



“Philosophical Park”: Cemeteries in the Scandinavian Urban Context

Pavel Grabalov, Helena Nordh

ABSTRACT Cemeteries in densifying cities are undergoing a shift into spaces used both for the dead and by the living; this in turn calls for a more nuanced approach to planning. Using Oslo and Copenhagen as cases, this paper explores why both cities recently developed strategies for cemetery planning and management. In analyses of the written policy strategies and interviews with ten experts working with the cemeteries, we observe that both municipalities share many reasons, including a growing demand for green urban spaces, cemeteries’ recreational potential and increasing diversity of burial practices and memorial forms. The policymakers and practitioners in both cities recognise the spiritual or “philosophical” aspects of the cemeteries, which distinguish them from other green spaces and direct attention to a need for a specific management strategy. Our findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of cemeteries as a special type of green space and can hopefully inspire practitioners in other densifying cities.

KEYWORDS graveyards, densification, green space, planning, spirituality, Oslo, Copenhagen

A New Role for Urban Cemeteries?

Since 2007, a cemetery in the Norwegian city of Arendal has been serving as one of the scenes for a music festival. A stage, sound equipment and seats for the audience occupy a small spot in front of the chapel. Many people bring their own folding-chairs and sit on the paths between the graves, while they listen to live music. The cemetery is famous for its beautiful greenery, hilly landscape, and historical graves surrounded by low iron fences. We attended a concert there in July 2018, and the melancholic jazz music rippling through the dusk made it easy to feel how special the atmosphere of this place was (see Figure 1).

This paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of planning of cemeteries as a special type of green space in cities experiencing population growth and densification pressure. Pursuing sustainability agendas, some such cities have already started to highlight cemeteries in their planning processes. Our study qualitatively examines recent strategic documents for the cemeteries in two Scandinavian capital cities (Oslo in Norway and Copenhagen in Denmark) and aims to reveal the reasons for the development of these strategies. By “reasons” we mean a set of trends, processes and arguments which motivated the municipalities

to look closely at the cemeteries they manage and introduce the above-mentioned strategic documents. This paper belongs to the field of urban planning and builds on the relatively new concept of “municipal spirituality” developed by McClymont (2015), as described below.

Figure 1: The audience at the concert of Sigvart Dagsland as part of the Canal Street Music Festival. Arendal Cemetery, Norway. July 2018



Source: Mona Hauglid, Canal Street: <https://flic.kr/p/26JAh3C>. Distributed under CC BY-ND 2.0 license.

In the postsecular world, where the fundamental relationship between people and spirituality is shifting (Herman et al. 2012), practices of memorialisation are increasingly personalised (Holloway et al. 2018) and contested (Woodthorpe 2010). Cemeteries as embodiments of such processes should also change. Indeed, we witness that the role of cemeteries is being redefined in many cities around the globe (see, for example, Cloke and Jones 2004; Kong 2012; Deering 2016; Sloane 2018; Paraskevopoulou 2019). This change is not always restricted to the primary function of a cemetery, which we understand as being a burial ground with space for memorialisation. The above-mentioned concert in Arendal illustrates one of many secondary cemetery functions.

Looking at the British urban context, McClymont (2014) describes cemeteries as planning’s “skeleton in the closet”, meaning that planners have no proper guidance for dealing with these places. According to her, planning currently plays no active role in guiding cemeteries’ development and maintenance nor has an inclusive vocabulary for articulating the specific non-instrumental values which differentiate cemeteries from other green urban spaces (McClymont 2015). To deal with this challenge she introduces

the concept of "municipal spirituality" which "describes (an aspect of) a place which allows access to the transcendental and promotes the common good" (ibid: 542). Transcendental, or spiritual, aspects are difficult issues to deal with in design and planning practices (van den Bosch 2019). However, we can only agree with Sandercock (2006) who emphasises the necessity "to recognize that spirituality may be embodied in planning work, whether we care to name it or not" (66). Furthermore, spirituality is receiving increasing attention as a factor relevant for effective public health practices (Oman 2018). We believe that spiritual values cannot be neglected in cemetery planning and are interested to see how they are addressed in new cemetery strategies.

This paper also draws on findings from Norwegian researchers who previously studied planning documents to identify what qualities the municipalities of Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm (Sweden) ascribe to their cemeteries (Nordh and Evensen 2018). They found that cemeteries are mostly described as an integral part of public green infrastructure but treated as private green spaces in the planning context. In this paper we move to lower levels of planning documents and assess cemetery-specific strategies and regulations in Oslo and Copenhagen. The reason for choosing these two as case studies is that both cities have recently created and adopted strategic documents for the development and management of existing cemeteries (Copenhagen Municipality 2015; Oslo Municipality 2017). These documents are referred to here simply as "strategies". The municipalities of Oslo and Copenhagen manage their cemeteries internally, in contrast to other cities where cemeteries are run by businesses, NGOs or religious organisations. This similarity between the cities allows for these strategies to be analysed together.

