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The Future of Urban Cemeteries as Public Spaces: Insights from Oslo and Copenhagen

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ABSTRACT

Public spaces are believed to make cities more liveable, healthy and socially equal. To date, discussions about public spaces have primarily revolved around emblematic types, such as squares and parks, while little attention has been paid to cemeteries. Drawing on a review of public space scholarship and cemetery research, an analysis of strategies for cemetery development in two Scandinavian capitals, Oslo and Copenhagen, and interviews with stakeholders, this paper elaborates on the cemetery as a special type of public space. Our findings demonstrate the potential of cemeteries' contribution to the urban environment as multifunctional public spaces – the trajectory envisioned by the two municipalities.

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Cemetery; public space; spirituality; liminality; multicultural society; multifunctionality

Introduction

Inclusive, accessible and green public spaces are a key focus of the UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda, which emphasises these spaces' critical role "in the formation and regeneration of healthy, prosperous and equitable cities" (Mehaffy et al., 2019, p. 134). The concept of public space is of central interest to urban studies (Mitchell, 2017). In this growing body of literature, researchers have examined different types of space, such as squares (Whyte, 1980), parks (Neal et al., 2015), and markets (Watson, 2009). However, little has been done to explore cemeteries as public spaces.

In Copenhagen (Denmark) and Oslo (Norway), the two Scandinavian cities in this study, cemeteries fulfil two basic principles of public space (Zukin, 1995): open access and public stewardship. Furthermore, they are well-maintained park-like environments (Skår et al., 2018) aimed at covering all citizens' burial and cremation needs (Cabinet of Denmark, 2020; Norwegian government, 1996). We see a need for a discussion about Scandinavian urban cemeteries as one special type of public space which helps to unpack the "nature of public space, its meanings and functions, and especially its transformations in the contemporary cities" (Staeheli & Mitchell, 2008, p. xix). To push such debates forward, we examined how Scandinavian cemeteries are described by practitioners involved in cemetery development and what future is imagined for cemeteries, as portrayed in strategic policy documents for Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemetery development. We aim to contribute to theories on public space and deepen the understanding of the cemetery's role in contemporary Scandinavian cities and planning agendas.

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Public spaces are neither permanently fixed nor defined and thus need to be examined from temporal perspectives. Cemeteries are especially interesting places to study over time, as they point towards eternity. Swensen and Brendalsmo (2018) discovered that Norwegian cemeteries have been in an in-between area of the private–public realms for centuries. Drawing on these findings, we focused on exploring the future of cemeteries in two Scandinavian cities, Oslo and Copenhagen. Such an analysis of cemeteries' transformation pathways will allow us to capture the essential characteristics of cemeteries as public spaces, which is difficult just by looking at their current status.

The use, experience and development of cemeteries strongly depend on contextual aspects (Nordh et al., 2021; Quinton et al., 2020; Rae, 2021), such as the physical settings, culture and national institutions as well as global processes (Walter, 2020). Davies and Bennett (2016) examined cemetery trends in Australia and argued that, due to lower visitation rates and changing burial practices, the social relevance of cemeteries was being challenged. Sloane (2018) explored challenges posed for the future of cemeteries by significant cultural shifts in the USA, such as secularisation, the critique of the death industry's professionalisation, the rise of environmentalism, and the growing popularity of public and digital mourning. But what do we know about current cemetery trends in Scandinavia, the region where this study is situated?

Previous research from Scandinavia has shown that the primary function of cemeteries – as a burial ground and place for memorialisation – often interplays with other functions (Skår et al., 2018; Wingren, 2013). Some urban cemeteries in Oslo are found to accommodate recreational activities, including walking, jogging, dog walking and picnicking (Evensen et al., 2017). In a study of two Norwegian cemeteries, Skår et al. (2018), inspired by Henri Lefebvre's ideas, noted that "one can see the varied use of this cemetery as 'the right to the city', a struggle to 'de-alienate' urban space through the appropriation of space" (p. 377). Unlike the studies above, which focus on people's use and perception, we take a bird's-eye view of the cemetery's role in contemporary cities and explore Oslo's and Copenhagen's municipal perspectives on cemeteries and cemetery futures.

In another study from Scandinavia, Kjøller (2012) showed the administrative ambiguity of Danish cemeteries, recognised as part of green infrastructure but managed by the Church in Denmark with little consideration of the objectives of green infrastructure management. Nordh and Evensen (2018) identified a similar ambiguity in the planning documents of Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm (Sweden). These municipalities categorise cemeteries as green infrastructure, but do not ascribe them the same qualities as other types of public green spaces. Our paper goes a step further, moving from city-level plans to considering cemetery-specific strategic policy documents that Oslo's and Copenhagen's municipalities produced recently (Copenhagen municipality, 2015; Oslo municipality, 2017), hereafter called *strategies*. Despite differences in their lengths and formats, both strategies demonstrate new thinking that enables interesting discussions regarding the role of urban cemeteries as public spaces. The similarities between Oslo's and Copenhagen's cultural and administrative contexts allowed us to contrast the documents, which would be difficult to do if they came from significantly different settings.

