

# Deathscapes and diversity in England and Wales: setting an agenda

## Introduction

The UK is an ethnically and religiously diverse country, shaped by long-standing ties with communities from the New Commonwealth, and other dynamic flows of international migration, particularly within Europe. National and local government, and other service providers, play an important part in the well-being of established minority groups and migrant residents within this

multicultural society. For instance, they play a key role in the provision of social housing, education, employment and leisure facilities. Likewise, many migrants and successive generations work in public sector services such as the NHS, as well as for private companies.

This paper focuses on a scarcely discussed yet important dimension of migrant and minority experiences in England and Wales: cemetery and crematoria provision<sup>1</sup>. These important spaces and services, including their gardens of remembrance,

## 1

This paper is based on the briefing report: Maddrell, A. et al (2018), *Diversity-ready Cemeteries and Crematoria in England and Wales*, University of Reading, Reading.

Aquest article se centra en una dimensió poc discutida, però important, de les experiències dels migrants i les minories a Anglaterra i Gal·les: els cementiris i crematoris de què disposen. Basat en una àmplia investigació amb comunitats locals i proveïdors de serveis en quatre ciutats casos d'estudi, aquest article explora les diverses necessitats funeràries culturals i religioses a Anglaterra i Gal·les, els reptes que hi estan associats i les formes en què tant les comunitats com els proveïdors de serveis (p. ex.: planificadors i directores funeraris) hi responen.

Destaquen vuit temes clau:

- i) l'oferta de cementiris;
- ii) l'oferta de crematoris;
- iii) l'oferta desigual per diferents grups migrants i minoritaris;
- iv) la diversitat en la diversitat;
- v) els canvis de patrons de repatriació;
- vi) el foment del diàleg;
- vii) la comprensió entre professionals i comunitats, i
- viii) la planificació dels cementiris com a espais de trobada.

*Este artículo se centra en una dimensión poco discutida pero importante de las experiencias de los migrantes y las minorías en Inglaterra y Gales: los cementerios y crematorios de que disponen. Basándose en una amplia investigación con comunidades locales y proveedores de servicios en cuatro ciudades casos de estudio, este artículo explora las diversas necesidades funerarias culturales y religiosas en Inglaterra y Gales, los retos asociados a estas y las formas en que tanto las comunidades como los proveedores de servicios (p. ej.: planificadores y directores funerarios) responden a ellos.*

*Destacan ocho temas clave:*

- i) *la oferta de cementerios;*
- ii) *la oferta de crematorios;*
- iii) *la oferta desigual por diferentes grupos migrantes y minoritarios;*
- iv) *la diversidad en la diversidad;*
- v) *los cambios de patrones de repatriación;*
- vi) *el fomento del diálogo;*
- vii) *la comprensión entre profesionales y comunidades, y*
- viii) *la planificación de los cementerios como espacios de encuentro.*

This paper focuses on a little discussed but important dimension of migrant and minority experiences in England and Wales: cemetery and crematoria provision. Based on extensive research with local communities and service providers in four case study towns, this paper explores the varied cultural and religious funerary needs in England and Wales, the associated challenges and the ways in which both communities and service providers (e.g. cemetery managers, town planners and funeral directors) respond to them.

It highlights seven key themes, namely:

- i) cemetery provision;
- ii) crematorium provision;
- iii) unequal provision across migrant and minority groups;
- iv) diversity within diversity;
- v) changing patterns of repatriation;
- vi) fostering dialogue;
- vii) understanding between professionals and communities; and
- viii) planning for cemeteries as spaces of encounter.

are provided and managed primarily by local government, alongside some private providers, including faith groups (e.g. the Church of England/Wales) and commercial services. Planners play an important role in forward-planning for and mediating negotiations around the location of local services.

In the UK as a whole more than 70% of the dead are cremated, the remainder being buried and a small percentage repatriated internationally (Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2018), a pattern broadly replicated in England and Wales. Funeral and remembrance practices are increasingly co-created by the bereaved, the deceased, the wider community and the funerary professionals (Mathijssen, 2017). Thus, as society becomes more culturally diverse, so do funerary spaces and practices, and the requirements for them. Having the 'right' sort of burial, cremation and associated rituals is important for the respectful treatment of the deceased and for those mourning them. The bodily remains of family and friends are widely deemed to be 'sacred' and where the dead are buried, scattered and remembered is of deep significance to many (Maddrell, 2016). Yet, it is notable that cemetery and crematorium provision in England and Wales is uneven, and provision for different ethnic-religious groups can likewise be uneven and inadequate.