There are additional reasons why these Scandinavian cities make interesting case studies. Firstly, Scandinavian cities have taken the lead in incorporating the concepts of sustainability, liveability and innovation into their planning and governance practices (Næss et al. 2019). It is therefore interesting to investigate where cemeteries are positioned in these new urban paradigms. Secondly, this part of Europe is considered to be one of the most secular regions in the world (see Kjaersgaard [2017] for a debate); this secularism might provide new development opportunities for cemeteries which have historically been governed by national churches. Thirdly, Scandinavia is notable for its high rates of cremation (Sørensen 2009; Kjølner 2012), which is a less space-intensive practice than the use of coffin graves. In both Norway and Denmark there is also a practice of reuse of grave space. Both these aspects affect the way cemeteries are developed. Finally, the presence of activities not connected to burial and memorialisation practices seems to be common in Scandinavian cemeteries (see, for example, Wingren 2013; Evensen et al. 2017; Nordh et al. 2017; Grabalov 2018).

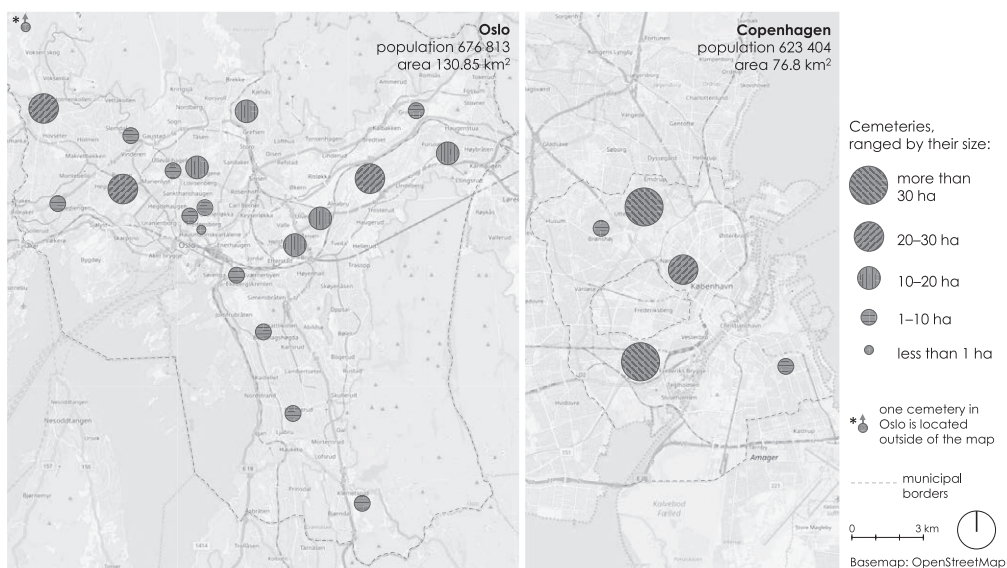
In this article we begin by describing the current legal and administrative context of cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen. We then outline our research methods and present our findings, before providing discussion and concluding remarks.

The Scandinavian Context: *Proper Cemeteries*

In both Oslo and Copenhagen cemeteries comprise a significant percentage of the total green space: 7% (186 ha) in Oslo (Nordh and Evensen 2018; Oslo Municipality 2019a) and 6%

(130 ha) in Copenhagen (Nordh and Evensen 2018). Many of the old spacious nineteenth-century cemeteries originally located on the outskirts of the city have found themselves, as the cities have expanded, situated within densely built environments. Twenty cemeteries are operated by the Oslo Municipality, while only five by the Copenhagen Municipality. The Oslo Municipality manages a substantial number of small cemeteries in comparison to Copenhagen (see Figure 2). A further three cemeteries in Copenhagen are owned and administrated by the Church of Denmark and are not included in the scope of this paper. Currently, both cities do not plan to establish any new cemeteries as they have enough space in the existing ones. The systems of management of cemeteries differ in the two cities and the following sections aim to present the local contexts of the cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen separately.

Figure 2: The cemeteries operated by the municipalities in Oslo and Copenhagen



Sources: Copenhagen municipality (2015), Oslo municipality (2017), StatBank Denmark (2020), Statistics Norway (2020)

Oslo: Outcomes of Functionalism

The 20 cemeteries in Oslo differ in size, position in the urban fabric, and layout. Describing the history of Norwegian cemetery design in the twentieth century, Dietze-Schirdewahn and Lunde (2019) demonstrate how it changed dramatically under the influence of functionalism in the middle of the century. They note that cemeteries at this time adopted a more organised layout, with plenty of open, grassy landscaping, modest gravestones decorated with flowers, and without fences around each individual grave. According to Dietze-Schirdewahn and Lunde (2019), these changes formed the basis for the contemporary multifunctionality of many Norwegian cemeteries.

