# 1 CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA, FORGOTTEN PUBLIC SPACE IN MULTICULTURAL EUROPE. AN AGENDA FOR INCLUSION AND CITIZENSHIP

Accepted for publication in *Area*. The information, practices and views in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

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**Article type:** Regular paper

**Abstract:** In western Europe, municipal or otherwise state-commissioned cemeteries and crematoria are public spaces and services, open to all. Cemeteries and crematoria grounds are neglected in geographical, planning and policy debates about the character, design, management, use and accessibility of public spaces, and likewise debates about the social inclusion of migrants and minorities. This may reflect a tendency to situate cemeteries socially and geographically in the peripheries of contemporary European society, but they are, nonetheless, sites of vital public health infrastructure, as well as being highly significant symbolic, religious-spiritual, secular-sacred, and emotionally-laden places. Examining cemeteries-crematoria against a criteria of inclusive public space provides new insights into i) the nature of public space and its governance; ii) rights and barriers to shared public spaces and associated infrastructure in everyday multicultural contexts; iii) national-local negotiations of majority-minorities social relations and cultural practices in and through public spaces; and iv) the need to place municipal cemeteries-crematoria centre stage in scholarship and policy on public space which is culturally inclusive and serves all citizens.

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: 10.1111/area.12824

**Acknowledgments:** This paper is grounded in the 'Cemeteries and Crematoria as public spaces of belonging in Europe: a study of migrant and minority cultural inclusion, exclusion and integration' (CeMi) project, funded by Humantities in the European Research Area (HERA). The authors acknowledge this funding, the wider team, and the contribution of project partners and participants; we also wish to express thanks to the journal editors and anonymous reviewers for constructive feedback on this paper.

**Funding information:** Humanities in the European Research Area [Grant number: HERA 2.078]

**Data availability statement:** No new data inform this paper



## 2 INTRODUCTION

> 'Citizens create meaningful public space by expressing their attitudes, asserting their claims and using it for their own purposes. It thereby becomes a meaningful public resource. The process is a dynamic one, for meanings and uses are always liable to change. Renegotiation of understandings is ongoing; contention accompanies the process.' (Goheen 1998: 479)

Public spaces range from grand parades to town squares, promenades and playgrounds, but public cemeteries are rarely examined as part of these symbolic and functional spaces. This paper, grounded in a related European study, examines municipal cemeteries and crematoria gardens (hereafter cemeteries-crematoria) as important but often forgotten public spaces, set within the context of changing trends in burial and cremation and increasingly culturally diverse populations in many European urban centres, large and small. Local pressures on cemeteries-crematoria include land scarcity in urban areas (Kong 2012) and reduced funding due to municipal austerity measures (Maddrell et al 2018). The arguments presented here claim a place for cemeteries-crematoria within critical studies of public spaces, countering their neglect within public space research and policy, whilst also addressing Ye's (2019) call for critical and intentional studies of diversity through a focus on provision for migrants and minorities. Central to both threads of the argument is the recognition that European municipal and other state-commissioned cemeteries and crematoria are sites of essential, social and public

health infrastructure and service provision, making them key public spaces and associated services.

Municipal cemeteries and crematoria were developed in European countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, largely as a means of managing public health issues associated with the disposition of the remains of the dead. Beyond this important practical function, cemeteries-crematoria with their surrounding memorial gardens are highly emotional-affective and symbolic spaces attributed with, and inscribed by, textual and performative expressions of familial and place attachment, personal, religious and cultural identities. In densely populated urban contexts cemeteries can also be valued and used as green leisure spaces (Nordh et al 2017), become sites of anti-social behaviour (Deering 2010), or be threatened by infrastructure or commercial development (Kong 2012). Thus, on the one hand, cemeteries-crematoria are places centred on the universal human experience of loss and remembrance which are expressed through diverse rites and spatial-cultural practices for the disposition of the dead, mourning and remembrance. On the other, they can be perceived as a type of public park, especially in densely populated urban areas (e.g. Vestra Gravlund, Oslo; Assistenskirkegården, Copenhagen; Eastern Cemetery, Dundee), as was evident across many urban areas in Northwest Europe during 2020-21 pandemic restrictions. This co-presence of seemingly antithetical uses and practices (e.g. funerals, grave rituals, running and dog walking) can in some cemeteries can cause tension with other users who attribute different meanings and norms to cemeteries-crematoria (Maddrell et al 2018; Rugg 2018). Public spaces per se are economically, politically and culturally 'charged' (Listerborn 2015), and the spaces and practices within cemeteries-crematoria carry additional symbolic, emotional-affective and/or religious charge (Maddrell et al 2108; 2021). In the context of multicultural and post-secular societies in north western Europe, diverse residents converge on cemeteries as shared public spaces for the disposal of the remains and remembrance of their dead, with varied rituals and practices. However, while discourses of post-secularism can presuppose that 'religion, public life, and secular reason can coalesce into a more or less cooperative and shared space' (Staudigl and Alvis 2016: 590), such co-existence is far from guaranteed, which impacts on the qualities and experience of these public spaces.