We organised this paper as follows: first, we outline our analytical framework built on public space scholarship and cemetery research; second, we summarise the cemetery contexts in Oslo and Copenhagen and the research methods employed; third, we present and discuss the findings by elaborating on the analytical framework's dimensions (liminal, spiritual, multicultural and multifunctional spaces). We continue with some suggestions regarding what kinds of public spaces the dimensions shape and how the dimensions could change. The paper concludes with a summary of our findings and ideas for implications for planning practice and future research avenues.

Analytical Framework

In this paper, while acknowledging the ongoing debate about the essence of the concept of public space (Qian, 2020), we demonstrate how the case of urban cemeteries challenges rigid interpretations of public space. If access is one of the key issues of being public (Madanipour, 2017), we question what kind of access. Staeheli and Mitchell (2008) recognised not only physical access but also issues connected to feelings of receptivity, hospitality and comfort as well as allowed and acceptable actions and activities. In this sense, public space is where the public *can* be (physical access) and *wants* to be (symbolic access). Access to public space is never absolute and varies across places and cultures, something Bodnar (2015) called "graduated publicness" (p. 2099). To situate cemeteries within the spectrum, we developed an analytical framework consisting of four dimensions – *liminal, spiritual, multicultural* and *multifunctional* – which this section elaborates on.

Type-classifying public spaces is a powerful analytical tool that demonstrates the magnitude of such spaces' roles in cities (Franck & Huang, 2020). While cemeteries are sometimes mentioned as examples of public spaces, position of cemeteries in such typologies is inconsistent. Carmona (2010), in his comprehensive classification of public spaces, places cemeteries in a category of public open space with parks, gardens, commons and urban forests. For Chiodelli and Moroni (2014), cemeteries, schools and hospitals are special public spaces designated for particular functions. In these typologies, cemeteries seem to be between different categories, being *liminal* spaces, the first dimension of our analytical framework.

The concept of liminality describes border crossings: spaces where different worlds interweave (Hajer & Reijndorp, 2001). Depending on the object of study, liminality can be operationalised in various ways (see, e.g. Zukin, 1991). The concept has been used in cemetery research by Deering (2012) and Francis et al. (2005), who pointed out that cemeteries combine a real, locatable place with a metaphorical place of pure emotions and senses. Maddrell (2016) has discussed the cemetery as a place that connects the bereaved and the deceased. Liminality also relates to planning documents' ambiguity regarding treating cemeteries as part of the green infrastructure (Nordh & Evensen, 2018). Cemeteries' liminality lies not only in their spatial character but also in their ability to accommodate complex meanings, different from other urban spaces. Such liminality situates cemeteries between clear positions and static forms, both in public space discourse and in people's everyday lives. The liminal dimension can be discovered in the tensions between various sets of meanings played out in cemeteries.

The second dimension of our framework is *spiritual* space. The presence of death brings spirituality, which we understand as "the search for the sacred" (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 17), into a physical space. Avoiding immersing ourselves in a discussion about the relationship between spirituality and religion (Pargament et al., 2013), we consider religion an integral part of spirituality. Regardless of religious views, cemeteries bring thoughts of something bigger than we as humans and individuals are. Religion and spirituality are often rejected by urban planners as part of the private sphere, irrelevant to the secular nature of the profession and even something potentially divisive (Sandercock, 2006). However, religion and spirituality have important spatial implications (Greed, 2016) and can contribute to public health (Oman, 2018). Calling for more active incorporation of spiritual aspects into planning practice, McClymont (2015) proposed the concept of "municipal spirituality", which pertains to public sacredness. The spiritual dimension is interrelated with the restorative aspects of spaces: spirituality can enable the perception of an environment as restorative (Bell et al., 2018), and restorative environments can lead to spiritual discoveries

(Ouellette et al., 2005). The cemetery as a restorative environment has been explored further by others (e.g. Lai et al., 2019; Nordh et al., 2017).

Young (2011) pointed out that public space allows encounters with people "whose social perspectives, experience, and affiliations are different" (p. 119). In diversifying Scandinavian societies, cemeteries are open for all, both in terms of physical access and as burial space, regardless of religion or culture. Thus, we can explore a cemetery as a *multicultural* space, the third dimension of our framework, which highlights the presence of different ethnic and religious groups in society and their right to positive inclusion (Cianetti, 2020).

Madanipour (2016) argued that public spaces can encourage diverse and tolerant public cultures but with some challenges. Researchers have already engaged with challenges around cemeteries in multicultural societies (see, e.g. Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021; McClymont, 2018; Wingren, 2013).[1] The right to religious expression is one of the key principles of socially just cemetery systems (Rugg, 2020), and is particularly relevant from a public space perspective. In the Norwegian context, Swensen and Skår (2019) discovered that cemeteries can stimulate intercultural contacts and bridge differences by sharing compassion.

