A PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNITY INTERACTION IN PUBLIC WATERFRONT SPACES ON BONAIRE

The history and influence of the free and accessible waterfront public spaces, its design and community interaction
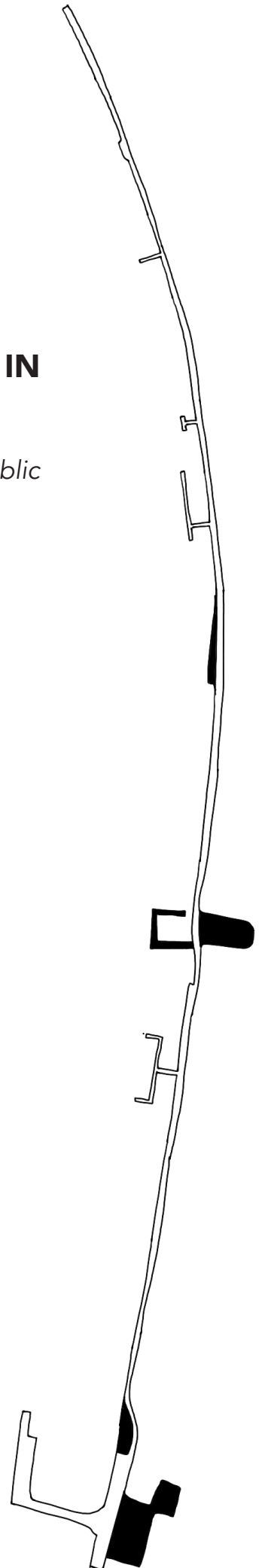
By

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Abstract

Public waterfront spaces are vital for community interaction, particularly on small islands like Bonaire, where accessible gathering areas are limited. This research explores the historical development and social significance of Bonaire's boulevard, the island's primary public seafront space, from the 1950s to today. It examines how design influences social interaction and whether historical and colonial elements have shaped the boulevard's evolution. Using historical analysis, comparative case studies, and community engagement through interviews and a survey, this study investigates how the boulevard has functioned as a social hub. It compares Bonaire's boulevard to similar public spaces worldwide, identifying common trends and unique characteristics. The research also explores how local residents perceive and use the space today, highlighting its evolving role in daily life. By documenting the boulevard's historical and contemporary significance, this research contributes to discussions on public space, urban design, and community well-being. Looking ahead, it questions whether public spaces will remain central to island life and how they might be reimagined to serve future generations.

Keywords

1   Introduction

Born and raised on Bonaire, I have always felt a deep connection to the island. Public spaces like plazas and parks are scarce on Bonaire, so social gatherings mostly happen along streets or in bars. The waterfront boulevard, running from Playa Lechi to Wilhelminaplein, is the island's largest dedicated public space. Public urban spaces can serve as gathering places where people from all walks of life can come together, fostering spontaneous interactions. This raises important questions: Can architects influence these social interactions? And to what extent does the design of public spaces truly encourage such spontaneous connections?
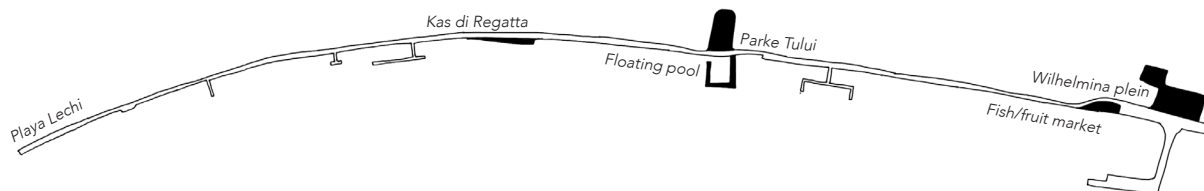
The considered waterfront — (Chaz Sweers)

Public spaces play a vital role in any community—they are easily accessible, free, and meant for everyone. "Thanks to such features as openness, accessibility and clarity, one can stay there with one's personal experience burden without disturbing other users" (Sobolewski & Czajka, 2020)
For islands like Bonaire, the surrounding sea is a defining feature. However, within the built environment, there are only a few seafront public spaces remaining. Over time, much of Bonaire's seafront has become privately owned or used by resorts and private homes, leaving less and less space that is publicly accessible and free of charge.

The public waterfront boulevard on Bonaire is such a normal part of life that it can easily be taken for granted. If these spaces truly foster spontaneous interaction and enhance well-being, and always have, then it's essential to protect them, expand them, and cultivate a stronger sense of pride in their value. This makes it essential to research, document, and understand the historical significance of the boulevard, one of the island's only public seafront spaces left. How does this space contribute to social and community interactions? And does this understanding provide a clear case for protecting the remaining seafront public spaces on Bonaire?

These questions cannot be answered through personal perspective alone; the voices of the local community must be at the heart of this research. To gather these insights, a questionnaire was distributed, receiving over 100 responses within the first 24 hours. Many participants immediately expressed their appreciation for the study, emphasizing how important it is to examine and focus on these spaces for future generations.

This thesis explores the development of the public waterfront boulevard on Bonaire from Playa Lechi to Wilhelminaplein, tracing its evolution from 1950 to the present day. Researching **how valuable the public boulevard on Bonaire has been for the community interaction over this time period**.

To truly understand the value of such a space, it must be viewed in a broader context. Around the world, waterfront boulevards have been preserved, and many have undergone significant renovations in recent decades. Are there convincing suggestions to be found that the design and layout of the public boulevards encourages or limit social interactions and communal activities? And how important is it that public spaces are preserved to maintain the accessible public spaces for everyone?