The following section outlines key debates about inclusive public spaces as sites of majority-minority citizenship, and competing uses, discourses and norms, leading on to a more detailed analysis of cemeteries-crematoria as public spaces.

## 3 PUBLIC SPACES: SHARED SPACE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION-EXCLUSION IN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETIES

Public space is typically defined as accessible areas, to which all which all citizens have the right to access and use. While some public spaces such as ceremonial squares in capital cities may be monolithic and institutionalised, their size, location and significance varies, as do the uses, users, practices, rhythms and meanings which co-exist in these shared spaces. Public space is typically designed to embody civic functions and values, including elements of 'symbolic significance' (Goheen 1998: 479) which are manifest in material symbols and immaterial norms, which may signify inclusion or exclusion for different groups (Rishbeth 2001). Hence, public spaces need to be evaluated in their local context (Amin 2008) and can be variously – and simultaneously for different people at different times – impersonal, alienating, intimate, inclusive.

At their best, inclusive public spaces can cultivate and reflect a sense of shared 'situated multiplicity' (Amin 2008) within a diverse society, functioning as social spaces where encounters with different Others fosters an inclusionary ethos to those outside of personal circles (Blomley 2009). This co-presence in shared space can create conviviality and cosmopolitanism (Koch and Latham 2012) as experienced though 'fleeting encounters' with strangers or acquaintances in urban public spaces such as marketplaces and libraries, whereby people 'rub along' with little- or un-known others whom they encounter (Watson 2009; Peterson 2017). Where this is the case, public spaces can helpfully be seen as an 'assemblage' of people, practices, meanings, uses and atmospheres (Koch and Latham 2012). Crucially, this includes democratic access to public goods and services, such as a public meeting place, water fountains, toilets, play and exercise equipment, and access to green-blue environments. Significantly, universal access to high quality public spaces is a United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development goal (Duivendooren et al 2021).

In practice many public spaces have been privatised or semi-privatised through regulation, surveillance and/or commoditization (Mitchell 2017). Thus, whilst represented as inherently inclusive, public spaces are not necessarily 'democratic' per se, rather, but are shaped by the ways they are economically, politically and culturally charged. In the context of multicultural societies, whilst public spaces are frequently represented as 'contact zones' of local-transnational encounter (Vertovec 2007), ideas of multicultural coexistence can be prescriptive and romanticised (Qian 2020). As Rishbeth et al. note, 'In thinking through dimensions of

racial and ethnic diversity in public space, it is important to recognise the potential of convivial encounters while not turning a blind eye to seemingly entrenched power structures. For too long, these dynamics have been overly simplified, with a cultural dimension largely missing from critiques of sociability in public space, and a failure to recognise racial inequality in public space access and use' (Rishbeth et al. 2018: 50).

The symbolic significance of public space is typically allied to national-regional-local identity narratives which assume or insist on the maintenance of a certain milieu, which has implications for who and what is acceptable in particular public spaces. Consequently, access to public space is frequently regulated and conditional (Blomley 2009), including being gendered (Beebeejaun 2016), racialised (De Genova 2018), and exclusionary for homeless people and other marginalised groups (Mitchell 2017). At a wider level, political ambitions for inclusive public space intersect with racial equality agenda (De Genova 2018), which also requires fine-grained attention to the multiple sites of encounter and experience where diversity is recognised and negotiated either overtly or in more tacit ways (Neal 2016).