Based on extensive research with local communities and service providers in four case study towns, this paper explores the varied cultural and religious funerary needs in England and Wales, the associated challenges and the ways in which both communities and service providers (e.g. cemetery managers, town planners and funeral directors) respond to them.

After discussing theory, methods and the English and Welsh planning context, it highlights seven key themes, namely: i) cemetery provision; ii) crematorium



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Ms Maddrell is a professor of Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Reading. She is a feminist geographer, with research interests in spaces, landscapes and practices of death, mourning and remembrance; pilgrimage and sacred mobilities; gender, and historiography. She is a co-editor of

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### Yasminah Beebeejaun

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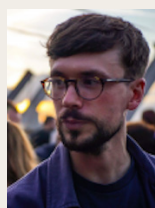
Ms Beebeejaun is an associate professor at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. She is the vice-chair of the Urban Affairs Association. Her research interests encompass ethnic and racial diversity in planning, postcolonial and feminist planning debates, and community engagement and empowerment.



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Ms McClymont is a senior lecturer of Urban Planning at UWE, Bristol. Her teaching and research interests are focused on planning theory and questions of ethics and decision-making in urban policy. Her recent projects explore cemeteries in multicultural urban settings and the unspoken value of community spaces.



### Danny McNally

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Mr McNally is a postdoctoral research assistant in Human Geography at the University of Reading. He is a social and cultural geographer whose research focuses on contemporary urban issues and their intersections with the ideas of participation, difference and diversity. He addresses such issues by focusing empirically on (1) town and city planning, and (2) the arts and cultural sector. His academic work is supported by previous industry experience in urban planning policy and consultation work in galleries and museums.



### Brenda Mathijssen

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Ms Mathijssen is an assistant professor of Psychology, Culture and Religion at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her research centres on the various ways in which people make sense of death, placing particular interest on the roles of ritual and belief in meaning-making processes. Her work also delves into religious-ethnic diversity, health and well-being.



### Sufyan Abid Dogra

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Mr Dogra is a senior research fellow and an anthropologist interested in exploring how practising Islam in the United Kingdom is being shaped by transnational networks of reformist Muslims. He is currently investigating the role of Islamic Religious Settings in tackling childhood obesity in the UK.

**Paraules clau:** Cementiris, crematoris, minories, migracions, diversitat cultural i religiosa

**Palabras clave:** Cementerios, crematorios, minorías, migraciones, diversidad cultural y religiosa

**Keywords:** Cemeteries, crematoria, minorities, migrations, cultural and religious diversity

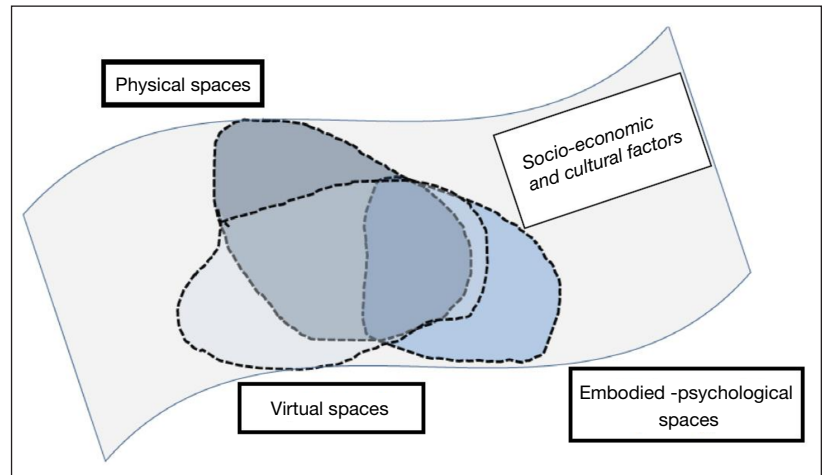
provision; iii) unequal provision across migrant and minority groups; iv) diversity within diversity; v) changing patterns of repatriation; vi) fostering dialogue; vii) understanding between professionals and communities; and viii) planning for cemeteries as spaces of encounter.