2   Methods and materials

To assess the value of the waterfront area in relation to community interaction, a broad range of resources has been utilized to provide a layered perspective on its significance. Consequently, multiple research methods have been implemented in this study.

To observe how people use and interact with the boulevard, site visits were conducted. These visits provided direct insight into public engagement with the space, and photographs were taken to document observations.

Interviews were also held with professionals on Bonaire who have knowledge of the island's history and public spaces. These included cultural historian Boi Antoin from Foundation Históriko Kultural Boneriano (FuHiKuBo) and architect Lyongo Juliana.

To gain a broader understanding of how the boulevard has been used since 1990 and how it may evolve in the future, a questionnaire was distributed to Bonaire residents, gathering insights from the local community. To ensure accessibility, the questionnaire was available in three languages: Papiamento, Dutch, and English. This inclusivity was reflected in the responses, with nearly a third of participants completing it in Papiamento, the local language. In total, 128 responses were collected.

In addition to the resources mentioned above, literature was reviewed, including books, newspapers, journal articles, and films, to provide historical and contextual background. Archival research was also conducted at the national archives, where historical photographs and maps were examined.

3   Results

3.1   The development of the boulevard over time on Bonaire

When Bonaire was still under occupation of the West-Indische Compagnie (WIC), the Dutch build Fort Oranje in 1639, right in the middle of what we now know as Kralendijk. This part of the island was ideal for docking, creating it to develop into the center of trading possibilities, resulting in a lot of people settling on the waterfront in Kralendijk.

During slavery, after abolition of slavery in 1863, in the 20th century and to this day Fort Oranje has always been the center of town. Until the 1980's the waterfront in Kralendijk consisted out of a road running directly along the coast. Piers and a big docking harbor were created, while the town kept growing and growing.

In 1988 multiple newspaper articles state the start and plans around renovating the infrastructure on Bonaire and the development of the 'sea promenade', the waterfront boulevard. This project, that will cost 3,5 million, gets approved in 1988. ("Fiat De Koning Ontwikkeling Van De Binnenstad: Twaalf Miljoen," 1988) ("Grachten En Kanalen Op Bonaire," 1988)

The development of the boulevard was not only to create a promenade, but would also serve as a barrier against the September-storms, which can cause significant damage to the bay of Kralendijk. ("Fiat De Koning Ontwikkeling Van De Binnenstad: Twaalf Miljoen," 1988) In 1991 the first phase of the development of the boulevard, including the renovation of Wilhelminaplein, was completed and celebrated with the opening of Wilhelminaplein in December 1991. ("Weinig Belangstelling Bij Opening Wilhelminapark," 1991)

During the early 90's the boulevard developed in different phases, making sure there were enough slipways for fisherman could still dock. Multiple piers were added and the promenade was filled with benches and palm trees. Although the boulevard has been finished for multiple years now, the development and improvement does not stop. In 2014, Parke Tului was realized, creating an public, shaded and gated park along the boulevard. 10 years later, in 2024, a floating pool was added along the coast in front of Parke Tului, making this a central meeting spot for sports and leisure.

The most recent development consisted out of the addition of benches and palapas near Kas di Regatta, creating shaded seating areas along the boulevard. The goal is to create a more beautiful and more facilitating promenade. (Bonaire.Nu, 2024)
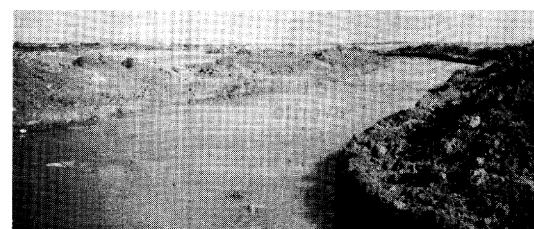

Fort Oranje at the end of the 19th century — (Antoin & Toré, 2010)

Arial photo in the first half of the 20th century — (Klomp, 2009)

Cruise ship in the first half of the 20th century — (Antoin & Toré, 2010)

KRALENDIJK — De ruim vier miljoen die de Nederlandse regering heeft goedgekeurd voor het Bonaireaanse wegenproject, worden steeds beter zichtbaar op Bonaire. Bij het laatste bestedings- overleg was 1,4 miljoen speciaal bestemd voor de renovatie van de wegen in de binnenstad; de aanleg van een boulevard aan de Kaya Gob. Debrot; de aanleg van een rotonde — de eerste voor Bonaire — ter hoogte van Bonaire Beach Hotel (BBH) en de noodzakelijke verbetering van de Kaya Corona (de voorma-lige Koninginneweg).

Een opvallende verbetering voor de verkeersveiligheid zal ook het ontlasten van de Abra-ham-boulevard zijn voor het vele verkeer van en naar de luchtha-ven. Al bij de bouw van de rondweg die noodzakelijk werd door het opblazen van de Abra-ham- boulevard, was er sprake van dat er een tweede weg gelegd zou worden. De Antillen N.V. is daar inmiddels al mee bezig. Dat wordt dan een weg rechtstreeks van de Kaya Betico Croes (Stadi-onweg) naar de luchthaven. …

Wie een kijkje gaat nemen bij de werkzaamheden die begin de-ze week zijn gestart zou menen, dat er grachten en kanalen wer-den aangelegd in de Industrie-zone. Niets is minder waar.

De Antillen N.V. heeft de zachte on-dergrond uitgegraven waardoor er een betere basis voor het ko-mende wegdek zal zijn. Het uit-graven, de regen en het grondwater geven echter wel de illusie dat zich spontaan een ka-naal heeft ontwikkeld op Bo-naire.

