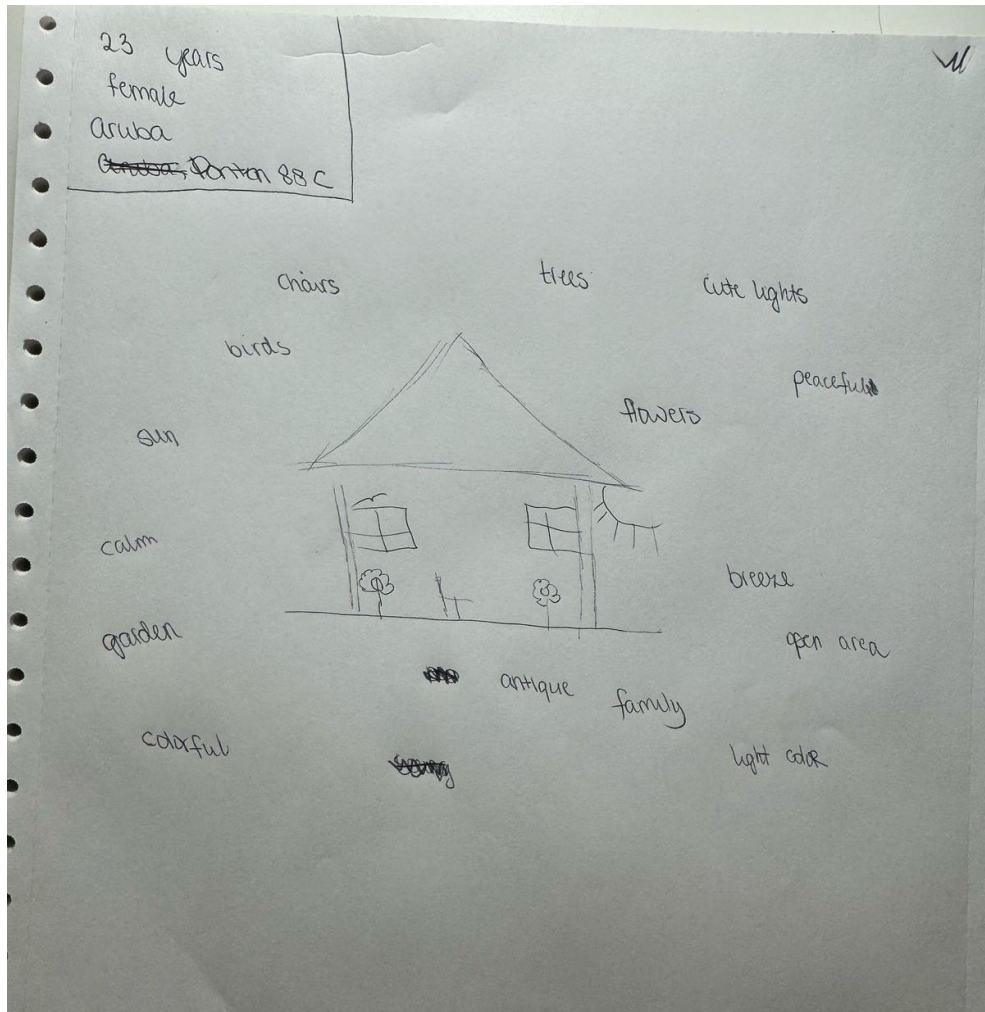


Figure B3. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

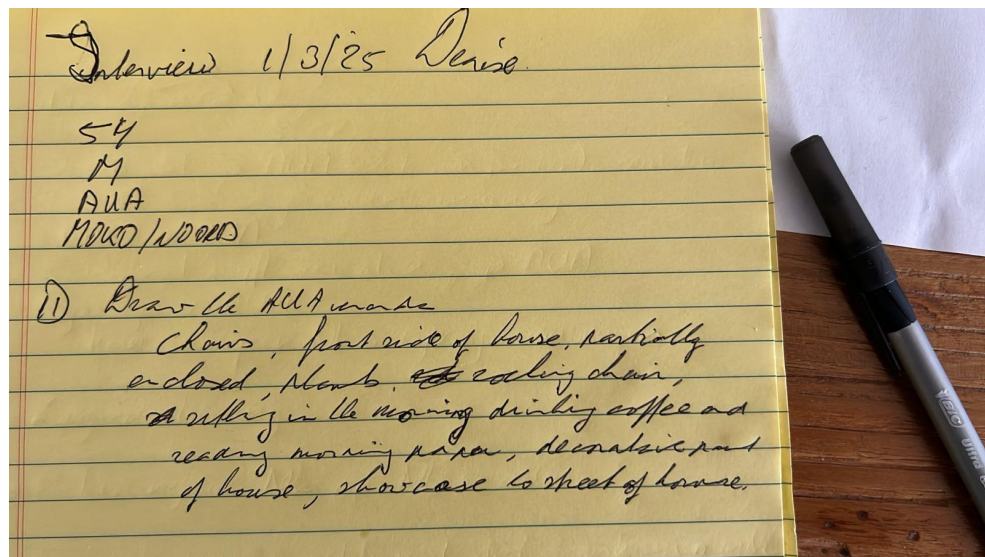


Figure B4. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

