

# Spaces for Burial and Death: Bridging Issues of Design and Experience in Urban Landscapes

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This paper focuses on sustainable design of cemeteries and asks to what extent cemeteries and burial places can serve as public open spaces, and as a means to improve health. The need to plan and manage spaces for death seems relevant given the increasing proportion of the older population, particularly those who are part of the old-old segment (85 years and older). In the next decades, it appears that cemeteries and spaces for burial will become common everyday places, which calls for an integration of theory, practice and research in this area.

Death is not only a central psychological fact of care, but a day-to-day quality of life issue for everyone. However, there is limited work on the experience of dying and the role of environmental factors related to death. As death and grief need a landscape in which to dwell (Baptist, 2010), there is a tension between private/public and sacred/secular factors (Petersson, 2006). Burial spaces may be used as environments for the deceased and also as settings for recreational and touristic activities.

In order to examine the private/public tension, we build on social norm theories (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) as well as on the attention restoration theory (Kaplan, 1995) to explore: (1) Can sites for burial be considered 'restorative'? (2) How can we integrate public interference that challenges the rites of burial? (3) How can the landscape be used to create meaningful, peaceful, and beautiful surroundings for rites of burial, recreation, and touristic activities?

## Method

This work is based on a qualitative examination of three case studies—

Skogskyrkogården cemetery in Stockholm; the Assistant Cemetery in Copenhagen; and a crematorium and chapel in Akureyri, Iceland (Esbjerg, 2010).

The paper discusses the extent to which spaces for burial—and its design related features—can be associated with the four components of the attention restoration theory: being away, extent, coherence, and fascination. It presents how these restorative elements may be related to the needs and purposes of different social groups. It illustrates through design (i.e., presented in drawings and sketches) how different environmental features can be manipulated to accommodate diverse use of these settings.

The understanding of cultural, spiritual and planning/practice issues are necessary for the development of theories and design of death related spaces. We conclude by arguing that environmental psychology has a role to play in this discussion and can contribute with theory and design recommendations from its studies.

## References

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