Along with traditional coffin graves, Oslo cemeteries also offer large areas for cremated remains: individual and shared ashes burials, including anonymous memorials (see Figure 3). The cremation rate in the city is 75%, much higher than the national rate of 43% (Norsk forening for gravplasskultur et al. 2019). As outlined by Hadders (2013), potential explanations for the differences in cremation rates around Norway might be a lack of access to crematoria, additional costs of cremation comparing to coffin burial, lack of cemetery space designated for interment of ashes, and Christian traditions of funerary practice. Regulations prescribe ashes to be disposed of in the ground; other types of disposal, including columbaria, are not permitted. At the request of a relative and with a documented wish from the deceased, a regional government can grant an exception from this rule and give permission to scatter ashes (Høeg 2019). According to the laws, a grave is protected for 20 years after the burial. After this period, protection can be renewed for a fee or a cemetery administration may reuse a grave for another burial.

Figure 3: Anonymous memorial in Østre Cemetery in Oslo. The sign says: “The memory grove [literal translation of the Norwegian word ‘minnelund’, anonymous memorial] is a burial ground where individual graves do not have inscriptions. Capture a memory, feel grief – for each of us sorrow has a different name”. September 2019



Source: Pavel Grabalov

In Oslo, the Community Church Council (*Kirkelig fellesråd*; part of the Lutheran Church of Norway) holds legal responsibility for cemeteries, but it is a specialised Cemeteries and Burials Agency (*Gravferdsetaten*) within the Municipality which undertakes their management and maintenance. Such an arrangement is unusual in the Norwegian context, where in most municipalities the church councils are in charge of all aspects of cemetery management (Hadders 2013) even though the cemeteries are open to all citizens, regardless of their beliefs. However, the arrangement is common in other Scandinavian capitals (Nordh and Evensen 2018). Oslo's Cemeteries and Burials Agency falls under the Department of Culture and Sport (*Byråd for kultur, idrett og frivillighet*). Such a structure mirrored the national level, where cemeteries as well as religious organisations were concerns of the Ministry of Culture (*Kulturdepartementet*) until 2019 and are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (*Barne- og familiedepartementet*).

Norwegian acts and regulations (a list of these can be found at the end of the bibliography below) require cemeteries to be held in a “proper” manner. Without explicit definition, “proper” (*sømmelig* in Norwegian) is one of the central concepts of cemetery laws. It applies to the general management of cemeteries, maintenance work, care of individual graves by grave owners, the design of gravestones and visitors' behaviour. For example, it requires owners to walk dogs on a short leash and prohibits such activities as playing, skiing, sledging, jogging, cycling, horse-riding and sunbathing. As pointed out by Skår et al. (2018), cemetery regulations in Oslo do not promote the recreational potential of cemeteries as public green spaces. However, previous research demonstrates that many of these recreational activities, and especially jogging and cycling, are an integral part of everyday life in at least two Oslo cemeteries (Evensen et al. 2017). The laws prescribe that cemeteries should be fenced and gated; driving through them is discouraged.

In December 2017 the Oslo City Council adopted the “Future Cemeteries – Great Green Urban Space” (*Fremtidens gravplass – Gode, grønne byrom*) strategy (Oslo Municipality 2017). It was developed by the staff of the Cemeteries and Burials Agency and the Department of Culture and Sport in cooperation with other municipal agencies. As a supplement to this document, the authors included references to three research papers devoted to two cemeteries in Oslo (Evensen et al. 2017; Nordh et al. 2017; Swensen et al. 2016). The strategy describes the current situation of the cemeteries in Oslo, highlights their role as urban spaces and their contribution to local climate and environmental objectives, and proposes directions for future development.

Copenhagen: The City of Cremation

Similar to the context in Norway, Danish acts and regulations (a list of these can be found at the end of the bibliography) also emphasise the importance of running a cemetery in a “proper” (*sømmelig* in Danish as well) and respectful manner, and provide a legal framework for doing so. Unlike Oslo, Copenhagen does not have a specialised cemetery agency; management of Copenhagen cemeteries is part of the wider City Operations Bureau (*Byens drift*) which belongs to the Technical and Environmental Administration (*Teknik- og miljøforvaltningen*) of the Copenhagen Municipality. In practice this means that,

in management and maintenance, cemeteries are merged with other public spaces, including streets and parks.

The laws require grave owners (for example, the relative of a deceased) to maintain their graves in a "proper" condition; failure to do so gives the cemetery administration the right to take over the grave. The documents explain that a grave maintained in a "proper" condition should be clean, free from weeds and covered with trimmed grass or gravel. Hedges around a grave – one of the most distinct features of Danish cemeteries – should be trimmed regularly as well. Like those in Oslo, the cemeteries in Copenhagen also have vast areas set aside for interment of ashes. This is especially important as the cremation rate in the city is very high – 94% (an employee of the Copenhagen Municipality, personal communication, February 21, 2019) – even compared to the Danish national figure of 84% (Danske krematoriernes landsforening 2019). Similar to the Norwegian legislation, Danish regulations prescribe ashes to be interred in a cemetery, although an exception is offered for ashes scattered at sea.

