

## **Green Urban Cemeteries: More than just parks**

It can be a place to get one's thoughts rested and let them stretch themselves out. So, it is very good mentally.

Yes, good to the eye and good for the head.

Man in his 40s visiting the Old Town Cemetery

### **Introduction**

Cemeteries are sites for burials and memorials, as they reflect how we deal with bereavement, mourning and remembrance (Maddrell 2016). According to Arffmann (2000), cemeteries have four functions; the hygienic function, places for sorrow, contact with eternity and marking of social status. But cemeteries have also been in use for a variety of activities throughout history (Brendalmo 2014; Deering 2014). This article aims to explore the cemeteries' functions in urban life nowadays, focusing on green cemeteries and based on fieldwork at two Norwegian cemeteries. Many of the green cemeteries are quite large, in many ways park-like, and often with a higher level of maintenance than many other urban green spaces. As cities become denser, green spaces are in danger of decreasing. This may have consequences on how urban cemeteries may shift from just being burial spaces to becoming spaces for recreation. Furthermore, new attitudes on death (Blanco and Vidal 2015;

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Deering 2014; Hviid Jacobsen 2013), increasingly diverse and multi-cultural urban populations or simply new ways of living in the city, could potentially lead to changes in use and new perceptions of urban green spaces (Gehl 2007; Franck and Stevens 2007; Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou 2000), such as urban green cemeteries. Cemeteries are publicly accessible spaces but with private graves, thereby not necessarily thought of as open spaces accessible to the local community (Woodthorpe 2011; Blomley 2005; anonymous 4). Knowledge on how cemeteries are used and ascribed meaning is limited (see anonymous 2; Deering 2014; 2010; Gomez and Van Herck 2012; Woodthorpe 2011; Johnson 2008; Harvey 2006; Sommer 2003; Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou 2000), but relevant to consider in the planning of urban green structures.

The design of various green urban spaces is crucial for how they are to be used (Adinolfi, Suarez-Caceres, Carinanos 2014; Nordh and Ostby 2013; Golicnik and Thompson 2010), and this should also apply for cemeteries. But sites and cities are not only physical environments, but also social spaces “created” by people’s varying and shifting spatial practices (Carmona 2014). Our study of cemeteries is inspired by the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) and his views on the production of social space as a spatial practice in people's daily lives (Lefebvre 1991a). In reference to another French philosopher, Michael De Certeau (1925-1986), landscape planning and design reflect specific imaginations about what an urban space is or should be, and how people should act (De Certau 1984). Their approaches inspire us to ask: For whom are the cemeteries designed and managed? In what ways are the cemeteries actually used? To help explore these questions, qualitative data from two

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cemeteries in Oslo is analysed. Here, both visitors and people passing by the two cemeteries were interviewed during the summer of 2014 about their intention to be at the cemetery and their views about the place.

We will start with a short introduction of the theoretical framework, focusing on Lefebvre's and De Certeau's perspectives on the social production of space. Thereafter, central regulations and planning documents of relevance for the design, public access and use of cemeteries in Norway will be introduced in brief. In the Result section, the different categories of qualities ascribed the cemeteries by the interviewees will be presented. While the primary purpose of the cemeteries' is as a burial ground, we present their secondary functions as spaces for reflections, recreation and cultural encounters. In the discussion section, these secondary functions form the basis to discuss whether the cemeteries seem redefined from their primary function as a burial ground, to spaces for secondary purposes such as recreation. We will also discuss how design and management measures can meet the redefinition of space through new practices. Hopefully, this knowledge will be of relevance for urban planning and management, as cemeteries are quite unique parts of the urban green infrastructure.

### **Theoretical framework**

To visit cemeteries may not necessarily be a common daily activity for all, but death is definitely an aspect of everyday life for everyone. Cemeteries touch upon existential aspects of life; thus, the green urban cemeteries may have the potential of being important spaces in people's everyday life in several ways. But people's experiences in the urban everyday life

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are not always made visible in urban planning, or in social and cultural theory. Whether everyday life could be the reference point to a higher degree in scientific models of empirical research is discussed (Highmore 2002; Gardiner 2000). Henri Lefebvre has been an important contributor in focusing and understanding everyday life and everydayness, both in academia and in urban planning. According to Lefebvre, the everyday is “the common denominator of activities, locus and milieu of human functions, (...) the uniform aspect of the major sectors of social life: work, family, private life and leisure” (Lefebvre 1987, 10). In the intersection between structures and praxis, the everyday is the most universal and most unique condition, the most obvious and the best hidden (Lefebvre 1987, 9). He requested an urban praxis that releases a potential for new forms of social relations (Read et al. 2013) based on people’s *active* role in society, and therefore radically different from the liberal-democratic concept of citizenship (Chiodelli 2013).

