

ANALYSIS:
CEMETERIES AS PUBLIC SPACE
– the new burial concept of Tábor

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Topic choice

These days, the relationship of people to death and places of rest isn't as open as it might have been a few centuries ago. As the topic of detabooisation of death is more and more discussed, this work wants to explore the ways of assisting that goal by incorporating cemeteries in the everyday life of citizens by making them an approachable public space while still keeping in mind the piety character of these places. It questions the way cemeteries are viewed nowadays and researches possible design approaches.

The aim of the diploma seminar is to research the topic of cemeteries and figure out the guiding principles of designing cemeteries as public space.

The questions:

What should a cemetery look like to provide space for conversation and thought?

What makes a cemetery part of public space – and public life?

Content

A) Cemeteries and burial techniques

The relationship of czech people to death and cemeteries

Burial techniques and options

Typology of cemeteries

Visits to cemeteries (Central Europe)

What aspects make a cemetery a good public space?

Cemeteries and burial techniques

The relationship of czech people to death and cemeteries

In previous times, people were much more in contact with death in their everyday lives than we are now. Death was something that took place at home, in the surrounding of friends and family who could say their last goodbye. Afterwards, this was probably followed by a feast, celebrating the life of the deceased. „The dead and the living were in immediate contact, their world were not separated. The dying were part of the life of the living and cemeteries were, until the era of enlightenment, places of public life and meetings.“

With the technological advancements of the 19th century and the following world wars, the relationship of people to death shifted. Death was seen as unacceptable, something to rather not include in daily life. Family members started to hide the process of dying and people were dying in hospitals rather than at home, and the last person they were in contact with was the doctor. The whole burial process was often put in the hands of funeral services, and with that, the graves also became more uniform. Mourning rituals slowly disappeared, which had an impact on the capability of family members to deal with and accept the death of their loved ones. This is especially the case for people without faith (which is the majority of the Czech population), since the topic of death is usually at least discussed among the believers. Death became a taboo in the society.

These days, there is an effort to speak about death more openly and establish personalised mourning rituals again. With that, new trends in burial techniques and cemeteries are coming as well. Since the topic of sustainability is current in other areas of life too, there is especially a tendency to establish rituals and burial sites more environmentally responsible and connected to nature. These might also provide a more pleasant ambience than the classical cemetery and a way, especially for non-believers, to feel more connected to the procedure as well, making the mourning process a bit easier in the end.

Burial techniques and options

INHUMATION (GROUND BURIAL):

Placing the body of the deceased into the ground, usually in a casket. Historically the most common burial technique. Nowadays, there's the tendency to find a more ecological solution.



ENTOMBMENT ABOVE GROUND (MAUSOLEUM):

The placement of the body inside a crypt or a niche, meant to keep the body clean and dry. Historically, family mausoleums were made, these days community mausoleums are more usual (although not so much in the Czech republic).

Source: <https://sleepyhollowcemetery.org/community-mausoleum/>



UNDER GROUND BURIAL (GRAVE):

The placement of the body in a casket into the burial space in the ground, with a tombstone and a headstone over. There are single burial plots as well as companion burial plots or family burial plots. Historically the most usual burial type, still very common to these days especially for people with faith, however, the cost is quite high.

Source: own photo



GREEN BURIAL (MEADOW GRAVE):

The body is placed directly into the ground either in a shroud or in a biodegradable casket. This is an attempt to conduct more ecological and close-to-nature burials. The burial place is marked with a wooden sign in the meadow.

Source: <https://www.novinky.cz/clanek/domaci-proutena-rakev-hrob-na-louce-v-praze-vznikl-ekologicky-hrbitov-40443102>

CREMATION:

Burning the body of the deceased (in a crematorium). The most common burial technique in the Czech republic, probably due to its lower cost and convenience. The ashes are put either into an urn, scattered or put directly into the ground.



AN URN GRAVE:

The urn with the ashes is put into the ground with a headstone above. There are single urn graves as well as community urn graves.

Source: own photo



COLUMBARIUM:

The urn with the ashes is put into a designated wall, usually along with objects of remembrance.

Source: own photo



ASH SCATTERING MEADOW:

The ashes are scattered along a designated meadow in the cemetery. There can be problems with the weather conditions though.

