



Back Bay Fens,  
Boston

## From Boston to the Balkans: Olmsted's Emerald Legacy

Christina Luke

South of the Charles River winds the Emerald Necklace, a series of parks that connects several neighborhoods in the Boston area. The genius behind the system was journalist turned landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmsted, who was propelled to the national stage in 1858, after partnering with Calvert Vaux for the design of Central Park in New York City. He subsequently created some of the most prestigious parks in the United States, and influenced the design of recreational areas for generations. Today his vision affects not only Boston, but also defines cultural policy at an international level, constituting the precedent for an element of international tourism development in several regions, including the Balkans and Turkey.

### Time in the Wilderness

Olmsted was influenced by a variety of experiences, including his childhood in New England and

transatlantic trips to Europe, especially England. However, the inspiration for his vision of the Emerald Necklace came in large part from time spent in California.

In 1864, Olmsted was appointed chairman of the first board of commissioners of Yosemite, which is now widely recognized as one of the first public wilderness parks in the world. The following year, Olmsted prepared a report to Congress, in which he stressed that splendor is the “union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature, not in one feature or another, not in one part or one scene or another, not any landscape that can be framed by itself, but all around.”

What Olmsted perceived as the ‘natural’ landscapes of Yosemite were not entirely natural, but large tracts maintained by Native American groups. For Olmsted, the vast expanse of open fields complemented the narrower spaces, enhancing the depth of the viewer's perspective. It is this feature that he so

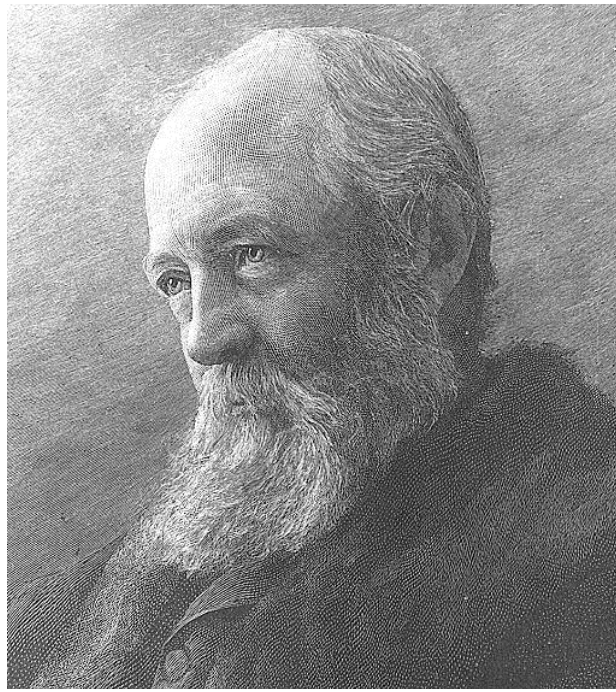
carefully integrated into his future designs.

Olmsted wrote the initial management plan for Yosemite. He outlined the major features of the park, argued for certain principles in design and conservation, and set forth guidelines for implementing tourism infrastructure within the park. His vision proved to have a significant impact on the development of Yosemite, and inspired supporters of the parks movement for generations. These included President Theodore Roosevelt, who was instrumental in establishing numerous national forests, parks, and monuments. For Olmsted, national parks were to be “a duty of dignity and be committed only to a sovereign state,” a steadfast promise that the United States has continued to uphold.

### A Vision for Boston

Olmsted was engaged by the Boston Park Commission in 1878. His challenge was to improve the ecological health of the saltwater marsh where the Charles River connected to Back Bay, and to create an efficient and effective water management system for the Stony Brook and Muddy Rivers. Olmsted also wanted to create an aesthetically pleasing park that would evoke the cultural landscapes of rural areas, especially farmlands and green pastures, and create a sense of tranquility that would complement the architecture of nearby buildings.