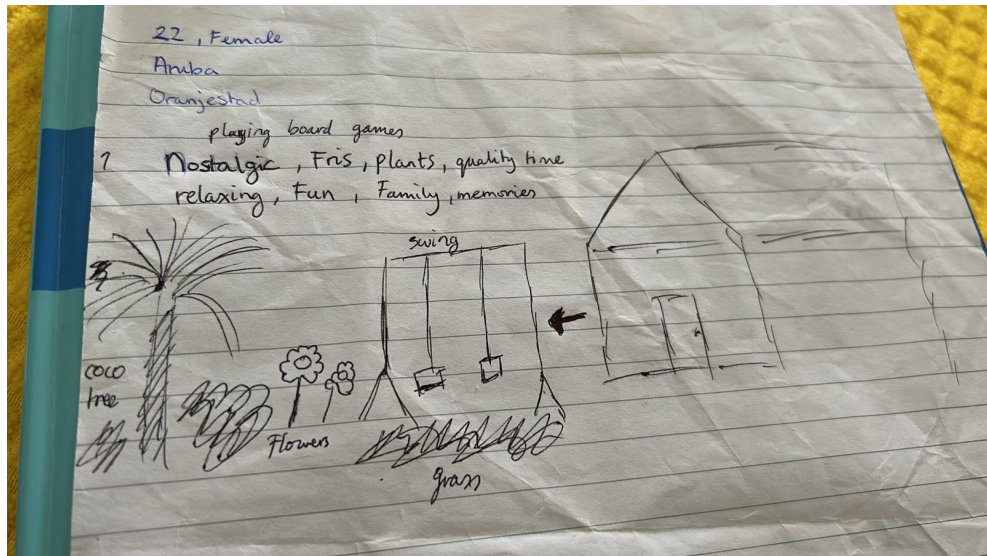


Figure B5. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

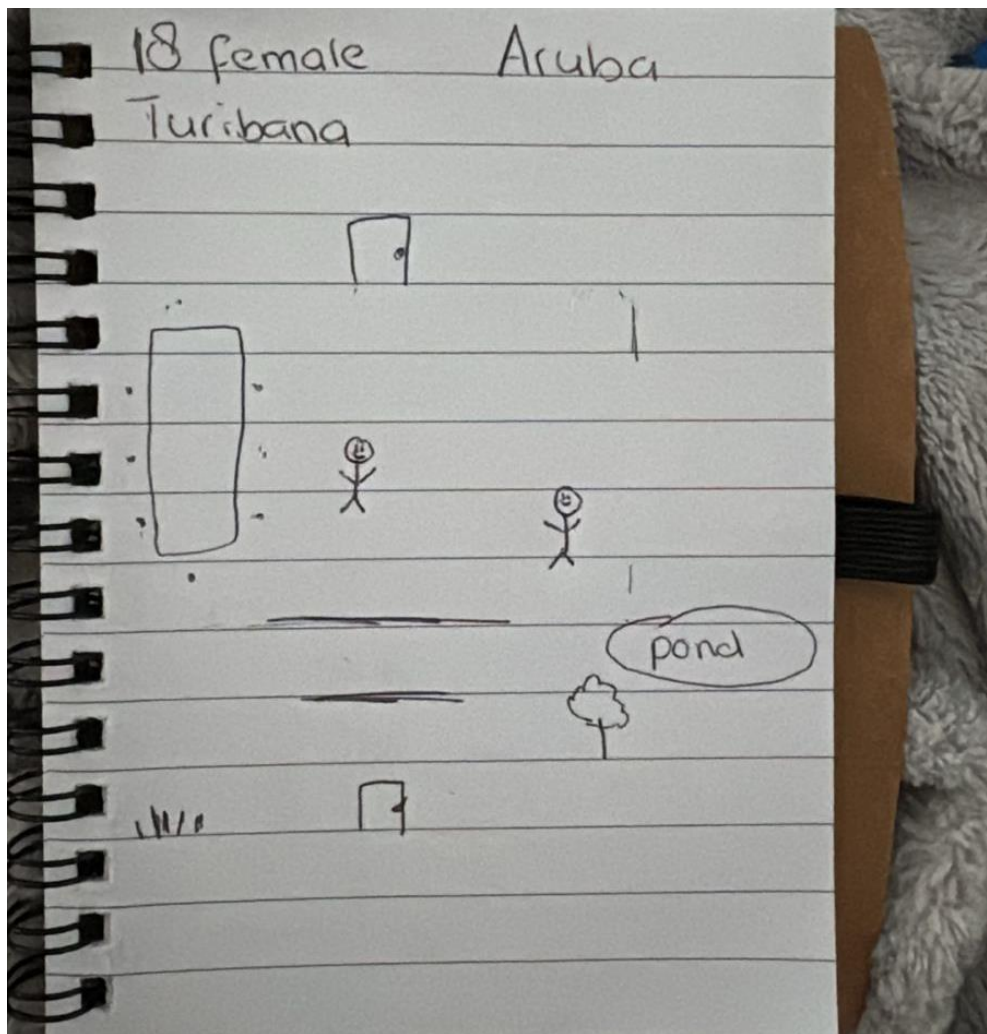


Figure B6. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 1, 2025.