Source: own photo



ASH PLACING MEADOW:

The ashes are put to a specific place in the meadow and covered with grass again. The place is signed with a small headstone. This method provides a more personal version of the ash scattering meadow.

Source: own photo



FOREST BURIAL:

The ashes of one or multiple people are put to the roots of a tree. This method is becoming more and more popular as people want to reconnect with nature again. The surrounding of the forest also makes the burial process much more pleasant and personalised than the classical one, especially for people without faith.

Source: own photo

OTHER ALTERNATIVES:

Due to the current trends, there is a need to look for more ecological alternatives for the traditional burial techniques as well. The combination of new technology and old traditions make up some very interesting options. The other advantage is that, apparently, the more alternative burial processes allow for the family to be more involved, and therefore maybe making the last goodbye easier.



HUMAN COMPOSTING:

The body is sealed in a container with a special mixture, that, with the help of active microbes, breaks the body down. The only thing left after this process is bones and compost, which can be used by the families as they please and returned to nature.

Source: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/rest-in-compost-these-green-funerals-offer-an-eco-friendly-afterlife>



THE MUSHROOM SUIT:

Developed with the intention to minimize environmental impact, the suit, made from mushroom spores, helps decompose the body and filter toxins from it, so that they do not affect the plant life surrounding the place of burial.

Source: <https://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/luke-perry-had-ecofriendly-burial-in-mushroom-suit-daughter-reveals-a4135956.html>



TREE PODS:

The body is buried in a biodegradable plastic shell, that decomposes over time and feeds the tree planted above. The goal of this design was to create cemeteries full of trees rather than tombstones.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/03/world/eco-solutions-capsula-mundi/index.html>



WATER CREMATION:

Stemming from old hawaiian burial traditions, the body is bathed in water, speeding up the process of breaking the body down. The bones are removed, and the leftover water can be recycled.

Source: <https://www.lexikin.com/funerals/burial-alternatives/>

Typology of cemeteries

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CEMETERY:

Public, also municipal cemeteries, are open to everyone, private cemeteries are open just to a certain group of people (religious groups, famous people, family cemeteries, army members).

POSITIONING TO THE URBAN STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION:



CHURCH CEMETERY (CHURCHYARD):

An early urban cemetery established next to the city church, on sanctified grounds. Usually small and surrounded by walls and strongly connected to christianity. They are more usual in smaller cities nowadays and, due to the proximity of the sacred building and the culture around it, are cared for more intensely.

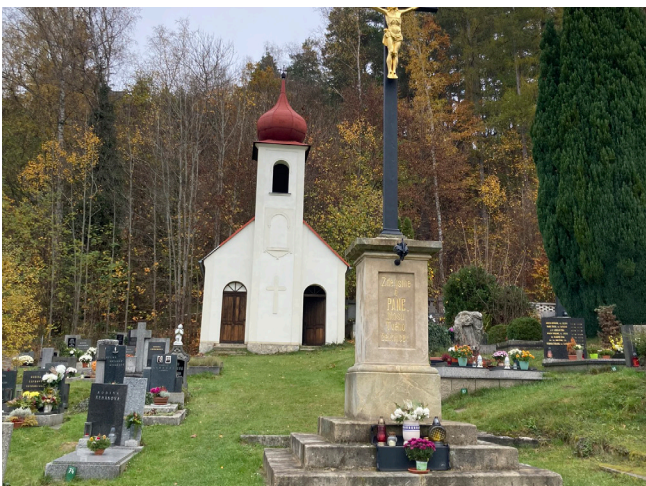
Source: own photo



URBAN CEMETERY:

In the times of industrial revolution and following health risks and need for more space, new, bigger cemeteries at the edge of the city were established. With time, the city swallowed them again and now, they often are a much needed green refuge for people as well as wildlife of the cities. They are often not directly connected to a church, and their floor plan is carefully planned.

Source: own photo



VILLAGE CEMETERY:

The cemetery in countryside areas without a church cemetery. Usually there is no strict floor plan, and the cemetery is accompanied by a small chapel and/or a cross in the middle. These czech cemeteries tend to be neglected in care. The positive aspect is the potential of a nice view and connection to the landscape.

