

GREATER GREAT BAY AREA

DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE 'FRIENDLY ISLAND' DUTCH SINT MAARTEN (NA)

ir Helena C. M. Heyning
Amsterdam, the Netherlands



The case study 'Greater Great Bay Area, Development Perspective' deals with the Dutch part of St. Martin and more specific with the area of its capital Philipsburg and surroundings, the so called Greater Great Bay Area.

The island of St. Martin is located in the North Eastern Caribbean (latitude 18N, longitude 063W), approximately 200 miles to the east of Puerto Rico. In the Treaty of Münster in 1648 it was divided into a French portion (called Saint-Martin, capital Marigot) and a Dutch portion (called St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles).

The main purpose of the Development Perspective is to study the impact of global economy on the historical city of Philipsburg and to balance and recon ciliate the large scale, modern and global developments with the small-scale historical setting and fragile environment, at the same time supporting desired and much needed economic developments. Quote Commissioner 'The time has come to assess and seize the potential and opportunity for the future of Philipsburg.'

The Island Council gave TKA, Teun Koolhaas Associates / Architecture & Urban Design, the assignment to develop the vision. The new town Almere in The Netherlands was intermediary in the process. The author of this case study, Helena Heyning, was a member and the spokeswoman of the TKA team.

December 2002 TKA started the preparations and interviews, March 2003 the final Development Perspective was presented to the Island Council and other stakeholders. The vision was received with much enthusiasm. The follow up is under preparation.

The ISoCaRP case study deals with the headlines of this Development Perspective.

Intermezzo 1

The global Development Perspective places St. Maarten on the threshold of an open-ended planning process, by creating an initial overall framework with a strong main structure. Space will be left within this framework for adventurous filling in of the details by private initiative. The Island Council creates the opportunities, lays down the boundary conditions and tests proposals for applicability, especially with reference to their environmental impact. 'A strong main structure with adventurous, flexible details' is thus the motto under which Philipsburg and St. Maarten travel towards a new future!



French & Dutch St. Martin (astronauts view)



AD 1650: the New village



AD 2000: the Old Village

Facts & Figures 2002:

Cruise tourists *	1.000.000
Population Dutch St. Maarten	40.000
Residents Philipsburg	3.000
Workers/commuters Philipsburg	4.000

* expected in 2003: 1, 2 million

1. Pressures on Philipsburg and the Greater Great Bay Area

There are considerable pressures to develop Philipsburg and the region around the Great Salt Pond and the Great Bay, the so called Greater Great Bay Area. These arise on the one hand from the growing demands of the large-scale global cruise tourism centred on Great Bay, and on the other hand from the needs of the local population for expansion of government and social facilities. Also fierce competition from other emerging commercial centres on the island and other Caribbean destinations are a reality. The negative spiral within which the town finds itself must be addressed.

Age-old Philipsburg with its delightful beach lies on Great Bay between the cruise terminal and Great Salt Pond. This little town with its detailed gridiron pattern, developed to meet the needs of the 18th century (salt industry), has great period charm which has won it a deserved place as a tourist attraction, and needs to be preserved as such.

At the same time, Philipsburg is a modern regional centre in its own right with a good infrastructure, comprising schools, churches, police station, health centre, government offices, banks, hotels, restaurants, cafes, shops and residential accommodation. The growing tourist industry is however laying claim to more and more space in this little town. The initial result is that the residential function is being largely driven out of town, in favour of

commerce (tax free shops, casinos) and hotels and the aesthetic fabric defined by traditional Caribbean architecture is being replaced by development often devoid of quality and respect of the historic surroundings.

The population of the island has undergone an explosive growth during the past three decades, from 10,000 to 40,000, as the economical focus turned from a few rich tourists to mass tourism (cruise ships). This growth asks for new social facilities as well as expansion of the government and its buildings and international offices for private enterprises. It follows that effective control of traffic and parking is another one of the main tasks facing St. Maarten in general and Philipsburg in particular.