Yet social relations in public spaces are fluid; practices and temporalities shape and transform the qualities of public spaces (Amin 2008; De Backer 2019). Therefore, public space is not defined merely by top-down symbols, values and norms, it is a confluence of material, representational, inhabited, rhythmic and practiced-performed space which can be challenged and contested. Witness, Civil Rights marches, Reclaim the Night, Gay Pride and Black Lives Matter, to name but some, which have each effectively contested exclusionary power relations through the symbolic appropriation of public spaces (Mitchell 2017). Some migrant and ethnic minority communities have likewise deployed protest and/or spectacle in public spaces in order to both affirm cultural identity and assert belonging in the city, e.g. the Canadian Hispanic Day Parade in Toronto (Veronis 2006).

Social inclusion is a frequent mantra in European politics and public policy discourse, but spaces and practices of 'inclusion' need to be critically evaluated in the light of what Elwood et al. (2016) refer to as spatial subversion and selective incorporation. This 'differential inclusion', intentional or unintentional, reflects both explicit state regulation, policy and practice, and implicit social codes which shape behaviours in shared public spaces whereby norms of private conduct become central to mediating minority presence in public space (Ye 2019). In this way 'ostensibly inclusive' spaces are shaped and scripted by 'situated codes of conduct' which serve either to marginalise or exclude those people or behaviours which are

deemed to be out of place (Blomley 2012; Qian 2020): ' [….] there are boundaries and enclosures embedded within these public spaces. Coexistence in a diverse context in this sense is marked relationally by broader structural inequalities, spatial subversion and selective incorporation' (Ye 2019: 491).

Therefore, migrants and established minorities frequently have additional prerequisites, or structural or cultural barriers to full access to and participation in public space. For example, norms which assume minorities should integrate rather than congregate, or dictate implicit 'acceptable' levels of minority presence in shared public space (Cancellieri and Ostand 2015; De Backer 2019). There is also limited tolerance of religious expression in European public spaces, beyond the buildings and activities typically associated with the 'national' church (Oosterban 2014) and its cultural heritage. The presence and visibility of non-majority religious practices, including death rituals, can be perceived as a threat to conservative majority local-national identity, narratives and beliefs, including widespread secular norms. These insecurities can prompt residents experiencing local demographic change to act defensively in order to protect their sense of personal and place identity (Leitner 2012).

Thus, the material form and the interactions enfolded by particular public spaces, both reflect and shape the social relations found there (Ye 2019). The same urban spaces and spatial relations which generate the possibility of encounters, can also create exclusions (Massey 2005; Ye 2019), and the role of structural factors, such as racism, in mediating lived experience of public spaces needs more attention (Valluvan, 2019). Yet while 'public space is a struggle' (Mitchell 2017:503) for many individuals and communities, marginalised groups persist in active struggle for membership in the public sphere because that presence reflects inclusion and acceptance (Blomley 2009), and is a right of citizenship.

Major contemporary socio-economic, political, health and environmental challenges underscore the need for fresh attention to public spaces, their shifting meanings and uses. The impact of migration and climate change (Duivenvoorden et al 2021), racial injustice, and the Coronavirus pandemic are all pertinent to understanding public spaces in general and cemeteries and crematoria as public spaces in multicultural Europe in particular. Yet, beyond some notable exceptions in landscape design (e.g. Grabalov and Nordh 2021; Rae 2021), cemeteries-crematoria remain largely absent from debates about inclusive public spaces and structural injustice. Given that public space frames and 'sets the bounds for what the public can be' (Mitchell 2017: 515) and citizenship is claimed in everyday life (Kallio et al 2020), the

essential functions, highly symbolic status, yet everyday spaces and practices of European municipal cemeteries-crematoria are central to these debates.

A brief outline of European cemeteries-crematoria arrangements and funerary trends is followed by a wider discussion of cemeteries-crematoria as inclusive public spaces, particularly for religious minorities.

