

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT. CASE STUDY THE MARINA OF LE MARIN (MARTINIQUE, FRANCE)

Olivier DEHOORNE

Correspondence Address: Université des Antilles et de la Guyane
Fouillole, BP 250-97157, Pointe-à-Pitre, e-mail: dehoorneo@gmail.com

Dorina Camelia ILIEȘ

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning,
1 University st., 410087 Oradea, Romania, e-mail: iliesdorina@yahoo.com

Alexandru ILIEȘ

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning,
1 University st., 410087 Oradea, Romania, e-mail: ilies@uoradea.ro

Abstract: The *Bay of Marin*, southern part of Martinique, France was chosen in the middle of 1980`s to become one of the main marinas of the Lesser Antilles. Because of the lack of facilities in the region the development of this modest bay was made. Since this development, Martinique is beginning to see a steady growth in visits by pleasure boaters. The progressive construction of this facility which began with an anchorage of a hundred of slips has resulted in the marina of *le Marin* to become preeminent in the region: presently with 700 slips, it now is home to over forty businesses that employ more than 300 people. The economic impact of the yachting trade is estimated at more than 15 million Euros. Owing to the insufficiency of the infrastructures in the region, this facility now encompasses near all the Bay of Marin. Initially lacks a nautical tradition in this region, but nowadays we are considering the importance of pleasure boating, which one might wonder whether this development would be successful in the local and regional environment. The new marina fronts on the old afro-Caribbean market town. The world of pleasure boating is largely a European and North American tradition but is notably a week-end activity in the Caribbean for more or less seasoned sailors who sail the Antilles chain. Rental boats occupy the bulk of tie-ups at the marina while other boats are permanent residences for a rather heterogeneous population. Although this new marina which has become well-suited to its regional situation, it nevertheless represents an enclave of international services.

Key words: port development, pleasure boating, tourism, le Marin, Lesser Antilles

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1. INTRODUCTION

The marina of the village of le Marin, located on the southern coast of Martinique, at the foot of the Bay of Marin, became in the course of last two decades one of the main marina facilities of this Caribbean island. The development of this bay which constitutes a dozen square kilometres of remarkably well-protected coastline began with the building of an anchorage of a hundred of or so slips. Where before there was a lack of quality facilities in the

Lesser Antilles and in the Caribbean this new facility, along with others in the region, is now recognized as providing « *paradise for sailing* » with its regular regime of trade winds.

Considering the importance of pleasure boating in a region devoid of a nautical tradition, it is important to identify the main components of its incorporation into this local and regional environment. Fronting on the old afro-Caribbean market town, the Le Marin marina is a prime example of the kind of regional transformation that this new activity can provide. The marina presently has more than 700 slips. Principally their occupants include Europeans and North Americans along with a local clientele as well as other itinerant sailors. This development, which has been developed in the context of the maritime traditions of the Antilles, illustrates how a foreign practice of pleasure boating can be incorporated into the local society, the economic issues that arise, and the environmental questions which the development poses. This paper attempts to understand two aspects- first how a modern marina comes into being in a specific Caribbean context, and secondly how it functions in this new environment.

2. PLEASURE BOATING IN THE BAIE DU MARIN, A NEW REGIONAL ACTIVITY

Over two decades the development of the Baie du Marin was transformed from one largely based on traditional activities to a new set of activities based on pleasure boating. This transformation was based on the excellent site characteristics that have long been recognized by experiences yachtsmen.