Following Lefebvre, space should not just be a product of planning and planners’ thinking, but with a style people can identify themselves with (Lefebvre 1991a). As a Marxist, he saw everyday life in the context of modernization and in accordance with Marx’ theory of alienation (Nalivaka and Tin 2014, 39; Lefebvre 1991b). According to Purcell (2013), Lefebvre sees “the right to the city” as a struggle to “de-alienate” urban space by the appropriation of space to make it one’s own. We consider Lefebvre’s perspectives on the production of social space and everyday life inspiring for this study of green urban cemeteries, with the question to discuss being: Are these urban green spaces planned and

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managed in a way that citizens in general can identify themselves with, or are they in a process of de-alienation?

A supplementary perspective to Lefebvre's is given by Michael De Certeau, focusing on everyday man's role in the production of space (De Certeau 1984). De Certeau sees users or the "ordinary practitioners of the city" as active participants in organizing public space and with an influence on spatial dynamics, e.g. by their own informal spatial strategies (De Certeau 1984). He claims that we can see the urban space as a product of - and subject to - institutional power. Landscape planning and design reflects a particular imagination about what a space is or should be aimed for, and how people should act. But people's everyday use of spaces may have different aims and meanings than their original purpose. Through spatial practices and an appropriation of space, spaces may be *redefined* and "made to one's own", following De Certeau (1984, 84). The redefining of spaces through new practices indicates that a norm or standard ("dominant representation") exists that the practitioner differs from. One may expect that a dominant representation also applies to cemeteries, expressed in design, management and rules for behaviour, and in line with the primary purpose of cemeteries to serve as a burial site.

In general, the main purpose of designing green cemeteries has been to serve the mourners and to honor the deceased. But other functions are also highlighted. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among grave visitors, Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou (2000) emphasized the importance of burial grounds for personal support and family well-being, as an anchor for

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family and community values in an increasing mobile population. While many of today's cemeteries have not necessarily changed so much from their original design or purpose, others have gone through different phases and changes, mirroring both changing views on death and burying, population growth and socio-cultural changes. For example, separate areas dedicated to minor religious groups with other burying traditions have been common to many places, are also likely to have common bereavement memorials with urns, more of an individual layout on the gravestones, etc. There are also examples of how new cemeteries are promoted and designed to facilitate recreational and commercial activities. Natural burial sites have also gained increasing popularity, specifically in the UK (Clayden et al. 2014).

The idea of the cemetery as a recreational *green* urban space was present as early as during the development of the English park-like cemetery design in the 19th century (Deering 2010; Johnson 2008; Sommer 2003). Besides the need for burial sites in an epoch characterized by explosive city growth, the design of many green urban cemeteries aimed to contribute with beauty and wildlife, and thereby improve the quality of life in the city. Paths, benches, sheltering trees and flowers invited for recreational use in addition to visiting gravesites. Green urban spaces as restorative places in which one can rest and recover from mental fatigue is supported by theoretical research (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989; Kaplan 1995), and has also been found at cemeteries (anonymous 3). A vast number of empirical studies support the health benefits of green urban spaces (for a review see the WHO Regional Office for Europe 2016); however, the number of studies looking at the health benefits of cemeteries is sparse. To discuss cemeteries' role in urban life today, there is a need for knowledge based on

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empirical research on how cemeteries are used and valued (Deering 2014; Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou 2000).

## **Contextual framework**

### ***The study areas***

To explore in what ways urban green cemeteries are used and ascribed meanings, two urban cemeteries in Oslo were selected as cases for the study (see Figure 1), both of which are highly vegetated (see Figures 2 and 3). *Gamlebyen Gravlund* (GG), or the Old Town Cemetery, is centrally located, surrounded by many houses and within a short walking distance to the city centre and public transport. On the other hand, *Østre Gravlund* (ØG), or the Eastern Cemetery, is surrounded by heavily trafficked roads in an area dominated by infrastructure, commercial buildings and offices. Both cemeteries are enclosed by either stonewalls, hedges or a fence, and have main entrances in addition to smaller gates. They are open all day long, but with no light at night. All things considered, the Old Town Cemetery gives a more accessible impression than the Eastern Cemetery based on design and location. The differences between them affect how they are used. While a number of everyday activities are registered at the Old Town Cemetery, the Eastern Cemetery is primarily used by those who visit graves (anonymous 2, see Figure 4). In this way, the two cases should be relevant to compare and discuss in relation to questions as to what one could win and lose if cemeteries are “redefined” from the “dominant representation” to secondary functions.