News article 1988 — ("Grachten En Kanalen Op Bonaire," 1988)

The Boulevard around the 1950's — (Fotocollectie Spaarnestad Onderwerpen, n.d.) (Fotocollectie Elsevier Binnenland, n.d.)

Wilhelminaplein and the floating pool — (Chaz Sweers)

New benches and palapas — (E Proyekto 'Embeyesé Nos Malekon' Ta Duna Bida Na Sitionan Di Rekreo Na Kosta Di Kralendijk, 2024)

3.2   Waterfront redevelopment on other public boulevards around the world

Bonaire was not the only place in the 1980s to redevelop its boulevard into a public promenade. During this period, cities around the world, including New York, London, Boston, and Toronto, undertook urban waterfront redevelopment projects. Similarly, Caribbean islands like Cuba and Jamaica also developed their waterfronts in the 20th century. To better understand the influences behind the development of Bonaire's boulevard, it's important to examine these similar waterfront projects in the region.

Geographers have noted that the drive for change started in the 1960s, triggered by technological advancements in the shipping industry that rendered older port facilities outdated. (Proudfoot, 2007) "City and state economies needing rejuvenation, changing residential and recreational trends, the decline of inner city markets and wholesaling areas, burgeoning environmental lobbies expressing popular concern over public health and quality of life, government controls and developer avarice all contributed to the movement for urban waterfront renewal during the 1980s". (Proudfoot, 2007) In North America, shifts in maritime activities have frequently aligned with the revitalization of older downtown districts. Gordon (1996) discusses how these transformations have reshaped the image of waterfronts, enhancing accessibility and managing the quality of the built environment. Although Bonaire has never had big industrial areas and has always been a small, sparsely populated island, worldly developments might indeed have had an influence on small islands like Bonaire.

"Throughout history, urban development in the Caribbean has been based on coastal locations. During the colonial period, urban areas were initially developed for the purpose of political and military control and trade and the subsequent export of raw materials to the metropolis. After emancipation, smaller urban settlements developed around the plantations, while since independence in the mid twentieth century urban development has maintained a coastal focus through the development of the tourism industry". (Dodman, 2008)
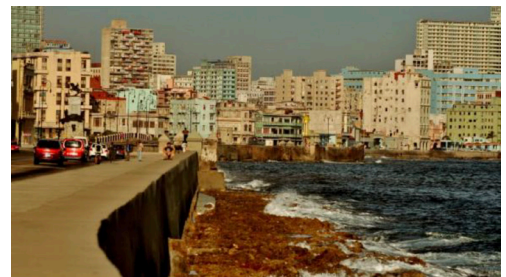
Dodman (2008) also suggests that a significant part of this transformation has involved reshaping urban waterfronts into hubs that stimulate economic activity, particularly by developing new commercial zones and boosting tourism, especially through the cruise industry. Once shaped primarily by trade and industrial growth, these waterfronts have undergone major redevelopment in recent decades, driven by both public and private investments aimed at enhancing their appeal for business and visitors alike.

The developments of the 1980s were not just driven by advancements in technology and urban expansion, but also show the response of cities to the rising demand for leisure, recreation, and tourism.
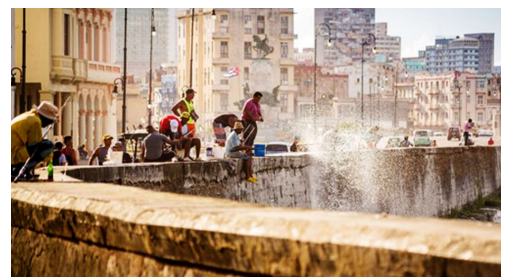
El Malecón (Avenida de Maceo), Havana, Cuba

At the heart of Havana, Avenida de Maceo, more commonly known as El Malecón by locals, extends for approximately 8 kilometers along the city's northern coastline, linking the historic district of Old Havana (Habana Vieja) with Centro Habana and the more modern neighborhood of Vedado. "The waterfront is particularly important in that it greatly defines Havana's historical character and its contemporary culture." (Currie, 2012)

Malecón Drive and El Vedado in the backdrop— (Currie, 2012)

El Malecón is made up of a four-lane road, a promenade, and a sea wall. Construction began in 1901 and was carried out in three phases, ultimately completing in 1952 at the mouth of the Almendares River. The sea wall, in particular, serves as a crucial barrier, providing strong protection against the ocean and its hurricanes. The waterfront was also developed to link new neighborhoods and support tourism infrastructure, including hotels, casinos, and access roads.

El Malecón — (Kaloyanova, 2023)

"Today, Habaneros, the name for locals, and tourist embrace El Malecón twenty-four hours a day. It is filled with tourists taking photos of the dilapidated buildings, Habaneros on romantic strolls, elderly gentlemen playing dominos on the sea wall, and people discussing latest baseball scores." (Gualy, 2012) While this vibrant scene reflects the lively spirit of Havana's iconic seafront, it also highlights a growing tension between tourism and local life. Warsewa (2018) touches on the sensitive subject of the negative impact that tourists and cruise ships can have when they arrive in often small, historic towns. Overcrowded streets, congested shops, and busy public spaces are beginning to threaten the quality of life for residents. Rising real estate and consumer prices are increasingly forcing locals to avoid areas where cruise tourists tend to gather.