A cemetery in general should also be kept "properly": for example, public roads and pedestrian paths cannot be built to cross a cemetery; a cemetery should be fenced; and the aesthetic values of a cemetery and its relationship with the church and surroundings should be preserved. Copenhagen cemeteries have information boards prescribing rules for visitors' behaviour (see an example in Figure 4): unauthorised persons are not allowed to move in the burial grounds, play and ball games should take place in a location other than the cemetery, and visitors should take into consideration the bereaved.

Figure 4: Information point near the entrance to Vestre Cemetery (from left to right): "Welcome to the cemetery" sign with guidelines for visitors' behaviour, map of the cemetery, and leaflets. Copenhagen. May 2018



Source: Pavel Grabalov

According to the laws and regulations of Copenhagen’s cemeteries, a coffin grave is protected for a period of 20 years. For an urn burial this period is 10 years. After this time, a grave can be renewed for up to 40 years at a time upon payment. The local regulations also limit the timeframe for how long a grave at each Copenhagen cemetery can be renewed. This provides the opportunity for the Municipality to re-designate cemetery space for other uses after a set period; for example, the Municipality plans to turn the old part of Sundby Cemetery into a park in 2020.

Copenhagen cemeteries got their strategic document “Five Cemeteries Towards 2065” (*Fem kirkegårde mod 2065*) in June 2015 (Copenhagen Municipality 2015). The strategy was prepared by a consulting company, which conducted an ethnographic study as a basis for their recommendations (Nielsen and Groes 2014). The strategy group also included employees of the City Operations Bureau of the Technical and Environmental Administration of the Copenhagen Municipality. The strategy consists of an introduction of the cemeteries’ current challenges and contradictions, a presentation of an overarching policy, and specific guidelines for each cemetery. This document also serves as a starting point for the individual development plans for each of the five municipal cemeteries. A contracted landscape architecture studio prepared these individual plans, and the last one, for Assistens Cemetery, was adopted by the Municipality in 2019.

Methodology

This paper is based on qualitative content analysis of the written strategy documents, supplemented by interviews with experts who work daily with cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen. We determined the sources of relevant data in a snowball sampling process which started with an interview with municipal employees in both cities. We asked practitioners to pinpoint the documents they use and the organisations they contact in their daily work. In total we identified two strategic documents and interviewed ten people, six in Oslo and four in Copenhagen, over the course of 2018 (see Figure 5 for a list of all data sources). Since we have chosen to focus this research on cemetery planning policies, we did not include individuals and organisations which were not referenced by the strategies or the interviewees (e.g. funeral companies).

Figure 5: Data sources in Oslo and Copenhagen

Type of Data	Oslo	Copenhagen
Documents	"Future Cemeteries – Great Green Urban Space" (Oslo Municipality 2017)	"Five Cemeteries Towards 2065" (Copenhagen Municipality 2015)
Interviews	The Cemeteries and Burials Agency: 2 interviewees	The City Operations Bureau: 3 interviewees
	The Department of Culture and Sport: 2 interviewees	
	Landscape Architect: 1 interviewee	Landscape Architect: 1 interviewee
	The Community Church Council: 1 interviewee	

The interviews took approximately one hour each and were conducted in English. We provided an interview guide to all participants (there was one participant who did not have time to read the guide before the interview). The guide helped us to consistently cover different aspects of the participants’ work with cemeteries but at the same time left space for other topics to emerge from the conversation. It included themes such as participants’ daily work and cooperation with other organisations, legal and strategic documents which guide their work, current challenges cemeteries face, and directions for the future.

First, we analysed the texts of the strategies and the interview transcripts separately but using the same method. Based on Brinkmann and Kvale (2018), we highlighted relevant fragments of the texts which could give us explanations for the development of the strategies. We grouped the highlighted fragments into categories of similar reasons. Each category was described, named and supplemented with illustrative quotes from either the strategies or the interviews.

Secondly, we merged our initial findings from the strategies and the interviews together. We looked for overarching categories which could connect the reasons revealed during the analysis. We included both the reasons mentioned only in the strategies or the interviews, and reasons mentioned in both sources of data at once.

For the presentation of our findings, we have translated the quotations from the written strategies into English from Norwegian and Danish. In addition, we have slightly edited the language of the interview quotations in order to improve coherence while preserving the original meaning. We have anonymised the interviewees by assigning each a number, which follows each direct quotation below.

Why do Oslo and Copenhagen Need New Cemetery Strategies?

We identified several explanations for the need for new strategies for the development of cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen. Figure 6 gives an overview of the results of the analysis. Both cities share many of the same reasons, but they also have separate motivations. In the sections below we explore and discuss these reasons in detail and illustrate them by using quotes from the interviews and the strategies.