Careful consideration must also be paid to the ecological and natural environments. Hills and valleys, bays and lagoons: wide open, green and blue, determine the image of St. Maarten – a beauty that has to be cherished because the charm of natural landscape and its ecology is fragile. These so called ‘Golden Eggs’ need protection as do the historical monuments.

Philipsburg cannot escape the pressure on it to develop, to meet the needs of both the tourist industry and the growing population as sketched above. It is however unable to respond to this pressure without effective guidance. Careful consideration must be paid to the siting of the new facilities required in the town.

The Development Perspective lays down the main lines along which Philipsburg and the Bay Area can develop and proposes strategies for improvement.

2. Road map: frequent consultation Island Council and stakeholders

One of the main issues laid down in the Terms of Reference was the consultation of the Island Council and other share & stakeholders like the St. Maarten Port Authority, the owners of the two Marina's, several Associations of Merchants and several Bus and Taxi Drivers Associations, the representatives of the Nature Foundation and the Heritage Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, the Property Owners' Association, St. Maarten Hospitality & Trade Association, etc.

In extensive and repeated interviews and workshops the share & stakeholders' wishes were explored and it was discussed to what extent these wishes could be reconciled and incorporated in the Development Perspective. All wishes and suggestions were assembled on a map in order to inform the Island Council, stakeholders and the public. This was followed by presentations of the main lines of the consecutive drafts and ultimately the final Development Vision.

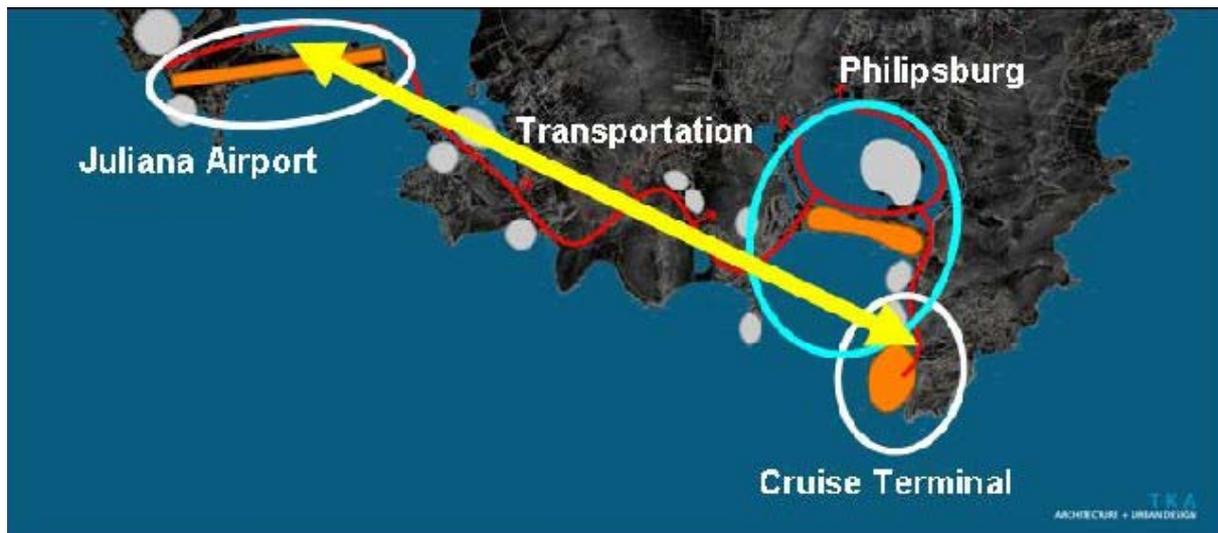
The process met much acclamation both from the Island Council and the stakeholders!

3. Overall Framework with Strong Main Structure: Diversity of Scales

The contrast in scale between present-day Philipsburg and the wide sweep of the sea, the Great Salt Pond and the mountains that surround it, the polarity between the intimate atmosphere of the historical town and the influence of the international world of the huge cruise ship and the aeroplane, will have to be translated into the **diversity of scales** on which further planning will be based.

