

VERBAND FÜR
GEDENKKULTUR

Cemeteries - in the midst of life

A position paper



Raising the awareness of society Acting strategically

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Foreword

Cemeteries - in the midst of life

There are about 32,000 cemeteries in Germany, often located in the middle of villages and easily accessible.

Cemeteries are the most visited green spaces. The bereaved and visitors take time out from everyday life in the natural environment that they offer.

Cemeteries are also places of encounter, people meet by chance or because they always devote themselves to the care of a grave at the same time and get into conversation with each other.

The Association for the Culture of Remembrance considers cemeteries an important part of the cultural heritage and has taken the lead together with other associations in applying to UNESCO to protect cemetery culture in Germany as Intangible Cultural Heritage. The first step (entry in the national list) was successfully completed on the fringes of the Conference of Ministers of Culture on 13 March 2020 and can now be chalked up as a success.

Cemetery owners have a great responsibility to maintain and develop these special places in such a way that they can meet all challenges with appropriate offerings.

The various aspects that need to be taken into account are discussed below.

“As a priest, I stand with the people who have lost loved ones.”

“I observe and talk to them and notice how time in the cemetery helps many to process their grief. The administration has set up a “mourning stop” with a bench, and I sit at the times posted there and am never left alone for long.”

**Together for a reconsideration
of climate-friendly burial.**



At a glance

The cemetery



A place of encounter

A feature of every cemetery is the possibility of meeting others, and often chance acquaintances arise. More and more cemeteries provide premises in which cafés are run. This really helps people to get into conversation with each other. It is a good thing if chapels are used as cultural facilities not only for funeral services. Cemeteries should be there for everyone and offer all groups and interests what they want and need. Special consideration should be given to migrants who have found their second home in this country and have their own special forms of mourning.



The grave and the stone

The appearance of a cemetery is shaped by its graves and gravestones. They carry the names of the families who have lived in that place. Family graves, which have often existed for a very long time, should not be abandoned just because the right of use has expired. Special measures are necessary to preserve these often particularly valuable graves. Support is needed in the selection of eco-friendly and low-maintenance grave plantings. Anonymous graves, where the place of burial is no longer identifiable, often make it difficult to cope with grief.



A natural oasis

Cemeteries can be important refuges for many native animal and plant species if suitable conditions are provided. Cemetery gardeners know about plants that also provide food for insects and birds. If these are also precisely adapted to the respective soil and climate conditions, you will perhaps have smaller flowers but less maintenance - and can enjoy more robust plants. Of course, not only graves but also entire cemeteries can be planted close to nature. Bat and bird boxes can round off the effect and create a natural balance in the cemetery.



Well equipped and maintained

Many people miss it when it is not there: barrier-free accessibility by bike or on foot, sunlit benches that invite you to rest, the individual grave. There is always someone at the cemetery, an administration member or employees who are sweeping the leaves and trimming the lawn. Sanitary facilities are also a matter of course. No one has to trip over roots as in the woods, and there are hardly any closures due to forest fires, storms, muddy paths, etc. A well-kept cemetery signifies appreciation for those buried there and an honourable remembrance such as we have always shown to our deceased.

**“I’m here
almost every
day.”**

“Our family plot is just a few minutes bike ride from where I live. The daily walk to the grave gives me comfort and strength. When I visit it, I enjoy the peace and quiet. The cemetery is a restful island for me in the midst of the urban hustle and bustle - I wouldn't want to be without this place.”

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Our cemetery culture must not die out

More nature and climate protection in cemeteries!

The cemetery has always been a place of remembrance, but also a place of fellowship where one can exchange thoughts with other bereaved people. A visit to a cemetery usually means time-out from hectic everyday life, from worries, needs and commitments. In the peace and quiet of this special cultural landscape, thoughts can focus and free space for reflection can be created.

However, the rise of alternative forms of burial is threatening to dissolve this culture.

The preservation of our cemetery culture, which has evolved over centuries, is the endeavour of our association. At the same time, the association represents the interests of all those involved in the cemetery business: Undertakers, gardeners, stonemasons, municipal as well as Christian, Jewish and Muslim cemetery owners.

Suggestions for cemetery owners

It is not always easy to reconcile cemetery culture requirements with the many ready-made products on the market. Economic side effects must be taken into account, especially if, for example, urn spaces are concentrated in a small area and the cemetery becomes increasingly empty as a result.

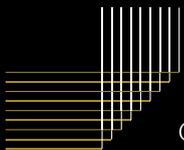
Do I need urn walls, urn casings, columbaria or should I not rather pay attention to the tradition that shapes my cemetery? What should be the guiding principle of my cemetery?

Each grave space must be maintained by the cemetery owner, which causes costs of one euro and more per visit, with 12 visits and 20 years making at least € 240.00 - and that's just for a single grave space.

Wouldn't it make sense to pay special attention to these spaces between the graves instead of putting up urn walls?

- With sponsorships for abandoned or neglected traditional graves?
- With small communal graves for clubs and groups of friends who have their memorial stone designed by the local stonemason during their lifetime?
- With grave goods that can be cared for, but don't have to be?

Developing cemeteries in a sustainable way is a big but solvable challenge if the right course is set.



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