Life in "Paradise" a social psychological and anthropological study of nature conservation in the Caribbean Netherlands

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A Thematic Analysis of the Drivers of Environmental Conservation in the Caribbean Netherlands.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 revealed that the most common social-psychological factors and motives for people's engagement in conservation actions are also evident among conservation actors in the Caribbean Netherlands. Despite these similarities, I believe that it is clear that the social, political, and cultural context in which people are engaging with the environment also has implications for people's experiences, motives, and behavior, a belief born out by the existing scholarly research. Clayton et al. (2016) defined the environmental problem as a human-environment problem and their work emphasizes the interaction between humans and their specific environments. This understanding highlights the importance of considering humans and human behavior within their environment or context. In the current chapter, therefore, I expand upon my discussion in Chapter 2. I delve more deeply into the survey results to focus on the specific context of the Caribbean Netherlands.

As "context" is a broad concept and can refer to many different levels of analysis (economic, political, historical, rural or urban, local or global) (Dilley, 2002), it is important to clarify the contextual features that I consider in this chapter. In addition to the fact that the environment is important to protect on the islands because it is a key resource for one of the main pillars of the islands' economies, the Caribbean Netherlands is an interesting case study for an exploration of the human-environment intersection. The Caribbean Netherlands' social, political, and historical context serves as a unique backdrop against which to explore the underlying motives of residents to protect the natural environment. Specifically, these contextual features create several challenges (and opportunities) that are likely to affect island residents who protect the local environments. Studies have shown that there is a relationship between people's sense of belonging and their engagement in pro-environmental behavior. However, I wanted to find out what happens when notions of belonging are contested or challenged due to specific contextual factors? How does this affect the relationship between belonging and pro-environmental behavior? The current chapter explores this question.

3.1.1 The Current Study

Not every form of pro-environmental behavior might be as influenced by the contextual factors I considered in this study and, likewise, the implications of one's sense of belonging, or lack thereof, might not have as much of an impact. As I already mentioned in Chapter 1, these dynamics of senses of belonging and overall social, political, historical, and cultural contexts are believed to be of particular relevance for publicly displayed pro-environmental behavior. This includes active involvement in environmental organizations, active kinds of environmental citizenship, and support for, or acceptance of, pro-environmental public policies (Stern, 2000). Examples of public sphere environmental behavior (from here on out referred to as conservation actions) in the Caribbean include clean up events or eco-restoration efforts, protesting against environmentally destructive industries, participating in awareness campaigns,

volunteering during annual rooster counts, or reforestation events. Stern (2000) indicated that "an important feature of public sphere behavior, including activism, is that environmental concerns are within awareness and may, therefore, be influential" (p. 409). Because of their visibility, other people within the community may respond more strongly to these types of behavior than, for example, actions occurring in the household such as reducing energy consumption. Thus, the main argument for focusing on publicly visible conservation behavior is that these actions are visible to other community members and, therefore, more susceptible to socio-contextual factors and others' opinions. Following the aforementioned reasoning and considerations, I address two research questions in the current chapter, namely:

1. *How does the political-historical and geographical context of the Caribbean Netherlands affect conservation actors?*
2. *How does this context affect the relation between belonging and conservation actors' motives to protect the Caribbean Netherlands' natural environment*?

As I will discuss at greater length in this chapter, two main themes emerged from my research. The first is that "**Nature Conservation is Political**". I use the term "political" to emphasize varying and, at times, conflicting interests conservation actors encounter when trying to protect, conserve, or manage the environment. The term "political" is also used to refer to the fact that the debates on nature conservation also occur between politicians and other people with power in the community. The debates about conservation efforts, motives, and challenges reflected on by the informants could be organized into four sub-themes. Namely:

- Conservation versus "progress";
- Nature is our culture or nature versus culture?;
- This land is my land; this land is your land;
- Acting local, acting Dutch.

The second theme is what I termed, "**Challenges are my motivation"** and reflects the heightened sense of responsibility conservation actors feel to protect the environment due to the islands' context. The challenges of the context arguably make conservation actors even more motivated to protect the environment. In the following paragraphs, I discuss in-depth the contextual features I considered and their theoretical implications on conservation actions.

3.1.2 Challenges and Opportunities of SIDS

The first contextual feature I considered is geographical and refers to the small and insular characteristics of the Caribbean Netherlands. Formally, the Caribbean Netherlands cannot be classified as Small Islands Development States (SIDS), as they are non-sovereign and one of the key aspects of SIDS is their sovereign status. As described in earlier chapters, the Caribbean Netherlands are formally incorporated into the Kingdom of the Netherlands and, more importantly are under the jurisdiction of the

government of the Netherlands. This means that unlike SIDS, the Caribbean Netherlands lack autonomy in many, though not all, instances. Some functions, as I will describe in subsequent chapters, are supervised and supported by the governance apparatus of the European Netherlands. This status is illustrated by the fact that they are so-called "special municipalities" of the Netherlands. Despite these factors, however, many if not all the characteristics of SIDS do apply to and are relevant when describing the societal features, and, more specifically, the challenges and opportunities in terms of sustainable development of the Caribbean Netherlands. Moreover, Ferdinand, Oostindie and Veenendaal (2020) argued that *non*-sovereign small, developing islands might experience the challenges of SIDS in greater extremes in particular because of their lack of autonomy. They argue that this is especially evident in issues surrounding social (and environmental) justice. Furthermore, Oostindie and Klinkers (2003), for example, argued that the dominance of the European Dutch within the Kingdom government creates a striking imbalance despite ongoing claims of equality and reciprocity. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss the common challenges and opportunities of SIDS and how they apply to the Caribbean Netherlands in relation to sustainability, development, and nature conservation as this provides a concise framework when considering the "small island" characteristics of the three islands.

Briguglio (1995) discussed a series of (economic) disadvantages and challenges of SIDS organized along with the four main characteristics of SIDS, namely: small size, insularity, remoteness, and vulnerability to natural disasters (see Appendix C for an overview). The disadvantages these places contend with include: the high degree of dependence on the import of products, services, and knowledge; high costs of living; insecurity around the availability of goods and services; unstable or impartial administrative services; and politics, i.e., "Everybody knows everybody" (Veenendaal, 2017a).

These disadvantages associated with SIDS have shaped much of the narrative related to island ecologies (Ferdinand, 2018; Baldacchino, 2014; Kelman, 2014; Ratter, 2018; Petzold & Magnan, 2019; Kueffer & Kinney, 2017; Scobie, 2019). The main argument is that small tropical islands, in particular, are rich in biodiversity, and the inhabitants are heavily dependent on their natural resources to ensure their quality of life and their economies. This emphasizes the need to properly manage, protect, and conserve the natural environment (Baver & Lynch, 2006; Ferdinand, 2018; Ferdinand, Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2020). At the same time, due to their insularity and often large and low-lying coastal areas, these small islands are also the most vulnerable to natural disasters, ecological degradation, and the implications of global warming (Baver & Lynch, 2006; Briguglio, 1995; Ferdinand, Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2020; Kelman, 2014). Ironically, SIDS contribute the least to the sources of climate change and thus these negative consequences of climate change are particularly unjust considering the disproportionate effect climate change has on these spaces (Ferdinand, Oostindie & Veenendaal, 2020). This inherently unequal position has stimulated debates on climate (in)justice (Baptiste

& Rhiney, 2016; Ferdinand, 2018). In short, this means that SIDS are forced to deal with environmental issues they are not responsible for from a disadvantaged position, geologically, economically, and in terms of capacity.

More recently, a growing group of scholars argues that SIDS face not only challenges but also enjoy opportunities (Baldacchino, 2006; Chandler & Pugh, 2018; Chandler & Pugh, 2020; Ratter, 2018; Grydehøj, 2020). Instead of only being vulnerable, islands and their communities are also seen as resilient – able to overcome whatever they are confronted with, despite their disadvantages. Islands are no longer viewed as singular, insular, and isolated, but rather as multiple, interconnected, and mobile (Bremner, 2016; Grydehøj & Kelman 2017; Hayward, 2012; Petzold & Ratter, 2015; Riquet, 2016; Chandler & Pugh, 2020). Kellman (2007) discussed how some characteristics of islands which are usually seen as a challenge also present or become opportunities. For example, islands' isolated character triggers creativity and strength through diversity and collaboration among the community for safeguarding their livelihoods. Similarly, instead of fighting the remnants of their colonial rule, islands use these connections in their favor to retain access to more resources and power, a dynamic I referenced in the previous chapter as the "head vs heart" dilemma.

Along similar lines, it has been argued that precisely because of their small scale, insularity, and remoteness, the environment of islands is (theoretically) well suited for conservation (Baldacchino, 2007; Mountz & Briskman, 2012; Krieg, 2018). Small islands are increasingly viewed as the go-to place to find new ways of thinking and approach complex issues such as climate change (Kueffer & Kinney, 2017; Chandler & Pugh, 2020; Perumal, 2018; Ratter, 2018). Lastly, while the limits in capacity and resources require island residents to wear multiple hats and knowing everybody can be challenging in certain social contexts, this also creates a social context where there is more social cohesion and citizens have better access to those in power (Veenendaal, 2017a). These characteristics can be argued to be both challenges and opportunities and is an acknowledged dualism associated with SIDS (Baldacchino, Cassar & Caruana, 2008).