Figure 6: Reasons for the development of new cemetery strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen

Oslo	Copenhagen
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Densification and demand for green spaces • Existing recreational activities within the cemeteries • Need to safeguard the future of the cemeteries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of spiritual aspects • Diversity of burial practices and memorial forms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipality’s focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surplus of burial space • Administrative challenges

Densification and Demand for Green Spaces

In both cities, policymakers and practitioners view cemeteries as resources to provide access to green space for citizens. The strategic documents and interviewees referenced population

growth, densification and greater demand for green areas as well-understood reasons to use cemeteries in new ways: “[i]n a densifying city, the land must be used smarter and more efficiently; in this process the cemeteries will increase their role as green elements of the city” (Oslo Municipality 2017: 2). A representative of the Community Church Council from Oslo explained that the decrease in the amount of green spaces in the city has led to more active use of cemeteries for recreational activities. The representatives of the Department of Culture and Sport in Oslo also emphasised the pressure on green areas, including cemeteries, in times of densification of the city. According to them, the new cemetery strategy has helped to raise awareness about the role of cemeteries among other departments of the Oslo Municipality participating in the development of the strategy.

Existing Recreational Activities within the Cemeteries

The authors of Copenhagen’s strategy note that despite a lack of intentional planning for it, recreational use of cemeteries has increased in recent years. In Oslo, while recreation is visible (see Figure 7), it is not recognised in official planning and management documents. According to our interviewee from the Department of Culture and Sport, the Oslo Municipality wants to understand “how we, as a city, can develop them [cemeteries] so that they’re more in line with what people actually use them for” (Interviewee 3).

Figure 7: A visitor walking dogs in Vår Frelzers Cemetery in Oslo. May 2018



Source: Pavel Grabalov

Making cemeteries more accommodating for recreational purposes will potentially bring more people to these places, which can be positive in terms of safety. Some of our interviewees touched upon this issue, while the strategic documents only briefly recognise it. As a representative of the Oslo Department of Culture and Sport noted:

We know that from other areas of urban planning that more people is one factor that makes places more secure and safer. So having more people there actually also makes these areas safer places in the city which is definitely only a good thing (Interviewee 3).

Need to Safeguard the Future of the Cemeteries

According to the authors of Copenhagen's strategy, the document should serve as an instrument to safeguard and renovate the cemetery space in the city. At the same time, several interviewees from Copenhagen noted that the current strategy does not involve a separate budget. Each new project instead follows a standard budget process, which might lead to partial or slow realisation of the strategy.

In the case of Oslo, the strategy does not explicitly acknowledge secure future of cemeteries as one of its aims. However, a couple of interviewees mentioned it, such as a Norwegian landscape architect who said:

I like if people feel connected to the cemetery. They also will fight for it as cemeteries are under pressure all the time because they want to build closer to them or even sometimes take parts of them to other things. And I think if people like or feel connected to the cemetery they would help to fight to keep it like that (Interviewee 5).

To find resources to safeguard the future of the cemeteries was also important:

It's easier if you can argue that cemeteries also are parks, they are recreational areas, they have values for everybody in the society, not only for those who have family buried here. It's just easier to keep them in the way we want them (Interviewee 5).

However, compared to British cemeteries, which need to attract audience and accommodate new activities in pursuit of financial survival (Paraskevopoulou 2019), Oslo's and Copenhagen's strategies as well as the statements of our interviewees, do not include financial concern as a reason for their development. This may be due to the fact that the municipalities have a stronger role in managing cemeteries in the Scandinavian cities than in Britain.

Presence of Spiritual Aspects

In both Copenhagen and Oslo, we found that the strategies and interviewees presented cemeteries as a special type of green space with its own unique qualities and meanings, defined by the presence of the dead. This distinctive character of cemeteries is a reason to develop specific strategies, different from those for other green public spaces. According to one municipal employee from Copenhagen, the cemeteries provide special benefits as quiet spaces imbued with memories and history. This interviewee used the expression

“philosophical park” (Interviewee 7) to conceptualise the unique character of urban cemeteries.

Such a conceptualisation resonates with an explanation of why people should come to the cemetery, given by the representative of the Oslo Department of Culture and Sport:

Being more aware that there is death connects people more to life. That might not be a political project, but more a philosophical one. I think on an overall societal level that death is very isolated from modern life. Very much. You don’t have your parents in your home on their last day anymore, they are in retirement houses or in hospitals. I also think that people need to be more connected to death as such because it’s a part of life (Interviewee 3).

The importance of this death-related aspect of the cemeteries, whether it is “philosophical”, spiritual or transcendental, as a reason to develop cemetery-specific strategies, was more evident in the interviews than in the documents.

For example, the landscape architect from Norway reflected on how attitudes towards spiritual aspects vary across time and among different people:

I think maybe the relationship to death is changing, I don’t know. Because I think lots of people like the quietness you can find in the cemeteries and they don’t feel uncomfortable walking around, looking at tombstones, reading names, real stories of people who lived before but now are dead and it isn’t painful. It’s kind of a green beautiful park in the city, but even something more because it has another meaning (Interviewee 5).

For an interviewee from the Copenhagen Municipality the development of the strategy also reflects a change in the public view of cemeteries:

Especially in the [19]60–70’s, a cemetery has been something that was hidden behind walls. And I think the walls were very much a symbol of the old way of thinking of cemeteries as something you visit only if you visit a grave. So, the policy moves to open up a cemetery and to use it for [different activities]. Not that you should allow all kinds of playing soccer and stuff in the cemetery but it’s to say the cemetery can be something special in the city. And people should use that (Interviewee 8).