We will now describe the last dimension, the cemetery as a *multifunctional* space. Public spaces are functionally programmed for particular types of activities and behaviours, but the range of activities differ. Hajer and Reijndorp (2001) argued that predefined monofunctionality of some spaces (for example, shopping malls) does not allow them to become genuinely public, even if they are publicly accessible. However, actual use can differ from planned functionality: for instance, shopping malls are experienced as public spaces by some groups (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000; Van Melik & Pijpers, 2017). Cemeteries can be considered monofunctional. They are created primarily as burial grounds and places for memorialisation but play many secondary functions (Evensen et al., 2017; Quinton & Duinker, 2019; Woodthorpe, 2011). Based on the British context, McClymont (2016) demonstrated that while cemetery functions may conflict, they usually coexist peacefully.

Woodthorpe (2011) described cemeteries as simultaneously containing different meanings and functions and called for holistic studies of such a complex phenomenon. In our analysis, we aim to follow this lead and explore our empirical material from Oslo and Copenhagen through the four dimensions described above.

Context and Methods

Both Oslo and Copenhagen acknowledge the value of public spaces and their contribution to public health, sustainability, liveability, integration and economic competitiveness (Carmona et al., 2019). Such attention to public spaces at the municipal level, together with recent cemetery-specific strategies, makes Oslo and Copenhagen rich cases for a discussion about cemeteries as a special type of public space.

Cemeteries occupy a substantial amount of Oslo's and Copenhagen's green space (for an overview of the cemetery context in both cities, see Table 1). Although the cemeteries were often established in the outskirts of the cities, due to urban expansion many of them are now situated in built-up areas. Because of high cremation rates and grave-reuse practices, Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries (unlike many cities worldwide) do not lack space. Some cemeteries in Copenhagen even have a surplus of burial space (Grabalov & Nordh, 2020).

Both cities manage their cemeteries themselves, so municipalities play the leading role in determining and financing cemetery development. In Oslo, the Lutheran Christian Church of Norway, through the Community Church Council, owns the cemeteries' land and has legal responsibility for

Table 1. Cemetery contexts in the municipalities of Oslo and Copenhagen (based on Grabalov & Nordh, 2020).

	Oslo	Copenhagen
Area	130.85 km^2	76.8 km^2
Population (2019)	676,813	623,404
Number of cemeteries managed by the municipality	20	5
Total land area (share of total green space)	186 ha (7%)	130 ha (6%)
Cremation rate (2019)	75%	94%
Reuse a grave after	20 years	20 years
Responsibility	The Community Church Council	The Copenhagen municipality
Management	Oslo municipality's Cemeteries and Burials Agency of the Department of Culture and Sport	Copenhagen municipality's City Operations Bureau of the Technical and Environmental Administration

cemeteries; however, due to a special arrangement, management and maintenance is carried out by the Cemeteries and Burials Agency of Oslo municipality (Skår et al., 2018). Among Norwegian municipalities, where the Church of Norway has traditionally been in charge of cemetery provision and management (Hadders, 2021), Oslo is one of the few exceptions (Van den Breemer, 2021). The responsibility for managing cemeteries in Copenhagen is dispersed among sections of the municipal City Operations Bureau, which also manages other public spaces. Besides the five cemeteries operated by the municipality, three burial grounds are owned and managed by the Lutheran Christian Church in Denmark and one by the Jewish community. However, since those cemeteries are not part of Copenhagen's cemetery strategy, we did not include them in the scope of our analysis.

The cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen accommodate both coffin burial and interment of ashes, which means that there is no difference between cemeteries and crematoria gardens, common in other parts of Europe (Nordh et al., 2021). National funeral legislation (Cabinet of Denmark, 2020; Norwegian government, 1996) requires that all human remains should be disposed in a cemetery, except for scattering of ashes in nature, which few have applied for (Høeg, 2019).

The cemeteries in both cities are park-like environments with natural components, such as grass, trees, flowers and sometimes water features. However, they have a unique character (see Figure 1). Oslo's cemeteries are characterised by open grassland with rows of uniform gravestones, whereas

Figure 1. Typical cemetery landscape: left – open grassland in Nordre cemetery in Oslo (June 2020), and right – graves surrounded by hedges in Bispebjerg cemetery in Copenhagen (April 2018). Source: Pavel Grabalov.

secluded areas with hedges around graves are typical of Copenhagen's cemeteries. Maintenance levels are generally high and prized by visitors (Kjøller, 2012; Nordh et al., 2017).

Recently, both cities have developed strategies for their cemeteries' planning and management. Copenhagen's strategy was adopted in 2015 and laid foundations for the city's cemetery development for the next 50 years (Copenhagen municipality, 2015). The project group that prepared the strategy consisted of employees of a consulting company and the City Operations Bureau. The document is based on an ethnographic study (Nielsen & Groes, 2014) through which the authors of the strategy identified five tensions crucial for the development of cemeteries: a public resource/a private place; a place for recreation/a place for grief; a place for all/a place for certain activities; a familiar place/an unknown and sometimes scary place; and a timeless place/a place in transformation (Copenhagen municipality, 2015). In its 36 pages, Copenhagen's strategy provides information about the aims and challenges of cemetery development, discusses the five tensions, and provides general directions for developing each of the five cemeteries.