Source: own photo



FOREST CEMETERY:

Cemeteries established in forests which often occur in more hilly areas where people have a stronger relationship to forests. The positive aspects are definitely the connection to nature and local landscape, which makes the burial grounds feel more natural.

Source: own photo



WAR CEMETERIES:

Dedicated to soldiers who died at war, typically very uniform, which makes them intentionally and more monumental.

Source: <https://www.kudyznudy.cz/aktivity/mezinarodni-vojensky-hrbitov-v-milovicich>



SYMBOLIC CEMETERIES (MEMORIALS):

Memorial cemeteries, often in a place of a massacre or other tragedies. Since the purpose of these is not to store actual bodies, but to remind people of a certain event, there is much more space for a more unusual, artistic design.

Source: https://www.vychodni-cechy.info/mi-retice/13_3529_lezaky-pietni-uzemi/



GARDEN (RURAL / PARK) CEMETERY:

Cemeteries on the outskirts of town, popular especially in the USA from the 19th century on. The spaces were designed with pathways so that they would feel as a public park, opposed to the crowded urban cemeteries. Often combined also with an arboretum or a botanical garden.

Source: <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/91241/mount-auburn-cemetery>



CONSERVATION CEMETERY:

Cemeteries which, aside from the function of burial, are intended to protect a specific landscape – the function is a tool to land preservation here. The burial techniques used are natural burials and the graves are marked in a delicate way so that they don't disturb the image of the landscape. The burials are not supposed to be more visible than the nature.

Source: <https://www.bluestemcemetery.org/>



GREEN CEMETERY:

Cemeteries dedicated to using green burial techniques, in order to fight the environmental side effects of a traditional burial – no coffins and tombstones are used.

Source: <https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/first-natural-cemetery-in-flanders-no-tombstones-and-biodegradable-coffins-9011>

SOME OTHER EXAMPLES OF CEMETERIES AROUND THE WORLD:



JEWISH CEMETERY:

Cemeteries designated for the burial of Jews according to their traditions. Flowers and candles are not used here, the way to pay respect is to stack stones on the tombstone of the visited grave. The graves are intentionally not cared for and, in case of lack of space, they are also stacked onto each other, which gives the cemetery a specific natural look.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_cemetery



CROATIAN SLOPE CEMETERY:

A christian cemetery in Krk, taking advantage of the local stone and the hilly terrain, creating a place incorporated into the local landscape.

Source: <https://www.trotop.be/en/island-hopping-croatia-road-trip/>



COLORFUL MEXICAN CEMETERIES:

With use of colors and tiles on the graves, often stacked onto each other, the cemetery is not a gloomy place, but a place to celebrate the dead and even feast with them, bring gifts and tell stories.

Source: <https://lacarmina.com/blog/2020/01/mexican-rainbow-graveyards-colored-tombs-mayan-skeleton-art/>



OLD SLAVIC GRAVE MOUND BURIAL SITE:

An old slavic way of burial, creating hills on top of the buried body, creating a hilly landscape. Preserved in forest areas.

Source: <https://pamatkovykatalog.cz/mohylo-ve-pohrebiste-688222>



HANGING COFFINS IN THE FILIPINES:

A practise meant to bring the deceased closer to the afterlife, the people carves the coffin themselves before the time of their death.

Source: <https://www.trotop.be/en/island-hopping-croatia-road-trip/>



TERRACED HONG KONG CEMETERY:

Due to the lack of space and the hilly terrain, these cemeteries compose of stacked graves with no space for greenery.

Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/style/article/hong-kong-cemetery-intl-hnk-scli/index.html>

Visits to cemeteries (Central Europe)

As part of the analysis part, a research of existing cemeteries was conducted to get a better feeling of what makes a cemetery in general a good one – what are the good aspects, the bad aspects and what makes a cemetery feel like a pleasant space to spend time at.

