

Call for Papers for the Panel
“The popular in funeral cultures”

Studies on popular cultures are rarely interested in cemeteries and funeral culture. We argue that the popular is an important dimension of funeral cultures and their recent and ongoing transformations. Apart from the fact that new elements of popular culture in the narrow sense of cultural artefacts – or commodities – appear in growing number on cemeteries (be it the ceremonial performance of the deceased’s favorite pop song or the embellishment of the grave by material allusions to his/her hobbies and passions), the latter are also becoming more popular in the sense that religiously and/or socially sanctioned frameworks of uniform collective religio-cultural forms are gradually disappearing. As a consequence, the necessity and possibility of such frames have become an issue of debate in scholarship and in the general public.

These recent developments are particularly interesting since, due to growing mobility and cultural diversification, they go along with the encounter of diverse religious and ceremonial traditions and their respective popular transformations. Cemeteries are now perceived as "translocal contact zones" whose boundary reducing function needs to be investigated.

This diversification may also instigate renewed interest in the relationship between the collective and the individual. While contemporary western funeral culture shows a distinct tendency towards individualization and the already mentioned popular means of individual celebration and commemoration, “diversity-ready deathscapes” must also allow for the opposite: collective ceremonies that are popular in the sense of pertaining to a particular cultural group or people.

Papers may deal with current and historical funeral practices in Europe and beyond. We welcome both contributions that present the results of empirical studies and contributions that engage in theoretically inspired reflections on the importance of the popular funeral cultures.

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