Oslo's strategy – adopted in 2017 – does not have the same ambitious timeframe and provides more general directions for the management and planning of cemeteries (Oslo municipality, 2017). The 13-page document is organised as follows. First, the strategy's aims presented and connected to the overall perspective of Oslo as a green, inclusive and creative city with space for everyone. Second, the strategy introduces the history of Oslo's cemeteries and their contemporary status and challenges. Third, it discusses cemeteries' functions. Finally, it describes a general vision for the cemeteries and sets goals for cemetery development and management.

Elsewhere we identified that Oslo and Copenhagen share many reasons for developing their cemetery strategies, including a growing demand for green urban spaces, cemeteries' recreational potential, and increasing diversity of memorialisation practices (Grabalov & Nordh, 2020). Unfolding these cases further, we now focus on the future trajectories that these strategies propose.

The strategies are at the core of our empirical material. Additionally, in 2018, we conducted semi-structured interviews with six municipal employees involved in cemetery management, two landscape architects, one politician and one representative from the Lutheran Christian Church. We sought interviewees who represented similar units or fields in both cities; however, this turned out to be challenging. Consequently, we interviewed six people in Oslo and four in Copenhagen. We asked the interviewees questions about their daily work with cemeteries, cooperation with other organisations, changes in cemetery management and design over time, and possible visions for the future. Each interview took around one hour and was recorded and transcribed. The ten stakeholder interviews coupled with the strategy documents provided solid material for analysis. Furthermore, we drew on empirical studies regarding how Scandinavian cemeteries are used and perceived by users (Evensen et al., 2017; Nielsen & Groes, 2014; Nordh et al., 2017).

For the analysis, we employed the four analytical dimensions (liminal, spiritual, multicultural and multifunctional spaces) in a top-down, deductive content analysis (Kyngäs & Kaakinen, 2020). We used the four dimensions as codes and marked relevant fragments of text in the strategies and the interview transcriptions. We were especially interested in identifying the empirical material with explicit or implicit statements regarding the future of cemeteries. At the final stage of analysis, we assessed how the four analytical dimensions could change in the future and visualised such changes with a radar chart. To provide excerpts from the strategies,

we translated them from Norwegian and Danish into English; the interviews were originally held in English.

Findings and Discussion

Liminal Space

The liminality of Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries relies on the tensions of their property status, management and design aspects, and actual use. We found several examples of such tensions. Although publicly accessible, cemeteries accommodate private graves. To make the equation even more complicated, cemeteries in Oslo are owned by the Church of Norway. Debates around whether the Church of Norway is a public or private organisation (Morland, 2018) add to the complexities of categorising cemeteries as public spaces. We suspect that most people may not notice who the owner of a cemetery is or think the owner is the municipality because it maintains the space.

Another tension is in the nature of memorialisation practices. While these practices engage with personal emotions of sorrow and grief, they are socially and publicly accepted and recognised in cemeteries. Through memorialisation, private recollections become part of public history. Copenhagen's strategy explicitly acknowledges the tension by saying that cemeteries are "a common cultural, historical and natural resource – that should be accessible to all – and at the same time a personal space connected to private needs and preferences" (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 8). Nordh et al. (2017) demonstrated that cemeteries in Oslo provide visitors with an opportunity to be alone and reflect, which is an underestimated quality in contemporary urban public spaces. At the same time, visitors are alone while among other people, which differs from private spaces, such as home gardens, and more crowded and active public spaces, such as cafes or libraries, where being alone may signal loneliness.

Copenhagen's strategy acknowledges that cemeteries are spaces for all citizens but not for all types of activities: "All types of users should be invited inside as long as they behave with respect for the deceased and their relatives and the cemetery's primary function as a burial ground" (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 9). Such tension feeds the liminality of cemetery spaces and defines what kinds of public spaces they are. In his principles of good public spaces, Carmona (2015) argued that "cities should offer something for everyone in the right locations, rather than everything for everyone everywhere" (pp. 399–400). The specialisation of public spaces gives users choices but often requires some restrictions (Franck & Huang, 2020). The strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen aim to define what cemeteries can offer citizens without eradicating cemeteries' unique characteristics.

The strategies may change the extent of cemeteries' liminality. One way to do that is to provide better physical access to cemeteries by organising more gates and making navigation in the cemeteries easier for visitors. For example, Oslo's strategy suggests: "To increase security and facilitate the use of the areas, the City Council will search for lighting that can increase the quality of the areas, while preserving the cemeteries' dignity" (Oslo municipality, 2017, p. 11). Such measures are likely to make cemeteries more present in the urban fabric and approachable for people and, by doing so, reduce cemeteries' liminality.