The result was a network of nine interconnected

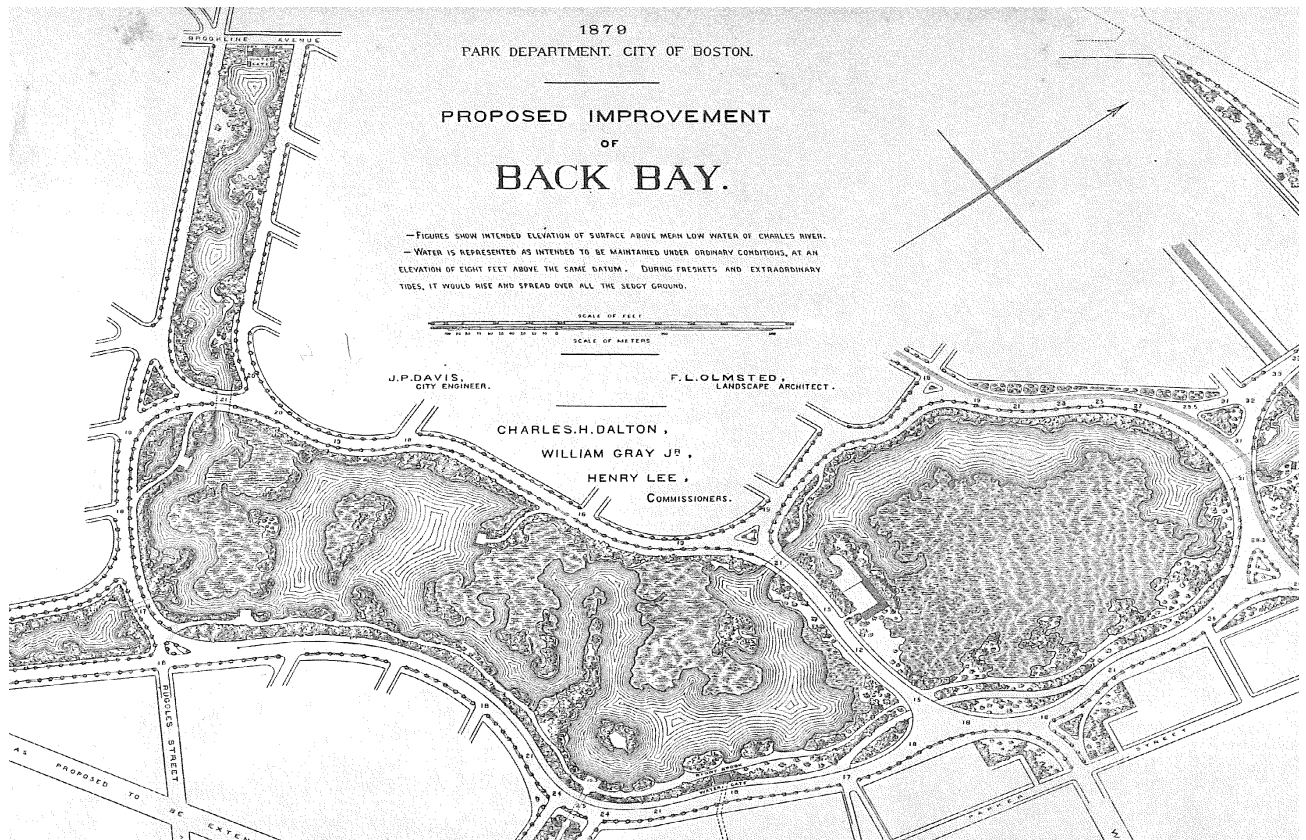


Frederick  
Law Olmsted  
(1893)

parks and waterways, many of which were created anew, covering more than 1,000 acres. Today, the Emerald Necklace is one of the last remaining intact linear parks designed by Olmsted. Its intended functionality is largely unknown to the public, even to those who enjoy it on a daily basis. The system offers a respite from urban life by providing venues for a morning run, an afternoon sail, or a Sunday stroll.



Yosemite  
National Park



Olmsted plan for the Back Bay Fens, Boston (1879)

### From Scenic to Cultural

The Olmsted plan for Boston not only addressed environmental needs, but also incorporated a progressive social mission. It was intended to create a scenic route that would link the wealthy residents of Beacon Hill and Brookline with the working class residents of Dorchester and Roxbury, both

geographically and symbolically. This was hugely influential at the time and subsequently influenced generations of landscape architects, urban planners, and environmentalists.

The Emerald Necklace also served as a conceptual analogy for connecting other types of locations along a discernible path into an integrated whole. The scenic aspects of a greenway that connected separate parks became the inspiration for the designation of routes that connect separate tourism sites. This is evident in the wording chosen by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which defines a cultural corridor as “a linear region linked together by similar cultural or heritage resources.”

Somerset Hotel adjacent to the Back Bay Fens, Boston (1948)



### Cultural Corridors

The United Nations established its Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1946. Among the founding principles was a vision to preserve and make accessible places of importance to natural and cultural heritage. A variety of related initiatives have followed including the Man and Biosphere Program, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Cultural Landscapes, the Global Compact Initiatives, the Global Partnerships for Conservation Initiative, the Natural Heritage Strategy, and

the World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism program. These demonstrate the enduring global commitment to the preservation of natural and cultural landscapes.

Recent reports from these programs have called attention to the prestige conferred by World Heritage status, and provided a framework for initiatives to promote cultural heritage at regional and national levels through preservation and conservation. These reports have also called for an increased emphasis on heritage routes and cultural corridors.