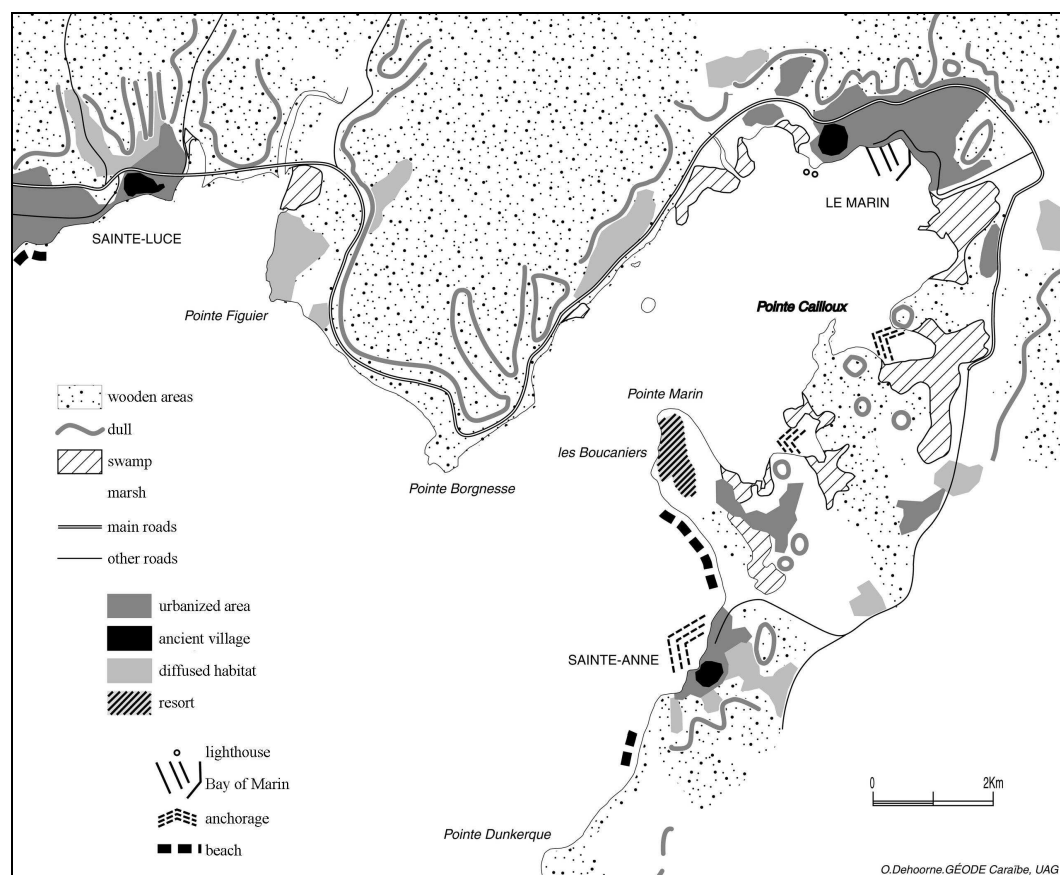


Figure 1. Geographical outline of the Bay of Marin

2.1. The qualities of the site

The Bay of Marin, also known as the "*Cul-de-Sac du Marin*", is a reticular valuable as port for pleasure boaters. The bay, situated between *Pointe Borgnesse* on the west and *Pointe Marin* in the east (an entrance to the harbour of barely a kilometre), forms a ring of coastline of nearly eight kilometres. Separated from the Atlantic Ocean by the peninsula of Saint-Ann, it opens into the channel of St Lucia and the Caribbean Sea. (figure 1). It is on the shore of this bay, not far from the hilltops that encircle it, is situated the old port town of Le Marin and the new pleasure craft marina which is locally known as La Marina.

When one arrives by sea, one can see clearly the shallow, clear bottom of the bay, dominated by a series of modest hills (referred to locally as "Mornes") These hills are covered by drought resistant vegetation, that extend progressively from the southeast to the northwest a 100 to more than 300 metres in altitude. In addition to the superior aesthetics of the site, the tropical maritime climate is clearly an added attraction. The average temperature is 26 °C and it has a high percentage of days with full sunshine and less rainfall than the northern portions of the island of Martinique (less than 1200 mm/year against more than 5000 mm/ year Mt Pelee in the north. The sea temperature is between 25° and 28°, without ever going down to under 20°; maximums can go as high 30° in July.

The advantages of this bay, besides the pleasing tropical character of the location, consist in its protected character from the hurricanes which characterize the Caribbean, especially during the months of August and September. The climate of the region is characterized by two seasons with two distinct rainfall regimes: the first one from December till May (Lenten period) is a dry season, marked by hours of sunshine which reaches a maximum in February, March and April, while the second season, from June till November, is the rainy season. Hurricane activity is clearly less important in the southern part of the Antilles due to lower ocean temperatures in the southern tropical Atlantic.