Another effort is a stronger approach to communication, which may improve symbolic access. Even if the two strategies do not explicitly discuss it, interviewees agreed on the importance of communication. In Oslo, the emphasis is on changing signs guiding visitors' behaviour and more active use of social media (see Figure 2). According to a Copenhagen municipality employee,

Figure 2. An Instagram post by Oslo's Cemeteries and Burials Agency showing a dog on a leash in Vår Frelsers cemetery. Comments from other users are hidden for anonymisation purposes. Reproduced with permission from the photographer, Dag Inge Danielsen. Source: Gravferdsetaten (2019).

management aims to communicate rules of behaviour to visitors, both through signs and the help of gardeners. Stronger communication strategies function similarly to increased physical access and lighting by reducing the extent of the liminality of cemeteries as public spaces.

Spiritual Space

Both strategies acknowledge urban cemeteries' primary function as burial grounds and places for memorialisation and are crafted to develop in line with this function:

> Here lies our dead who are buried, here you can remember the dead and here you can mourn. In the cemetery, there is an ambiance that can be called elevated. People move here in a markedly different way than in other public spaces. (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 6)

Dealing with emotional and spiritual experiences requires dignity in cemetery maintenance, or, as an interviewee from Oslo's Cemeteries and Burials Agency put it, "in everything we do, we have to think that someone can watch us" (Interviewee 1).

Being spiritually rich places, cemeteries require timeframes different from other public spaces. While Oslo's strategy does not have a defined period, Copenhagen's aim is 50 years. An interviewee from the Copenhagen municipality explained it this way:

> If you buy a grave for your mother, then you might be visiting this grave for the next 30 years, and you expect something in the surroundings also. [. . .] You are reminded that life is short and that it is going to

> end sadly for all of us. And it's a good thing. And especially these days, when we are all just concerned about now, now, now … so I think we can sell that, I think there is an audience for that also in 25 and 35 years. (Interviewee 7)

In that sense, cemeteries can provide qualities missing in contemporary urban cultures that reconfigure their attitudes towards death and mortality (Walter, 2020) and where death and ageing are often avoided.

In the future, cemeteries could better accommodate individualised choices for the deceased and bereaved, as explained by a Copenhagen municipality employee: "I think a new trend is that you not just put flowers on the graves, but you put personal stuff, something that has a special meaning between you and the deceased" (Interviewee 8). A landscape architect from Copenhagen confirmed that people wish for more individualised ways of dealing with the losses, and cemeteries have to adapt.

Both strategies mention new disposal and memorialisation forms, but only the document from Oslo makes new forms a priority and names three to be introduced: a columbarium, predefined places for ash scattering, and forest burial. A politician from Oslo described the latter as "very Norwegian" (Interviewee 3), referring to the national passion for nature. This interviewee also stressed the public character of new burial forms. Compared to the private coffin and urn graves, collective memorial spaces may be perceived as being more public, where strangers can share commemoration.

Nordh et al. (2017) found that Oslo's cemeteries, which combine nature, culture and history, coupled with respect for the deceased and reflection on existential questions, make people perceive them as restorative environments. Spiritual and restorative experiences are somewhat related, as they include components of reflection and contemplation. The strategies recognise cemeteries' restorative aspects for the public, although without an emphasis on mourners. As stated in the strategy, if "tranquillity and peace in a city are increasingly sought after", the cemeteries could answer the question, "Where do Copenhageners have the opportunity to go when they want to be away from the pulsating life of the big city?" (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 13). Cemeteries' restorative aspects are described by the metaphor of a "quiet oasis" (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 25), with nature and heritage as essential elements.

The spiritual dimension of urban cemeteries is difficult to define and can have different meanings for different groups of cemetery visitors. Both the strategies and the interviewees recognised the spiritual importance of cemeteries as places to reflect on life and death and as public spaces for private emotions and individual choices. These meanings are interconnected and together demonstrate how cemeteries can provide Oslo and Copenhagen's citizens with space for "the search for the sacred" (Pargament et al., 2013, p. 17). The cemetery-specific strategies provide insights on how spiritual and thus non-instrumental aspects of urban places can be articulated in planning practices, something that McClymont (2015) urged planners to do by focusing on municipal spirituality.

Multicultural Space

Historically, the national churches in Scandinavia have played an important role in the management of burial grounds, usually constructed around churches, and in Norwegian and Danish, traditionally called *kirkegård*, which literally means "churchyard". While in Denmark this word is still used for any type of burial grounds, in Norwegian a religious-neutral term, *gravplass*, "burial ground" (Ministry of government administration, reform and church affairs, 2010,2011), has been used in official

discourse since 2012. However, *kirkegård* is still commonly used in Norway. Although linguistically knitted to the Lutheran-Christian churches, cemeteries in Norway and Denmark are open to all society members.