Seen on a larger scale, one of the main developments will be the creation of a contemporary corridor, a '**transportation axis**', between the cruise terminal and Juliana International

Airport, with a number of nodes along it representing various functions of the international world.



Transportation axis

One further node along this corridor will be Philipsburg, where the **'historical axis'** (east/west) meets the modern world, the **'future axis'** (north/south). Contemporary and future development, large-scale and global in nature, will take place along the future axis, while the emphasis along the historical axis will be on the preservation and restoration of the small-scale historical structure and its details.



Scheme: Historical & Future axis



In situ: Historical & Future axis



Umbilical cord: Central axis

Alongside this historical axis we have Philipsburg's own **'central axis'**, an **'umbilical cord'** combining historical and contemporary elements and linking the beach, the historical Court House and the present Administration Building (government centre) to the town's new administrative complex on Pond Island and beyond. This central axis will have a green look, with lots of shade-giving trees and a succession of large and small squares and green malls.

This simple framework fits the present situation 'naturally' and forms a strong main structure with an exciting starting point for adventurous, flexible details and phased developments in the future.

Intermezzo 2

The Development Perspective includes details of plan for each sub region i.e. suggestions for the urban fabric, landscape, traffic and parking solutions, indications for the Visual Quality Plan, the zoning plan, etc. In chapter 4 – 6 a few highlights are presented.



Head of Town: Front Street (early morning)



Bougainville & Caribbean architecture

4. 'Old' Town Philipsburg

One of the central themes of this Development Perspective is the upgrading and beautification of Philipsburg old town – in particular the commercial quarter (Central & Head of Town) but also, albeit to a lesser extent, the residential part (Foot of Town).

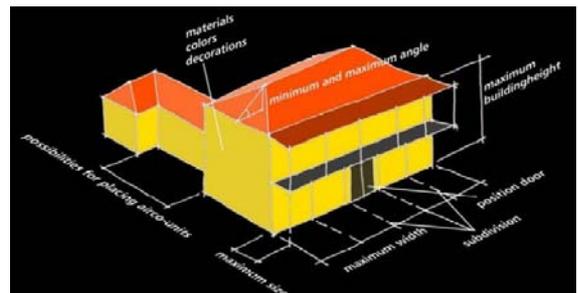
While it is true that the old town has been seriously neglected, its main structure is still intact and hence provides a basis for future development along the 'historical axis' it represents. The town does potentially have a lot to offer, and can be made much more attractive to tourists and locals.

A favourable investment climate must be created for the owners of buildings or land in the old town, since the contribution of the private sector and the energy of the public will play an essential role in the upgrading and beautification of the properties, alongside the investments made by public bodies and the stewardship of the public space by these bodies. Partnership and shared effort are key to the whole enterprise. They require a common vision on the socio-cultural, economic and physical planning aspects of the old town.

The planning instruments such as the Zoning Plan, Visual Quality Plan and Traffic & Parking Plan are very suitable means of providing the clearly defined spatial and cultural future perspective required, to clarify the relevant dos and don'ts and to translate them into objectives which will provide the necessary legal assurances for the success of the plan.



Monument



Architectural characteristics

A first draft of this Visual Quality Plan including Urban and Architectural characteristics, amongst others the principle of 'palm tree height', was part of the Development Perspective.

The creation of a Quality Team (to guide, assess and give recommendations concerning restoration, construction and renovation work and plans for new buildings) to support the beautification drive and a Municipal Consultancy Office (which can be consulted free of charge) could do a lot to stimulate the process.

Part of the traffic plan is the new regional Ring Road round Great Salt Pond that will reduce the pressure of heavy through traffic not only on Philipsburg but also on the other neighbourhoods situated on the Pond. It will also allow Philipsburg to tackle all the current parking problems in town at a single blow and make an end to the legal and illegal landfills in the Salt Pond, a threat for the historical age-old salt pans.