### ***Primary function: Original design and purpose***

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The two cemeteries were established after a period of population growth and urbanization in the 1800s, which forced the creation of a common legislation on burials in order to deal with health issues (anonymous 4). The Law on Churches and Cemeteries entered into force in 1897, along with the responsible management assigned to the newly established “Church Supervision”. The new law demanded that cemeteries be designed with the graves arranged in a grid system, which one can see built up on the two cemeteries by paths and hedges.

The layout we see today in the Old Town Cemetery was established in 1874, but the cemetery’s origins date from the 1280s when a Franciscan monastery was established in the area. A Muslim burial ground was also established in 1972 in the eastern section. The Eastern Cemetery was established in 1895. A Jewish burial ground was established there in 1912, which is located in the eastern part, but separated from the rest of the cemetery by a row of spruce trees.

We can assume that the park-like design established at the end of the 1800's was influenced by the English landscape park ideal, and the intention of planting trees and flowers was to honor the place and the deceased. Whether secondary functions were taken into account in the design of these spaces, to let other citizens benefit from the establishment of the green cemeteries, is not a likely assumption.

### ***Cemeteries in today’s regulations and urban planning***

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In brief, here we will mention those paragraphs (translated) in the central regulations and planning documents of relevance for the design, public access and use of cemeteries in Norway. In Oslo, The Church has the responsibility for the cemeteries, while the City of Oslo's Burial Department has the operational responsibility, including the facilitation of funeral services. § 1 in the national funeral regulation states that, "The burial place should be managed with the order and dignity as its distinctive character requires". "Stay, traffic, work, and other actions at the cemetery should be performed in a decent and least noisy way, so that they do not act disturbing to others. As much as possible visitors should walk, and dogs should be kept on a leash" (§ 9). According to law, Norwegian cemeteries must be fenced in with lockable gates, and as a general rule the area within the fence should be maintained (§ 7). Norwegian cemeteries are required to be divided into burial fields, in which each field should normally be arranged in a grid pattern (§ 4). The local funeral regulations for the Oslo municipality states that, "Calm and order shall be the rule for graveyards and cemeteries. Behavioural rules should be determined by the church warden and posted at each cemetery, easily visible for the visitors" (§ 28). Behavioral rules posted on local information boards tell visitors that biking, jogging, skiing, horse riding, driving without a special permit, sunbathing and playing are all prohibited. Dogs are allowed, but should be kept on a leash. Furthermore, the users are encouraged to show consideration to the grave visitors, and all activities should be quiet. As we can understand, nothing in the regulations acts as *efforts* to promote cemeteries as public green spaces.

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In an urban planning context, the formal status of cemeteries seems to be somewhat unclear (anonymous 5). In the map attached to the municipality plan of Oslo (Oslo municipality 2015), the cemeteries are marked as area category “Buildings and facilities”, and are not included in any of the “green” categories. Moreover, the walkways at the cemeteries are not marked in the municipality plan. In the green infrastructure plan of Oslo (Oslo municipality 2010), cemeteries are described in the text as valuable areas for recreation and included in the definition of green infrastructure, though in the map showing access to green space they are still not included as urban green infrastructure (anonymous 5). Therefore, in an urban planning context, it seem as if cemeteries are not part of urban green infrastructure in line with other publicly owned green areas (ibid.). Even so, walking, stay and other calm activities are juridically allowed.

## **Methods**

### *Data*

This study is primarily based on semi-structured interviews with visitors at the Old Town Cemetery and the Eastern Cemetery. This fieldwork was a follow-up to a pilot study on the Old Town Cemetery (anonymous 6) and an observation study on the two cemeteries (anonymous 2). 59 visitors were interviewed at the Old Town Cemetery, of which 48% were men. At the Eastern Cemetery, we carried out 24 interviews, including five couples and 31% men. The interviewees varied in age from approximately 20 to 90 years. The moment

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observation prior to this study and published in another article (anonymous 2) show that visitors at the Eastern Cemetery are older than those at the Old Town Cemetery.

Visitors at the cemeteries were cautiously asked if they had time to answer a few questions about the place and their stay. People who showed signs of grief were not approached. To recruit people passing through to an interview, we stationed on walkways and stopped those persons who did not look too busy. We collected data until we had got a satisfying spread in the data material according to gender and age, corresponding the moment observation study (anonymous 2). All three authors participated in the fieldwork, with the interviews lasting from 5 – 45 minutes. At the Old Town Cemetery, more people were in a hurry because they used the cemetery to pass through. This was not the situation at the Eastern Cemetery, and the interviews here were therefor longer lasting. If the situation allowed, we asked the visitor to sit down on a nearby bench. To sit down together brought a calmer and more reflective conversation. Twelve interviews were not recorded, but in these situations notes were taken immediately after the interview, emphasizing the main elements from the interview guide.