Newport West / Ocean Boulevard, Kingston, Jamaica

The Ocean Boulevard in Kingston Jamaica is another example of a large-scale redevelopment of the waterfront in the 1960s an 1970s. The ocean boulevard currently runs along the coast in the center of the capital Kingston. The accomplishment resulted in the creation of an unashamedly altered street scape, skyline and waterfront designed to serve the needs of the nation in its early years of independence. The intention was to provide new roads, buildings and open spaces so that people would "once again be able to stroll along the water's edge". (Dodman, 2008)

Nearly 30 years later, other villages in Jamaica followed Kingston's lead, redeveloping their waterfronts to better accommodate the growing tourism industry. Ocho Rios developed Island Village, while Port Antonio established the Port Antonio Marina, both designed to cater to cruise ship passengers. However, these projects were largely driven by top-down planning, with minimal input from local residents or the broader community.

Ocean Boulevard, Kingston — (Dodman, 2008)

Over the last 20 years the modernizing and redevelopment of these boulevards has not stopped. "In the Jamaican context, the expansion of tourism is seen to be a key driver for development, and the redevelopment of these waterfronts has been specifically targeted to encourage this industry". (Dodman, 2008) Even though this is the case, in Kingston the waterfront is also widely used by its locals. This is evident in the survey discussed by Dodman (2008), which highlights perceptions of the Kingston Waterfront. According to the findings, 77.0% of respondents either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the area belonged to Jamaicans, while 62.3% felt the same about its appeal to tourists.

Port Antonio Marina, Port Antonio — (Dodman, 2008)

These case studies highlight a significant shift in waterfront development that began around the 1960s. Changing technology, growing urban populations, and the rapid expansion of the cruise ship industry all contributed to a global surge in urban waterfront development during the second half of the 20th century. This transformation resulted in waterfront spaces that were no longer designed solely for transportation and car use, but instead evolved into pedestrian-focussed areas. These boulevards remain highly valued today, prompting ongoing maintenance and modernization efforts to preserve their accessibility and appeal.

3.3   The public waterfronts as a place for community interaction

While the public waterfronts may seem to have developed solely for practical and technical reasons, it also intentionally created new, carefully designed public spaces within cities. This transformation aimed to allow people to once again stroll along the water's edge, while also catering to the growing demand for leisure, recreation, and tourism. Influential architects, urban architects, and sociologists—such as Donald Appleyard, Kevin Lynch, William Whyte, and Jan Gehl—who were active in the mid to late 20th century during this time of redevelopment, provided key insights into what makes a successful public space: Genuinely public, democratic spaces are those that hold shared significance, remain open and accessible to all, and foster both participation and care from their users. These spaces cater to diverse needs, offer opportunities for exploration and engagement, and encourage individuals to interact with, adapt, and reshape them. Democratic spaces are not simply liked, they are loved. (Francis, 1988)

"Jan Gehl strongly emphasizes the social functions of these spaces, i.e. human behaviors stimulated by them. These types of behaviors are also referred to as non domestic activities and they are divided into three basic types: necessary, optional and social activities. The necessary activities are the ones which people simply have to perform, e.g. everyday shopping, going to work or school, waiting for public transport. Optional actions are defined by J. Gehl as those that people start to feel like doing in conducive time and place, such as taking a walk. The third type of actions, i.e. social ones in a way develop the latter type by introducing more people. For example, children playing together or even more passive participants observing other users of the same space, e.g. drinking coffee at a coffee table on a square while observing others. "If non-domestic space is of poor quality, only necessary activities are performed (…). In favorable surroundings a completely different wide spectrum of human behaviors becomes possible". (Sobolewski & Czajka, 2020) Public spaces / waterfronts have a true social function and the design can enhance this more through focusing on important factors Francis (1988) mentions such as user diversity, comfort, accessibility, publicness, discovery, delight and challenge, participation, control and modification.

This chapter takes a closer look at how Bonaire's public waterfront is used and the important social role it plays in the community. By tracing patterns of use and social gathering over the past century, and drawing insights from the 128 individuals who took part in the survey, it reveals how the boulevard has become much more than just a scenic walkway.

Community gathering on Bonaire before the building of the boulevard

The urban center of Bonaire has long been located in and around Fort Oranje, along the bay of Kralendijk, in the neighborhood known to locals as Playa. In the early decades of the 20th century, Playa was a central gathering place for the community. Three key meeting spots stood out: the music kiosk behind what is now Wilhelminaplein, the WELKOM bar along the waterfront opposite Wilhelminaplein, and the fish market (Plasa Machi Mimi) along the coast. (B. Antoin, personal communication, December 30, 2024) "Welkom determined the face of the harbor of Kralendijk during a few decades. Until the 1950s, approximately 100 meters to the south of Plasa, there was a wooden pub where sailors and dockworkers would enter to chase away fatigue or warm their muscles. The pub plays an important role in the life of Playa and in the life of the people that would frequent Playa." (Antoin & Toré, 2010) All three gathering spots were centered around Wilhelminaplein and later became linked to what would eventually develop into the boulevard. While the fish market still exists today, the kiosk was rebuilt in stone when Wilhelminaplein was renovated.

Music kiosk — (Antoin & Toré, 2010) WELKOM bar — (F. D. Antoin, 2015) Fish market — (Antoin & Toré, 2010) Wilhelminaplein — (Van de Poll, 1947)

Although all these spots were located around Wilhelminaplein, the square itself wasn't publicly accessible until it was redeveloped in the early 1990s. The last photo, taken in 1947, shows Wilhelminaplein still fenced off. It was especially along the coastline at Playa where the community came together—to catch up, shop, and make music. This was the social heart of the area, where everyday necessities like shopping for fish naturally blended with social interaction, and where dedicated gathering spots like the kiosk and the WELKOM bar brought people together.