The implications of SIDS on people's behavior and experiences have been examined in various ways: governance and political processes (Baldacchino, 2012; Veenendaal, 2016b; 2017b); entrepreneurship (Baldacchino & Fairbairn, 2006; Burnett, & Danson, 2017); (eco) tourism (Sharpley & Ussi, 2014; Cheng & Wu, 2015); and well-being (Bates, Coleman, Wiles & Kearns, 2019). A growing body of literature also examines the experiences and behavior of islanders with regards to environmentally related subjects, such as: climate change (Klöck & Nunn, 2019; Baptiste & Thomas, 2017; Baptiste, 2018; Kelman, 2018; Petzold & Magnan, 2019; Nunn, & Kumar, 2018): climate justice (Baptiste & Rhiney, 2016; Ferdinand, 2018); natural disasters (Mika, 2018; Heger, Julca, & Paddison, 2008; Kelman & Khan, 2013); and international conservation policies (Dahl, 2017).

A few studies have examined how (Caribbean) SIDS affect people's involvement in conservation behavior from a socio-psychological perspective (Baptiste, 2018; Baptiste & Thomas, 2017). For example, one study found that children on islands have a different relationship with the environment than children growing up on the mainland, suggesting challenges for conservation efforts (Shapiro, Peterson, Stevenson, Frew & Langerhans, 2017). Another study conducted by Rauwald and Moore (2002) found that islanders (Trinidadians and Dominicans) displayed stronger pro-environmental attitudes than mainlanders (Americans). The idea that "islandness" has implications for nature conservation was also explored by Coulthard, Evans, Turner, Mills, Foale, Abernerthy, Hicks and Monnereau (2017). The authors found that the temporal context (i.e., histories, trends, shocks, and other vulnerabilities of islands) in combination with the relative importance of social well-being to islanders, are determinants for what kinds of conservation interventions island communities engaged in and how these were received, supported, and attained.

While these studies do not investigate the reasons for these differences in-depth, they support the idea that a small island context affects people's drivers to engage in environmental conservation actions. Considering the (possible) challenges and opportunities presented by SIDS, it is possible, for example, that this affects people's sense of responsibility when it comes to protecting the environment. It could be, for instance, that the combination of the high dependence on, and vulnerability of, islands' natural resources might heighten residents' sense of responsibility for, and sense of urgency to, conserve the environment. Along similar lines, the small scale of the islands might trigger debates on land use, which can create tensions within the community regarding the conservation of the environment and affect people's decisions to participate in conservation actions. Lastly, the reality that people often know each other in small communities can also have implications for people's participation in conservation actions.

Many other scholars warned of the danger of neglecting islands' diversity and lumping them into one category and using only simple measurements (Grydehøj, 2020; Kelman, 2007; Kelman & West, 2009; Kelman & Khan, 2013; Walsche & Stancioff, 2018). Moreover, as shown by Coulthard et al. (2017), it is important to consider the temporal context when examining SIDS' characteristics. Therefore, in addition to these traits of SIDS, I consider a second temporal/socio-political contextual feature – the complicated (post-)colonial history of the islands which has, in part, led to intricate and sometimes problematic administrative and governance structures. I argue in this thesis that this complicated (post-)colonial history can have implications for the conservation efforts of residents in the Caribbean Netherlands.

3.1.3 The Experiment of the Caribbean Netherlands

The second contextual factor that I considered in relation to nature conservation efforts in the Caribbean Netherlands was the (lead up to the) constitutional reforms of the

islands on the 10th of October in 2010. Specifically, I took the following aspects into account: the colonial history the islands share with the Netherlands and the sentiments of "re-colonization" brought about by the constitutional reforms; the integration of management responsibilities for the environment into the legal and governmental administration of the European Netherlands; the increasing presence of Dutch and foreign NGOs concerned with the islands' natural environment on the three islands; and, lastly, the growing number of (European) migrants on the islands.

Oostindie and Klinkers (2012) called the political and constitutional integration of Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius into the European Netherlands as "special municipalities" following the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, "The experiment of the Caribbean Netherlands" (p. 262). They termed it an experiment because so much was still unclear regarding the exact changes the islands would encounter with their new status, specifically in terms of which legislation from the European Netherlands would be transferred to the Caribbean Netherlands and how this legislation would be implemented. Also, while there was a majority of votes for the islands to become special municipalities of the Netherlands, there was still much division among local politicians. Those opposed to the new status argued that the islands gave away too much control to the Netherlands and did not receive enough in return – not in terms of recognition of, and respect for, local cultural norms and values, but neither did they receive as much as they could or should have financially. This dissatisfaction was expressed by many as a leading to a sense of "re-colonization" of the islands by the Netherlands, by forcing islands to become more Dutch than they would like to have been (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012).

In line with these divided sentiments, the islands' integration into the Netherlands had both positive and less positive outcomes, according to residents of the islands (Veenendaal, 2015). In the decade after the 10th of October 2010, several evaluations took place to get a sense of how islanders experienced their new constitutional status. A first analysis one year after the reforms revealed that residents of the Caribbean Netherlands had mixed feelings about the implementation of the constitutional reforms (CurConsult, 2012). Five years after the reforms, the divided sentiments remained. In two separately conducted evaluative studies, residents expressed that they felt that there were both positive and negative outcomes from the reforms. They were positive about improvements in healthcare and education and the execution of various smaller projects because there was finally the availability of funding and the logistical capacity to do so. On the other hand, they were disappointed by the high cost of living and growing levels of poverty. Residents were also dissatisfied with the lack of consideration of local circumstances from the Netherlands in terms of legislation and enforcement of regulations. They felt that there are now more restrictions (similar to the European Netherlands) but fewer benefits in terms of social services, again compared to the European Netherlands. The lack of progress on all fronts was partially blamed on the islands' small scale and limited capacity. In the

end, good governance comes down to individuals, making the executive councils of the islands at least partially responsible for whatever progress, or lack thereof, has occurred[8].

The residents placed much of the blame on the lack of preparations with which the changes were implemented and differences in culture, interests, and concerns between islanders and the Dutch (European Netherlands) (Spies, Soons, Thodé, Verhey & Weekers, 2015; Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2018). Moreover, more citizens of the European Netherlands have moved to the islands in the ten years or so since the constitutional reforms. In particular, this growth comes from wealthier people and those who are responding to the increasing number of job vacancies created and advertised within the growing Dutch community for positions as teachers, doctors, financial advisors, and the like. This creates a cycle of ever-increasing numbers of European Dutch people moving to the islands. The group of wealthy migrants tend to have some degree of power in the local economies by starting business, buying land, and making real estate investments, and therefore, increasingly gain a sense of ownership of the islands. This has resulted in a sense that this ownership is being removed from the local communities.

This increase in Dutch immigration, a growing group of Dutch tourists, and the greater prominence of the Dutch government, all stemming from the constitutional reforms has, therefore, led to feelings of "re-colonization" among (some) residents, particularly on Sint Eustatius (Veenendaal, 2017a) and Bonaire (De Geus, Mac Donald, Oostindie, Stipriaan & Vermeer, 2021). Overall, these developments further strained the relationship between the islands and the European Netherlands and between the islanders and the (new) Dutch migrants residing on the islands. In addition, many residents expressed that they felt too many Dutch European migrants now reside on the islands (Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2018). This was particularly the case on Bonaire, where, for example, protests took place against the integration of the island into the European Netherlands. Protest signs are scattered on the island expressing sentiments such as "*Minder Makamabas*" ("fewer Dutch people"), and *"Weg met RCN"* ("Out with the National Office for the Caribbean Netherlands") (See Figures 15 and 16).

8 The island governments (public entities) consist of an Island Council and an Executive Council. The Island Council is the highest administrative body of the public entity and all members are members of political parties directly elected by vote of the residents. Thus, the Island Council represents the public, outlines policies, and monitors the Executive Council. The Executive Council is responsible for the daily management of the public entity. The Executive Councils are chaired by aLieutenant Governor, appointed by the Dutch Crown.

Figure 15. Sint Eustatian politician Clyde van Putten speaking to a group of protesters in front of the RCN building on Bonaire.

Figure 16. Protest sign hanging on the gates of the government building of the public entity of Bonaire.

Oostindie and Veenendaal (2018) describe these debates on the experienced benefits and the drawbacks of being integrated into the Netherlands (i.e., their non-sovereignty) as the "Head versus Heart dilemma". On the one hand, remaining closely connected to the Netherlands has several pragmatic benefits, but this creates dissatisfaction emotionally and ideologically. Moreover, their analysis revealed that "the increasingly significant role of the Netherlands on these islands has resulted in augmented resistance towards the Dutch metropolis, even if the more material benefits of the constitutional link with The Netherlands remain strongly relevant to the island populations" (p. 2).

In sum, like the implications of small-scale, the constitutional reforms presented both (new) challenges and opportunities for the islands. Both of these can affect the motives of residents of the Caribbean Netherlands to protect the three islands' natural environments. In the rest of this chapter, I investigate how these contextual factors affect residents' efforts to protect the environment.

3.1.4 Belonging and Protecting the Environment

In addition to possible direct implications for conservation actors' motives on the three islands, this chapter examines how these contextual features influence the relationship between belonging and nature conservation efforts. The need to belong is one of the most important, persistent behavior motivations (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Fulfilling this need gives people a sense of meaning and identity, strengthens their self-esteem, and their overall well-being. One way to fulfill this need is to engage in behavior approved of by the community or the group a person wants to belong to. Conserving the environment can be considered such behavior (Batson, 1998; Nolan & Schultz, 2013; Clayton et al., 2016). Indeed, several research lines examined the relationship between people's need to belong and their engagement in pro-environmental behavior.