By doing so, it illustrates that diversity-ready cemeteries, crematoria and remembrance sites are a necessary but currently neglected aspect of an inclusive and integrated multicultural society (§6). It must be understood that there are not simply diverse cultural and religious practices, but rather ‘diversity within diversity’ (e.g. denominational and regional differences). Likewise, there is a need to understand how such practices are mediated in local and personal circumstances. Addressing this will contribute to greater social well-being and a more inclusive civic culture

### Mapping grief

Dying, death, burial, cremation, bereavement, mourning and remembrance create overlapping spatial patterns in physical space, body-minds and virtual arenas, which in turn can reflect and create powerful fixed and dynamic relations to particular spaces and places (Maddrell, 2016). Places that have or take on meaning in relation to the dead can therefore act as a catalyst, evoking memories, loneliness and/or comfort, or an unpredictable combination of the three. This includes within the body, as the mourner can carry grief within, which can come to the fore in response to specific places at particular times, producing individual and collective emotional-affective ‘maps’ which can serve as navigational aids and route maps for those living with loss (Maddrell, 2013, 2016). Dying, death and bereavement produce new and shifting emotional-affective geographies, whereby material objects, places and communities can elicit new and heightened significance for individuals and groups.

Figure 1



Mapping grief: a conceptual framework for understanding the spatial dimensions of death, dying, bereavement, mourning and remembrance (Maddrell, 2016: 181)

In Figure 1 the ‘Mapping grief’ framework highlights the ways in which dying, death, grief, mourning and remembrance are experienced in and mapped upon (i) physical material spaces, including the public and private arenas and artefacts of everyday life; (ii) the embodied-psychological spaces of the interdependent and co-producing body-mind; and (iii) the virtual spaces of digital technology, religious-spiritual beliefs and non-place-based community. These maps can provide insight into the geographies of emotionally ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ places at a given juncture (Maddrell, 2016: 166), including places where the dying or bereaved find comfort and consolation, i.e. what might be described broadly as ‘therapeutic environments’ (see Bell et al, 2018). Inevitably, such mappings of grief and consolation are dynamic.

Figure 1 also highlights how the experience of dying and mourning are shaped by socio-economic and cultural factors such as wealth, ethnicity, gender, religion and family (Maddrell, 2011, 2016). The 2011 Census showed that 13 percent of the population in England and Wales (7.5 million people) were born overseas (the majority identifying as white) and 14% of the population identified as non-

white (ONS, 2012). Increasing international migration and socio-economic and cultural factors impact on existing requirements and preferences at cemeteries, crematoria and remembrance sites in England and Wales.

The expression of the importance of place attachment in ‘continuing bonds’ with the dead has been documented in works noting the use of vernacular language, symbols of local identity and the choice of specific materials in memorial practices (e.g. Maddrell, 2009, 2011, 2013). This research on dying, death and memorialisation has begun to consider the implications of international migration and the contexts of multicultural societies and post-colonial legacies in Europe (Venhorst et al, 2013; Hunter, 2016; Gunaratnam, 2013; Jassal, 2015) on hospitals, hospices, cemeteries, rituals etc., adding insight into the ways in which death and remembrance are deeply cultural and political (Stevenson et al 2016). The meaning of ‘home’ can be complex for established minorities and migrants (Kaplan and Chacko, 2015). Within multicultural societies, what might broadly be described as the spaces and practices of ‘deathscapes’ play a significant part in facilitating or hindering that sense of being ‘at home’. In England and Wales, municipal cemeteries, as material, symbolic and performative sites, are particularly important public spaces of

representation of collective identity and memory, intertwined with discourses of heritage and nation, and the demarcation of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (see McClymont, 2018). Municipal cemeteries and crematoria (i.e. cremation facilities with gardens of remembrance) are the focus for the following discussion, which outlines key findings from the ‘Deathscapes and diversity’ study in England and Wales and highlights an ongoing agenda for researchers, planners, policy-makers, practitioners and communities.