## 4 EUROPEAN CEMETERIES-CREMATORIA, FUNERARY TRENDS AND DISCOURSES

Municipal cemeteries and crematoria are frequently co-located, especially in countries/ regions where the rate of cremation is growing, as is the case in much of north western Europe. They typically incorporate one or more buildings for funerals and other memorial rituals, as well as other service-related buildings, usually set within an accessible memorial garden or parkland with footpaths, and varying proportions of green space to hard landscaping. European cemeteries-crematoria spaces and associated rituals are broadly grounded in Judaeo-Christian beliefs, practices or heritage, with the norms of regional and local provision reflecting blends of historic and emerging religious, secular and cultural requirements and preferences. Within this context, Roman Catholic, Orthodox church and Jewish communities require burial (usually including perpetual grave rights), whereas European countries with an institutionalized affiliation to a Reformed church and/or growing secular worldviews, tend to have higher rates of cremation. This can be seen in Sweden and the UK where 83% and 78% of funerals respectively are now cremations (SKKF, 2019; UK Cremation Society 2020), although Norway's cremation rate remains relatively low at 44%. The latter is similar to France at 40%, but other traditionally Catholic countries such as Spain and Ireland have closer to 20% cremations, and figures vary between urban and rural areas (Nordh et al, 2021), illustrating the importance of situated data and analysis. The growth of cremation, especially in those countries where cremated remains can be collected and disposed according to personal preferences (e.g. the UK and Netherlands), coupled with the growing individualization and secularization of lifecycle rituals, has changed majority use of and cultural attitudes to cemeteries and associated rituals (see Klaassens and Groote 2014; Venhorst et al 2013). However, even where cremation is the norm, this may be highly regulated; for example, Sweden legally requires the formal interment or scattering of cremated remains at the crematorium unless there are specific reasons for dispensation, such as for Hindus and Sikhs who usually disperse cremated remains in rivers (Nordh et al 2021).

However, the growth of natural burial and reduced rates of repatriation of deceased migrants, plus population growth in minority communities who favour burial, combine to create localised increased demand for burial space. For example, while South Asian and North African migrants have historically favoured repatriation of bodies to their country of birth or heritage (Jassal 2015), recent studies show increased preference for burial or cremation within Europe (Hunter 2018; Kadrouch Outmany 2016; Maddrell et al 2018; Mertz 2019), especially amongst younger generations and women who want their remains to be near their children (Ahaddour and Broeckaert 2017; Maddrell et al 2021). These trends towards in situ disposition of the dead by religious and cultural minorities results in an increased need for perpetual grave rights, and what are perceived as 'additional' requirements or 'out of hours' services in multicultural districts. In some cases these changing needs have resulted in localised tensions between secular state providers, homogenized cultural norms and minority faith groups, notably in France and Luxembourg (Hunter 2018; Pirenne 2019; Coenen 2020). Such tensions can also be seen between primary funerary and remembrance functions, the sacred status of the dead (however defined), and secular leisure use of cemeteries, such as dog walking and running.

The governance of public spaces is often fragmented (Duivenvoorden et al 2021). This is also true of many European cemeteries-crematoria, which are simultaneously characterized by certain aspects being highly prescribed and managed through national regulatory frameworks, while arrangements for minority provision is typically locally determined and ad hoc. In this context, the traction and influence of different minority communities are uneven, depending on existing cemeteries-crematoria provision, local collaborations, funding streams, planning, regulation and established practices associated within public spaces per se and cemeteries-crematoria in particular. This has implications for the local negotiation of change, including meeting minority spatial and ritual needs in public cemeteries-crematoria, not least because their infrastructure can ossify preceding majority norms materially through architectural forms and symbols, and services can be predicated on the assumed cultural assimilation of minorities, and/or through implicit Eurocentric or colonial notions of classed, racialized and religious hierarchies.

While public space is often interpreted purely as 'publicly owned', in Europe public cemeteries-crematoria have varying combinations of government, state-delegated or outsourced ownership, regulation, management and secular/religious status. This includes local government-owned, managed and regulated municipal cemeteries, as in France, UK and

Luxembourg. In Sweden, Norway and Denmark the provision and management of cemeteries and crematoria is delegated by the state to the national church, but this includes a legal requirement for appropriate provision for people of different religious traditions (Nordh et al 2021). In Luxembourg, Belgium and France, practically all cemeteries and crematoria are run by municipalities, but there are a few historical private faith-based cemeteries. In the Netherlands and the UK there is a greater mixed economy of municipal, commercial and confessional cemeteries; in Germany, commercial crematoria and private cemeteries have only emerged over the past 25 years. As with other public spaces, the public/private divide is not always clear in cemeteries-crematoria. Cemeteries and funeral services are funded by taxes in some European countries, e.g. Norway, Denmark and Poland, but where burial plots are bought or rented, a form of commoditization and privatization within the wider public space, this public/private binary is blurred. In municipal cemeteries in Ireland and UK, individual graves may be bought 'in-perpetuity', elsewhere, graves are typically provided or leased for a fixed term e.g. twenty years (Nordh et al, 2021), which presents a challenge for those faith groups requiring perpetual grave rights.