The first body of work involves the concepts of place attachment and place identity. Place attachment represents "(positively) experienced bonds . . . that are developed over time from the behavioral, affective and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their socio-physical environment" (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 284). The general relationship between place attachment and pro-environmental behavior is that those who have a positive and strong attachment to a place are more likely to protect it than those who feel less attached, as I demonstrated in the last chapter (Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Gifford & Nilsson, 2014; Lewicka, 2005; Lewicka, 2011; Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Mihaylov & Perkins, 2013; Hernández, Martín, Ruiz, & Hidalgo, 2010; Stefaniak, Bilewicz & Lewicka, 2017). Several studies concluded that people's engagement in conservation behavior also strengthens their bond and sense of identity with the place, and that place attachment fulfills the psychological need to belong (Manzo & Perkins, 2006; Mihaylov & Perkins, 2013; Scannell & Gifford, 2017).

The second line of research involves work on intra-group dynamics and social norms. Previous research has shown that social norms affect many kinds of behavior, including conservation behavior, e.g., littering behavior (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren, 1990), recycling (Burn & Oskamp, 1986), energy consumption (Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein & Griskevicius, 2007), and pro-environmental behavior in general (Farrow, Grolleau, & Ibanez, 2017). One reason people abide by social norms is to fulfill their need to belong. The need to belong compels people to strive to build and maintain relationships with others and is related to peoples' adherence to group norms (Steinel, Van Kleef, Van Knippenberg, Hogg, Homan, & Moffitt, 2010; Culiberg & Elgaaied-Gambier, 2016).

While the existing literature suggests a positive relationship between the need to belong and pro-environmental behavior, this relationship might differ in the Caribbean Netherlands. Specifically, and as I discussed in Chapter 1, the constitutional reforms exacerbated contestations about the relationship and history the islands share with the European Netherlands and prompted debates on identity and belonging (Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2018; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). Specifically, islanders often express their fears that the strong Dutch presence might lead to a loss of the islands' traditional local culture and identity (de Geus, Mac Donald, Oostindie, van Stipriaan & Vermeer, 2020). Moreover, the small scale of the islands creates an environment where people and their behavior are easily made subject to criticism or appraisal by the community, affecting their sense of belonging. In line with this reasoning, Coulthard et al. (2017) presented some evidence for the relationship between islandness, belonging, and nature conservation. Specifically, they showed that belonging as an indicator of social well-being is a relevant factor to consider when evaluating islands' conservation efforts. They found that "in island contexts policy implementation processes are highly sensitive to social identity – us and them, insiders and outsiders – and perceptions of control and autonomy, all of which can positively or negatively influence responses to [marine] conservation." (Ibid, p. 306).

In terms of the relationship between protecting the environment and people's need to belong, the implications of engagement in this behavior thus can be twofold. On the one hand, there is a dire need to protect the natural environment of the Caribbean Netherlands. It serves as the central resource for the islands' largest economic pillar of tourism and is the source of the residents' overall well-being. On the other hand, the sentiment exists that mostly (new) European and North American migrants are visibly active in nature conservation. Thus, this raises the question about the relationship between the sense of belonging of conservation actors and their motivation for participating in conservation actions in the Caribbean Netherlands. Reasoning from people's need to belong may give additional insights into why residents are motivated to protect the islands' natural environment and how this is affected by the socio-political and geographical context.

3.2 METHOD

I used the same set of interviews I discussed in Chapter 2 for the current analysis (N = 35). However, instead of a (semi)quantified content analysis, I opted for using experiential thematic analysis as it can reveal new or less common experiences of residents of the Caribbean islands related to nature conservation and sheds new light on the methods already known in the field of environmental psychology.

3.2.1 Thematic Analysis

I analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2016; Clarck & Braun, 2013; 2014). I analyzed the informants' accounts informed by a critical realist or contextualized epistemology (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2012). This approach loosely conforms to the definition of critical realism and, as a position, it affirms the existence of "reality", both physical and environmental, but, at the same time, recognizes that its representations are characterized and mediated by culture, language, and political interest rooted in factors such as race, gender, or social class (Ussher, 1999). In terms of informants' sense-making, the informants' reasoning is treated as real and true to them, but I also acknowledge that this reasoning is shaped by the cultural context and factors such as their age, ethnicity, gender, migratory status, and other personal experiences.

Procedure of Analysis

As I discussed in Chapter 2 and following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. After carefully reading and rereading the transcripts, initial complete "open" coding created the first conceptual labels. Next, the initial set of labels were then clustered and organized into overarching themes. This process derived both semantic (surface meaning) and latent codes (underlying ideas and patterns), as the goal was to gain a better understanding of how the motives of conservation actors are influenced or shaped by the context of the three islands by linking them back to existing concepts and theories. This coding procedure generated an understanding of the relations between the themes.

The analysis focused on identifying and organizing reoccurring debates and the patterns within the debates in narratives shared by informants as they reflected on their motivation to make an effort to protect the environment of the islands. Once the initial descriptive, social-psychological drivers for their behavior were coded (as I discussed in Chapter 2), I paid attention to how the informants referred to the island context when discussing their efforts to protect the environment. Informants discussed both opportunities and challenges presented by the context, and these affected their efforts and motivation. The two contextual factors that I discussed in the Introduction, as well as notions of belonging, were my guidelines for exploring the implications of the context on the motives and actions of conservation actors in the Caribbean Netherlands. In the

following results section, I will present and discuss the identified themes. I will reflect on and answer the two research questions in the discussion.

3.3 RESULTS

As I described above, two main themes were identified. The first theme consists of four sub-themes. The first theme is called "**Nature Conservation is Political".** It reflects the range of political debates inherent to nature conservation due to the choices and trade-offs required to be made when protecting the environment. I use the term "political" to emphasize varying and, at times, conflicting interests conservation actors encounter when trying to protect, conserve, or manage the environment. These different points of departure were visible in making conservation decisions -- what should be protected, how, by whom, and for whom, discussions on land rights and ownership, and debates on belonging within the island communities. I also use the term "political" to refer to the fact that the debates on nature conservation also occur between politicians and other people with power in the community. The most reoccurring and evident debates present in the interviews about conservation efforts, motives, and challenges reflected on by the informants could be organized into four sub-themes. Namely:

- Conservation versus progress;
- Nature is our culture or nature versus culture?;
- This land is my land; this land is your land;
- Acting local, acting Dutch.

The second theme is called **"Challenges are my motivation"** and reflects the heightened sense of responsibility conservation actors feel to protect the environment due to the islands' social, cultural, political, and historical contexts. The challenges of the context arguably make conservation actors even more motivated to protect the environment. I elaborate on the two themes and their sub-themes in the sections below. I address the explicit implications of the relation between the defined context on the themes in the discussion.

3.3.1 Nature Conservation is Political

During the first week of fieldwork on Sint Eustatius, I attended a "science café" (an informal meeting open to the public where themes around science can be discussed) where several researchers and community members gave a presentation on their latest research findings and informed the attendees about new project proposals. One of the sessions discussed the heavily eroded cliff near the Fort in Orange Bay. A group of local community volunteers shared some ideas on how the cliff could be reinforced to prevent additional collapse – planting trees and plants, reinforcing the cliff concrete, and placing mesh nets to catch large rocks. At some point during the public discussion, one of the attendees, a Dutch ecologist who was on the island doing fieldwork, stated that the first

measure that should be taken was the removal of the immense number of roaming cows, goats, and sheep as they cause erosion through overgrazing and consequently destabilized the cliff over time (Figure 17 and 19).

Figure 17. Small heard of cows roaming and grazing in a neighborhood on St. Eustatius.

He offered to shoot the goats himself as he had a hunting license. Immediately the presenters and the crowd erupted into restless murmuring, loud smirks, and nervous laughter. I looked around the room and saw reactions ranging from eye rolls, silent laughter, and making comments like "Well yes, but that is not possible", "Never gonna happen", "I do not think we can do that". Another attendee in the room responded, saying, "Well, you might be right. However, that will not happen cause as everybody knows: A goat is a vote!". The discussion continued for a while but seemed to end with the majority agreeing that the goats are an issue on an island. Implementing the suggested approach would be very unpopular in the community, and thus unlikely to occur anytime soon. There is a long history of the ownership goats on the islands. Goats can eat almost anything, require relatively little care, and provide an important source of protein for islanders. Most goats roam freely on the islands. They also have an important cultural, social, and symbolic value to islanders. Therefore, "outsiders" suggesting the culling of goats would be seen as yet another example of non-islanders coming in and telling locals what to do, with no consideration of their history and culture.

Figure 18. The eroding cliff in Oranjetown referenced to by the ecologist offering to shoot down the goats on St. Eustatius.

This moment illustrated that nature conservation can become very political in the Caribbean Netherlands. During my fieldwork and throughout my interviews, the notion that nature conservation is political was apparent in various ways and, therefore, I identified it as one of the two main themes. I use the word political to refer to the considerations and debates influenced by power relations between individuals when allocating priority, rights, or natural resources objectives. How nature conservation is political in the Caribbean Netherlands presented itself in four prevalent ways (sub-themes), namely:

- the debate between conservation and development;
- the debate between nature versus culture;
- the way the identity of the conservationists affects and is affected by their conservation actions; and, lastly;
- a debate on (land) ownership and rights.

I discuss the sub-themes in the paragraphs below. Overall, this theme reflects the conflict of interest about what aspect of nature is protected, when nature is or should be protected, how nature is being protected, and by and for (the benefit of) whom. Accordingly, this theme captures the (cultural) sensitivities that accompany the interests of different stakeholders. This affects the conservation actors' sense of belonging, influenced by

the islands' small scale and the constitutional reforms. In the following paragraphs, I elaborate on these intricacies in more detail.

Figure 19. Goats roaming in the village 'The Bottom' on Saba.

Conservation versus Progress?