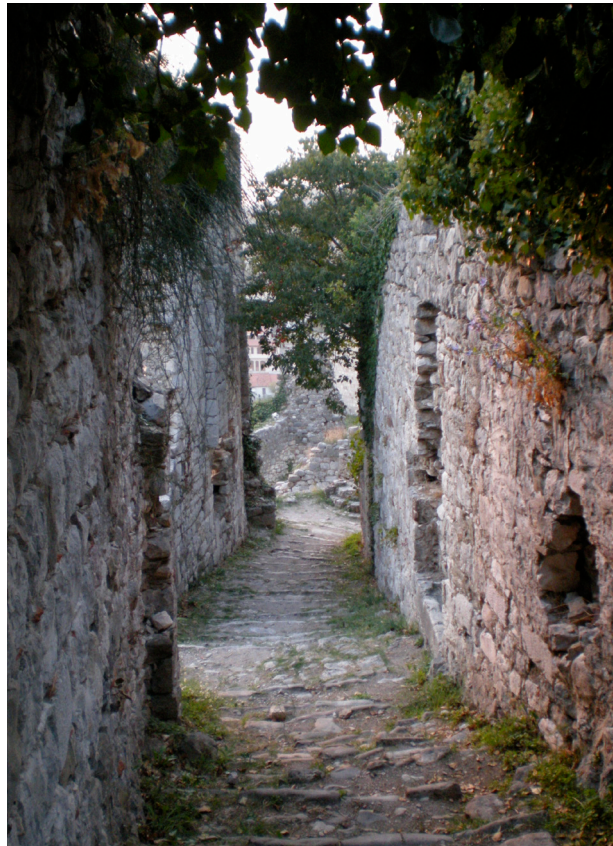
Cultural policy analysts envision seamless connectivity among natural and cultural heritage sites, for visitors moving across ethnic and religious boundaries, as well as national borders. Heritage policy is part of a larger agenda aimed at building democracy through civic spaces that embody acceptance and tolerance. It offers a focal point for negotiating cultural and natural heritage in the context of social connections, political hurdles, ethnic strife, economic development, and urban rehabilitation.

Cultural heritage has become an important element at the negotiating table for diplomats, development agencies, and investors in public-private partnerships. Of keen interest are historic properties that enhance infrastructure in the tourism sector, especially those that can be adapted for use as restaurants and hotels.

### The Balkans and Turkey

Cultural corridors are increasingly being viewed as strategic in many parts of the world, and are receiving emphasis in government planning documents such as the Turkish 2023 Tourism Strategy. Cross-border programs between Bulgaria and Turkey, and between Turkey and Armenia, show a firm policy that views heritage as *the* base point from which to collaborate on regional economic development. The Council of Europe has launched several programs in southeast Europe that attempt to integrate nature, culture, and people. These include the Emerald Network, the Regional Program on Cultural and Natural Heritage, and Cultural Corridors.

Other major players include the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development, especially in the Sandzak and Novi Pazar regions of the Balkans, which encompass areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo. Smaller programs, such as the United States Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP) and the Turkish International Development



Stari Bar,  
Montenegro

Agency (TIKA) offer support for more specific projects.

A variety of agencies are supporting preservation projects along heritage corridors in Turkey, including initiatives focused on the synagogues of İzmir and Armenian heritage at Ani, both supported by the AFCP and the World Monuments Fund. Some are aligned with niche markets that cross boundaries under specific labels, such as the European Route of Jewish Heritage and the Routes of the Olive Tree, both supported by the Council of Europe. UNESCO has tentatively listed the Selcuk Caravanserais on the route from Denizli to Doğubeyazit as a World Heritage site, an indication that future sites are likely to cover broad geographic areas, rather than discrete monuments or sites. In fact, it is not only those places fully inscribed as World Heritage sites, but also those on the tentative

#### ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Sources for this article included *Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove: A Preliminary Report* by Frederick Law Olmsted (1865), several recent reports from the Council of Europe, documents available from the Ministry of Culture & Tourism in the Republic of Turkey, and the websites of organizations including the National Association for Olmsted Parks and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

list that point to the strategic use of the UNESCO brand in promoting regional tourism in Turkey.

The World Monuments Fund has also supported work at the Çukur Han in Ankara, which helped set the stage for the first ‘museum hotel’ in Turkey, the luxury Divan Çukurhan. From the historic hotels of Palazzo Radomiri on the coast of Montenegro to the Pera Palace in the heart of Istanbul, investors are taking notice of the potential embedded in cultural tourism. Those at UNESCO and the Council of Europe are also taking notice of future opportunities for regional integration through cultural corridors.

### Full Circle

Fairsted, the Olmsted home and headquarters of his prestigious landscape architecture firm, re-

mains nestled near the Emerald Necklace in Brookline, Massachusetts. The relatively unimposing structure offers a contrast to his vast historical influence. The connectivity that Olmsted envisioned and implemented in Boston has since been echoed in green spaces and cultural corridors throughout the world. The Emerald Necklace is among the places where we can look to understand the importance not only of social and municipal engineering embedded in an aesthetically vibrant landscape, but also the contemporary cultural policies emanating from a variety of government agencies, including UNESCO and the Council of Europe. While the Olmsted name is rarely invoked in this regard, a close look at his work reveals a lasting legacy not only in the United States, but also on the global stage. ■

Temple of Artemis, Sardis



**Christina Luke** is a Senior Lecturer at Boston University with appointments in the Writing Program, the Department of Anthropology, and the Department of Archaeology. She is also Co-Director of the Central Lydia Archaeological Survey. Among her research interests are cultural policies that harness heritage landscapes to promote tourism development at local and regional levels, especially in the eastern Mediterranean and Latin America. She holds a Ph.D. degree from Cornell University. Email [cluke@bu.edu](mailto:cluke@bu.edu)