The authors of Copenhagen’s strategy express the same sentiment when they write that the cemeteries have important common values, including cultural, historical and natural ones, and should be open to everyone.

Diversity of Burial Practices and Memorial Forms

In both cities, the cemetery strategies call for greater diversity in terms of the burial practices and memorial forms to be supported. They aim to promote diversity on different levels. Examples of new burial and memorial practices which Oslo’s strategy proposes include woodland burials, columbaria and pre-defined places for ash scattering. Both cities intend to promote less space-consuming practices: cremation in the case of Oslo and woodland burials in Copenhagen. Burial and memorial practices are constantly evolving, so Copenhagen’s strategy prescribes the development plans for each of the five municipal

cemeteries to be flexible and open. This is especially important considering the long, fifty-year time frame of Copenhagen's strategy.

Oslo's strategy was also motivated by another type of diversity: Oslo is a city open to all religious beliefs and non-beliefs. According to the authors of the strategy, the cemeteries should accommodate the diverse religious and spiritual needs of all citizens. Although Oslo and Copenhagen are primarily Protestant Christian cities, both have diverse populations. Therefore, many religious groups have their own sections in municipal cemeteries (e.g. Catholics, Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians). The representative from the Oslo Department of Culture and Sport confirmed that the religious aspect is important for the future development of the cemeteries because of the great number of belief systems in the city. However, the strategic document itself includes only general phrases about religious diversity without providing concrete solutions. The representative of the Community Church Council of Oslo thinks that a clear weak point in the strategy is that religious groups were not consulted during its development. Without immersing ourselves in the discussion about similarities and differences between religion and spirituality (see, for example, Oman 2018), we should acknowledge that working closely with religious groups is one way of dealing with spirituality in planning. Here it seems there is a lot of work to do in both cities.

Surplus of Burial Space

According to Copenhagen's strategy, the cemeteries there face specific challenges due to a surplus of burial space. Two factors explain such a surplus. First, the rate of cremation has increased, which correlates with less space-consuming burial practices. Compared to coffin graves, for example, shared areas for the interment of ashes require less space. Second, as mentioned earlier, after 20 years it becomes a grave-owner's responsibility to renew and pay for a grave, which not all people choose to do. The strategy notes that unused burial space leads to degradation of traditional cemetery qualities. The authors of the strategy explained that it is "unfavourable for the cemeteries" since "when areas lose structure and identity, it discourages customers to choose such areas for burial because they are characterised by openness and lack of identity. The room for grief no longer exists" (Copenhagen Municipality 2015: 6).

The use of this extra space for other purposes, including recreation, is not programmed. Hence policymakers need to look for new ways of using extra cemetery space or even, as in the case of the old part of Sundby cemetery, to transform it into a park completely. The surplus of space is unique for Copenhagen and our interviewees from Oslo do not acknowledge facing such a problem in the city now.

Administrative Challenges

Copenhagen's strategy aimed to address the Municipality's internal administrative challenges. As mentioned by one of the interviewees, the city needed the strategy after a change of managers and the dispersal of cemetery responsibilities across different municipal agencies. The development of Copenhagen's strategy was also in line with the innovation

agenda of the Technical and Environmental Administration of Copenhagen, inspired by the ideas of liveability and provision of services for citizens (Munthe-Kaas 2015). Innovation is part of the Oslo Municipality's agenda as well, and one interviewee mentioned that it helped inspire the strategy. According to the strategy, the Oslo Municipality wants the Cemeteries and Burials Agency to be more innovative in introducing new burial forms and environmentally-friendly solutions.

After its approval, Oslo's strategy was discussed in a national newspaper as a part of the political agenda of the city's left-green government (Sørgjerd 2018), which begs the question of to what degree politics influenced the development of the strategy. The representative of the Department of Culture and Sport noted that while cemeteries had not been on the political radar in Oslo for a long time, they are a "very important area to develop on the political level because everyone has a relation to the cemeteries" and they are a "large part of the city" (Interviewee 3). According to this interviewee, local politicians welcomed the strategy because they got "a chance to discuss the role of cemeteries and actually in what direction we should go" (Interviewee 3).

Contrary to this, the interviewee from the Cemeteries and Burials Agency explained the lack of political interest in the cemeteries in the past as follows: "if you are a politician, you can't win an election saying that we have made very nice graveyards" (Interviewee 1). To quantify these comments, we reviewed the political programmes prepared by ten parties which entered the city council after the recent municipal election in Oslo in September 2019 and found that cemeteries were not in their focus. Only two parties – the Christian Democratic Party (KrF 2019) and the Centre Party (Oslo Senterparti 2019) – briefly mentioned cemeteries, both aiming to safeguard land for them in the planning and development process. Other parties did not even touch upon this topic.