The first sub-theme depicts the debate surrounding the mistaken belief that conservationists are always against development. Many conservation actors shared that their work is challenging because members in the community feel that environmental protection inhibits or prohibits (economic) development. The majority of conservation actors did express that they do not support creating new environmentally depleting infrastructure or other economic ventures such as the placement of oil terminals. Moreover, they argue that not everyone benefits equally from the developments made and that the benefits do not outweigh the drawbacks:

> *P5: But it's political. And then you can say, yes, economic development, what economic development? I, I saw the Marriott this morning, well, I wonder whether there are enough flights to Bonaire to get all those rooms that we currently have on Bonaire, to get them full. So, yes, you can say, economic development, yes, for some[…] it'll make the island so much better. Yes, maybe for the politicians, because of some money goes under the table, but otherwise, I don't see it.*

However, conservation actors were also adamant in explaining that their efforts to protect the environment did not necessarily mean no development. Rather they felt

that the conflict was because of developers' unwillingness to consider the environment; for example:

> *P12: That synergy between development and nature management that is -- that's completely absent. That's just a, how do you say, a big question mark here or something.*

The rejection of conservation for the sake of development was not just a concern among locals who want economic improvement, but also among Dutch or other foreign developers who fight against local conservation efforts, for instance:

> *P9: We have huge legal processes sometimes with Dutch developers and, because they just don't want to understand that it's an area that is internationally protected, for example, and that you can't just start developing.*

These conflicts and choices feed into the perception that the "Dutch are taking over". At times the critical stance of conservation actors towards certain types of development also has implications for their sense of belonging in the community. For example, P31 protested the placement of a new oil terminal. He shared how his efforts had a direct effect on his safety and reputation within the island community:

> *P31: And I look at a small 11 square [mile] island like this, just a few years ago we had a bit of a fight, where we ended up in court on four occasions. I've been threatened during the period when we protested and fought against them building another oil terminal right in front of the airport [...] So we fight these things, and a lot of local people express hatred towards me for fighting it, and think that yeah, I am against progress.*

The influence of small-scale was visible in this theme. Specifically, because the islands are small, the implications of conservation efforts that inhibit potential development opportunities are clearly visible and directly felt by the majority of the island community. Yet development affects the natural environment and thus amplifies conservation actors' incentive to act, especially when this development is deemed harmful to the natural environment. So, on the one hand, the perceived economic advantages to the islanders stemming from various development projects leads some people to be very much in favor of them, despite the environmental consequences. Yet, for other people on the islands, it is exactly these environmental consequences in such close proximity that inspires them to act.

The debate between conservation versus development was heightened by the constitutional reforms in several ways. It seems that the Dutch and other "foreigners" dominant, vocal, and visible presence in emphasizing the need for conservation efforts intensifies the local community's resistance towards these efforts, as they feel these efforts disrupt their need for economic development. However, it was also the case that it was

precisely the wealthy opportunistic Dutch migrants who would start lawsuits against local conservation efforts for rejecting their development plans. Lastly, the excerpts also illustrate that protecting the Caribbean Netherlands' environment affects people's sense of belonging, even if you are local. The community rejects local conservation actors working to protect the environment because the community feels they are not acting in favor of the community's economic needs. Non-local conservation actors, due to the colonial history of the islands, experience resistance from the community as their efforts are felt to be too dominant or determinantal for the future of the islands and, thereby, become linked to sentiments of colonization (i.e., islanders losing control and ownership over their land).

Nature is Culture or Nature versus Culture?

This sub-theme encapsulates the informants' reflections on dealing with the different views and perspectives people have on the environment. Some conservation actors experienced clashes with local people and their efforts to protect the environment, for instance in no longer allowing the consumption of sea turtles. In contrast, others used the local culture to their advantage or as an explicit motive for conserving the environment, such as using traditional knowledge to preserve the environment. For instance, P18 shared with me the driver of her efforts to protect sea turtles on Bonaire, an initiative that was started by the Dutch, which required a change in local cultural practices:

> *P18: So we have been on Bonaire a long time and at the time that it [the NGO] was founded the main motivation was to stop people eating sea turtles and eating the eggs, because that was a cultural thing that was happening on Bonaire and other islands. So some Dutch gentlemen started the organization and they managed to implement changes in the laws at the end of the 1990s whereby it was made illegal to eat sea turtles and to take the eggs.*

Along similar lines, P9 shared how the protection of the native parrot received some resistance as it used to be common practice for households to own a parrot.

> *P9: Uhm, having a Lora [parrot] has obviously always been uh something pretty normal, um, and that's phased out eventually, so yes that is, that doesn't always fall into good ground.*

Other conservation actors, for example P31, expressed their concern for the loss of local cultural knowledge as central in their efforts to protect the local environment. P31 focused on reforesting the island and referred to a loss of knowledge about certain plants and trees' medicinal powers and believes that trees are important for the community's health. He argued that this loss of local cultural knowledge is due to the exposure to the influence of foreign cultures where the bond with the environment is much weaker:

P31: And then I keep looking and see all the populations coming up, regress to [the] problem, young and old people, and more people of this Caribbean region. I'm not talking about all of them. Have become so foolish due to the constant influence from the American TV. They think they need a pill for everything, when their fore-parents used to be them, some bush-tea for everything, you know?

These examples illustrate the duality, and thus the political character, of this theme. In terms of nature use and conservation, when conservation actors express the sentiment that local cultural practices are harmful to the environment, and that their personal environmental beliefs compete with cultural practices, this can lead to tensions with the local community. This is particularly the case when foreign cultural beliefs are introduced to the community, for example:

P5: Yes, you bring in your own culture. I come as Dutch with, with my, ... I have lived here for more years than in the Netherlands, but, yes, how to deal with animals in nature and everything, how to respect that, ... I do impose my [Dutch] culture.

In other cases, conservation actors emphasized local cultural values and practices as being beneficial for nature conservation. These efforts tend to receive more support from the community. This was clearly visible in a long-standing debate on the presence of donkeys on Bonaire. There are approximately 1200 donkeys, of which about 500 roaming freely on the island. They were brought by the Spanish who first occupied the island over 500 years ago (Spoelstra, 2019). Therefore, although they are not native to the island, they are considered a long-standing part of the island's culture and history, despite the damage they do to the plants. Moreover, the roaming donkeys are often involved in car accidents, and cause issues with trash circulating around the island because they raid unattended wastebins in search of food. As was the case with the goats on Sint Eustatius, the political aspects of nature conservation efforts come to the fore around donkeys on Bonaire. In short, the debate consists of two opposing groups: one group that argues the donkeys are invasive and should be removed from Bonaire's environment. A second group argues the donkeys have been around for centuries on Bonaire and are not per se bad for the environment. However, both groups claim they are also against the inhumane treatment of donkeys and argue from an animal welfare perspective. P9 explained the viewpoints of the two parties as follows:

P9: The donkey problem is another example. Of which two groups are facing each other. One says yes, a lot of suffering among the donkeys. I say purely from nature point, it is not an endemic species, it never will be, but they do damage our nature. Others say yes but they also spread seeds and of course all that is true, but uncontrolled population of donkeys on the island that is not conducive to nature. I do understand the call to sensitivity […]. I understand the bit of yeah it's been part of the island for 4-500 years

and people are used to seeing the donkey walking around, and if that falls away at once, yes that stands out indeed.

As P9 points out, the community support the groups receive when dealing with the donkeys on the island comes down to the approach. One group has a more radical perspective and wants to remove all the donkeys from the wild. The opposing group feels that this is inhumane and wants to keep them, or at least a controlled population, in the wild. What followed was that the latter group, who also focused on the donkeys' cultural value, tended to receive more support from the community, particularly from locals and people in positions of power, including some long-established and rich local families. This was also the case for P19, who joined the "Save Bonaire's donkey" group and said that the donkeys must be protected as they are also part of Bonaire's culture (Figure 20):

P19: Yeah. Then she asked me "what you think about the donkeys?". So she say "yeah because I hear rumors they want to get rid of all the donkeys in the wild". I said"you cannot do that because that's a part of Bonaire culture, you know?

These multiple layers making up this debate have affected how politicians deal with, or, rather, avoid, the issue altogether. Similar to the "A goat is a vote" remark made on Sint Eustatius, the donkeys also represent Bonaire's votes.

Figure 20. An image made by the Bonaire Donkey Protection League Foundation posted on social media to wish the community a happy Bonaire Day (national holiday), emphasizing the importance of free roaming donkeys for the culture of Bonaire. Source: Facebook.