Appropriate spaces and associated services for burial, cremation and remembrance rites are central to ideas and experience of home and belonging for both majority and minority communities. Evidence shows that where cemeteries and crematoria are experienced by migrants and established minorities as public spaces of marginality or exclusion, this generates a sense of less than full citizenship. Further, inadequate funerary provision in the face of religious-cultural requirements can constitute a form of harm which can exacerbate grief, especially for long-standing established minorities who cannot fulfil ideal funerary rights in their home country, i.e. the place where they live, work, pay taxes, raise families, build communities, and die (Maddrell et al, 2021). Experience of marginalisation in cemeteries-crematoria can reinforce wider experiences of social exclusion, injustice and racism (ibid; Rugg, 2020). Therefore, scrutinizing provision for minorities within European municipal cemeteries-crematoria raises important political questions about how these important public spaces can become more inclusive, as well as the inclusiveness of public spaces per se.

## 5 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN MUNICIPAL CEMETERIES-CREMATORIA: AN AGENDA FOR INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES

Material, social and symbolic capital intersect in and shape public space, and its norms (Qian 2020) and these intersections can be seen par excellence in cemeteries-crematoria. While

cemeteries-crematoria share much of the agenda for inclusive public spaces such as parks as identified by Rishbeth et al. (2018): i) maximisation of participation; ii) legitimisation of diverse activities; iii) micro-retreats; and iv) redress of structural inequalities, they also have additional sensitivities associated with their functions, meanings and symbolism. Echoing the representation of public spaces as an assemblage, Raffnsøe (2014: 10) describes cemeteries as an 'heterogeneous ensemble' "which encompass 'the said as much as the unsaid', the discursive as well as the non-discursive", shaped by state regulation and local discursive cultural norms. In Foucauldian terms, the visible and invisible power relations operating in cemeteries and crematoria create discursive norms and incorporate a disciplinary (prescriptive), legal (prohibitive) and a biopolitical (conductive) dispositive (ibid: 16). The exact extent to which these discourses and dispositives are perceived and experienced as repressive, permissive or empowering, depends on a complex interweaving of spatial, organisational, material, legal and social-cultural factors, and an individual's or communities' standing in relation to those. Attention to the effects and affects of 'symbolic projection' (Amin 2008: 13) in public spaces reiterates the significance of the material design, cultural norms and regulation of cemeteries-crematoria and the messages these convey to majority and minority users.

Analysis of cemeteries-crematoria and their role in the experience of 'citizenship' also offers insights to the nuanced situated negotiation of public spaces that are inhabited by both the living and the dead. Given that 'every public space has its own rhythms of use and regulation' (Amin, 2008: 9) and its own atmosphere (Koch and Latham 2012), understanding cemeteries-crematoria as situated, dynamic and lived public spaces is vital for their effective planning, design, management and ethos of service provision. Critical analysis of the planning, management and use of cemeteries-crematoria in European multicultural societies can also tell us much about the everyday lived experiences of urban diversity, social inclusion and exclusion. Implicit and explicit processes of majority territorialisation can be evident in cemeteries. This can be seen in the presence of majority iconography such as statues and religious symbols in the built environment, and structural factors, such as grave reuse and services bound by majority norms of the Monday to Friday 'working week', as well as the literal spatial marginalisation of minority faiths in peripheral spaces within cemeteries (Maddrell et al 2018; 2021). Attention to any dissonance within cemeteries-crematoria provides a lens through which to identify tensions in wider public spaces within specific national and local contexts. Understanding diverse needs in cemeteries-crematoria also

demonstrates the intersection – and in many cases inseparability - of multiple public spaces, services and their governance, e.g. health care, registry and coroners.