While in Oslo and Copenhagen the majority follows Protestant tradition, both cities have special sections for various religious, ethnic and other communities. These include Jews and Muslims in both cities; Buddhists, Catholics, Orthodox Christians, atheists and homosexuals in Copenhagen, and Bahāʾī Faith and Åsatrufellesskapet Bifrost (a Norwegian pagan community) in Oslo. Allowing people to conduct disposal practices in accordance with their belief or tradition is in accordance with inclusive cemetery management and "represent(s) an important part of full citizenship in a multicultural society" (Maddrell et al., 2021, p. 685). One could question whether cemetery sections foster inclusion or exclusion and whether they provide a sense of belonging or unnecessary segregation. However, a Copenhagen municipality employee clarified that these initiatives came from the communities themselves:

> We have made no special sections that were not wished for. We don't do it on our own initiative. We only do it because someone comes to us and says we want to lie together. I personally think it would be more beautiful that just [everyone lies together] … How much together are we? … But I think it's what people want. (Interviewee 7)

Both cities' strategies mention the cemeteries' openness for all citizens, regardless of beliefs or non-beliefs or ethnic or social identity. Otherwise, the multicultural dimension is almost entirely left out of Oslo's strategy. In Copenhagen, the strategy emphasises the role of cemeteries as a meeting place for different cultures and religions: "You also get the opportunity to experience how other individuals and cultures relate to death and say farewell to their dead – a perspective that is often taboo and difficult to talk about in public" (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 13).

In our interviews, the role of cemeteries as multicultural spaces was a prominent topic. A representative of Oslo's Community Church Council explained that the law prescribed consultation with all registered religious and belief organisations for their input in cemetery management and development, but it was difficult to organise productive consultations. The interviewees in both cities mentioned several intercultural challenges, sometimes even pointing to racism, such as the vandalism of Muslim graves and complaints from other mourners about "disturbances" from Roma funeral rituals. These examples indicate the challenges of inclusive cemetery management, a topic that needs further exploration.

Multifunctional Space

Both municipalities aim to strengthen the multifunctional character of urban cemeteries. Oslo's strategy highlights cemeteries' environmental values, specifically the impacts on the local climate and biodiversity. Cemeteries are highlighted as part of the city's green infrastructure, which has a long planning history in Oslo (Jørgensen & Thorén, 2012). By introducing more functions, Oslo's strategy aims to use cemeteries in a "smarter" way (Oslo municipality, 2017, p. 2). This direction includes a temporary gardening project on land reserved for the future expansion of a cemetery and installing beehives in an active cemetery: "This is a good example of combining the use of burial grounds as urban spaces with important climate action" (Oslo municipality, 2017, p. 9).

Copenhagen's strategy focuses more on cemeteries' recreational uses. Not apparent in cemeteries in Oslo, but quite common in Copenhagen, are private and public events, such as music concerts, theatre performances, guided excursions, art exhibitions and weddings. A Copenhagen

municipality employee explained that the strategy opened doors for more events and allowed employees to be less restrictive: "It's obviously a political wish that we should open more, so we open more: we grant people the right to do more things than we did ten years ago" (Interviewee 7). As we demonstrated elsewhere (Grabalov & Nordh, 2020), the presence of recreational activities in the cemeteries motivated the municipalities to develop their strategies. Now we notice that the strategies themselves have become drivers of more active recreational use of the cemeteries.

Copenhagen's strategy more explicitly emphasises the cemeteries' primary function and the need to subordinate cemetery development to this function. Oslo's strategy mentions the same idea but focuses primarily on cemeteries' impact on climate change adaptation and mitigation. This focus can be the reason for the critique raised by Oslo's Community Church Council representative, who thought that "they don't have enough focus that these are cemeteries. They are not playgrounds" (Interviewee 6). At the same time, during the interviews, Oslo's municipality employees emphasised the cemeteries' primary function in the same strong way as their colleagues from Copenhagen.

Both the strategies and the interviewees highlighted the possible conflicts between different activities in the cemeteries while aiming to find a balance between them. An employee of the Copenhagen municipality explained:

> In the summer, we have a lot of people lying on the grass with their blankets and without a lot of clothes on. And next to them there is a grave … That's not so good, so we really have to think about how to mix but not to mix. To take people in so they can drink beer and have fun, but still have the distance to people who have some family burials. (Interviewee 9)

Bringing more people and activities into cemeteries is not always considered to conflict with cemeteries' primary function. Copenhagen's strategy expresses this complementarity as follows:

> For many users – both recreational and bereaved – it is important to be able to "get away" from death in the cemetery. They need death to be demystified by the presence of people and life in the area. Otherwise, the grief can become all-consuming. (Copenhagen municipality, 2015, p. 9)

Moreover, as an interviewee from the Copenhagen municipality noted, "some people might think that it's actually quite appealing to have children playing on your grave and not be placed in some sad area" (Interviewee 8).

Copenhagen's strategy promotes zoning, which differentiates areas for burial and ash interment and sections that are inactive (i.e. more park-like). Such separation should be visible and clear to visitors and should balance the more active use of cemeteries with respect for sorrow and grief. An interviewee from the Copenhagen municipality added that even in recreational zones, the city wants to preserve the cemetery's character (for example, by keeping some heritage tombs), so people, even in 50 years, will know that they are in a cemetery, not a park. A landscape architect from Norway shared a similar idea and stressed the relevance of cemetery gates, which limit access to cemeteries while signalling to visitors that they are entering a special place.