The tension between the differing cultures of the islands' diverse population existed not only between "locals" and the "Dutch" but was also seen between migrants with another cultural background. As I explained in Chapter 1, the population of the Caribbean Netherlands is made up of migrants, and immigration increased markedly not just from the European Netherlands, but also from North America, Colombia, Venezuela and other neighboring islands in the past decades. This is particularly evident on Saba and Sint Eustatius where there are close ties with migrants from St. Kits and Nevis and Dominica. P27, for example, shared how the pro-environmental values of Saba are actually more closely in line with those of Europeans and North Americans. It is the values brought by the increasing group of immigrants from other Caribbean islands coming to Saba that present problems and, at times, bring conflict or tensions when it comes to protecting the natural environment:

> *P27: We have seen, as we predicted it in our research as well that people who lived in the US and Europe would be better recyclers. […] I think its definitely got to be with the immigration in the last few years. We've had a lot of nationals from countries where waste is not taken seriously as it is on this island. […] I remember one day I gave someone a ride and she just while we were driving she took a bottle and threw it out of the window. And I stopped and I got really, I just screamed at her. "Don't ever do that again!" I might have used a few other words, but, I was just so shocked that somebody could do that.*

This sub-theme reveals how SIDS are not necessarily isolated but rather interconnected and, therefore, vulnerable to foreign cultures' influence. There are tensions between changing cultures and different cultural values imposed on, and sometimes embraced by, the islanders, which affects the residents' efforts to protect the environment. While cultural changes are constant and inevitable and not necessarily unique to the islands, the sentiment of imposed cultural (Dutch in particular) values is heightened due to the constitutional reforms. Specifically, the islands' current cultural changes and tensions can disrupt the amount of support received from the community when trying to protect the islands. Moreover, informants also mentioned the growing number of immigrants on the islands, which led to debates on conservation of the islands' environment. Lastly, the debates on culture and conservation have implications for conservation actors' sense of belonging. Overall, it appears that integrating culture positively in conservation efforts, such as, for example, focusing on the traditional medicinal values of plants, receives more support and praise from the community than efforts that (forcefully) change traditional practices, such as banning the consumption of sea turtles. Even if the conservation efforts pertain to a similar desired outcome, the ones that use traditional culture as an argument tend to receive more support. This tendency has consequences for the conservation actor's sense of belonging, as "anti-culture" conservation efforts can lead to exclusion. In contrast, "pro-culture" conservation efforts can lead to inclusion. These consequences seem to be regardless of the conservation actor "being" local or not.

This Land is my Land, This Land is your Land

The third sub-theme of "Nature conservation is political" encapsulates the conflict of interest and debates surrounding the ownership of the environment and, more importantly, the question for *whom* the environment is being protected. While all conservation actors reference the inherent value of the natural environment for all living beings, there was a visible division among conservationists who emphasized the importance of protecting the environment for tourists or visitors to the islands versus conservationists who emphasized the local community. This is relevant to elaborate on for two reasons. When emphasizing the importance of protecting the environment for tourists' benefit, conservation actors tend to focus on the environment's monetary value, which also strongly affects their approach to environmental conservation. Specifically, this view often results in unequal and/or limited access to the environment (e.g., implementation and enforcement of protected areas and species). As a result, island residents can feel as though the environment is only being conserved for the benefit of the foreigner or the tourists instead of for the local community. As P9 explains:

> *P9: But where I want to go is the marine park that surrounds the island […] the Bonairian says that we actually protect that for the diver, and for the tourist who uses it. Not for the Bonairian who fishes on the water and who swim along the coast […]. So that sentiment that's a right sentiment. And then you see who, who makes the most out of the whole industry? Yes, they're the foreigners.*

As the P9 shares, this sentiment is also heightened by the visible and increased presence of Dutch and other foreign development activities and ownership on the island since the constitutional reforms. This finding is in line with the conclusions of Jaffe (2006) describing the "dark side of Caribbean environmentalism". Jaffe discusses how tourists' attraction to the Caribbean underlies the efforts of many environmentalists in the region. At the same time, simultaneously, the poorer citizens continue to suffer from exposure to various kinds of environmental hazards such as pollution. This paradox described by Jaffe (2006) is visible in this sub-theme. Namely that the underlying motive of conservation actors to protect the environment for the economy leads to increasing economic inequality between the different groups of the islands' society (i.e., the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer). P3, a conservation actor on Bonaire who also works in the tourism industry, described these sensitivities and how they are related to loss of access and ownership rights within the community of Bonaire:

> *P3: I think that there are a lot of investors coming over from Holland. And ready to spend a lot of money and want to keep all of these exclusive touristic activities for themselves. They're not really integrating and setting up you know, a structure that people – everybody who lives on Bonaire – has a piece of the pie.*

Like other conservation actors discussed previously, P3 is also referring to the new type of visitors and migrants coming to Bonaire after the constitutional reforms. In the 1970s the island became known as a fantastic dive spot and, consequently, a small group of European Dutch and Northern Americans moved to the island to open dive shops which, in turn, attracted a global diver community to the island. Dive tourists are typically known as being "eco-friendly tourists" who respect the environment and local culture of the island. However, with the exponential growth of cruise tourism and, later, the constitutional reforms in 2010, it is now more attractive and easier for investors to come to buy up land on the islands, compared to before 10/10/10. Consequently, the "original" visitors to Bonaire (mainly divers) who came for the island's authenticity are also seeing and experiencing unwanted changes, just like the local community.

Some conservation actors emphasized that they protect the environment for the health or well-being of the community and for future generations. It was clear that their approach results in more inclusive efforts such as nature education and finding ways of increasing residents' exposure to the environment. Some conservation actors mentioned that they especially want to engage with and include the local community in their efforts. By doing so, they hoped to inspire them to take on the role of protecting their own environment, as well, instead of leaving it up to, and thus perhaps giving it away to, non-locals. These actors wanted to work against the feeling that nature conservation was being imposed upon them by the growing group of non-locals. As P9 explained:

> *P9: What you want to see is that the Bonairean is proud too. They do have a certain pride in nature, but that they become even more proud of their nature and that it is not imposed by the Netherlands, but that it also comes from the Bonairean.*

Going back to Bonaire's donkey debate, I also encountered local activists who explicitly stated that they joined the organizations and participated in the conversations on how to manage the donkeys and their role and impact in the environment. Conservation actor P19, for example, shared how he felt compelled to get involved as no locals were truly represented in the environmental debate.

> *P19: Who's the one who decides what is good for the island, and what is not? Because the donkey's been here for more than five hundred years. I mean it's...you have to get the balance. And that's why I say ok then I want to help too. Because they was saying it was only, people from the outside who want to fight for the donkeys.*

This fear of losing ownership of the environment was a concern among several conservation actors:

> *P14: I miss our own locals to contribute. I'm not bitter, but I'm sorry no one's following my work. I'm happy with everything I've done, but sometimes I wonder what I'm doing*

for what. If I stop the tours, it'll stop, and the foreigners will take over. I'm not against foreigners, but I'm sorry we can't always get our own local Bonairians back.

Not only do debates exist between locals and non-locals, but they also occur between the locals and their government:

P31: Well, look here. At this stage today I'm 57 years, I spent 12 years developing the [reforestation project]. […] That place supposed to belong to an ancient uncle of mine. […], the place just sat there abandoned for years. […] I say OK, abandoned, I move and then start to clean around there. Then some people went to court to claim it theirs. They been to court [on] four occasions and lost. And two years, two and a half years back, a new set of people went to court, claim that they are descendants of his [ancient uncle's] wife. Now the strange thing is I know these people, been talking to some of them for years, and they were trying at the census office to find a connection to this lady, which they could not establish. […] Anyway, so we been in court for a few years, and I met the marshal, who had come from Sint Maarten and presented [...] the verdict from the court say how in x amount of time to move from there. But I'm thinking: the same marshal guy is blood related to the folks.

This anecdote illustrates a debate on land ownership between locals and the island government. In combination with the other land use debates I have discussed, it also highlights some typical characteristics stemming from the island's small scale. In this case, I can see an example of the impact of small scale on the judicial and medical/healthcare facilities on the islands. On Saba and Sint Eustatius, there is no office for the Joint Court of Justice, and no clerk. This means that residents of Saba and Sint Eustatius are required to contact and visit the clerk's office on Sint Maarten. Court hearings are held regularly on Saba and Sint Eustatius in a governmental office building. In addition, due to the relatively limited availability of more specialized medical treatment facilities on the islands, coupled with the distance to the European Netherlands, the Dutch government has set up an agreement with the government of Colombia. Residents in need of specialized medical treatment not available on the islands can receive it on Curaçao or in Colombia. In the case I highlighted above, the judge had to come in from another island to rule on the case and the conservation actor was absent due to going to Colombia for medical treatment. Lastly, the context of small scale and "everyone knows everyone" is clear by the fact that the officer tending to the case seemed to have been related to the family trying to reclaim ownership of the land the conservation actor worked on. As a consequence, "everybody knowing everybody" can lead to both land use losses and gains, both of which can affect the environment. Moreover, the islands' small scale also means that there is automatically less land to distribute and that unequal land use distributions are felt immediately.

The conservation actors' accounts revealed how the constitutional reforms and the small scale of the islands affect the debates on land use and access to conservation efforts. Notably, the takeover of (primarily Dutch) migrants creating businesses profiting from the environment created a focus among conservation actors on protecting the environment for the tourists and the economy instead of for the local community. Consequently, there is a growing, perhaps unjust, sentiment that people who want to protect the environment might not have the local community's interest at heart. In combination with the fact that space is limited, the loss of access to land is felt directly by most of the population. Relating these developments to the loss of land ownership by locals can lead to a rejection of conservation efforts. This has negative implications for the sense of belonging of people engaging in conservation actions. Specifically, due to these underlying beliefs and sentiments among some local residents, conservation actions can be perceived as negative for the community and consequently inhibit acceptance of this behavior and the people engaging in this behavior.

Acting Local, Acting Dutch ("Foreign")

This sub-theme captures the identity politics conservation actors encounter and engage in. "Acting local, acting Dutch" depicts how informants consciously engage in or avoid certain forms of conservation behavior that carry with them the perception of either dominant local or Dutch (foreign) norms and values. This is a relevant debate because, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, there is a perception that mostly (Dutch) foreigners are actively involved with the conservation of the islands' environment (Figure 21). Some respondents noted that this is mostly due to practical reasons, like money and time, for example:

> *P18: Almost 95-98% of our volunteers are non-Antilleans [...]. I think there are a lot of practical reasons why Antilleans find it difficult to volunteer with us, because it's very expensive to live on Bonaire and typically Antilleans are not in higher paid jobs or they are using all the hours that they have in order to work to make a living, to live on Bonaire. Whereas it is perhaps the Dutch retirees or the Americans who are here for six months, who have perhaps earned their money and have the spare capacity, that tend to be the core team of our volunteers.*

Figure 21. A group of volunteers after participating in a clean-up activity on Bonaire, with (mostly) foreigners participating during this clean up. Source: One Hour Clean-up Power Facebookpage.