An integral part of the Visual Quality Plan for streets, alleys and squares is a lighting plan. Well lit, clean public spaces, be they roads, alleys or squares, look safe and are a sine qua non for a lively, 'touristy' setting, after sunset as well as in the daytime.

5. Pond Island

In contrast to the old town of Philipsburg which is small-scale, colourful and incorporates a wealth of natural materials, Pond Island will be developed into an area where a businesslike, modern and future-oriented atmosphere reigns. Pond Island will offer space in the future for large office buildings, for both government, institutional and commercial purposes, which would stand out like a sore thumb in the intimate environment of old Philipsburg.

The main axis is formed by the impressive green mall running north-south with a town road (one-way dual carriageway) flanked by double rows of palm trees on each side. A network of minor roads will give access to the existing facilities (University of St. Maarten, facilities for sports and other events, etc.) and those to be allotted in the future. In order to highlight the importance of the green mall, the main buildings and those with the most interesting architectural features should preferably be sited along it.

The use of a simple grid with a choice between extensive and intensive development makes it possible to allot larger or smaller lots, as desired, for different purposes.



Master plan Pond Island



Green Mall (im.)

A waterside promenade with facilities for walkers, joggers, skaters and cyclists will be laid out all round the island. Further study is needed to determine whether it would be feasible to create mangrove plantations at the edge of the landfill zone, to provide a green belt round Pond Island at the boundary between land and water.

Good park management is part of the deal. The usual practice in such cases is that the various landowners and companies 'top up' the standard contribution made by the local authorities. It was advised to set up an Owners' Association or a Foundation to manage the maintenance funds and put the work out to tender thus becoming the central manager of the area.

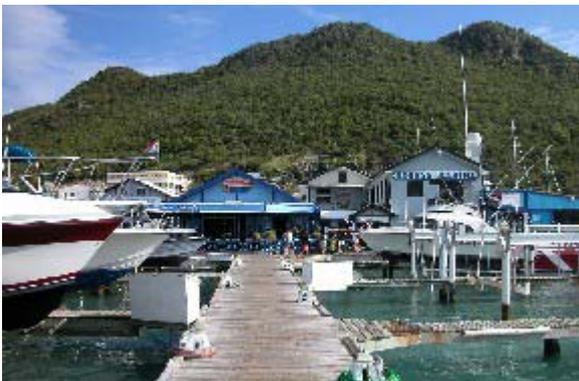
6. Marina's

The variation in waterfronts is one of the charming aspects of Philipsburg. You can choose between sandy or rocky waterfronts or local wooden boardwalks. Unfortunately, tourists who want to walk from the Cruise Terminal to old Philipsburg still have to do so in very poor circumstances. Things might change in the near future if the two main landowners come to a partnership, including relocation of present wharf activities and coordination of the design review process. This process might lead to the creation of a united public waterfront.

The most important part of this unified public space along the waterfront is the boardwalk which will offer a selection of cafes, restaurants, bistros and pubs with ample Entertainment on the Waterfront, day and night. To suit more active tastes, there are scuba-diving and snorkelling tours, sailing trips or fishing charters. A choice of charter boats is for hire. Last but not least, St. Maarten is home to the famous Heineken Regatta, the 'Biggest Regatta in the Caribbean'.

The package of plans relating to the waterfront will also include provisions for a restricted enlargement of the harbour basin to create more room for charter sailboats and big new yachts. The enlargement of the marina must be carried out in an environmentally friendly way. Developers have to submit an EIA report, including proposals for mitigating any undue environmental impact, as part of the required urban design and final building plans.

As for the Visual Quality: the main building material is wood (painted or with the natural patina brought about by weathering) or stone and plaster. Buildings are roofed with metal sheets or wooden shingles. Colours match the bay: whites, greys, greens and blues, to which may be added a few passionate Carib pastel tints. Buildings should not exceed 'palm tree height', which here means two to three storeys at most. Careful landscaping with trees, illumination and use of attractive paving materials is a must are sufficient parking places.



