

Remembering the future: New cemeteries and the paradox of planning for heterotopic space

Despite awareness of issues affecting an aging population, planning policy has very little to say about cemeteries, crematoria and other 'deathscapes'. A review of contemporary development plans has revealed that fewer than 20% of English local authorities have pro-active plans for cemeteries, whilst pressure for land for burial has been well documented in the media.

To consider these issues further, this paper explores a case study into the planning and development of a new cemetery and crematoria in a small English town. It does so with reference to Foucault's notion of 'heterotopia': places which are 'outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality' (Foucault, 1986, p24). Foucault sees cemeteries as prime examples of this sort of space, and it is this sense of being outside of the usual that may make them problematic for planning. Drawing on observations and interviews, the paper presents how they represent something both unwanted and necessary (i.e. death) and hence challenge standard notions of temporality and the role of the planning in providing for the public interest.

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