2.2. The building of the marina of le Marin

It is only at the beginning of 1980's that the anchorage of le Marin was begun. Its real importance began to be recognized around 1984 with the elaboration of a departmental nautical plan which recognized the potential value of the site for the development of the region. A first construction was built to shelter a dozen crafts, complete with access to water supplies. The marina developed initially from a nautical club; a rental boat of a dozen sailing boats) was established in 1986. The management of the harbour was undertaken by the Antillean Society of Working {Exploitation} of Marinas (SAEPP). At the end of 1980s, it had a hundred slips. The harbour front was soon developed to include new buildings and parking lots and eventually more than 330 anchorages were added by 1993. Furthermore larger sailing ships of up to ninety metres could be accommodated due to the development of a 200 meter long by 5 meter floating dock. The harbour of le Marin now accounts for over 620 slips to which can be added additional floating water buoys. Around the port, there are now about forty businesses of which provide maintenance, storage, and rental companies, food suppliers, restaurants and night spots. All together these businesses supply up to 300 directly created jobs (Mellado V., 2003). The marina now has 16 rental boat companies which account for two thirds of the slips. This reflects the initial reason for being for the development which was largely seen as providing access to rental boats rather than providing anchorages for semi resident yachtsmen. Tax exemption laws that allow exempting taxable incomes sums put in French Ultramarine Investments, were also instrumental in biasing the development in this terms of rental facilities. The law provides for a five year exemption from taxes for these companies for new boats.

To the west of the old market town, approximately four hundred metres from the marina, the new supply quarter extends over unused lands of the former plant of le Marin (figure 2); this site provides office and commercial functions that function as

supermarkets servicing the sea trade. It is in this area that services boats with dry dock facilities for the most spacious sea craft. It also provides a storm harbour of two hundred slips for boats during the hurricane season.

