

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN CEMETERY SPACES

“TRAVEL NOTES” FOR NEW SCENARIOS TO EXPLORE

THE USE OF MEMORY

How do we use our autobiographical, collective and cultural memory TODAY?

We at Mneme often ask ourselves this question.

Cemetery spaces are not just funerary or museum “containers”. They bear witness to the history and memory of an entire population, such as, for example, industrial archaeology sites. There is a wealth of material and immaterial memories in the cemetery landscape that affect, even if motionless and in silence, the historical and socio-cultural processes of an entire community. Memory has quite a complex anthropological and psychic function, even if we are not aware of it.

THE POTENTIAL OF CEMETERY SPACES

How do we use the potential of cemetery spaces in Europe?

The social and cultural planning, within the Cultural Heritage sector of Universities and non-profit organizations, is today having to manage an increasingly hybrid and complex reality. There's a need for competent professional people in numerous sectors that are versatile, capable of facing the criticalities of finding funding; the difficulties of inefficient organizational and economic models; the communication and partnership problems between public and private bodies; listening to and getting communities involved. Can these sectors be basins of inspiration and support for cemetery management in order to focus on and share the criticalities of use and reuse of cemetery spaces? For example, there is a lack of human resources in managing cemeteries that are capable of devoting themselves to planning more extensive and complex socio-cultural projects; an interdisciplinary network that produces ideas, revives human and economic resources and involves the community.

MEMORY AND THE COMMUNITY

Does European cemetery management know today's “users” of cemetery spaces? Is it open-minded and listening to the needs of the community that uses these places today? Nowadays, it's not just enthusiastic tourists who walk among cemeteries, it's also people, families, generations with different needs, customs and cultural habits. The community must be heard and included in a policy of requalification and re-use of a public place in relation to its cultural context.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

Cemetery Management, Cultural Institutions, Non-Profit Organizations, Universities, Other Bodies => Potential of Cemetery Areas.

CASE HISTORY • WELFARE AND CULTURAL WELL-BEING POLICIES

In both the UK and Italy, many non-profit associations were created with the specific purpose of dealing with the protection of cemeteries which today have an important role for cemetery administrators and users. Many London cemeteries, for example, started being managed 20 years ago by groups of volunteers who founded organizations, in collaboration with public and private bodies so as to prevent their destruction. *The National Federation of Cemetery Friends* is a federation that brings together all the English cemeteries stemming from the thrust of these association movements. Today, in the UK, this civil flurry of activity has led to redevelopment work on cemeteries involving the community and various professional figures so as to facilitate access to finance, the execution of long-term co-planning projects, the implementation of a network in a supralocal perspective and the involvement of the community. The figure, for example, of *Partnership and Community Engagement*, within the Brompton Cemetery Conservation Project (London), has an important role in mediating and bringing the community closer to the changes put into action by architectural work and restoration projects, which go beyond the pragmatic reuse of a space.

FACILITIES AND SERVICES

“Presiding” cemeteries, through recovering their unused buildings to be used as *visitor centres, coffee bars, spaces for the community* is an investment in terms of costs and personnel, yet also a good starting point for other services and economic advantages for the cemetery and relevant territory.

There are equipped and multifunctional areas in various London cemeteries with numerous uses that also include refreshment areas and commercial sales. These destinations of use, in the various areas, allow the cemetery to be experienced by the community in everyday life as a living place of encounter and well-being. At the *Arnos Vale Cemetery* (Bristol), the cemetery has also become the place chosen to celebrate marriage ceremonies.

There are initiatives, activities and meetings in London for people, families, communities that live in mourning, launched by the cemetery spaces. These actions, designed for “mourners”, suggest a further development of on-site psychological assistance services and activities related to artistic and holistic therapies.

TOOLS AND PRODUCTS

Equipping the cemetery with informative digital and/or paper material serves to connect the venue to the surrounding territory, therefore to other contents and cultural experiences.

Brochures, panels, paper and/or digital maps are tools which, if designed for specific targets and uses, increase the venue's accessibility and usability from numerous points of view (not just tourism).

Laboratories, courses, meetings, interdisciplinary workshops (and much more) are functional initiatives aimed at making the cemetery space “converse” with the community and the local social context (including but not limited to).

EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, FESTIVALS

Putting into action the programming of various types of cultural and recreational events at cemeteries means changing their destination (and perception) of use and transforming them into a space of artistic expression, in which the community recognizes itself.

This takes place in English cemeteries, but above all at the *Certosa Monumental Cemetery* in Bologna (Italy) where the unusual and suggestive context of the venue amplifies the experience of the theatrical performance (even at night) and manages to convey themes of great current and collective interest. As a result, the cemetery fulfils a social (and sacral) function similar to that of the ancient Greek theatre: a public place where the community, of the dead and the living gathered together, reclaims its memory and uses it for its benefit.

ABOUT US

Alessandra Bricchetti

Mneme is a cultural association from Milan (Italy) that is dedicated to research, editorial and audio-visual projects aimed at enhancing the places of memory with material and immaterial cultural heritage that is still hardly known. As founder of Mneme (Alessandra Bricchetti), in 2017, thanks to the support of the *Banca del Monte di Lombardia Foundation* bank, I won a competition that allowed me to travel throughout the UK and Italy cemeteries in order to observe how these spaces were managed by the cemetery administrators and experienced by the community. Today, after a certain time, I am writing a bilingual “travel diary” to be published so as to recount the Melancholy Heritage Project's experience (and challenges), enriching it with the material, experiences and research carried out so far. It was an intense and complex journey with numerous critical points; yet it is a journey that continues.

WRITE TO US

info@associazionemneme.it

We would like to learn about other experiences, points of view and good practices of using cemetery spaces throughout Europe that enable us to experience other scenarios and change processes regarding the use of these complex spaces. We would also like to hear stories and news of cemetery spaces that tell something more regarding popular culture, rituals and “experiences” of the European community. We cannot travel all over Europe, but we would like to include this chorus of voices in the “travel diary”, on our website and in other initiatives. If you would like to send us some ideas, write to us by December 31, 2019 (in English if possible).

Thanks!

 **mneme**
LA MEMORIA DEL BENE

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