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Dr. Anna Grichting

Mid Term Paper

Public Parks and Enlargement of Towns

by Frederick Law Olmsted

Aisha Ali Alkhelaifi

aa1104376@qu.edu.qa

ID: 201104376

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“America’s great pioneer landscape architect” that is what Frederick Law Olmsted was called. His paper encouraged three great moral vitalities: the first being public health; by having trees to purify the air and to reduce water pollution, the second is fighting urban wrongdoing especially among poor children, the last was improving the purpose of civilisation by providing services and resources that are available to all. He also focuses on the relationship between the built environment and the natural one.

Context:

• Authors’s Background:

Frederick Law Olmsted is considered is considered to be the founder of American landscape, and the countries most prestigious parkmaker. He was born in the year 1822 in Hartford, Connecticut. He passed away at the age of 81 in the year 1903. (“Designing an american landscape”, n.d)



A drawing of Frederick Law Olmsted

Between the year 1837 and 1857, Olmsted occupied many jobs: he was a farmer, a clerk, a sailor in the trade of China, and other variety of jobs. In 1848 he moved to New York, and without any college education, He became the superintendent or the director of Central Park in 1857.

He served as the administrator and then architect-in-chief of Central Park’s construction. After that, he served in the US Sanitary Commission as the administrative head, which was the predecessor of the American Red Cross.



Central Park in 1857

In addition to urban design, Olmsted was very keen on preserving the natural and beautiful areas for the public’s enjoyment. He served as the head of the commission in

preserving Yosemite Valley and was a leader in establishing the Niagara Reservation.
(A Short Biography, 2011)



Niagara Falls



Yosemite Valley

Olmsted opened the world's first full-scale professional landscape design firm when he moved to suburban Boston in 1883. ("Designing an american landscape", n.d)

- **Time Period:**

This paper was read before the American Social Science Association at the Lowell Institute, Boston, on the 25th of February 1870.(Schuyler, 23)

It was during the Neoclassical period of time, which began in the mid 18th century. The general style was of long white columns carrying doomed roofs with pediment, and of course symmetry.



The Lincoln Memorial, an early 20th century example of American neoclassical architecture.

In this time period, city life started to have a certain appeal to people, and the migration from rural life to the city life started to become more popular. Cities were consisted of buildings and skyscrapers alone, no leisure places or green areas for relaxation. It was the place to be if one wanted to work not particularly live.

Therefore when people moved from the country side to the city they missed the open fields and fresh air.

That is what Olmsted tried to compensate in the city when he came up with the idea of the park.

- **Geographical Context:**

The author lived in the United States of America, surrounded by open space and greenery.

In 2000 a study has been made that said that 50 percent of the American population live in a suburban area, the numbers also increasing since since the metropolitan areas continue to become larger, thus transforming the United States into a suburban nation. That is why the cultural significance and environmental impact of suburbia remains the topic of hot debate among scholars.

Olmsted's work focused on landscape architecture and planning effected the suburban life of America and improved it in a drastic way. (Morgan, Cushing & Reed, 2013)

- **Urban Context:**

Mainly his work was focused in New York and Boston. He moved to large dense urban areas after living in a rural area for a long period of time -Connecticut. One can notice the influence that had on Olmsted's work and how he related that form of quiet life to the city and wanted to improve city life by introducing; even if in a small amount, a place where rural life can be experienced in the heart of the city.

Planning theories or concepts:

The high density of urban areas cause people to be distant and cruel, which contrasts to the countryside where there it is easier to “maintain a temperate, good-natured, healthy state of mind.”(site) Olmsted took the city of Boston as an example, he sees the the increase in size of the commercial areas in cities as a trespass on the peaceful life of country people, who are as vulnerable as anyone to the infections of urban society.



Charlesbank, sidewalk on Charles Street, Boston, MA

In the making of parks, Olmsted proposes that they do not only become as beautiful plazas to behold, but also as centres of recreation, of which he separated into two types: one for sports, intellectual games like chess, and other activities, and one for passive leisure.

He also categorised the passive recreation into two further types: one for large crowds gathered, and one where smaller crowds are gathered, this type stimulate more intellectual and interpersonal activity. In the first one, diversity of people and their activities adds to the importance of communal life, with Central Park mentioned as an example. To allow this, parks must be large, but this do not reduce the importance of multiple smaller parks which makes access easier from any part of the city. Theoretically, no resident would be far way from a park than a reasonable walk, providing access to the renewing benefits of the countryside.

Relevance today and to the city of Doha:

In our world today cities have the highest rate of occupancy, higher than any other area in a country including Qatar it was estimated that 60% of people live in Doha. Having these high number of occupants in one city with no open air outlet can be devastating for the health and well being of; not only the people, but the city life it self, as Olmsted mentioned, when people walk



The business heart of Doha

around the city they have a certain harshness to their eyes with no real human contact. That is why the presence of a park, of a public space full of greenery and light can effect the city in a tremendously positive way.

For example, Aspire park was introduced to Doha seven years ago. And now one can see it almost always crowded with people. Even in the hottest summer months some people go to the park as a refuge from the bustling city life. This is what is mentioned by Olmsted as the park for sports, intellectual games like chess, and other activities.



Aspire park lake in Doha

Another principle of Olmsted that was adopted by Doha is having a green space within walking distance of each neighbourhood. When looking at the plan of neighbourhood in Doha, you can see small green dots of grass and trees. These act as a reliever of

stress to those people living around it. As a personal experience, one remember's when one was a kid of how cheerful the weekly trips to those small parks were. A small place where families can bond and friends can catch up while the children enjoyed their time. Therefore, Olmsted speech is very much relevant to our city, especially since the awareness was boosted by the 2022 campaign of staying healthy and encouraging sports.



Map of The neighbourhoods of doha showing small scattered parks.

In conclusion, one would say that Olmsted thought about the need of the people, he studied their moves and actions and analysed them, which led him to a problem that he then tried to fix. The problem being the urban life and its' negative effects on the citizens, and the solution was incorporating nature back to the citizen's lives which balanced out these negative effects, thus providing Olmsted with a tremendous success.

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