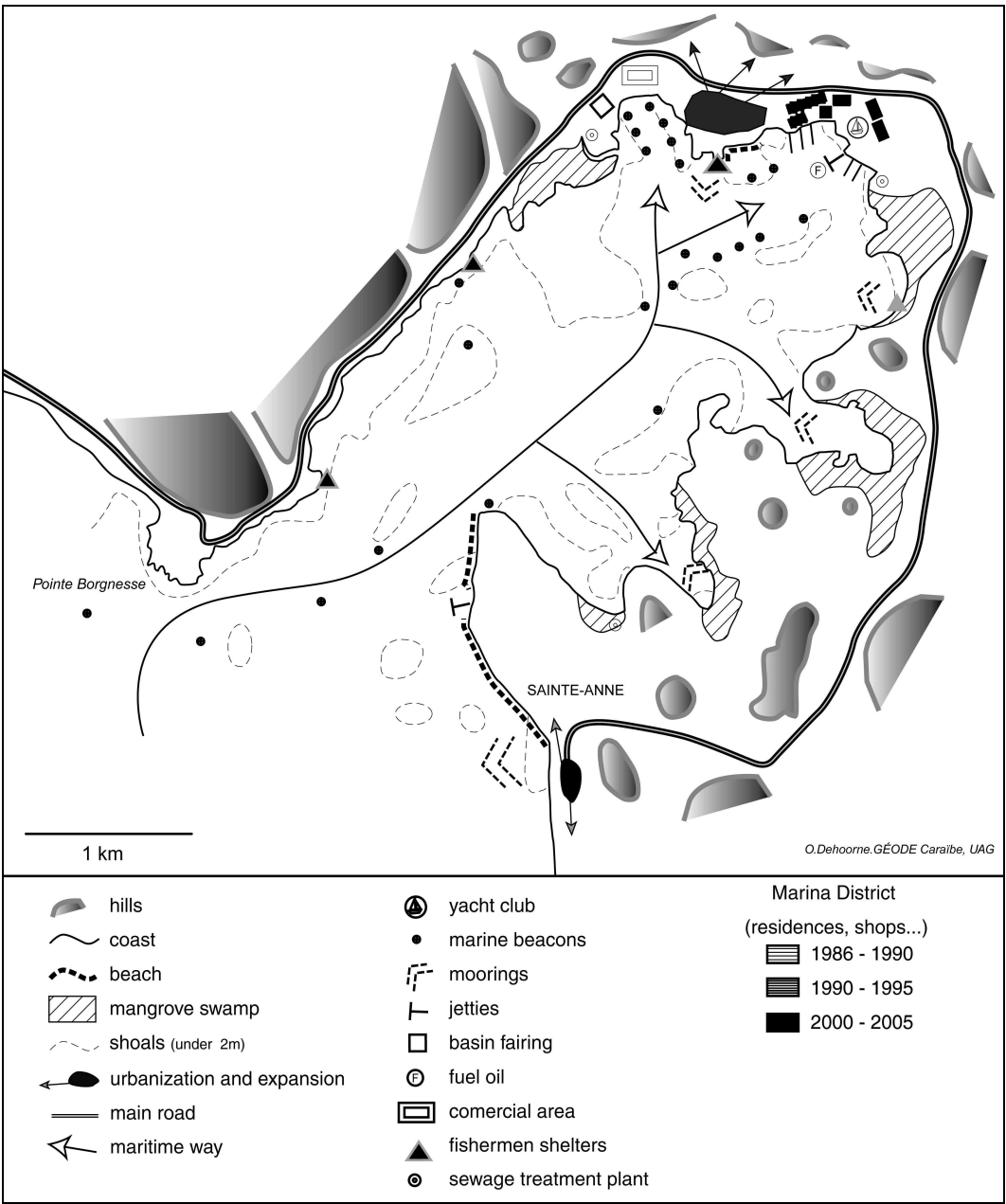


Figure 2. Pleasure boating and navigation in the Cul-de-Sac du Marin (Martinique, France)

However, despite the importance of these facilities, which make of the Le Marin marina one of the most of the southern Antilles, other anchorages are to be found all along the bay that include the mangrove embayment infested with mosquitoes that extend all the way to the village of St. Ann.

Management of the site requires dealing with the silting up of the bay which can and does aggravate the destruction of the coral reefs and generally impoverishes marine life. Navigation is limited by shallows (10 metres on the approaches to the harbour, and then 2-5 m in the harbour). The situation requires constant dredging. The navigation channels are blocked at the entrance of the bay by lobster racks which is symbolic of the conflict between the new activity of pleasure boating and the traditional fishing activity. This former fishing port, located less than forty minutes from an international airport and some of the nicest beaches of Martinique, was an obvious choice to become in a decade to become the centre of pleasure boating in the Caribbean: a site that combined stopover, shelter during bad weather, and a residence for some.

3. THE MARINA'S CLIENTELE

The number of resident international yachters with those making a stopover in Le Marin along is nearly 50,000 people with 9,000 crafts a year. Increases in use over the years have been steady and has resulted in doubling the number of users. While the overall tourist has seen a decline of more than 25 % since 1998, pleasure boating has not yet been affected by the phenomenon that has been called "the crisis of tourism in Martinique". As indicated elsewhere we consider this so called crisis to be more the absence of suitable strategy of development which is largely based on an unsuitable and aging tourist infrastructure. (Dehoorne O., 2004).

Pleasure boating facilities, although developed only recently, is one area where tourist activity is competitive in the French Caribbean islands. Le Marin is a good example of this cutting edge approach. Pleasure boating now accounts for 6.5 % of the tourists on the island where at the beginning of the 1990's it accounted for less than 3 %, (when dominated beach tourism).

Pleasure boating remains largely concentrated during the winter due to the difficult weather conditions that can prevail during the summer rainy season. Nevertheless the level of activity is fairly steady over the period extending from December until May. The geographical origins of the yachtsmen is dominated by a French clientele coming largely from metropolitan France (78 %) but this percentage is less than the 86 % which is the number of overall number of tourists of French origin coming to Martinique. European yachtsmen account for 5 % as compared to 4 % for the whole tourism). The Belgians and the Swiss account for most almost half of the Europeans). The Caribbean clientele represent about 14 % (against 8.2 % for the whole of tourism) and the North American about 2 % (against 0.9 %).

Beyond geographical origins, the profile of marina users tends to include the occasional yachtsmen having little knowledge of the marine world or of the Caribbean, to the newly retired, to repeat customers and regulars. Crews recently arrived by air meet up with other cruise crews who have docked at the marina to refuel. This marina is also the quiet world of affluent residents of Martinique who go on week-ends or live year long on their yachts. Their quiet life contrasts with the nocturnal night life of the new «*nomads of the seas*» who travel around the Caribbean over six months to a year with their wife, children, dog and Internet onboard. These people appreciate the support which le Marin provides in terms of technical services, supermarkets, and medical services. The Venezuelan coastal islands often are seen as their final destination.