Bobby's Marina & Great Bay Marina



Marinas and Landfill (helicopter view)



Scale model: Landfill - Marina's - Old Philipsburg



Marina by night (im.)

7. Landfill & Cruise Terminal

The position of the landfill between the Marina's and the Cruise Terminal is strategic in more than one respect:

- Long-term strategic reserve
- Immediate financial revenues
- United Waterfront
- Position on the 'future axis'.

Possible future facilities would focus on the cruise tourists: Fun for Children and the Young at Heart and facilities more suitable for Adults

As regards the future Urban Design and Visual Quality, the following items should be taken into account during the development of the site:

- Continuity of the boardwalk from Cruise Terminal to Marina Waterfront
- Building height on hill and near Cruise Terminal seven to eight storeys, going down to two or three storeys ('palm tree height') near Great Bay and on the Philipsburg side.
- Careful choice of building materials & colours (pastels, whites, greys and silvers)
- Careful landscaping with trees, illumination and attractive paving materials
- Sufficient parking space and a generous profiling of the connecting town road.

The Cruise Terminal itself forms one end of the large-scale 'transportation axis' running to Juliana International Airport. The huge pier and the gigantic cruise ships moored alongside it dwarf old Philipsburg.



The influx of tourists is enormous compared to the population of Philipsburg.



Crowd waiting for water taxis



Traffic congestion Front Street

Since the cruise industry came to the island, revenues have soared and there has been considerable importation of manpower for work in the cruise industry or related activities.

The feasibility of the plans (intention) for a substantial extension of the cruise terminal and making St. Maarten a home port should be investigated thoroughly as the question arises whether St. Maarten as a whole has sufficient load-bearing or so called carrying capacity for such a project and whether there is enough room in Philipsburg to make it viable. Only extensive research will tell how realistic such ideas are and how to plan this phenomena of ever expanding globalization. Does St. Maarten have enough skilled labour to take on a task of this magnitude, or would it mean even more immigration? We all know that the tourist industry is volatile, susceptible to all kinds of influences (hurricanes, terrorism, global economy, etc.).

On the other hand, tourism is currently an economical niche representing the main source of employment - and of income - for the island. The research should also cover feasible solutions to (e.g. environmental) problems arising, and their financial consequences.

Intermezzo 3

The Development Perspective is but a first step towards development. A smart and well balanced development strategy is needed and projects have to be worked out and fitted into the overall strategy. Each sub-project has a scale of its own, relates to particular policy sectors and geographical areas, has a specific time horizon and is more or less binding on the members of the public involved. One common feature of all projects however, is that they are based on the Development Perspective, which provides a common framework within which the various systems involved can develop over time.

8. Follow-up: Sub-projects & Overall Strategy

The Development Perspective lays down the main lines along which Philipsburg will develop. This common framework provides a firm basis for further planning, in which the details of the various sub-projects involved will be worked out and put into execution. The Development Perspective is no more than a first step, but a very important one.