The first few years after the built of the boulevard

The construction of the boulevard and the introduction of a promenade completely transformed the look of Playa's waterfront. In the survey I conducted, 36 out of 128 participants had experienced both the boulevard's development and the redevelopment of Wilhelminaplein, with 92% viewing these changes as positive. The most common reason cited was improved accessibility, as the promenade made it easier to walk along the water. Additionally, many participants appreciated the area's enhanced appearance, describing it as more beautiful, cleaner, and safer—factors that contributed to increased use and a more inviting, lively atmosphere.

In its first few years, the boulevard was primarily used for walking, jogging, and leisurely strolls along the new promenade. Another popular activity was exercising in the water, including swimming, playing water polo, and sailing. Beyond recreation, the boulevard became a social hub where people met up, cruised along the waterfront by car, and gathered for nightlife, happy hours, and festivals. Events like the Regatta also attracted crowds, transforming the boulevard as a vibrant gathering place. The boulevard extended the area of gathering from only centering around Wilhelminaplein all the way to Playa Lechi, introducing movement.

## Social gathering on the boulevard now

The boulevard remains a popular gathering place for the local community. According to my survey, 62.5% of the 128 participants use the boulevard—including Wilhelminaplein and Parke Tului—at least once a week, with more than 43% visiting multiple times a week. Even those who use it less frequently still visit occasionally, while only three participants reported never using it. The fact that the boulevard and Parke Tului, along with the floating pool, are the most frequently visited areas highlights how well-received these more recent additions have been.
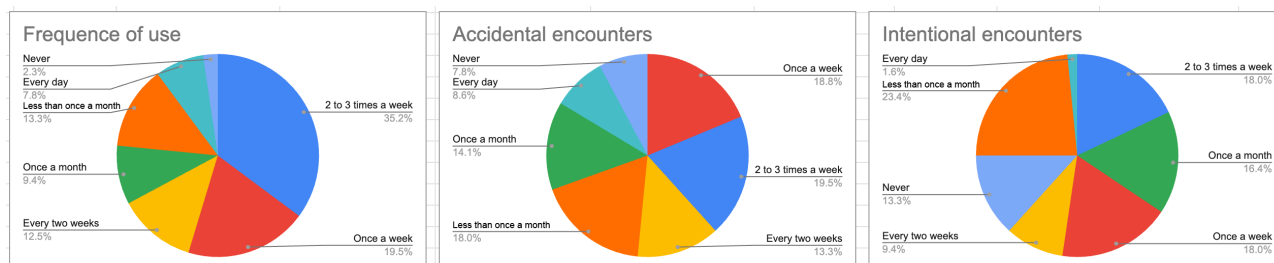
Results survey 'The boulevard as our meeting spot' — (Chaz Sweers)

Nearly 50% of participants said they unexpectedly run into someone at least once a week on the boulevard, while 38% intentionally meet up with someone just as often. This demonstrates the boulevard's role in fostering social interaction without the need for prior planning. In fact, 90% of participants believe the boulevard enhances social contact. The most commonly cited reason is that you're always likely to bump into someone you know. Others appreciate that it also creates opportunities to meet new people, brings together individuals from all levels of society, and serves as a central spot for socializing and working out. Additionally, its central location and the abundance of activities in the area makes it an even more attractive meeting place.

Certain elements of the boulevard could further enhance social interactions. In the survey, participants were asked to select the elements of the design they think generate an easy meeting spot. The most commonly mentioned were the benches along the water, the benches with palapas, and the promenade, all of which were seen as relaxed, informal gathering places. The floating pool and the playground in Parke Tului also ranked highly as spaces that encourage social interaction, while the kiosk/stage and piers are least popular.
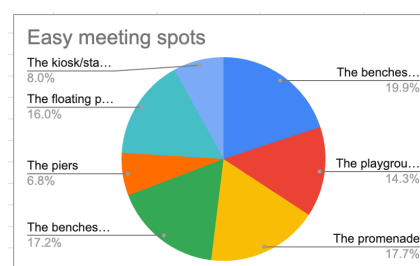
Results survey 'The boulevard as our meeting spot' — (Chaz Sweers)

There is a clear consensus that the boulevard, Wilhelminaplein, and Parke Tului have a positive impact on social and community interaction. However, the survey also revealed that accessibility is not universally perceived as adequate. Only 65% of participants considered the boulevard accessible to everyone, with many feeling that it is not inclusive enough for people with disabilities.

The transformation of Playa's waterfront into the current boulevard reflects ideas from theorists like Jan Gehl and Francis, showing how thoughtful design can enhance a space's social function. What was once an informal gathering area centered around daily necessities has become an intentionally designed, accessible, and vibrant public space. The construction of the promenade improved access along the coastline, allowing people to walk, jog, and gather more freely. Today, the boulevard caters to diverse needs—offering spaces for exercise, play, relaxation, and spontaneous social encounters. Features like benches, the floating pool, and Parke Tului support optional and social activities, encouraging interaction across all age groups and backgrounds. The boulevard now fosters the kind of inclusive, people-focused urbanism these thinkers advocated

3.4   A view towards the future

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents recognized the value of the public waterfront, with 96% considering it highly valuable and 97% emphasizing the importance of preserving the boulevard. However, this does not mean the space is without room for improvement.

The survey went beyond assessing the boulevard in its current state—it also invited participants to think like designers and suggest ways to enhance it. A total of 114 people shared their ideas, ranging from making parts of the boulevard car-free and incorporating public art to adding more shaded areas, preserving the local houses along the waterfront, and introducing a bike lane. Other suggestions included planting more trees, installing additional benches, increasing parking spaces, and creating more playgrounds.