We started each interview by asking the visitors why they were at the cemetery. Thereafter, we asked them to describe the place and the atmosphere. Many of the interviewed spontaneously compared the cemetery with a park. If they did not do this, we asked them to make such a comparison. All the visitors were also asked to give their opinion about what activities they thought were acceptable or not. The longer interviews opened up for deeper

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reflections about the person's relationship with the cemetery and topics arising during the conversation.

In addition to the visitors at the cemetery, we also approached 59 persons passing outside the cemeteries. These people were asked questions about why they did not pass through the cemetery. To obtain information from the managers, we interviewed two employees from the City of Oslo's Burial Department on-site.

### *Analyses*

All the recorded interviews were transcribed. The analyses followed a systematic text condensation (Malterud 2012), a descriptive and explorative method inspired by Giorgi's psychological phenomenological analysis (Giorgi 2009). An important goal for this analysis was to search for the essence of a phenomenon, looking at objects from the perspective of how they were experienced (Malterud 2012). The first step was to form an idea of a total impression, then to identify and sort meaning units. The condensation of the material then followed before the synthesizing phase, in which descriptions and concepts were developed (Malterud 2012). Six meaning units were found, representing the secondary functions of the cemeteries, as well as the category "*Different thoughts on accessibility*", because of its relevance to the visitors' perceptions of the place.

### **Results: Secondary functions ascribed the cemeteries**

#### *A multifaceted urban green space*

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Both the interviews and an observation study (see Figure 4) show that people visit the cemeteries for many different purposes, particularly at the Old Town Cemetery (see Figure 5). A main impression from the interviews was that visitors often included *several* qualities and functions in their descriptions of the place and their stay, as exemplified by these two women:

I am here first and foremost because it is convenient and close, but also because it is a wonderful cemetery. They keep it well, and here there is a calm and pleasant atmosphere. Always lots of people and dogs and (...) Very green and lush, a nice place to be!

Woman39 50-60 years, passing through GG with her grandchild in a buggy on the way to the sea

I am here to walk the dog, but I really love this place. I live right up here, so usually I stay here twice a day, almost. I'm very fond of cemeteries in fact, I think it is so lovely and peaceful and ... I like to walk around and read on the graves, looking at different names. ...I don't know, but there's such a nice, quiet and melancholy mood from this place. (...) Here you may somehow stay a little in peace, while in the park you find people who grill and lots of talking and things like that, true. Also, it is always very beautifully cared for. I appreciate the gardeners working all the time, people decorating their graves and ... it contributes to the harmonious feeling.

Woman 25-30 years walking her dog, GG20

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Peacefulness, greenness and aesthetically pleasing were highlighted as important aspects among almost all of those interviewed, while quite a few visitors mentioned the cemetery as a cultural heritage in comparison. Those who mentioned the Muslim and Jewish sections primarily talked about it in a positive manner, as exotic, as interesting and a way of having a cultural encounter. Not all of those interviewed were aware of these sections, especially the Jewish one at the Eastern Cemetery, which is hidden by a spruce hedge. The following quotation illustrates how inspiring the historical dimension of a cemetery may be:

Interviewer: How would you describe the place?

Woman: It is very beautiful, very peaceful. So, I find it very fun to walk around to look and read on the gravestones, especially the older graves. I think this is really exciting.

Interviewer: What does it gives you? It is the names, how they are made?

Woman: Actually, it is not so much about the design, more so that... Yes, until the 1940-50s, I'm not sure, so it was common to note the profession or title on the gravestones. For example, down here, you find one where you can read "Car owner". Haha! Maybe he was a sort of driver, and maybe he owned his car, but just the fact that it once was a nice title... stuff like that, I think it is funny! ... After the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, it felt heavy to go and look at the tombs. Some of the deceased after that event are located here.

Woman 50-60 years visiting the family grave, ØG51

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For many, the experience of nature seems like an integral part of other qualities ascribed to the place, such as peacefulness and being aesthetically pleasing. This young woman emphasizes the element of nature in her description of the cemetery:

Interviewee: I think it's really great that one meets the nature in the middle of the city. It's very nice, a lot of plants... trees, and... There are not so many places like this in Oslo.

Interviewer: How do you experience the ambience of the place, can you describe it?

Interviewee: I don't know, it's somehow like walking in the forest, I think ... it's a bit like that cozy feeling, yes.

Woman1, 25-30 years, photographing at GG

A large majority of the interviewees also mention the good maintenance as a positive and important aspect of the stay, expressing that the well-maintained environment and the flowers on the graves evoke good feelings. This effect of good maintenance seems related both to the beauty and the intention of the maintenance to honor the burial place and the deceased.