4. PLEASURE BOATING: ECONOMIC ISSUES

At this beginning of the millennium, the "*big tourist lake*" which makes up the Caribbean region appears be one of the more secure destinations in the world close to the United States. The market for pleasure boating is taking on a growing importance even if it is necessary to consider its vulnerability to hurricanes and the dicey international economic situation.

The recent expansion of yachting has opened new opportunities for Martinique and all the Antilles. Of the total spending by tourists in Martinique of around 213 million Euros, the percentage accounted for by pleasure boating accounts for 3.5 % of the total. In fact, the available studies (ARDTM) estimate rather poorly the economic impact of pleasure boating since they do not distinguish very well the diversity of spending accounted for by this activity. In fact, it appears that spending are around 8.2 million Euros now as opposed to the 4.6 million Euros spent 15 years ago. Further 66-70 % of this outlay is spent locally.

Average outlays are about of 174 Euros for each person by stay as opposed to the average of 448 Euros for the land bound tourist. It is difficult to project typical expenses since each stay is variable. Some sailors stay for long periods of up to a couple of weeks at an anchorage with independent supplies of water and fuel while others only make a stop over to refill their supplies of perishables. Finally it should be noted that although pleasure boaters do not get much media attention, nevertheless their economic impact is much more important (80 % or 5 times more so) than cruise ship passengers who spend a mere 22 euros each a day.

Of 60,000 jobs directly related by tourism (5.4 % of all employment) 2.6 % are associated with pleasure boating. Studies show that 130 visitors who spend 380 euros on average create one job in Martinique's economy (ARDTM source). Of this average expenditure of 380-Euro, 263 Euros remain in the local economy and create a profit 171 Euros. The harbour abounds with a multitude of different jobs that involve the maintenance of boats (cleaning, assemblage of photovoltaic plates etc). Specialized workers such as carpenters can make in three hours the equivalent of a full day's work in the local economy.

The economic impact of pleasure boating goes well beyond the expected tourist consumption and notably includes hull maintenance of all types. The rental of boats is an activity that not only includes large companies but also individuals who take the opportunity to take advantage of the market that has been generated locally. Small entrepreneurs rent out their services for between 900 and 1,500 euros per week. In some cases experienced navigators will provide services in finding the proper boat needed by a customer (700 Euros for each person for week or 2,500 Euros for a catamaran and 4,500 for a more spacious boat). In addition some need the services of a caterer at 100-150 Euros a day. These arrangements are sometimes negotiated on the wharf in an informal manner or sometimes by using the Internet. Presently there are many web sites that offer services in a wide range of prices. New products such as eco-cruises designed for commercial purposes or even out of a real concern for environmental protection are constantly being developed. Other services such as the return of boats to their initial anchorages are sometimes offered so the customer can return home by air from places like Saint-Vincent, Union, and Trinidad. All of these activities have gone into to the steady growth of this marina.

Finally, beyond the economic impact, the building of the marina of le Marin reinforces Martinique's image as a tourist location. Since this form of tourism has international reach, it further enhances the island's interest for all forms of tourism. Tourists who have come by other means enjoy the activities associated with the marina such as the nightlife and good restaurants that it produces. The marina du Marin now provides a window on the world of pleasure boating for those unfamiliar with it.

5. THE MARINA OF LE MARIN BETWEEN: TRADITIONS LOST AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Establishing a new set of activities that is related to international markets has also to be assessed in terms of its local social and cultural impact. Clearly certain elements of the population have been left by these new activities.

5.1. The old black market town and white Marina

The built-up area of le Marin is made up of a juxtaposition of very specific building types: to the east of the old market town, the marina with its high value businesses extends

to the east to the new administrative centre. To the west of the market town, extends the supply section of town for pleasure boating with its commercial zone, and more still to the west are the homes of the original fishing population. Towards the interior, rent assisted housing is found on the slopes of the hills. The only real location where the different groups come together in a superficial way is in the southern commercial zone. Of course of time spent there differs widely depending on the class of person.

The transformation that is taking place to accommodate tourism and pleasure boating sometimes results in difficult encounters between the pleasure boaters and the fishermen. The village still has about 70 fishermen in the areas known as the *Petite Poterie, du Canal O'Neil and the old market town of Duprey*. They mostly work at modest crafts or the gum trade. As result of the progressive expansion of the activities associated with the marina, there is a movement by the young of this section of town to Duprey.