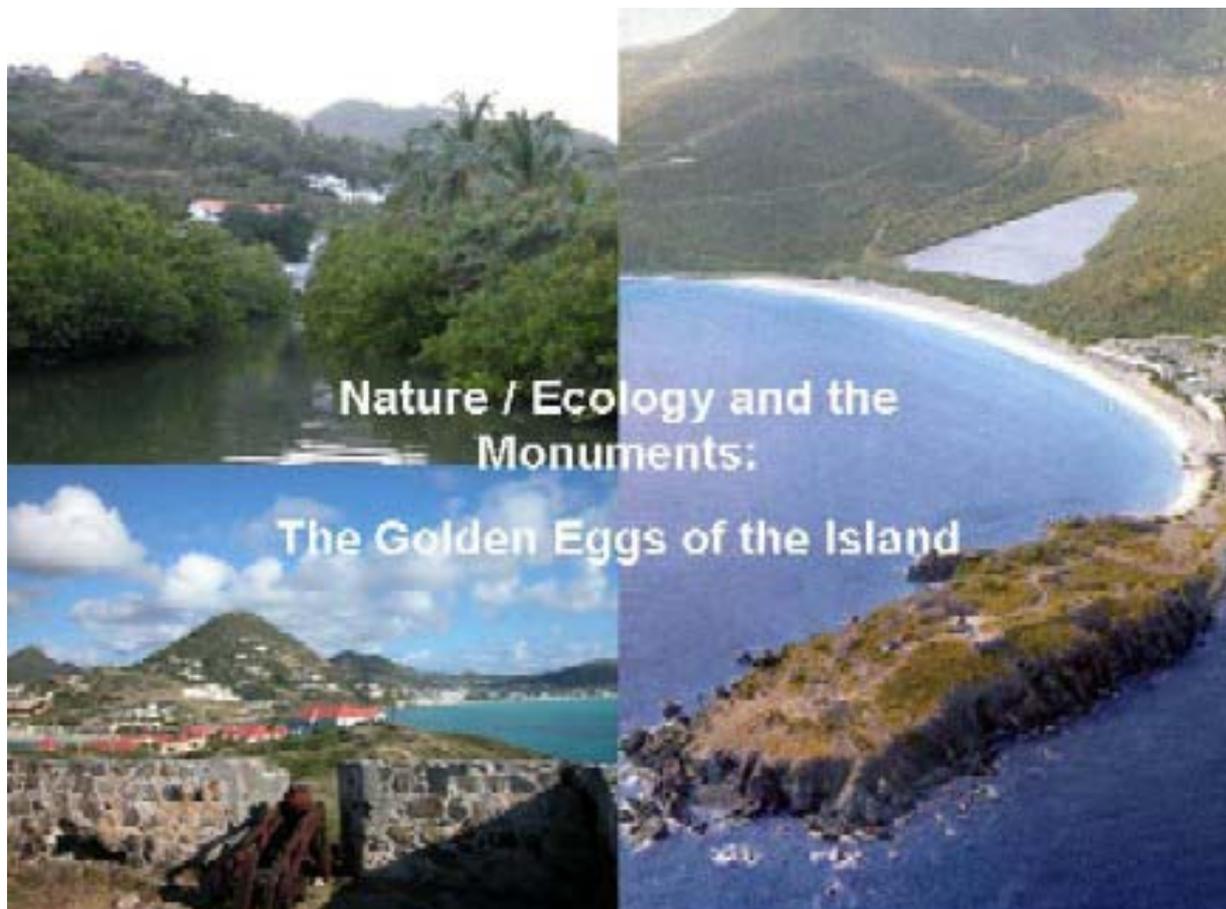
The next step after the formulation of this Development Perspective is to designate the various sub-projects that have to be worked out and budgeted.

The various consequences of these manifold activities will have to be covered by an overall development strategy in which the non-spatial aspects of the planning are designated, i.e. the financial-economic and social feasibility and the possibility of phasing the execution of the plans. The relationships between the various steps involved in the execution of the projects, the demands they will make on the resources of government organizations and of the organizations representing the private individuals and companies involved as users, and the demands made on the capacity of the building firms and suppliers involved in the work, are of equal importance.

It may be noted in general that proper communication with the public is of vital importance in this whole planning and execution process. Public involvement, the extent to which they identify with the various sub-projects, can be raised by prompt delivery of tangible results of the Development Perspective.

Tangible short-term results, no matter how small, create confidence in the ultimate success of the project.

The environment, as an independent policy sector, is a separate chapter in the follow-up planning, though the environmental protection plans do of course have points of contact with the other plans.



The 'Golden Eggs'

Courtesy TKA
Pictures: NASA, TKA