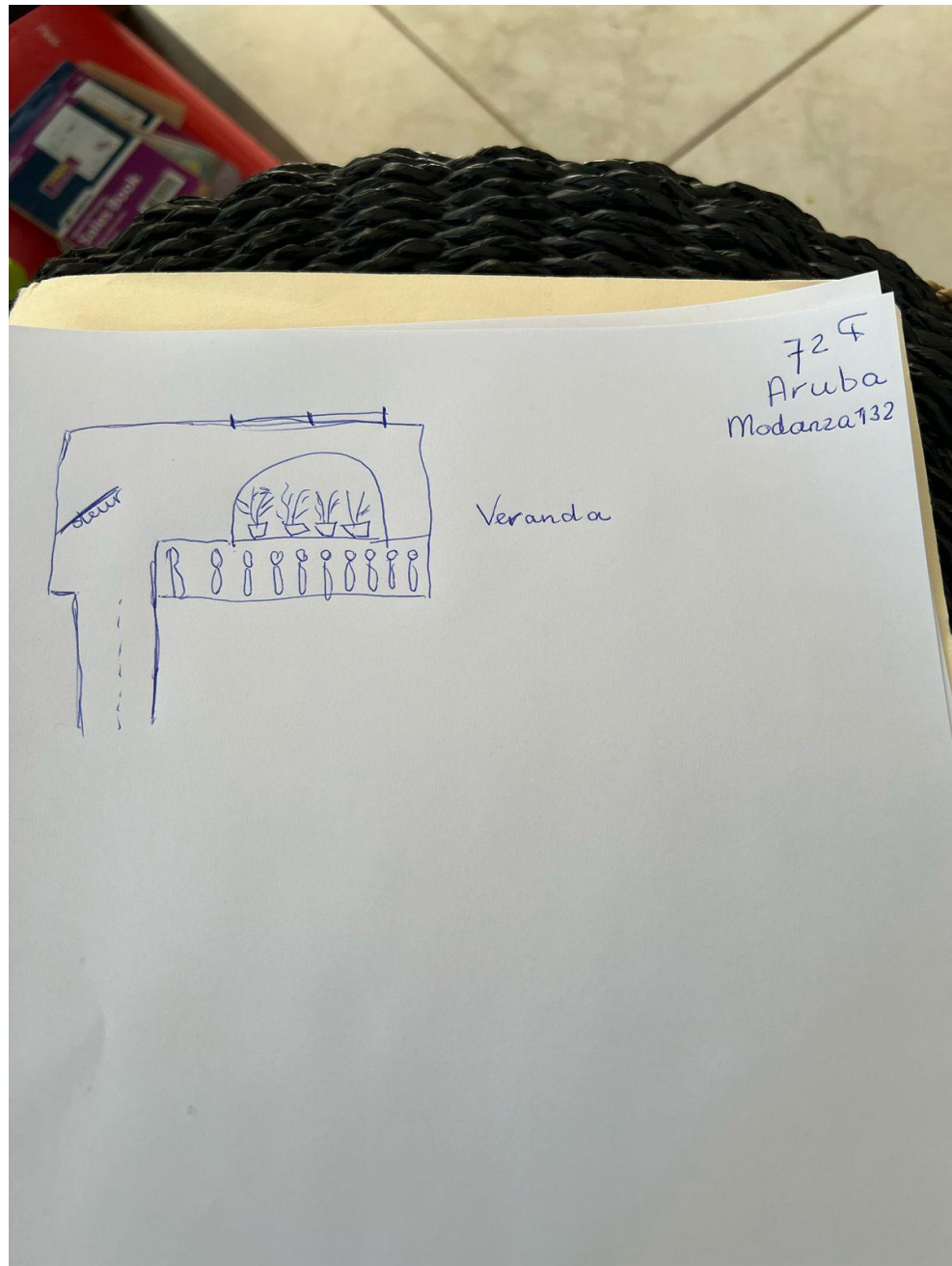


Figure B7. Mental map, Aruba. Photograph by subject, March 3, 2025.

APPENDIX C: ARCHIVAL IMAGES



Figure C1. Queen's Year celebration, Aruba. Photograph by BUVO, *Celebracion Ana di La Reina Cas di Gezaghebber*, Image # 4, 1977, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure C2. F.C.C.A. social housing, Aruba. Photograph by BUVO, *Casnan di F.C.C.A.- Lantamento di Sushi - Auto wrakken den cura*, Image # 14, 1982, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure C3. Marine posing on a veranda, Aruba. Photograph by Gerardus Hubertus Delnoij, *Foto-collectie Delnoij*, image # 196, 1964-1966, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure C4. Similar spatial and architectural