The unregulated and informal anchorages in the Bay of Marin also pose pollution problems. Certain boats are anchored in sensitive locations and other aging craft seem to have been forgotten by their owners. The growth of marina activity requires extending the port zone to the village of Saints-Ann and therefore needs some type of regional governance for the management of the bay. The policy of the l'Association de Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Martiniquais (Association of Maintenance of Heritage Martiniquais) (ASSAUPAMARO, created in 1986, was created to promote environmental protection and sovereignist approach to governance. Their aims do not often coincide with the commercial pressures for further marina development. In addition the marina is seen as making certain "suspicious populations" i.e. rastas and hippies likely to stay too long in the region. (Mellado V., 2003). Other parts of the of the Caribbean, such as the American Virgin Islands restrict tend to restrict from their locations

In the present case the classic confrontation between white customers (European and North American) who dominate the world of pleasure boating and the afro-Caribbean villagers is inevitable. The construction of houses for local elites tends to provide an intermediate zone between the two opposing groups. At present, in spite of the politically correct speeches, the marina and the market town of le Marin constitute two distinct groups that have little to do with each other. The distinction is obvious at night when each of the groups goes to its respective neighborhoods. In the floating restaurants of the marina, the only black Antillean one is likely to see is the barman who mixes the cocktails. The harbor makes up an enclave that has an international role and doesn't need to consider the local realities.

5.2. The harbor of le Marin in its regional context

The harbour of le Marin is ranked among the most important in the Lesser Antilles (figure 3) with that of Pointe-à-Pitre (more than 1 000 slips in the Marina de Bas de Fort), the island of Saint-Martin (about 750 slips shared over ten sites, the most important being on the French side of the island: Anse Marcel and Oyster Pond in the American Virgin Islands (more than 600 slips in Tortula, notably in Wickhams Cay I and Wickhams Cay II).

Le Marin's more southern position allows it dominate the routes of cruises in the south of Antilles with the only real competition coming from the English-speaking site of Rodney Bay on the neighbouring island of St Lucia (250 slips). From le Marin, yachters can take a leisurely sail from island to island: St Lucia is 18 miles from le Marin), the archipelago of Grenadines (Saint-Vincent, Béquia, Canouan, Tobago Cays, Carriacou) provide about fifty slips and numerous other anchorages that are reputed to be best in the world and can be found within a distance of 88 miles. When the cruise extends beyond a week, the voyage can extend to the shores of South America by way of Grenada, one of the options is to the southeast 90 miles towards Trinidad. The other option is the route to the southwest: 85 miles to reach Los Testigos, 45 added miles for Margarita and 155 miles of more westward for Los Roques (figure 3).