Wat al eerder benoemde, een iets breder trottoir langs de boulevard, nog wat meer zitgelegenheid èn iets minder verkeer op de boulevard. Het paranda rijdende verkeer heeft ook een sociale functie en geeft interactie tussen mensen. Helemaal geen doorgaand verkeer lijkt aantrekkelijk maar maakt het ook saaier. Het lijkt mij een goed idee om bij parke Tului de doorgang langs het water af te sluiten om zo het park meer aan te laten sluiten bij de zee en het wandelgebied. Het gemotoriseerde verkeer kan er makkelijk omheen gelegd worden.

1 response

Mas espasiooooo! Hasi e luga mas agradabel pa e lokalnan. Pa ta un sitio di enkuentro ku intenshon di invita hende, no bai pròp tur kos riba otro. E ta bira muchu sofokante. Na luga di hèki, lage habri. No hisa buta muraya, don't gentrify! Invita hende ku aktividat. Buta un muraya dedika na arte, krea un speeltuin na tinu i espasioso. Hopi kos na Bonèiru ta sinti half-assed. Mi sa ku espasio ta limitá pero probecha di dje, tá kreativo. I wouldn't be lazy with the space and i would prioritize comfort and accessibility over everything else. People will use space how they want regardless of the designs intention. So why not invite people to be creative with the space. Look at Sorobon and their palapas. So simple yet so functional because people are allowed to use it how they want.

1 response

Sera partinan di e kaminda, ku e ta bira kompletamente la peaton(voetgangers), pues ta bini un parti grandi ku por kana so. Sera kaminda pa outo: Parke Tului te ku rains Fishes, karels te ku Wilhrlmina plein. Sin outo, of solamente pa un hende yega na entrada di su kas. pone mas palu ku ta bira grandi pa sombra.

1 response

Move the trees to ONE side so people can walk more comfortably. Mothers with baby strollers, Handicapped, wheelchairs. Place trees that actually create shade, bloom, instead of palm trees OR remove the trees all together in the narrow parts. More seating areas...again, not in the middle of the walkway. More access to the water with stairs.

1 response

Grotere bomen planten die genoeg schaduw geven, met bankjes en een kleine tafel eronder. Of anders palapa's plaatsen met bankjes en een tafel. Langs de waterkant. Meer plekken maken waar mensen met een beperking zich gemakkelijk kunnen verplaatsen op de boulevard of het water in kunnen, zoals met een hellingbaan.

1 response

Lomi ponr afdak pa ora awaseru kai. Tambe lomi pone kaminda ku por tin musika pa asina atrae mas hende ne parke. Lomi organisa varios aktividat soshal ne parke pa atrae hende i pa asina por tin mas sosialisashon entre hende.

1 response

Results survey 'The boulevard as our meeting spot' — (Chaz Sweers)

To maintain a public space does not only mean that it stays there, but also that it adapts to its time. It is so important to involve your local community in the design of the public space, as it is them who use it most.

4   Conclusion

The waterfront boulevard of Bonaire, from Playa Lechi to Wilhelminaplein, holds deep historical, social, and cultural significance. Since its redevelopment in the late 20th century, it has evolved from a simple coastal road into a vibrant public space that fosters social interaction, leisure, and community engagement while enhancing accessibility and urban aesthetics.

Through historical analysis, case studies of international waterfront developments, and survey data, this study highlights the boulevard's central role in Bonaire's daily life. Similar to waterfront transformations in places like El Malecón in Havana and Ocean Boulevard in Kingston, the space has been repurposed and now promotes community engagement, tourist attraction, and economic growth. Survey results indicate that the boulevard supports both planned and spontaneous social interactions, with design elements like seating and shaded areas enhancing its communal function. An overwhelming majority of 96% of the participants find the public waterfront highly valuable and 97% find it important that boulevard is preserved. However, improvements in accessibility and inclusivity remain highly necessary.

As coastal privatization keeps increasing and the tourism industry keeps growing, preserving its public waterfront is crucial. Bonaire's boulevard should continue to prioritize inclusivity, accessibility, and community involvement to maintain its role as a key social and recreational space for residents and visitors alike.

5   Discussion

The transformation of Bonaire's waterfront boulevard from a simple road to a vital public space has had significant social, cultural, and economic impacts. The findings in this study demonstrate how intentional urban design can influence social interaction, accessibility, and overall quality of life. This section discusses key themes that emerged from the research and their broader implications for public space development on Bonaire and beyond.

5.1 Accessibility and Inclusivity
While 64% of survey respondents found the boulevard to be adequately accessible, a significant portion of participants highlighted concerns regarding access for all community members, particularly those with mobility impairments. The challenge of ensuring inclusivity in public space design remains a key issue. Research by Francis (1988) emphasizes the importance of accessibility and user diversity in democratic public spaces. Future improvements should focus on ensuring that seating areas, pathways, and recreational facilities cater to people of all abilities.

5.2 Preservation of Public Waterfronts
The historical analysis of Bonaire's waterfront highlights a concerning trend: the gradual privatization of seafront spaces. Similar to other urban waterfront redevelopments worldwide, such as those in Kingston and El Malecón, there is an ongoing tension between public and private interests. It is essential that there is a balance in tourism, economic development, and community needs. The success of the boulevard as a social space underscores the need for policies that safeguard public access to waterfronts, and to not simply design it for the privileged and the tourists.

5.3 The influence of tourism on Caribbean islands
The study of other waterfront redevelopments—such as Kingston's Ocean Boulevard and Havana's Malecón —reveals the influence of tourism on a small Caribbean island. Where development happens from a top down, economic perspective. A key lesson from these case studies is the importance of integrating community input into planning and redevelopment efforts to ensure public spaces remain truly democratic and beneficial to all. The incredible response rate on the survey shows how willing the community is to be involved.