Another respondent explained the overrepresentation differently. Namely that is has to do with higher levels of environmental awareness and concern among the foreigners compared to locals:

> *P6: It's often the foreigners who are very interested in nature, compared to locals. […] It's because it comes from their point of reference. They lived in America, and they do not like how that place has become. It has become crowded, a lot of people, crime, litter, destruction. And they chose to leave their country […] and now they see the danger of the same thing they ran away from happening here and they start to resist. And if there is an organization who does the things they agree with, they will join and become a volunteer. And with me it's the same thing, I went to study abroad. I went to study in America and there I saw how things can become. What development does, what the consequences are for nature. And when I came back to Bonaire, I appreciated the things we have here much more and realized we need to treasure what we have.*

According to P6, foreigners are indeed more likely to get actively involved in conservation actions as they have experienced what destroyed environments look like and have a strong desire to prevent that from happening on the islands. Consequently, they are also more likely to support all efforts to prevent environmental degradation from

taking place. In addition to this reflection on the debates regarding the perception of over-representation of non-locals and under-representation of locals in the scene of nature conservation on the islands, P6 referred to an experience that is very common for small scale islands. Specifically, when she mentions that she moved abroad to continue her education. Studying abroad is very common in the Caribbean, as most islands do not have facilities for education beyond the high school level. In the Caribbean Netherlands and the other Dutch Caribbean islands, most high school graduates move to the Netherlands or the United States to continue their studies. This leads to an exposure to new environments and cultures, which, as was the case for P6, can trigger a new appreciation for the islands' environments and thus a desire to protect these environments. As these views and behavior are often learned in other countries (i.e., Europe or the United States of America), locals who have not left the islands might not always understand and consequently appreciate these efforts. This is especially likely if the (political) relationship between the islands and European Netherlands (and thus Europeans) is difficult. These developments have implications for who gets involved in nature conservation actions on the islands, how people get involved, and how the community receives their efforts.

For instance, influenced by the sentiments brought to life with the constitutional reforms that "the Dutch are taking over", several informants shared how Dutch migrants tend to be very direct in their communication. This communication style clashes with the local island culture, where conflict tends to be avoided. As one Dutch informant shared:

> *P33: I've had to learn it, too. And that's just a cultural thing. Because I'm very direct and I do tjsak - tjsak - tjsak - tjsak. And it works. That works great in the Netherlands, but it doesn't work here. [...], that definitely works against you.*

P5 explained why nature conservation could be challenging on the islands since it includes confronting others about their behavior, which is not a thing people usually do on the islands:

> *P5: This culture is very non-conflictive. People don't talk to each other about behavior. You can also put someone in a very awkward position.*

Due to this conflict avoidant cultural upbringing, P9 explained that it is often difficult for locals to take on conservation roles that include enforcement activities. The reason being that you are likely to address a friend or family member in a manner that could be interpreted as shaming or reproachful due to the small scale of the islands:

> *P9: You know them very personally, and we notice that, which is also very difficult for the Bonairians, you notice that, you will have heard it more often [...], enforcement*

and supervision, yes you see that just very often it is sometimes difficult for them, yes you know almost everyone anyway.

Indeed, another local informant shared how she experiences remarks from her friends and family whenever the topic of conservation, specifically environmental violations, arises:

P30: I've had arguments with some very close friends and relatives. And the same for my colleagues, all of us, all of us have had many arguments with people and sometimes it gets heated[...]They say if I tell you, you go tell [the authorities], you know those kind of jokes I have with my friends.

Overall, the informants were aware that depending on how they projected their views on the island could affect their reputation and their sense of belonging. This awareness triggered some informants to be sensitive to, and aware of, how they expressed themselves and the types of behavior they choose to engage in. P8b, for example, a Dutch migrant, shares how she tries to be as considerate and respectful as possible towards local culture, precisely because she is aware of the way the community perceives some Dutch migrants:

P8b: We do that consciously and unconsciously. I think we create goodwill because we do what we do. With respect for the local culture, the language. A lot of people are joining us at the moment since 10/10/10, which I'm really ashamed of from the Netherlands. [...] And that respect is so important. I mean if you just get on respectfully with each other, you know, you can still have your differences.

She expressed her belief that consciously engaging with culture is beneficial, especially for non-locals, to improve the acceptance of, and support from, the community for her conservation efforts. She is also aware of how the new Dutch migrants moving to the islands after the constitutional reforms disrupted the acceptance of Dutch residents and the overall relationship with the Netherlands. This also has consequences for how she is seen and accepted within the local community as a Dutch woman and has heightened her need to be culturally sensitive. However, other (non-local) informants took a different approach, namely, not to engage in so-called sensitive areas of conservation to avoid conflict with the local community. P7 shared:

P7: I would say that we don't really have any kind of... disputes or difficult angles with the people because basically we don't work for example with fishery. So we don't even have any conflicts of interests. […] Or um...currently we're not working with sea turtles, for example. The sea turtles are very sensitive, and people are not harvesting them or anything like that. But let's say that we're more about setting the ecology, the biology of the island. So people actually perceive that as something very positive. Like ok, you're actually bringing knowledge to us […] And so I will say that we actually have a very good relationship with the community.

When I asked another local informant if it helps to be from the island when confronting people about their behavior, he shared:

> *P23: I think so. I believe so because listen. You can also have a person from wherever that doesn't understand the culture and brings across the message wrong. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.*

In response to the belief that conservation efforts would be accepted better by the community when coming from locals, several non-local conservationists who worked at an organization focused on nature conservation shared how they were eager to expand their team with locals. They believed this would help to make the connection with the community and thus increase the effectiveness of their conservation efforts:

> *P11: I think, ideally what I would like to see, is that our organization can build up sufficient funding. To the point where we can meaningfully and permanently employ more local people.*

This opinion was nuanced a bit by local conservation actors, however, who confirmed that it could work in your favor to include locals in terms of community acceptance. That being said, if the conservation efforts are not appreciated; for instance, by the implementation of restrictive measures, you will be confronted with a negative response from the community regardless:

> *P27: You know I know there is one lady that woks at [NGO] and because she is local people are more like "Hey! I know your father and your mother, you come from good people so I will listen to you at least." And it's probably the same with me you know, people will probably listen to me a bit longer than someone else. But you'll still hear it afterward.*

Moreover, he remarked that while involving locals can be beneficial for community support and achieving success with your conservation efforts, the real issue remains that it is not the locals who get the top positions in nature conservation organizations:

> *P 27: But of course, every director of the [NGO] has not been from Saba. and it's always seen as an outsider coming in to tell me what to do, or to tell us what to do. You know, for instance "don't fish here", "you shouldn't litter", "you should eat this", you have to keep this clean etc. You know, and it's always a foreign person saying it. Or even there is local people, but you look at the head of the organizations and not so much the soldiers. And that's what you see, a lot of push back against that.*

Lastly, P27 noted that being local does not necessarily make the conservation process easier. Instead, when I asked him if the community would better accept certain

regulations or ordinances if they were to come from a local, he responded that it probably has more to do with the approach. Specifically, if a person – regardless of their background – works with a group of people whose behavior should change, there will be a greater chance of success because the group's needs and concerns will have been directly considered rather than a person simply telling them what they cannot or should do:

I: So, it would be more accepted if you would take on that role?

P 27: Probably not, ha-ha. Because you tell them what they can't do. It's probably a bit more difficult to engage them. […] I recently met a lady. She was doing participatory research on sharks. And she had an interesting look on engaging stakeholders from the ground up. Especially those persons that you want to change the behavior. And it was just interesting to hear her perspective that you start to listen to them and gather their motivations and then see how you can work with the way they think to change their behavior. And that's what we have not done. We tried to change their behavior from our perspective, rather than their perspective.

Overall, the approach adhered to by conservation actors appears to be a bigger determinant for the acceptance by, and support from, the community for their efforts compared to being local or not. One informant explained why the importance of using the right approach is related to the small scale of the island and the constitutional reforms:

P9: You're trying to build a bond with the general audience around you. And especially on a small island, that's very important. Because that gives people confidence in you too. I think that's a basis to work here. To get something done, you have to gain that trust.

As he continued, he shared how he encourages new Dutch migrants to learn from, and adjust to, local ways before taking action, which is typical for small communities:

P9: And I also always say, sit back and observe for a year, and get to know people, and it's all about linkages, if you're good with, with one you can accomplish a lot, but if you don't, you know in advance that it's going to be stranded, you don't even have to put your energy in.

In sum, this sub-theme illustrates that while being local might be helpful for receiving support from the community, the most significant determinant for achieving support for conservation efforts lies in the approach used by the actor. Moreover, non-locals seem to have become more aware of the need to be culturally sensitive when conserving the environment since the constitutional reforms were implemented in 2010. This development has different implications for locals. On the one hand, locals might feel more inclined to take on environmental conservation tasks due to the outsiders'

dominant presence. On the other hand, precisely because of foreigners' dominant presence in conservation on the islands, locals might prefer not to engage. It can affect their reputation precisely because some conservation actions require a form of behavior that contradicts local cultural practices such as being confrontational. The small scale of the island creates an environment where everybody knows each other, and this further complicates locals' participation because situations where the confrontation with friends and family might occur are not uncommon. Overall, a culturally sensitive approach (acting local) seems to be the dominant determinant rather than being local or non-local.