Two young men from Iran and Afghanistan reflected on the paradox in that the cemetery is so pretty and decorated, when the site itself actually is associated with something sad and final, namely death. This paradox may have to be further emphasized if the two men were aware of the Jewish section located just behind the hedge, where it is not customary to decorate with

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flowers. The quotation illustrates that the cemetery is a place for cultural and religious encounters. At the same time, the dialogue indicates another important quality of the cemeteries, namely being a space that allows for reflections on the existential aspects of life:

Interviewee 1: The atmosphere is just quiet and nice, it's pleasant. There not so much sadness.

Interviewer: Do you agree (speaking to his friend)?

Interviewee 2: I somewhat agree. Too good, I think! Too good, yes. A cemetery for me is a place to come and get a completely different idea of the world, where you finally get to be... just to think about life... Life is absolute. But then, when you come *here*, then one thinks instantly that you are in a park, more than being at a cemetery, right. You lose a part of the feeling about what's going to happen. A different mindset. ... That idea gets a little farther away when you come here.

Interviewer: Do you think this is negative?

Interviewee 2: It has its advantages. It's not negative that it's like a park.

Interviewer: What are you thinking (speaking to his friend)?

Interviewee 1: That it is good to lie here.

Interviewer: There is perhaps something soothing in it, you don't really have anything to fear?

Interviewed 2: In addition, it must be a bit alternating. One is going to die. It (the place) should remind us that death is the end. It is sad, but there is a truth to come.

Two young men from Iran and Afghanistan sitting on a bench, ØG95

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*Passage: Not only the shortest way*

To pass through the Old Town Cemetery using the shortest way by foot takes a few minutes. Many of those interviewed told us that passing through the cemetery was the shortest way to daily tasks, but the passage seemed to include more experiences than simply being the shortest way:

It is very nice to walk here, it is taken good care of. Yes, quiet and calm. Birds and stuff like that. I could have gone there on the road, but I chose to go here. It occurs as being natural to me, it's more pleasant to go here. It differs from the road. It's green, the smell of trees and stuff like that.

Young man on way home passing through GG35

We live right nearby and we often pass through. (...) This is a very nice park, it is a very calm atmosphere and like a breathing space. Yes, and a bit unusual being like this and at the same time being a cemetery, but it's a sort of space just for us who have a property in the vicinity, and so it also becomes like a park. Yes, it is a very nice atmosphere here. Maybe it is because I like that life occurs on a burial site. I appreciate that. Yes, I could have been laying here! I like that people use it ordinarily and that there is life.

Woman85 30-35 passing through GG with a buggy

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To pass through the Eastern Cemetery takes a few more minutes compared to the Old Town Cemetery. In contrast to the Old Town Cemetery, passing through this cemetery was not necessarily a shortcut to, e.g. public transport. This young couple was walking outside the fence because they were in a hurry, but told us that they often pass through the cemetery:

She: I think it's more cozy to walk inside, then we are released from the exhaust smell, and there's less noise. I think it is a quiet and nice cemetery.

He: Yes, and you find a lot of nice flowers, it's beautiful to walk on the path that is right behind these bushes here. We have done that, oh yes.

Young couple<sup>120</sup> passing outside ØG

### *A place for thoughtfulness and reflectivity*

A main impression from the interviews was that these urban green cemeteries were ascribed a unique quality as places for thoughtfulness and reflectivity. Not only did the greenness, aesthetically pleasing and peaceful atmosphere contribute to this quality, but the dimension of death ascribed to the places seemed to motivate the visitors to think in other ways than they would usually do. Many of the interviewees were very conscious about the value of this, with some examples shown below:

Interviewer: Do you think this is a park?

Interviewee: Uh, sort of.

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Interviewer: What separates and what is the same?

Interviewee: The same is the luxuriance and the greenness. What separates, and this is very important, is that you get that kind of apropos, that it is very good to live, us staying alive. It reminds me that we should not take it for granted, simply. Being here gives me some thoughts that are a little bit important... Yes, definitely."

Woman39 50-60 years passing through GG with her  
grandchild in a buggy on the way to the sea

Now, we are here to look for the grave. But it has happened, that I've been stopping by here just to cool it a bit. It is a quiet place, and then it gives a little peace of mind. Really. So, I talk a little bit with my dad, then, who went last time.

Husband and wife to look for a grave, ØG53

What you see when you walk around here is mostly people who sit alone. Because they want to be alone. Here, they don't have to deal with others, because there are so many invisible and not definable rules in this room.... Don't go fast, don't say hi.... And then, one is allowed to sit in peace. There is room for contemplation.