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7   Appendix 1; Survey 'The boulevard as our meetingspot'

Bon dia,
Mi ta un studiante na TU Delft, kaminda mi ta hasiendo mi masters den arkitektura, mi ta skirbiendo mi tesis over di e influensia ku e boulevard, Wilhelminaplein i Parke Tului tin riba e interakshon den komunidat i enkuentro sosial. Pa haña un mihó komprondementu di e balor ku e boulevard, Wilhelminaplein i Parke Tului tin riba nos komunidat mi ke hasi bo algun pregunta tokante bo eksperensia di e boulevard.

E kuestionario ta considera e boulevard for di Playa Lechi te ku Fort Oranje. E no lo tuma mas ku 5 minut.
Masha danki pa yudami!!

Bon dia,
Ik studeer aan de TU Delft, waar ik mijn master architectuur doe, en schrijf momenteel mijn scriptie over de invloed van de boulevard, Wilhelminaplein en Parke Tului op gemeenschapsinteractie en sociale bijeenkomsten. Om een beter inzicht te krijgen in de waarde die de boulevard, Wilhelminaplein en Parke Tului heeft voor onze gemeenschap, wil ik u graag een paar vragen stellen over uw ervaringen met de boulevard.

De vragenlijst gaat over de boulevard van Playa Lechi tot Fort Oranje. Het duurt niet langer dan 5 minuten. Ontzettend bedankt voor uw hulp!!

Bon dia,
I am a student at the TU Delft, where I am doing my masters in architecture, and I am currently writing my thesis on the influence of the boulevard, Wilhelminaplein and Parke Tului on community interaction and social gathering. To get a better understanding of the value the boulevard, Wilhelminaplein and Parke Tului has on our community I would like to ask you a few questions about your experience of the boulevard.

The questionnaire considers the boulevard from Playa Lechi until Fort Oranje. It will not take longer than 5 minutes. Thank you so much for you help!!

Por fabor skohe bo idioma / Kies hier jouw taal / Please choose your language

- ○ Papiamento
- ○ Nederlands
- ○ English

Section 01:
E boulevard komo nos lugá di enkuentro
De boulevard als onze ontmoetingsplek
The boulevard as our meeting spot

Kiko ta bo edat?
Wat is uw leeftijd?
What is your age?

- ○ 18 òf mas yòn | 18 of jonger | 18 or younger
- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-34
- ○ 35-44
- ○ 45-54
- ○ 55-64
- ○ 65-74
- ○ 75 i mas grandi | 75 en ouder | 75 and older

Kon frekuente bo ta usa e boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?
Hoe vaak gebruikt u de boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?
How often do you use the boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?

○ Tur dia	Elke dag	Every day
○ 2 a 3 biá pa siman	2 à 3 keer per week	2 to 3 times a week
○ Un biá pa siman	Een keer per week	Once a week
○ Kada dos siman	Elke twee weken	Every two weeks
○ Un biá pa luna	Eens per maand	Once a month
○ Menos ku un biha pa luna	Minder dan een keer per maand	Less than once a month
○ Nunka	Nooit	Never

Kon frekuente bo ta topa ku un hende **intenshonalmente** na boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?
Hoe vaak **spreekt u met iemand af** op de boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?
How often do you **intentionally** meet up with someone at the boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?

○ Tur dia	Elke dag	Every day
○ 2 a 3 biá pa siman	2 à 3 keer per week	2 to 3 times a week
○ Un biá pa siman	Een keer per week	Once a week
○ Kada dos siman	Elke twee weken	Every two weeks
○ Un biá pa luna	Eens per maand	Once a month
○ Menos ku un biha pa luna	Minder dan een keer per maand	Less than once a month
○ Nunka	Nooit	Never

Kon frekuente bo ta topa ku un hende **aksidentalmente** na boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?

Hoe vaak komt u **toevallig** een bekende tegen op de boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?

How often do you **accidentally** run into someone at the boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului?

○ Tur dia	Elke dag	Every day
○ 2 a 3 biá pa siman	2 à 3 keer per week	2 to 3 times a week
○ Un biá pa siman	Een keer per week	Once a week
○ Kada dos siman	Elke twee weken	Every two weeks
○ Un biá pa luna	Eens per maand	Once a month
○ Menos ku un biha pa luna	Minder dan een keer per maand	Less than once a month
○ Nunka	Nooit	Never

Kua parti di e boulevard / malekon públiko bo ta usa mas tantu?

Welk onderdeel van de openbare waterkant gebruikt u het meest?

Which part of the public waterfront do you use most?

○ E boulevard | De boulevard | The boulevard
○ Wilhelminaplein | Het Wilhelminaplein | Wilhelminaplein
○ Parke tului/ pisina flotante | Parke tului/ het drijvende zwembad | Parke tului/ floating pool

Bo por menshoná 2 òf 3 aktividat ku bo ta hasi **mas tantu** na e boulevard / malekon públiko (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului)?

Kunt u 2 of 3 activiteiten noemen waarvoor u de openbare waterkant (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului) **het meest** gebruikt?

Can you name 2 or 3 **main** activities you use the public waterfront (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului) for?

....

....

....

Bo ta sinti ku e boulevard / malekon públiko (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului) ta yuda establesé kontaktonan sosial?

Heeft u het idee dat de openbare waterkant (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului) helpt bij het maken van sociaal contact?

Do you feel like the public waterfront (boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului) helps enhancing social contacts?