Some of the new burial and memorialisation forms that the strategies propose can better accommodate various activities in the cemeteries. For example, Oslo's strategy emphasises that a section for forest burial, because of its nature-like organisation, will provide better opportunities for secondary functions. Furthermore, compared to traditional coffin graves, collective memorials for urn interments resonate with multifunctional use. Oslo's strategy suggests that future cemeteries

will have more of such areas, which would change the traditional landscape of a Norwegian cemetery.

Juxtaposition of the Four Spaces

In our analysis, we observed how the four dimensions (liminal, spiritual, multicultural and multifunctional) of Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries could change. With the empirical material as a foundation, we will now discuss and speculate about what we foresee as the future of cemeteries in these cities.

First, we noticed measures and goals that would change the cemeteries and possibly reduce the tensions within them. These measures could decrease the level of liminality and bring cemeteries more actively into both planning discourses and people's everyday life. At the same time, liminality is inherent in the character of cemeteries and will continue. Balancing the different aspects of liminality is one of the key directions in cemetery development. Second, cemeteries' spiritual dimensions are likely to remain because of the presence of death. By their nature, cemeteries embody spirituality, an asset that requires special attention in planning and management (McClymont, 2015). Third, we expect the multicultural character of Oslo's and Copenhagen's populations to be mirrored more clearly in cemeteries because of increased immigration and the general debate about inclusion and equality in planning practices (Sandercock, 2000). Finally, because of the strategies, and as addressed by our interviewees, urban cemeteries' multifunctionality in both cities could increase, as cemeteries will integrate and facilitate more functions, including recreational and environmental.

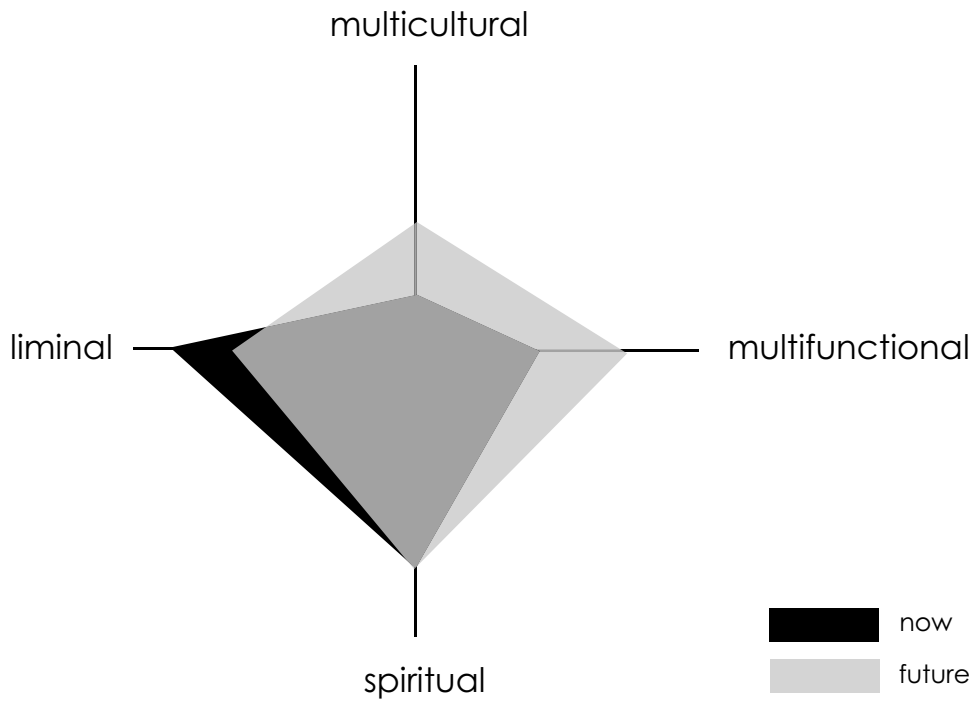

Figure 3. Possible future of cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen as public spaces based on the proposed analytical framework.

A radar chart (see Figure 3) visualises the changes in the four dimensions and suggests that cemeteries in both cities could expand as public spaces. The transformation of cemeteries should be viewed in the context of the major social, political and cultural shifts discussed in public space literature (see, e.g. Bodnar, 2015). For Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries, the most relevant trends are the rise of sustainability agendas and environmental concerns, migration and diversification of populations and pursuing more individualised choices. However, cemeteries are also influenced by cemetery-specific trends connected to how people approach death and bereavement (Walter, 2020). Looking at the planned trajectories for Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries, we argue that they, as public spaces, could play a more diverse role. They could accommodate more functions, cultures, forms of disposal and design ideas, thus serving as inclusive public spaces.

We acknowledge the obstacles in the path to this ideal. Rephrasing Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city (Skår et al., 2018), we ask, who has the right to the cemetery? Whose interests should come first: the bereaved or other visitors'? The strategies suggest some ideas – for example, zoning for different purposes; however, our study demonstrates that policymakers and practitioners tend to view different functions as mutually beneficial. Indeed, cemeteries' primary function and the rules and expectations regarding visitors' behaviours shape certain conditions for other functions. Like Rugg (2020), we argue that the right to the cemetery should be built on principles of social justice, providing dignity and cultural sensitivity.