3.3.2 Challenges Are my Motivation: Increasing Sense of Responsibility

Throughout the interviews, respondents shared the struggles and barriers they face when protecting the environment instead of just reflecting on their motives to engage in these conservation actions. When asked what kept them going despite all of the challenges, ultimately, all informants said something along the lines of:

> *P30: You ask why I keep doing this? It's not for the pay for sure, but you know it's, if I don't do it really, we'll go to hell. So somebody has to keep mopping with the faucet open. Otherwise, we're swimming!*

These statements showed that the barriers the informants encounter are, in fact, the reason why they feel inclined to take action. Despite the many challenges, the informants' sense of responsibility served as a critical driver for their continued attempts to protect the islands' natural environment. The informants felt that those who they believed are responsible for the natural environment were taking the wrong measures, and that they are not doing enough. When asked who the informants were referring to, the most common answer was "the government". Reasons mentioned for this failure to act on the part of the Dutch government ranged from a lack of interest or it not being a priority to a lack of knowledge of the islands' challenges.

> *P23: I mean with the whole garbage recycling plant; we have had major hiccups with that. We have tried to explain to the Netherlands, listen, be careful with this and that and other, and you know how the Netherlands is: wie betaalt bepaatt [who pays, decides]. And they are like no you need this burner, and you need this that, and the thing doesn't work always the way it should. So they need to listen to us also. And I see sometimes they hear us, but they don't listen.*

The island government, in contrast, was blamed for not taking any action at all. Informants expressed that short term economic needs received more attention than the environment and that local authorities are also reluctant to take action for more personal or relational reasons. Not only did conservation actors critique the government, but they also felt that some NGOs on the islands should be doing more:

P5: In addition, look, it is, it is internationally protected area, it is a Ramsar area, it is a wetland. The management falls under [NGO] but on the other hand I find that there is far too little enforcement. And all sorts of things are happening, that don't, well, just need to be addressed.

The same conservation actor stated that the local government does not take enough action and that the Dutch government is afraid to interfere because they do not want to come across as too dominant and colonial, confirming the island residents' negative sentiments:

P 5: Right now, they're very afraid to say anything about this kind of thing, because they are afraid to come across as being too colonial. [...] Actually, they don't want to burn themselves to it, they don't want to get involved.

Several informants expressed this frustration towards the government for not taking adequate actions. For example, a conservation actor reflected on the new form of governance and coalitions that arose after the constitutional reforms. According to her, the new government dismissed a long line of conservation work that had taken place on the island:

P30: The previous government it was fine but this government when in two years ago they are a party that was largely made up of [family names] related to a lot of fishermen, a lot of underprivileged people. I don't know if fishermen themselves are empowered to do what they wanted to do. And then when certain violations started to happen, a lot of the people that support and felt empowered to go and [protest]. And then when you get that in a public meeting, they are saying things like people should be able to take sand when they want to take sand and where they want to take sand and they should be able to fish where they want to fish and I go like woah. So that's like 15 years of 20 years of educating and compliance out the window.

This sub-theme also reflects the challenges of existing conflicts of interest in nature conservation and relates to the previously discussed theme "Nature Conservation is Political". As one informant shared, her frustrations about the government's choices to allow environmentally harmful practices to continue, her frustration grew as she remembered an earlier remark; namely, she is perceived as a nagging Dutch woman, while all she wants to do is conserve the environment.

P5: And I think they sold their island, and they're still selling it. They have that whole coast with that coral mining […] Huge trucks come crashing down, so much so that during a tour we can't understand each other. Just boom, boom. With big bulldozers, they're going to flatten that coast. [...] Permits are simply bought off and in that moment I'm like, yes, great, I'm makamba.

Her reference to being a nagging Dutch woman is part of her frustration regarding the island community's growing sentiment that all Dutch people are perceived as intrusive and not welcome, affecting her sense of belonging within the community. Earlier she had shared:

> *P5: And what I see a lot, and now again from that anti makamba policy. Yes, they say, they have it bad financially, there are many changes, the difference between rich and poor has also become much bigger, because you see those huge houses. All those Dutch people with their big mouths, and all those gated communities, those big cars. And, you know, all the things that you'd like to have, too, […], how frustrating. And in the meantime, someone's screaming less makambas, this. And do you think, oh yes, indeed, fewer makambas. So yes, you only hear, on the radio too, you're very much fueled by radio and newspapers. That, I always find that sad, yes.*

When asked why she continues despite all of these frustrations, she stated:

> *P5: Well, no, because then nothing would affect me, no. No, and it's important, and I can see it. Look, I guess my frustration is what drives me, too. If it doesn't affect you anymore then, uh, then, you're going to leave it at that. So as long as I'm still frustrated, then I have my ... then, I still have my drive, yes.*

In sum, none of the (legally) responsible parties do enough according to the informants. This increases their sense of responsibility to make an effort despite their challenges. The informants argued that the local government does not do enough because they want to avoid conflict in the community and focus more on economic development rather than nature conservation. The Dutch government does intervene but is not sensitive enough to local needs. The NGOs who are responsible for environmental management do not do enough, perhaps due to lack of capacity or a reluctance to enforce, all of which might be due to the small scale of the islands and the enforcers needing to confront people they know personally. Overall, frustration among the informants due to the authorities' lack of action served as extra motivation to actively protect the islands' natural environment.

3.4 DISCUSSION

I can summarize the outcome of my analyses into two main findings. The first is that the Caribbean islands' particular context does affect the conservation actors' motivations and behaviors. Second, the types of behavior the informants engage in, their reasons for doing so, and how this is affected or determined by the islands' societal context is interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The influence of the contextual factors I considered on conservation actors' motives and behavior were thematically coded and clustered into themes. During the interviews and analysis, it became clear that while

informants were asked about their efforts and what motivates them, most informants shared all the challenges they encounter or have encountered throughout their efforts instead. While these challenges likely explain the fact that relatively few people are actively and publicly engaged in conservation actions, for the group of conservation actors who informed this study it seemed as though the challenges served as an extra motivational factor to keep going.

The first main theme identified reflected the political nature of environmental conservation and management. Nature conservation is political all over the world, not just in the Caribbean Netherlands. Nevertheless, the Caribbean Netherlands' context does co-determine which debates are dominant or present in nature conservation on the islands. In particular, the dynamics of increased immigration from the European Netherlands and the complicated systems of governance had a pronounced impact. For example, in the sub-theme, "Conservation versus Development", informants referred to Dutch developers and how their neglect of local environmental policies is a reminder of arrogance that harkens back to how island communities were treated in colonial times. The second main theme identified captured the heightened sense of responsibility felt by the conservation actors due to lack or inadequate action taken by other (legally responsible) parties. I will discuss the two research questions introduced at the beginning of the chapter in the following section.

3.4.1 How Does the Political-Historical and Geographical Context of the Caribbean Netherlands Affect Conservation Actors?

In Figure 22 and 23, I summarize the implications of small scale and the constitutional reforms on the motives and efforts made to protect the environment mentioned by the informants. The first column presents the implications of small scale and islandness, and the constitutional reforms experienced by the informants as identified in the interviews. In the second column, I bring together the effects of these characteristics on informants' efforts to protect the islands' environments. As I discussed in the Introduction, the Caribbean Netherlands being "SIDS" and the (lead up to) the constitutional reforms that took place in 2010 present challenges and opportunities. This was experienced by conservation actors who participated in this study.

For example, in terms of the islands' small scale, the conservation actors repeatedly stated that knowing many people in the community at times created complicated situations when they were required to confront friends or relatives with their environmentally harmful behavior. Also, informants argued that the islands' small scale affects the (local) capacity to tackle environmental issues. However, the small scale and the Caribbean Netherlands' insularity also has benefits in terms of motivating residents to act. For example, due to the islands' small scale, the chances are that many people have left the islands for certain periods of time and experienced environmental conditions elsewhere. These experiences with different environments, environmental degradation, in particular,

inspired the actors to take action. Moreover, the small scale of the islands and the lack of capacity and resources are precisely what motivated many of the informants in this study to take on the responsibility to help protect the local environment.

Challenges and opportunities were also caused by (the events leading up to) the constitutional reforms. One of the biggest challenges was the islands' sentiment that foreigners dominate environmental conservation and that engagement in these activities can create sentiments of "re-colonization". Especially whenever locals and migrants are confronted with opposite ideals, such as non-locals forcing environmental conservation by demanding change in local cultural practices or non-locals claiming areas for development or conservation and removing access from locals. On the other hand, the presence of non-locals was also appreciated because they were seen to have helped in increasing local capacity and resources to conserve the islands' environment.

3.4.2 How Does this Context Affect the Relationship Between Belonging and Conservation Actors' Motives to Protect the Natural Environment?

The effects of the context on the relation between belonging and conservation actors' motives to protect the environment is twofold. In addition, the idea of being local is important to consider when examining these implications. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, according to my classification, the group of conservation actors who participated in this study are predominantly non-locals. Even though this distinction is somewhat arbitrary, being local or not does seem to have implications for how the island context affects the relation between belonging and nature conservation.

The first direction in which the context affects the relationship between belonging and conservation actors is that the actors' current sense of belonging or desire to belong in the community can affect their engagement in conservation actions and how they choose to do so. As I mentioned in the Introduction, the tensions among residents on the three islands are high, with an increasing number of (European) foreigners migrating to the islands. Also, there tends to exist a belief on the islands that protecting the environment is something mainly outsiders are concerned about. This belief motivates the local conservation actors who participated in this study to engage in conservation actions to ensure that locals do not lose all ownership over the environment to foreigners. On the other hand, it is also possible that precisely because of foreigners' dominant presence in nature conservation, non-locals will identify less with this behavior or deliberately choose not to get involved to avoid association with non-locals, which can hurt their sense of belonging.