Focus of the Oslo Municipality on Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

Compared to Copenhagen, Oslo's strategy is more focused on the environmental aspect of the development of cemeteries and their contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Discussing the background of Oslo's strategy, one interviewee pointed to a local political focus on green and environmentally-friendly development – the so-called "green shift" (Hofstad and Torfing 2017). Oslo has ambitious goals in climate adaptation and mitigation and was the European Green Capital of 2019. Another interviewee from the Cemeteries and Burials Agency confirmed that the green and environmental focus of the current government of Oslo was important for the strategy's development because "we are mainstreaming environmental issues in all departments" and the first draft of the strategy was written with significant input from an employee of the Agency who was "very interested in green work" (Interviewee 2). In general such attention to the "green" role of cemeteries is in line with a long history of green infrastructure planning in Oslo (Jørgensen and Thorén 2012). The authors of the strategy think that cemeteries can support Oslo's green infrastructure because of their significance for recreation, biodiversity, local climate and flood prevention.

The landscape architect in Copenhagen also recognised cemeteries' potential for adaptation to climate change through storm water management. However, unlike Oslo, such

adaptation is not part of the municipal cemetery strategy. Indeed, a cemetery functioning as a green space can infiltrate a large amount of runoff through its permeable surfaces with vegetation and recharge ground water. In addition, the cemetery as a green space in an urban setting can provide room for nature-based solutions for water retention. Currently Copenhagen's cemetery strategy does not cover environmental issues. The landscape architect believed that if the Municipality were to write the strategy today, it would include a focus on climate change adaptation. This interviewee gave an example of a new storm water management project planned for Vestre cemetery, which was developed independently of the cemetery strategy written in 2014.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This paper has explored the various reasons behind the development of the cemetery strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen. We wanted to understand what motivated policymakers to infuse these strategic documents with new directions for the planning and management of cemeteries. In these concluding remarks we outline our key findings and discuss some similarities and differences between the two cities, as well as the limitations of our study and possible directions for future research.

In both cities, the municipal authorities are in charge of management and maintenance of the cemeteries but distribute such duties differently. While Oslo concentrates cemetery responsibilities in a specialised agency, in Copenhagen the same responsibilities are spread across different divisions and merged with maintenance of other public spaces. This might explain the more inclusive approach to the cemeteries by Copenhagen municipality, which actively promotes their recreational potential as "green oases" (Nordh and Evensen 2018).

Looking at cemetery rules and regulations, we have seen that both cities use the word "proper" to define the required maintenance of the cemeteries in general and individual graves, as well as visitors' behaviour. Lacking a precise description, this concept relies upon national culture and values, many of which are shared across Scandinavian countries. Being such a fluid concept, the idea of "proper" is likely to change over time and to be understood differently by various actors, thus leaving space for interpretation. Contrary to Deering (2016), who discussed conflicts over notions of a cemetery's primary function and recreation in the British context, in this study we did not discover any significant disagreements. Both cities' strategies and the interviewees express appreciation for the peacefulness and tranquillity of cemeteries and seek to promote activities which suit the essence of the space as a "philosophical park". As Skår et al. (2018) demonstrated in the case of Oslo, a similar idea is also shared by cemetery users.

We found that Oslo and Copenhagen have in common many reasons for the development of their cemetery strategies. In both cities densification and a growing demand for green spaces provide a basis for the new strategic visions for cemeteries. Furthermore, Oslo and Copenhagen both recognise the recreational potential of their cemeteries as well as the variety of activities already taking place there. In Copenhagen, a surplus of cemetery space contributed to the development of the strategy to maintain quality and secure the future of cemeteries. Long-term safeguarding of cemeteries is also noted in Oslo. Both

municipalities are interested in increasing diversity in terms of supporting different forms of burial and memorialisation and accommodating religious or spiritual needs.

We noticed that the policymakers and practitioners in both cities recognise the spiritual or “philosophical” aspects of cemeteries. Compared to other types of green spaces, such aspects define the character of the cemeteries and call attention to their need for a specific strategy. We believe that this shared recognition of the spiritual aspects of cemeteries fits the concept of “municipal spirituality” established by McClymont (2015), which “offers an inclusive language of public sacredness, rather than rejecting religion as a privatised, under-theorised epiphenomenon of identity” (542). The idea of the cemetery as a sanctuary is not a novelty and can be traced back to nineteenth century park cemeteries in Britain and rural cemeteries in the USA (Sloane 2018), but it has a new representation in contemporary Scandinavia.

Our findings demonstrate that the interviewees in both Oslo and Copenhagen reflected significantly on the spiritual aspects of the municipal cemeteries, but that the strategies themselves do not pay enough attention to this topic. We also noticed that the Copenhagen Municipality demonstrates more cohesive results in this direction. Spirituality, including its impact on public health (Oman 2018), is an important issue in planning, but is often neglected for a variety of reasons (Sandercock 2006). As we know from previous research, some of Oslo’s cemeteries are perceived as restorative environments (Nordh et al. 2017) and their spiritual qualities is one of the factors which affects such a perception. Thus, working with the spirituality of urban cemeteries might positively contribute to the municipality’s efforts to promote public health across different sectors. According to van den Bosch (2019), landscape architecture as a field has been successful in incorporating spiritual values and may provide powerful insights into how to embody spirituality in cemeteries’ development and management in practice.