The interplay between various functions is only one example of the tensions played out in cemeteries. Being truly liminal spaces, cemeteries connect private memories and public history, religious and secular communities and the living and the dead. Returning to Young's (2011) normative ideal of city life, which "provides public places and forums where anyone can speak and anyone can listen" (p. 240), we argue that urban cemeteries can offer special qualities as such forums. However, as Madanipour (2016) noted in his general discussion on culture and tolerance in public spaces, to achieve such an ideal, public spaces – and, we say, cemeteries as well – need to be "a forum for self-expression, discovery and mutual recognition" (p. 53). Otherwise, instead of bringing people closer, cemeteries can do the opposite and manifest the differences and inequalities that already exist in a society. The system of cemetery planning and management has to function as just and equal, and be perceived as such by all communities in the society. We underpin the argument made elsewhere (Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021; Nordh et al., 2021) that allowing for diversity within disposal practices is important. Here, providing specific cemetery sections for religious communities is one example. Furthermore, acknowledging cemeteries in Scandinavia as green spaces for recreational purposes, such as places to go for a walk or to drink a cup of coffee, makes cemeteries more public without necessarily losing their spiritual atmosphere. We believe that cemeteries can succeed as forums of diversity while maintaining their distinct position and role in an increasingly homogenised physical urban environment.

Conclusions

Based on an analysis of empirical material from Oslo and Copenhagen, we have seen examples of how each of the four analytical dimensions – liminal, spiritual, multicultural and multifunctional – are present in the cities' cemetery strategies. Cemeteries in these cities, being public spaces in the sense of access and stewardship, have their distinguishing features shaped by their primary functions as burial grounds and places for memorialisation. As argued elsewhere (Grabalov & Nordh, 2020), the role of cemeteries in cities under densification pressure, such as Oslo and Copenhagen, is

shifting. Changing conditions demand that policymakers pay special attention to urban cemeteries and adapt to maintain cemeteries' apparent characteristics and relevance.

In the analysis of the two cities' cemetery strategies, we highlighted a juxtaposition of the four analytical dimensions and identified that cemeteries have the potential to become more public in the future. Based on the empirical material, we expect the cemeteries in these cities to maintain their spiritual dimension while becoming less liminal, more multifunctional and more multicultural. Over time, their role could become more diversified.

We cannot see all the possible changes and trajectories that could shape the future of Oslo's and Copenhagen's cemeteries. The strategies we have analysed can propose such a future, but changes in society and technology often happen with no planning intentions. We have, however, already witnessed developments related to the strategies' objectives. Since 2021, Norwegian legislation has allowed local authorities to establish columbaria in cemeteries, which the Oslo municipality has planned in its cemetery strategy (Sitter, 2020). The same year, the Copenhagen municipality opened a therapeutic garden in Vestre cemetery (Copenhagen municipality, , n.d.), in line with the strategy's aim to develop some of the cemetery for recreation (Copenhagen municipality, 2019).

Public spaces may have various meanings in different societies (Smith & Low, 2013), which is especially true for cemeteries. This study provides a glimpse into some challenges that arise around a sample of Scandinavian cemeteries and may inspire planners in other regions to reflect on the various functions that cemeteries have and the meanings they represent. We demonstrate the potential of cemeteries' contribution to the urban environment as multifunctional public spaces – the trajectory envisioned by Oslo and Copenhagen's municipalities. We acknowledge the benefits of this idea but argue for the cautious introduction of new functions of cemeteries in view of their primary purpose. The idea of municipal spirituality (McClymont, 2015) offers a powerful foundation for such work and can help planners find the proper language to incorporate and articulate cemeteries' intangible values, including spiritual and religious ones. Opening planning for greater recognition of spirituality requires more than adding one more criterion into planners' check lists; we call for greater attention to spiritual values in planning education, policies development, and participation processes more broadly.

The ways cemeteries' spirituality is embodied and recognised vary greatly across contexts. We encourage more geographically diverse research, particularly on multicultural and multifunctional aspects, not least from users' perspectives, which might differ from policymakers' views. The four-dimensional analytical framework proposed here can provide a point of departure for international research.

Our attempt to discuss cemeteries as a special type of public space provides theory for a nuanced and multifaceted interpretation of the concept of public space and how it is manifested in contemporary cities. While research has been focused for a long time on the social and political aspects of public space (see, e.g. Mitchell, 2017), the case of urban cemeteries demonstrates that public space can also accommodate spirituality and facilitate reflections and contemplations – necessary and often neglected qualities in contemporary cities under densification pressure. This case exemplifies the need for diverse public spaces and recognition of various urban lifestyles and choices (Carmona, 2015). The tensions between the different meanings associated with cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen are inherent not only to cemeteries but to public space in general. We encourage planning theory and practice to engage more with such tensions by working with them rather than against them.

Note

1. See also the research project "Cemeteries and Crematoria as Public Spaces of Belonging in Europe: A Study of Migrant and Minority Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and Integration" (https://cemi-hera.org/).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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