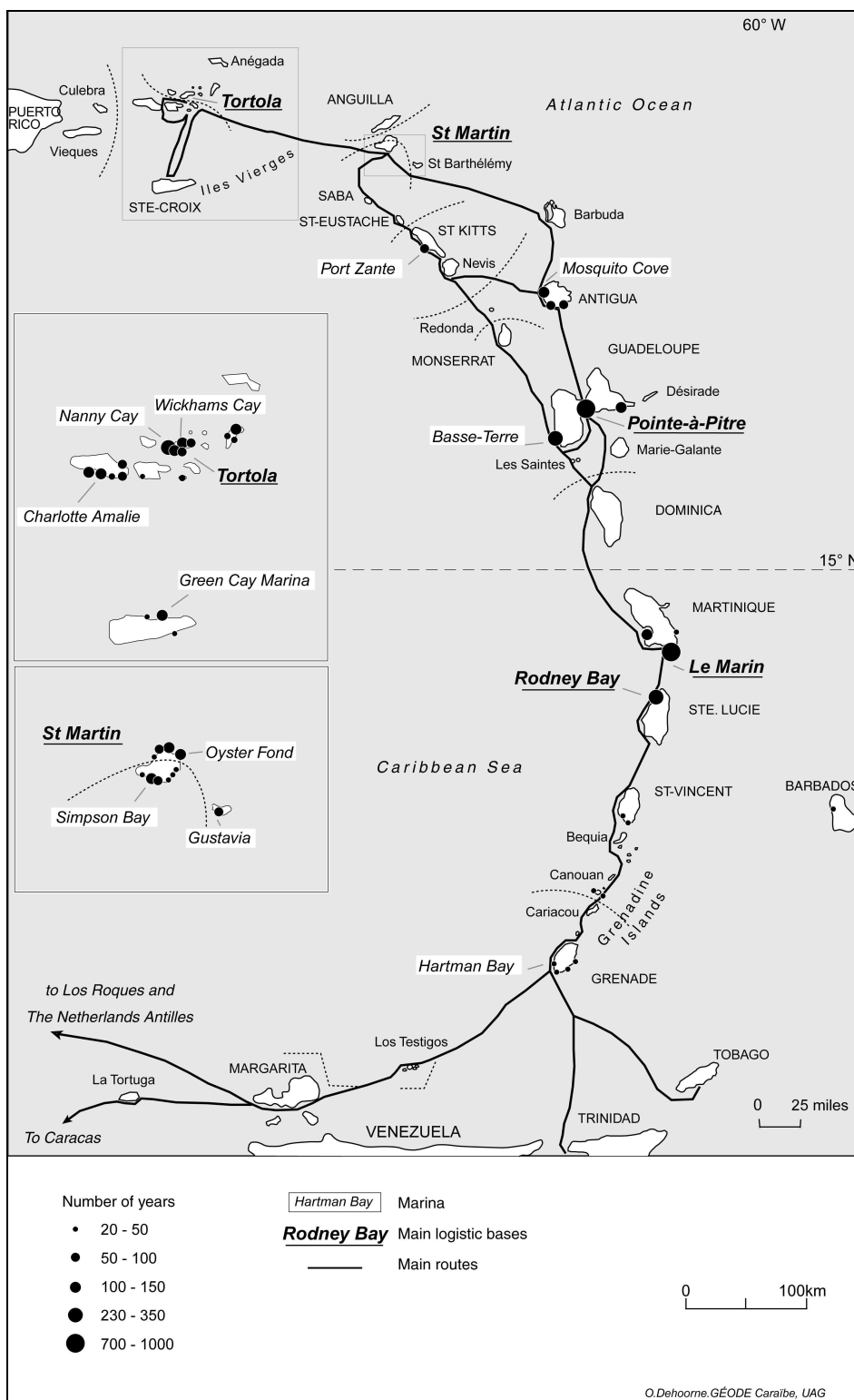


Figure 3a. Pleasure boating in the Lesser Antilles



Figure 3b. Pleasure boating in the Lesser Antilles. The expansion zone
(Source: O. Dehoorne, 2008)

The guadeloupéen archipelago, with the marinas at Pointe-à-Pitre, Saints-Françoises (120 slips) and Rivière Sens (Basse-Terre, 350 slips), are more oriented to the northern Antilles with routes leading to Antigua (40 miles), Barbuda (23 miles), Nevis (35 miles), that eventually attain the facilities of Saint-Martin and of Tortula (islands that are separated by 80 miles from one another).

To develop these port facilities also contributes to a type of unlawful trade that includes drug trafficking, and illegal migrations. The shipment of drugs from Colombia and Venezuela follows the same routes to the United States and sometimes use "European" harbours in the Caribbean Sea to eventually ship into Europe. As for the stowaways, discreet and efficient (notably thanks to the usage of mobile phones), transportation is provided by simple catamarans to the coasts of Florida for migrants coming from the Far East as well as nightly runs from St Lucia which provides Martinique with low cost labour.

6. CONCLUSION

The Caribbean Sea and the Antillean Crescent have a significant comparative advantage for. With the wonderful climate, the islands form a set of ports and marina locations that are near to coral reefs that make of the region an international tourist destination. The new facilities that have been put in place have produced a significant set of economic impacts that complement the traditional activities already in place. The employment that is created is well above the traditional, low paying jobs, associated with tourism. Increasingly there are attempts to organize the workers in order to seek better conditions for those employed in the marina trade. Evidence for the changes is found in the case study of Le Marin which has recently seen some significant growth. The new marina development significantly expands by including pleasure boating with the other activities associated with a beach resort. The developments are based on international demand for these types of facilities and thus reflect the impact of globalization but it has its downside by increasing marginalizing the original inhabitants who depended on fishing for their economic support. The traditional places are being taken over by the new activities as well the natural facilities being subject to siltation and increasingly inaccessible fishing grounds. Since they have limited skills beyond fishing, they find it

also difficult to integrate into the new economic activities associated with the marina development. There is little hope that they will be able to reverse their increased marginalization from the activities that have taken hold.

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