definition of Aruban veranda, Grenada. Photograph by Robert Rasmijn, *Foto-Collectie Robert Rasmijn*, *doos-dia* # 3-27, 1960-1965, Archivo Nacional Aruba.

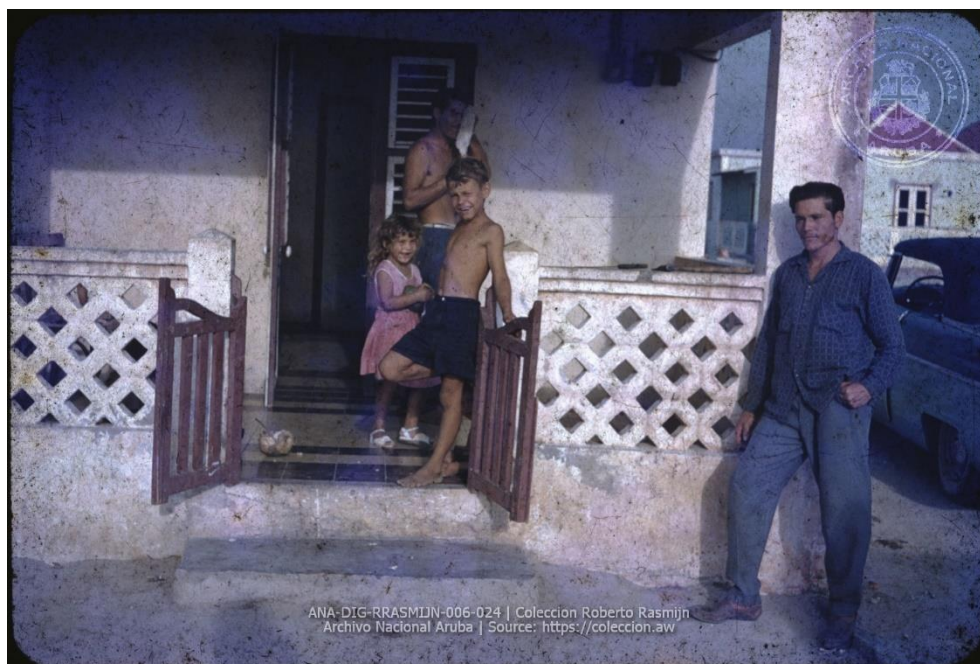


Figure C5. Getting dressed, Aruba. Photograph by Robert Rasmijn, *Foto-Collectie Robert Rasmijn, doos-dia # 6-24, 1960-1965*, Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure C6. Children on the veranda, Aruba. Photograph by Dr. Johan Hartog, *Landschappen - Aruba (Dr. Johan Hartog Collection)*, n.d., Archivo Nacional Aruba.



Figure C7. American oil refinery workers neighbourhood Lago Colony, Aruba. Photograph by Nelson Morris, *Bungalows in Lago Colony* (#5157, Lago , Aruba, April-May 1944), May 1944, Archivo Nacional Aruba.