The evaluated aspects are the following:

Location:	country, city
Establishment:	year/century
Type:	urban / rural / forest cemetery / symbolic cemetery Christian / Jewish / without / other traditinal looks / specific style (by architect / time / region) burial types: graves / urns / meadows / forest active / not active
Form:	floor plan terrain vegetation sacred buildings
Amenities:	service building / water supply...
Care:	yes / no (how?)
Atmosphere:	closed off / inviting, pleasant / unpleasant
Good elements:	...
Public space function?	yes/no (why?)

The studied area is mainly focused on central Europe.



Cmentarz Garnizonowy / Garrison Cemetery



Location:	Poland, Gdańsk
Establishment:	19th century
Type:	city cemetery, symbolic cemetery Christian traditinal looks burial types: graves, urns active
Form:	floor plan: ortogonal grid terrain: inclined vegetation: grown trees, shrubs sacred buildings: chapel
Amenities:	yes
Care:	yes – maintained, flowers, gifts
Atmosphere:	closed off, but quite pleasant
Good elements:	small bench at every grave personified grave surroundings grown vegetation
Public space function?	no



Alter Nördlicher Friedhof / Old North Cemetery



Location: Germany, Munich

Establishment: 19th century

Type: city cemetery
Christian
traditinal looks
burial types: graves
not active

Form: floor plan: ortogonal grid (overgrown)
terrain: flat
vegetation: grown trees, shrubs, lawn
sacred buildings: nearby church

Amenities: —

Care: yes – maintained by the city

Atmosphere: inviting, pleasant, informal feeling

Good elements: benches for sitting, lawn to sit on
connection to nearby playground
grown vegetation, more entrances

Public space function? yes (space to rest)



Petersfriedhof / St. Peter's Cemetery



Location: Austria, Salzburg

Establishment: 12th century

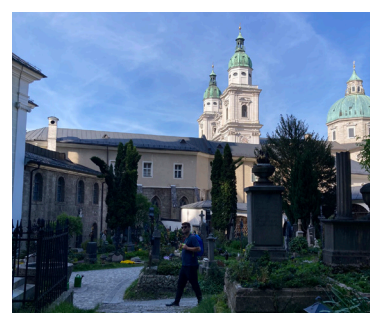
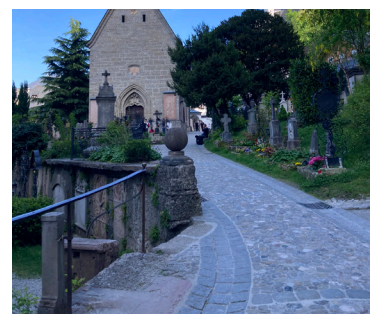
Type: city cemetery
Christian
traditinal looks
burial types: graves
active

Form: floor plan: organic blocks with rows
terrain: multiple levels
vegetation: small size trees, shrubs
sacred buildings: chapel

Amenities: yes (water supply)
Care: yes – maintained, flowers
Atmosphere: closed off, pleasant, cozy, but touristic

Good elements: clean look
historical surroundings
small size

Public space function? no (no leisure space)



Waldfriedhof / Forest Cemetery



Location:	Germany, Freising
Establishment:	—
Type:	forest cemetery Christian traditinal looks (forest version) burial types: grave, urn, meadow, forest active
Form:	floor plan: ortogonal grid, organic batches in forest and meadow area terrain: inclined vegetation: grown forest trees, shrubs sacred buildings: nearby church
Amenities:	funeral hall, water supply, service build.
Care:	yes – maintained, flowers
Atmosphere:	closed off, pleasant, quiet, melancholic
Good elements:	pleasant open space in front of the hall surrounded by forest with wildlife
Public space function?	no (but still welcoming)



Ďáblický hřbitov / Ďáblice Cemetery



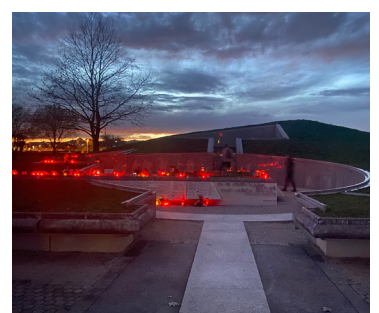
Location:	Czech republic, Prague
Establishment:	1912–1914
Type:	city cemetery Christian specific style (by architect – cubism) burial types: grave, urn, meadow, forest active
Form:	floor plan: organic terrain: flat vegetation: grown trees, shrubs sacred buildings: –
Amenities:	funeral hall, water supply
Care:	yes – maintained, flowers
Atmosphere:	inviting, pleasant, park-like, open
Good elements:	laid-back park-like entrance area forest burial part diversity, specific style
Public space function?	yes, partly