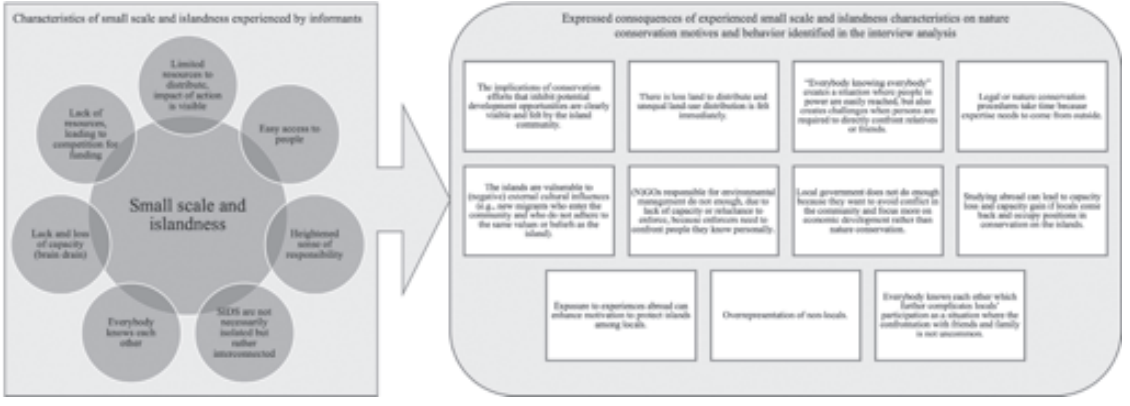

Figure 22. Summary of the Identified Characteristics of Small Scale and Islandness and their Impact on the Motivation to Engage in Conservation Actions.

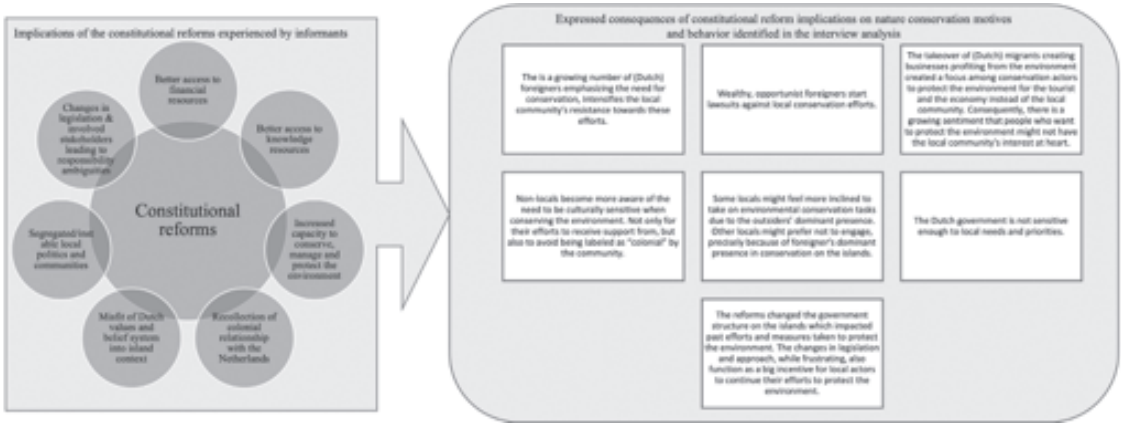

Figure 23. Summary of the Identified Characteristics of the Constitutional Reforms and their Impact on the Motivation to Engage in Conservation Actions.

Throughout my analysis, however, it was clear that being local or not (i.e., belonging or not) is one of the determinants for the kinds of conservation efforts informants engaged in and the approach they used. Some informants believed that locals are more likely to receive support from the community for their efforts than non-locals. However, my analysis showed that the approach adhered to – taking into consideration local cultural values and concerns or, conversely, not taking these into consideration – was a more significant determinant for the community's support than an informant's local or non-local status alone. Indeed, awareness of the islands' cultural sensitivities about the active or dominant presence of non-locals has been heightened since the constitutional reforms, and most of the non-local informants noted that they consider local culture and beliefs as much as possible in order to receive support from the community.

The second direction in which the context affects the relationship between belonging and conservation actors is that engagement in conservation actions can affect the sense of belonging of the community's conservation actors. Specifically, there was some evidence that engaging in conservation actions can affect a person's sense of belonging in the island community. Several informants shared the extent to which their conservation efforts benefit their sense of belonging within the community. One local informant, for example, shared how the community was praising him for his actions:

> *P19: I'm born here I know I have a lot of friends that I get after, but I grew up here. Most of them already know me, especially with the village I come from. […] And now the more people get to know me because I was in the media a lot of times in the past. I talk about the donkeys. I talk about oh what you want for the island. And then people oh, it's very good, no. And that way that I get involved a meeting a lot of people from the government, the commissioners. And now that I have a lot of friends that because of what I do.*

The experienced benefits to a person's sense of belonging also seemed possible for non-local conservation actors. For instance, P35, an American non-local, shared:

> *P35: I feel like I've always been very well accepted. I have even local politicians tell me I'm more Statian than they are because I'm so involved.*

These responses suggest that (some) informants experience a link between their sense of belonging and their conservation efforts. Specifically, they both felt that their efforts to protect the environment help improve their sense of belonging within the community. However, we also saw that their conservation actions led to experiences and feelings of exclusion among other informants. This was mostly the case when conservation actors engage in conservation behavior that can be perceived as unfavorable such as protesting against certain economically beneficial but environmentally destructive developments or placing restrictions on culturally sensitive behavior such as eating sea turtles.

Engagement in these types of behavior appeared to be harmful for their reputation within the community.

There was also some indication that informants allowed the possible repercussions of their engagement in conservation actions to affect their sense of belonging in the community, but this partially depends on how much these repercussions bother them. Conservation actors who were not concerned about their reputation acted according to their beliefs despite the possible consequences to their sense of belonging. In contrast, conservation actors who were more sensitive to possible repercussions would share their active consideration of cultural sensitivities related to nature conservation. When I asked another local conservation actor how he deals with people talking behind his back and whether that bothers him, he responded:

> *P27: Sometimes it's good, sometimes it bad. But at the end of the day I just do it because of my passion – because of what I love. You have critics and supporters, and you have to take the critics seriously and run on the support you have. And that's what I do. When it first begins, you question a lot. At the end of the day you realize, it doesn't matter what you do, you will be criticized.*

The seeming lack of concern expressed by local conservationists about the consequences for their reputation could imply that locals who actively engage in conservation actions on the island are not, or at least less, concerned about their reputation within the community than other locals who do not engage in conservation activities. This reasoning can also explain the apparent reluctance among other locals to engage in conservation actors actively. Specifically, locals who are concerned about their reputation might be less likely to engage in conservation actions as a means to protect their reputation. Overall, it seems that while being local might help for receiving support from the community, the most significant determinant of achieving support for conservation lies in the approach adhered to by the actor. As shown in the sections above, the influence of "notions of belonging" on the behavior and motives of the conservation actors is intertwined with the small scale of the islands and the experience of the constitutional reforms. Table 6 summarizes the implications of the context on the relation between belonging and residents' participation in conservation actions as seen throughout the analysis of the interviews. All conservation actors were aware of this dynamic to some degree, and this is affected by the small scale of the islands and the constitutional reforms.

Table 6. Summary of implications of the context of the Caribbean Netherlands on the relationship between belonging and (motives of) conservation actions.

Implications of the context of the on the relationship between belonging and conservation actions.
· Visibility of actions can affect reputation and sense of belonging in both directions
· Efforts to conserve the environment seen as "Dutch", leading to exclusion
· Non-local conservation actors, due to the colonial history of the islands, experience resistance from the community as their efforts are felt as too dominant or determining for the future of the island and then linked to sentiments of colonization (i.e., islanders losing control and ownership over their land).
· Affects approach adhered to and choice of conservation action engaged in
· Inhibiting actors from taking action
· Approach matters for acceptance of efforts
· Being local or not matters for acceptance of efforts
· The community rejects local conservation actors who protect the environment as the community feels they are not acting in favor of the community's economic needs.
· Loss of land ownership by locals can lead to rejection of conservation efforts. This has negative implications for the sense of belonging of non-local people engaging in conservation actions.

3.4.3 Differences between Islands

There are also differences between the islands and the manner with which the constitutional reforms affected their motives. Interestingly, the tensions between the growing European Dutch and American community appeared to be less of an issue on Saba because the foreigners are used to adhering to similar social norms related to the environment as the local community on Saba. The tensions created due to the Dutch government's dominant presence was expressed on all islands but seemed to be most dominant on Bonaire. This is in line with the fact that, indeed, the visibility of the Dutch government and community on Bonaire is the greatest compared to the other two islands. The governance of the three overseas municipalities is based on Bonaire and although there is a Dutch governmental presence on Sint Eustatius and Saba, the bulk of the administrative apparatus is to be found on Bonaire. While Saba is substantially smaller than Sint Eustatius and Bonaire, the challenges and opportunities induced by small scale were expressed in similar ways by conservation actors on all three islands. The analysis showed that role of the political, cultural, social, and historical context should not be underestimated or neglected. Specifically, the importance of certain motives is visibly influenced by the islands' small scale and the constitutional reforms that went into effect in 2010. This chapter also showed that notions of belonging significantly influence conservation actors' motives and behavior in the Caribbean. The next chapter will consider the relationship between the need to belong and people's motivation to engage in conservation behavior more in-depth.