Man ca. 45 years resting on a bench, GG29

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Interviewee: New graves give some thoughts and reflections, especially when they are children. It touches and affects me a little bit, and that is not only negative. This is not a bad side of the cemetery, to touch a bit on the course of life.

Interviewer: Does it give a dimension that other green lungs do not have?

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely.

Woman 50-60 years walking her dog, GG37

Many of the informants mention the quality of quietness and peacefulness, and the importance of this in a generally noisy city. This is quite interesting, because the actual noise level was likely as high inside the cemeteries as outside because of traffic noise from the outside, in addition to the sounds of lawn mowers:

You get in a different mode here, not having any noise to interfere with the quiet. I'm used to sound, but this is a quiet place to think, to sit down.

Young woman walking her dog, GG41

Interviewee: I think it is very peaceful here.

Interviewer: What about the sound? Is it quiet?

Interviewed: Yes, for me it is. People are working (lawn mower), but sound does also relate to different dimensions. My heart is with God, I am calm. I close the sounds outside. When I read the Quran, I talk with God, and then the sounds are completely gone.

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Palestinian man (50-60 years) on the way to the Chapel to pray, GG36

This woman, as with some others, nuanced the impression of quietness and peacefulness:

Yes, it's very beautiful here, then. Very respectfully done. If you look at the area isolated, and forget about the noise, so it is beautiful and nice, a place you can calm down. (...) We also have a family burial site at the Norstrand Cemetery. It is something completely different. There, it is much more quiet... There, you can let things sink in over you in a completely different way, with only the smaller local roads around.

Woman on her way to visit a grave, ØG54

### *A place of mourning, grief and to show respect*

Many of the interviewees pointed out that they wanted to show respect for the mourners:

Yesterday I went for a long walk. ... so I was very hot and sweaty. But I put on my t-shirt again when I was entering the cemetery. It has something to do with showing respect.

Man, ca. 65-70 years, resting on a bench, ØG17

When you walk around on a site where there are dead people, one takes a little bit more care and it may not be as much arms and legs as otherwise... It is the same for

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all: we will all die, and somewhere we are going to end, at one or another gravestone.

And most people have a certain respect for this, I think.

Man in his 40s resting on a bench, GG88

The feeling of respect (see Figure 6) was expressed as a distinctive quality of the place, making cemeteries different from other green spaces. This woman represents those who reflected over the cemetery as a kind of contrast to current society in general, in which the degree of freedom for behavior seems like an important norm:

Interviewee: I actually think of this place as a last stand, where we have some clearly defined limits according what is okay and not, for now everything will be so very fine all over the place. It's all becoming so boundless...

Interviewer: Is this something that makes this place a little attractive to you? To feel those limits?

Interviewee: Oh yes, it is. I don't think that there are so many sites that are clearly defined in that way anymore. So, I hope it can continue to be that way, that it continues to be one of those small lungs where you know how to behave when you walk into the port here. So you should do it here, you know it in that you enter, and then it becomes a little bit safe.

Woman 50-60 years visiting the family grave, ØG51

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But what is correct and respectful behavior at a cemetery? A main impression from the interviews was that most visitors, also including those who visit graves, accepted more calm and quiet activities such as strolling, walking the dog on a leash and relaxing on the benches. Jogging, bicycling and loose dogs were not likely appreciated, whereas to sit down on the lawn for sunbathing or picnicking were also activities accepted by just few visitors. Some of the interviewees expressed that if such activities were canalized to separate parts of the cemeteries, it would be acceptable behavior (see Figure 7).

### *Different thoughts on accessibility*

A walk, stay and other calm activities are juridically allowed for according to the regulations. As expressed earlier, cemeteries are part of the green infrastructure in cities, but not treated similarly to other publicly owned green areas in a planning context (anonymous 5). To discuss whether cemeteries are “redefined” and “de-alienated” in relation to the primary purpose, an important question is whether citizens perceive cemeteries accessible as a community asset. Localization, design and gates contribute to this, in which the Eastern Cemetery seems to appear as more “closed” than the Old Town Cemetery:

There are not so many ways out. Sometimes, I should like to go out there (points), and I have walked around the entire cemetery. I've been in the office, and asked why there is nothing about the ports on the information board. Actually, there is one port on the corner here. But the ports are hard to find. If you're coming from there, so it's very far to go along the cemetery. In that way, I would have preferred more ports."

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Woman in her 50s visiting a grave, ØG90

Not that many of the interviewees talked about the cemetery as being scary. But the dense and high hedges affected the perception of safety, which in turn affected the perception of accessibility. Many visitors appreciated the work done regarding managing and cutting the vegetation:

Oh yes, the cemetery is very much more open. Before, I was quite anxious. I was afraid to go here. But now, it's just peace.