Looking at postsecularism as a positive agenda, Herman et al. (2012) note that it recognises “values, ethics and spirituality, in a broad sense, as potentially useful building blocks in the creation of a city” (61). By acknowledging the embodied spirituality of the cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen, the strategies for their development contribute to bringing such values forward in overall city planning discourses. Memorial forms and memorialisation practices are important areas through which spirituality is materialised. Holloway et al. (2018) demonstrate the lack of scholarly knowledge on the role and function of spirituality in contemporary memorialisation. The strategies which we studied seek to satisfy the changing demands of citizens by introducing new burial forms and promoting greater diversity among them. However, they do not provide policies for systematic work with the spiritual values of cemeteries.

Despite a scholarly discussion about the possible negative environmental impact of cemeteries and funeral practices due to body decomposition (Fiedler et al. 2012) and cremation (Mari and Domingo 2010), we did not encounter any mentions of this from the interviewees or in the texts of the strategies. We could identify only the positive perception of cemeteries as green urban spaces, especially in Oslo.

Along with many similar reasons for the development of the strategies in the two cities, we found a few differences. Oslo’s strategy focuses on strengthening the environmental

potential of the cemeteries, while the Copenhagen Municipality concentrates more on social aspects. The environmental focus of Oslo's policy is influenced by the more general "green shift" of Oslo towards becoming a sustainable and environmentally-friendly city (Hofstad and Torfing 2017). Although Copenhagen also has ambitious environmental targets, the development of its cemetery strategy was more in line with the Municipality's emphasis on innovation, liveability and provision of services for citizens (Munthe-Kaas 2015).

Both cities adopted their strategies quite recently, and thus it is too early to analyse their full implications. However, we have made some observations which support our findings. During the programme of the European Green Capital in 2019, the Oslo Municipality chose a cemetery gardener as an "ambassador". He shared his experience of the "green shift" in cemetery management, including the use of electric machines (Oslo Municipality 2019b). In Copenhagen we noticed how the Municipality has facilitated recreational activities at the cemeteries, including provision of extra toilets, trash cans and information signs to accommodate visitors who came to see cherry trees blossom in Bispebjerg cemetery (see Figure 8). Nevertheless, how the strategy might shape the future of the cemeteries requires additional study.

Figure 8: Cherry trees blossom in Bispebjerg Cemetery, Copenhagen. April 2018



Source: Helena Nordh

A further difference was that while Copenhagen's strategy deals with the internal administrative challenges of scattering cemetery responsibilities across municipal departments, Oslo's strategy is more integrated into the politics of the city. In our analysis

we saw that Oslo's strategy significantly reflects the Municipality's "green" focus, which the left-green city government of 2014–2019 inherited from their forerunners and strengthened substantially. However, the interviewees expressed ambivalence regarding the importance of the cemeteries themselves in municipal politics. Do they only help to illustrate the general "green" goals of the local politicians, or do they have their own important place on the agenda, separate from other green spaces? Our limited findings in this direction do not allow us to answer this question with certainty, but we can suggest that so far cemeteries attract quite limited political interest.

One of the potential topics for discussion around cemeteries is collaboration between the Municipality of Oslo, which manages the cemeteries, and the Church of Norway, which is responsible for the cemeteries by law. Rather than providing new directions for such collaboration, the strategy ignored this question. In broader terms, the Scandinavian cemeteries can give useful insights into debates on the relationship between the public (municipal) and the private (religious or spiritual) in contemporary cities – a topic we aim to cover in future publications.

We narrowed our analysis to the cemeteries of only two Scandinavian capital cities; thus, we cannot claim that our findings are general enough to apply to other cemeteries in Scandinavia, let alone other parts of the world. At the same time, the results of our analysis contribute to a more nuanced understanding of cemeteries as a special type of green space, which might be relevant for planning in other densifying cities with strong sustainability agendas. Other cities might learn from the experiences of Oslo and Copenhagen how to address the complexity of urban cemeteries in strategic planning, including how to consider the spiritual aspects. Looking ahead, we would like to explore what kind of future policymakers and practitioners envision for Scandinavian urban cemeteries.

The concert in Arendal cemetery ended when it started to get dark. The festival staff began dismantling the stage and taking away the seats. In the main alley, lamps were lit. The audience walked out of the concert area in a variety of directions and along different paths. Some decided to visit the graves of their relatives or friends on the way home. We overheard many discussing how special it was to be in the cemetery in the dark for the first time. Such cemetery events vividly demonstrate how versatile urban cemeteries can be.

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Authors

Pavel Grabalov is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Public Health Science, Faculty of Landscape and Society, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). This paper is part of his current PhD project devoted to the role of cemeteries in contemporary cities.

Contact: pavel.grabalov@nmbu.no

Helena Nordh is a Professor in Landscape Planning at the Department of Public Health Science, Faculty of Landscape and Society, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU). Her research bridges environmental psychology and landscape architecture/planning/management with a focus on people-environment interactions.

Contact: helena.nordh@nmbu.no