Rethinking community and public space from the margins serves to materialize and disrupt the discursive logics of a social core and periphery (Pyati and Kamal 2012). Returning to the quote which opened this paper, Goheen (1998) observes that citizens claiming and using public space in their own way makes public space meaningful and makes the spaces themselves a meaningful public resource. Conceptualisations of diversity as the co-presence of differentially empowered micro-publics in shared urban spaces (Amin 2002) are central to understanding differential inclusion in cemeteries-crematoria in multicultural settings. Likewise, the dynamism of society and space: public space is liminal, emergent, always in process, and a dialectic negotiation of inclusion and exclusion, (Qian 2020; Massey 2005). Given their functional, symbolic, emotional and religio-cultural significance, it is necessary for municipal cemeteries-crematoria service providers, planners, landscape designers, community interest groups and users to engage in regular dialogue, evaluating and planning for evolving and varied needs through local consultations. It is also important to identify and disseminate good practice from inclusive examples of cemetery spaces and services, design and management. This requires attention to i) understanding the varied ways in which cemeteries-crematoria are used and experienced by diverse users, including majority communities, established minorities, EU and Third Country National migrants; ii) planning for changing cemetery and crematoria needs and meanings in evolving multicultural European societies with changing demographics; iii) identifying and sharing a range of creative strategies for fostering public dialogue, consultation and co-production regarding diverse cemeteries-crematoria uses, needs and practices; iv) engaging and educating those using cemeteries-crematoria for leisure; and v) national and local strategic prioritisation of cemeteries-crematoria planning and resourcing.

## 6 CONCLUSION: AN AGENDA FOR CEMETERIES-CREMATORIA AS INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SPACES

Public spaces constitute a confluence of state infrastructure, symbols, narratives, values, and norms. By definition, public space should be accessible to all. Consequently, the intersection of majority-minorities cultures and practices in public spaces reveal much about national-local social relations and local definitions and spaces of citizenship. Contra to their marginalisation in policy and scholarship on public spaces, cemeteries and crematoria are especially interesting and important public spaces.

As spaces of essential public service provision which materialise and reflect public values, cultural practices and norms, municipal cemeteries-crematoria constitute public spaces par excellence, to which everyone should feel they belong. Yet, in some European countries or localities, migrants and ethno-religious minorities are marginalised within the public space of municipal cemeteries-crematoria by majority-defined infrastructure and service design and governance, such as architectural forms and symbols, regulations restricting the movement of cremated remains, and a Monday to Friday working week, as well as discourses of ideological bordering expressed and enforced through explicit/implicit cultural norms of cemeteries-crematoria practices. Experiences of inclusion or marginalisation in such symbolically important public spaces reflect structural and symbolic (in)equalities in wider society, and are amplified by the emotional intensity and religious/secular 'sacred' qualities attributed to cemeteries-crematoria. As sites which facilitate or hinder diverse needs and sense-of-belonging, cemeteries-crematoria also offer insight to the qualities and governance of public space as a reflection of lived citizenship within a given locale and governance regime.

Attention to municipal cemeteries-crematoria is timely in the context of an evolving multicultural and post-secular Europe, limited cemetery space in many urban areas, changing demographics and evolving cultural practices. Across European states, cemeteries and crematoria are organised, regulated, funded and managed differently. Nonetheless accessible and inclusive municipal cemeteries-crematoria, their design, maintenance and planning, need to be centre stage in conceptualisations of, and policy for, shared European framing of public space and fulfilling the EU 2016 Action Plan on Integration of TCNs, which aims to enhance intercultural dialogue and combat xenophobia (EC 2016). These issues are all the more pressing in the context of international Black Lives Matter-influenced reviews of structural and institutional racism, and the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted disproportionately on ethnic minority groups in Europe.

Clearly, it is socially and politically important to understand the need for culturally-inclusive public cemeteries-crematoria in diverse societies in Europe and elsewhere. Analysis of municipal cemeteries-crematoria provides insight to the character and functions of metropolitan and suburban public spaces; the uses and roles of cemeteries-crematoria in multicultural post-secular societies; intersections of majority-minorities cultural-religious expression; and any changes required to ensure inclusive public spaces and services that

correspond to evolving local demographics. The arguments presented here are grounded in an European study, but many of the issues are pertinent to, culturally diverse societies elsewhere.

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