Woman in her 50s visiting a grave, ØG89

One man told us that he was not aware of the place before his father died, despite having lived in the area for several decades:

I didn't know how nice this place was! Now, I stop by and "greet" my parents before I eat my lunch in the memory ground. (...) I combine to putter about the grave with the stroll to here, and to eat lunch.

Man 50-60 years eating his lunch, ØG45

Others have to open up their "own fences" before they become familiar with the cemetery, such as this young woman:

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The first time I went here, it was a bit like; "Oh, may I go here, then?" But now, we pass through here all the time, and I think that there is so much cozier to walk here than outside.

Young woman, passing through ØG120

The Old Town Cemetery is very centrally located and well-known, and many people are passing through or staying here for a while. This young man represents many of those interviewed here:

Many people use this place like me, walking their dog or sitting down on a bench, because it is so close."

Young man walking his dog, GG34

While most visitors seemed to think about the cemetery as a community asset, as long as one is conscious about showing respect, some were sceptical about opening up these green spaces for common use. But just a small proportion of the interviewees outside the cemeteries expressed that the cemetery only belonged to those who had a grave to visit. Of those who were interviewed outside, a minority did not enter because they thought the cemetery had a negative or unsafe atmosphere. For most, the way outside was the shortest way.

Our impression from interviews with the local managers was that they, in accordance with the regulations, saw their primary function as taking care of the place as a burial site. For them, it was not the main aim to design or maintain the cemetery with the intention to open it up for

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other activities. But at the same time, they were conscious of the fact that cemeteries are public spaces, and that visitors are allowed access according to the behavioural rules. The managers understood people's motivation to visit such a beautiful urban green space, but they also expressed promoting open access as challenging. For example, dossers, drug addicts and flashers were mentioned as disturbing elements, and they also had to deal with a lot of dog excrement at the Old Town Cemetery when attending flowers on the graves. At the Eastern Cemetery, the managers had plugged a hole made in the fence several times by people who needed an entrance to use the cemetery as a shortcut.

## **Discussion**

Through spatial practices and appropriation of space, urban spaces may be *redefined* and "made to one's own" (De Certeau 1984, 84). The redefining of spaces through social practices indicates that a norm or standard ("dominant representation") exists that the practitioner (user) differs from. This study indicates that citizens redefine urban green cemeteries by visiting them for several different purposes beside its primary purpose of being a burial place. The secondary functions described by the interviewees showed that the two cemeteries were highly valued as green, recreational urban spaces, but with unique qualities compared to other urban green spaces as parks. For many, the experience of nature seems like an integral part of other qualities ascribed to the place. We find this integration as an important characteristic of the cemeteries, according to Woodthorp's (2011) characterization of cemeteries as *simultaneous* spaces of emotion, commerce and community. The number of people that walk through the cemetery to experience the multifaceted urban green space and all its qualities

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illustrates this. Cemeteries have unique roles as places for mourning and grief, where the visitors *respect* for this aspect appears as an additional, but important quality of the place (see also anonymous 3, 6).

The Old Town Cemetery appears as more “redefined” according to de Certeau, in the way that people to a higher degree have appropriated this space through new practices that differ from the original and still main purpose. This can be explained by the visitors at the Old Town Cemetery are younger than on the Eastern Cemetery. Inspired by Lefebvre (1991a; 1991b), 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. An important question is then whether this “de-alienation” of the cemetery is negative and in conflict with the primary purpose of serving the mourners and honoring the place (Francis et al. 2005; Woodthorpe 2010). Or may this “redefinition” of space through new practices allow for viewing cemeteries in other ways, as open and valuable green spaces for everyone? An important question is then whether cemeteries are perceived as accessible.

One aspect of accessibility is whether citizens, including those without a grave to visit, perceive the cemeteries as private spaces or community assets. Of those interviewed outside the fences, there was just a small group who did not enter the cemeteries because they thought the places belonged to those who had a grave to visit. For most, not entering was due to practical reasons. Many of the visitors at the two cemeteries, especially at the Old Town Cemetery, expressed that they regard this cemetery as a community asset or a ‘common

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garden' to stay at or to pass through. This accords to other studies, characterizing cemeteries as both sacred and secular spaces, intended to serve the whole community including multiple social and political meanings (Rugg 2000). Nevertheless, several aspects seem to contribute to perceptions of limited access. A negative and scary atmosphere associated with both spiritual dimensions and deviant behavior was mentioned, and more light was asked for by several visitors (see also Deering 2010). The interviews outside the cemeteries were very short because people were in a hurry, and therefore we can not elaborate further on this theme. But, the short interviews outside showed that only a minority pointed to negative perceptions about the cemeteries as the main reason to not pass through the cemetery. We see individual barriers to visit cemeteries as an important topic for future research. The interviews among the visitors also showed that most were conscious about showing respect for the mourners, grave visitors and the place itself. Respect for those visiting graves seem to keep some potential visitors outside, but several visitors acknowledged respect for others and the place as a genuine quality of the stay making it different from for example parks.