○ Si | Ja | Yes
○ No | Nee | No

Si ta asina, riba kua manera e ta yuda bo establesé kontaktonan sosial?
Zo ja, op welke manier helpt het u bij het leggen van sociaal contact?
If so, in what ways does it help you enhance social contacts?

Kua elementonan di e diseño bo ta kere ta generá un lugá fásil pa topa? (bo por skohe mas ku un)
Welke elementen van het ontwerp zorgen volgens u voor een gemakkelijke ontmoetingsplek? (U kunt er meer dan één kiezen)
Which elements of the design do you think generate an easy meeting spot? (you can choose more than one)

- ○ E bankinan kant'i awa — De bankjes langs het water — The benches along the water
- ○ E bankinan ku palapas — De bankjes met de palapas — The benches with palapas
- ○ E speeltuin na Parke Tului — The speeltuin in Parke Tului — The playground in Parke Tului
- ○ E stage na Wilhelminaplein — Het podium op het Wilhelminaplein — The stage in Wilhelminaplein
- ○ E wafnan — De pieren — The piers
- ○ E pisina flotante — Het drijvende zwembad — The floating pool
- ○ E paseo / promenade — De promenade — The promenade

Bo ta kere ku e boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului ta sufisiente aksesibel pa tur hende?
Vindt u dat de boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului toegankelijk genoeg is voor iedereen?
Do you believe the boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului are accessible enough for everybody?

- ○ Si | Ja | Yes
- ○ No | Nee | No

Si no, bo por spesifiká dikon?
Zo nee, waarom niet?
If not, why?

Bo ta kere ku e boulevard/Wilhelminaplein/Parke Tului ta sufisiente aksesibel pa tur hende?
Heeft u de aanleg van de boulevard begin jaren 90 meegemaakt?
Have you experienced the building of the boulevard in the early 90s?

- ○ Si | Ja | Yes
- ○ No | Nee | No

Section 02:
E konstrukshon di e boulevard
De ontwikkeling van de boulevard
The development of the boulevard

E boulevard i wilhelminaplein a wòrdu konstruí/redesaroyá den e promé añanan di añanan 90, promé ku esaki e tabata simplemente un kaya. E preguntanan aki ta tokante e promé añanan ku e paseo nobo aki tabata wòrdu usá.

De boulevard en het wilhelminaplein zijn in het begin van de jaren 90 aangelegd/herontwikkeld, daarvoor was het simpelweg een straat. Deze vragen gaan over de eerste jaren dat deze nieuwe promenade in gebruik werd genomen.

The boulevard and wilhelminaplein were built/redeveloped in the first few years of the 90s, before this it was simply a street. These questions are about the first few years this new promenade was being used.

Ora nan a konstruí e boulevard, bo a eksperensiá esaki komo un kambio positivo?
Wat is uw leeftijd?
What is your age?

- O   Si | Ja | Yes
- O   No | Nee | No
- O   Parsialmente |

Bo por elaborá dikon bo a òf no a eksperensiá esaki komo un kambio positivo?
Kunt u toelichten waarom u dit wel of niet als een positieve verandering heeft ervaren?
Can you elaborate why you did or did not experience this as a positive change?

....

....

....

Pa ki tipo di aktividat bo a usa e boulevard i Wilhelminaplein entre 1990-2000?
Voor welke activiteiten gebruikte u de boulevard en het Wilhelminaplein tussen 1990 en 2000?
What kind of activities did you use the boulevard and Wilhelminaplein for between 1990-2000?

....

....

....

Bo uso di e boulevard a kambia durante e último 20 añanan?
Is uw gebruik van de boulevard de afgelopen 20 jaar veranderd?
Has your use of the boulevard changed over the last 20 years?

O   Si | Ja | Yes
O   No | Nee | No

Si ta asina, kon esaki a kambia? Kua aktividatnan a kambia?
Zo ja, hoe is dit veranderd? Welke activiteiten zijn veranderd?
If so, how has this changed? Which activities changed?

....

....

....

Section 03:
Imaginá si abo lo ta e diseñador!
Stelt u zich voor dat u de ontwerper was!
Imagine you were the designer!

Duna mi un bista di bo ideanan di e boulevard/wilhelminaplein/parke tului!

Wilt u uw ideeën over de boulevard/wilhelminaplein/parke tului met mij delen?

Can you please give me an insight in your ideas of the boulevard/wilhelminaplein/parke tului?

Imaginá bo lo ta e diseñador, kiko bo lo a agregá òf kambia?
Stelt u zich voor dat u de ontwerper was, wat zou u dan toevoegen of veranderen?
Imagine you were the designer, what would you add or change?

....

....

....

Bo ta kere ku e elementonan/kambionan aki lo yuda benefisiá interakshon den komunidat?
Denkt u dat deze toevoegingen of veranderingen de sociale interactie in de gemeenschap ten goede zouden komen?
Do you think these new elements would help benefit community interaction?

- ○ Si | Ja | Yes
- ○ No | Nee | No

Kon balioso bo ta kere ku e boulevard / malekon públiko ta?
Hoe waardevol is de openbare waterkant volgens u?
How valuable do you believe the public waterfront to be?

No ta balioso											Hopi balioso
Helemaal niet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Erg waardevol
Not at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly valuable

Bo ta kere ku ta importante pa konservá e boulevard / malekon públiko?
Vindt u het belangrijk om de openbare waterkant te behouden?
Do you think it's important to preserve the public waterfront?

- ○ Si | Ja | Yes
- ○ No | Nee | No
- ○ Neutral | Neutraal | Neutral