Centralno pokopališče Žale / Žale Central Cemetery



Location:	Slovenia, Ljubljana
Establishment:	1906 (Plečnik's part 1942)
Type:	city cemetery / symbolic cemetery Christian specific style (by architect – Plečnik) burial types: graves, urns active
Form:	floor plan: ortogonal grid, circular grid terrain: inclined vegetation: grown trees, alleys sacred buildings: church
Amenities:	funeral hall, water supply, storage space
Care:	yes – maintained, flowers
Atmosphere:	impressive, massive, but inviting
Good elements:	atypical design language multiple apparent, inviting entrances sitting spaces separated from graves
Public space function?	yes (ways separated from burial space)



Cmentarz Nieistniejących Cmentarzy /Cemetery of Lost Cemeteries



Location: Poland, Gdańsk

Establishment: 2002

Type: symbolic cemetery (for destroyed ones)
all faiths
specific style (memorial)
burial types: –
not active



Form: floor plan: ortogonal
terrain: flat
vegetation: grown trees, bulbous plants
sacred buildings: –



Amenities: –

Care: yes – maintained

Atmosphere: inviting, pleasant, melancholic

Good elements: simple, clean look
openness
artistic style

Public space function? no (no resting space)



Hřbitov Horky / Horky Cemetery



Location:	Czech Republic, Tábor
Establishment:	—
Type:	rural cemetery Christian traditinal looks burial types: graves, urns active
Form:	floor plan: ortogonal grid terrain: inclined vegetation: shrubs, thujas sacred buildings: chapel
Amenities:	water supply
Care:	no – not well maintained
Atmosphere:	closed off, not that pleasant
Good elements:	potencially good view
Public space function?	no (no resting space)



Hřbitov Klokoty / Klokoty Cemetery



Location:	Czech Republic, Tábor
Establishment:	18th century
Type:	rural cemetery Christian traditinal looks burial types: graves, urns, meadow active
Form:	floor plan: ortogonal grid terrain: flat vegetation: few grown trees, shrubs sacred buildings: church
Amenities:	—
Care:	yes – maintained, flowers
Atmosphere:	closed off, but pleasant
Good elements:	nice view, sitting places sound of gravel when walking entrance path from the city centre
Public space function?	no (closed off feeling)



Hřbitov Bubeneč / Bubeneč Cemetery



Location: Czech Republic, Praha

Establishment: 19th century

Type: city cemetery
Christian
traditinal looks
burial types: graves, urns
active



Form: floor plan: ortogonal grid
terrain: flat
vegetation: grown trees, shrubs
sacred buildings: –



Amenities: –
Care: no – not well maintained
Atmosphere: closed off, not very pleasant

Good elements: grown canopy of trees

Public space function? no (closed off, claustrophobic feeling)



What aspects make a cemetery a good public space?

Not surprisingly, the most welcoming feeling cemeteries were those ones, that had the general qualities of a public space – a sitting space, openness, lack of strictness, and spaces not dedicated solely to the original function of burial, but that could be used variously. Mostly, these were the city cemeteries and the non-active ones. The absence of a an active church made also made the space feel less formal, and therefore more pleasant to spend time in.

In the non-active cemeteries, one could even find people jogging, walking their pets or their children, picknicking and simply enjoying the pleasantly quiet surroundings. Also, the more apparent the entrance was, the more people tended to be spending time inside. The active cemetery, where these activities were going on as well, was the one with a clearly separated path with benches between the burial spaces.

The question might be, how can we bring these attributes, respectfully, even into the still active and newly established cemeteries?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CEMETERIES AS A PUBLIC SPACE:

- multiple entrances – permeability, ability to walk through
- welcoming entrance / connection to the city
- zoning (separation of active burial areas from public space function areas)
- incorporate piet-character leisure spaces (sitting spaces)
- clearly show what IS allowed (signs)



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