In this paper, we set out to explore cemeteries' role as urban, green spaces. What makes cemeteries to 'more than just parks '? Both mourning and grief, including visitor's respect for those feelings, constitute valuable aspects of the atmosphere (anonymous 3; Maddrell 2015). But, also religion (s) and spiritual values are important dimensions. McClymont (2015, 1) argues that "religious and spiritual values can be rearticulated as concepts which add a substantive positive dimension to planning and its conceptualization and construction of place." She uses the notion of *municipal spirituality* to redefine the value of places as

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something beyond the rationally perceivable world articulated in instrumental terms, and uses cemeteries to illustrate how this notion may be an alternative, but useful concept for planning practice. Greed (2016) discusses whether environmental aspects of sustainability have tended to predominate modern urban planning, at the sacrifice of non-spatial factors as belief and religion. Because religion has major spatial planning implications for all aspects and levels of urban policy, she argues that “neglecting religion’s existence results in an incomplete planning agenda, undermining equality and diversity objectives” (page 154). Our study shows that cemeteries’ position in urban planning can benefit from employing approaches that include their diverse qualities and functions as green urban spaces for recreation and cultural encounters. Studies on cemeteries’ value for religious and spiritual activity supplement this picture, in emphasizing the need for diverse and respectful planning and management of cemeteries as sacred, spiritual and non-physical spaces (see also anonymous 1).

To care-take access to restorative and green urban spaces, such as cemeteries, for all citizens, ownership is of importance. Varying from for example UK (Rugg 2000), almost all cemeteries in Norway are owned by the Church. In Oslo, the Church is the formal owner while the municipality do the management. Without going into detail on this quite sensitive political issue, discussions are raised whether this arrangement should be replaced by a more religion-neutral owner to increase their status as community assets (NOU 2013). Our study indicate that individual, perceived access differs, sometimes along and sometimes despite of, formal and juridical ownership and accessibility. We see individual perceptions of

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accessibility to cemeteries as a relevant topic for further research, to help management in care-taking different (potential) users and user-groups.

In a context of modern urban planning, we question whether the cemeteries in too high degree are planned and managed as a “dominant representation” instead of facilitate secondary functions (see also Francis et al. 2000). The managers interviewed expressed that their main role was to facilitate the place as a burial site. Other activities appeared as an effect of being attractive well-maintained green spaces, but sometimes in conflict with the primary purpose to be a burial site. In a perspective of urban outdoor recreation and urban sustainability, it seems relevant to ask whether and how the managers may focus more on other visitors, those who have acquired these urban green spaces in their own way through new practices.

The unique character of the cemeteries could obviously be in danger of disappearing if the cemeteries were made more accessible to promote more or other types of use. There is a challenge to utilize cemeteries’ potential for restoration, contemplation and relaxation for citizens, without compromising the main purpose or dominant representation to serve the mourners and show respect for the place. Many of the interviewees said that they felt safer at the cemeteries if more people used them, but at the same time many of them appreciated the calm atmosphere without too many visitors. To keep cemeteries as calm, quiet and meditative spaces, it seems important to design cemeteries with public-privacy aspects in mind.

Cemeteries represent both shared human spiritual experience, as the dimension of death, and individual decisions (expressed by for example individual design) (McClymont 2015).

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Strolling or relaxing on benches does not need to be in opposition to a quiet and respectful atmosphere if the visitors know where they should go or sit down. More than warning signs, positive signs for walks, enough benches, clear footpaths, hedges for zones between public and private areas, all of these are part of an effort to promote citizens to visit cemeteries without disturbing those who visit the graves. Lights, enough ports and welcome signs at the gates should all contribute to this, and were measures mentioned by the interviewees.

From our point of view, to design and manage cemeteries for better access in such ways as those mentioned above are not in opposition to the regulations. But managing cemeteries with other users than those who visit the graves in mind may have its implications. Based on this study, promoting the use of green urban cemeteries has a great potential for citizens and a sustainable city. The situation at the Old Town Cemetery illustrates this. Here, visitors have appropriated the space and made it their own through new practices. This process of de-alienation and redefinition inspired by Lefebvre and De Certeau has probably started at the Eastern Cemetery and at other urban cemeteries. Based on the unique qualities of urban green cemeteries as described in this study, the appropriation of space through social production should be welcomed, but met with careful management and regulations to help meet their original purpose.

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