### Deathscapes and diversity research methods

Extensive fieldwork was conducted in four large multicultural towns in England and Wales: Huddersfield, Newport, Northampton and Swindon (2017-18). Each town has a broadly similar population (approximately 100,000-150,000) including ethnically diverse populations as identified in Census data (see Table 1 below) with varying countries of origin or heritage, religious groups, long-standing established ethnic minority communities and clusters of recent migrants, including those from within the European Union (EU) and beyond (known as Third Country Nationals [TCNs]). Towns were chosen in contrast to large cities where multicultural communities tend to be most highly concentrated and related minority services most highly developed. Extensive interviews and focus groups

Table 1.

	NEWPORT	NORTHAMPTON	SWINDON	HUDDERSFIELD
Other white	1.7%	6.5%	4.2%	2.9%
Pakistani	2.1%	4.2%	0.6%	9.9%
Indian	0.8%	2.5%	3.3%	4.9%
Other significant groups	1.2% Bangladeshi 1.0% Black/African	3.1% Black/African 1.5% Mixed-race white/afro-Caribbean	1.6% Other Asian	1.1% Black/Afro-Caribbean

General description of the populations of migrants and minorities in the cities under study (ONS, 2016)



were conducted with cemetery, crematoria and funeral service providers and users, as well as local established minority and community interest groups. Figure 1 shows the location of the case study towns, and Table 1 gives an overview of the migrant and minority populations within them.

### Planning and policy context

Mainstream services typically base their offer on the historic traditions of the Christian and secular ‘majority’ population. Where cemetery and crematoria managers and funeral directors aim to meet faith-based requirements, such as burial within 24 hours, these may still be deemed as outside of ‘normal’ practice. For example, while private funeral directors usually provide a 24/7 service, public sector workers such as GP doctors, coroners and cemetery workers typically have a Monday–Friday working week. As a result, for those migrants and established minorities unable to ensure a timely and appropriate burial or cremation of kith and kin, cemeteries and crematoria can be experienced as spaces of difference and exclusion, generating a sense of marginalisation and less than full citizenship (Maddrell, 2011; Stevenson et al, 2016). There is, therefore, a need ‘to include the excluded’ (Beebeejaun, 2012) in bereavement services, and to be attentive to further differences within and between ethnic and religious groups.

In England and Wales there is a lack of national and local government planning policy for cemeteries and crematoria. Partly, this is the result of the limited legal responsibility for local authorities to provide funerary services. Spaces for new cemeteries and crematoria, or expansion of existing ones, can be identified by the town planning system but, unlike other European countries, there is no specific requirement to provide spaces. Therefore, local authorities may not have designed and/or prioritised a specific policy to deal

with changing cemetery and crematoria needs. Previous research shows that less than 25% of English planning authorities mention planning for cemeteries in their Local Plan; those that do, typically group them together with green space, heritage spaces, or sites of biodiversity (McClymont, 2016). In the post-2008 era of austerity, local government budgets have been under severe pressure, resulting in some cases in bereavement services (including cemeteries and crematoria) being sub-contracted or reduced, and service users facing increased costs. Private providers are also becoming more diverse, including crematoria and natural or ‘green’ burial grounds.

### Key themes

#### *Cemetery provision*

Our research shows that cemetery provision, in general and for migrant and minority groups in particular, varies considerably between different towns in England and Wales. In some towns, for example, it is possible to conduct same-day burials, as well as burials during weekend hours. This is important for the local Muslim and Jewish communities, who need to bury their kin as soon as possible after death, but this challenges a cemetery system set up around a Monday to Friday working week. While seven-day services are available in some larger cities, towns are lagging behind to the frustration of those living there.

*The facilities are not here yet, unlike in bigger cities such as Leicester and Birmingham. They can bury the dead at any time, because they can do the burial first and the paperwork later. So that's the kind of provision that we want. In Islam, when someone passes away, we have to hasten the burial because there is no good in keeping the body. (Male, East African origin, Muslim, Northampton)*

Where same-day burials or burials during weekends are difficult to arrange, this is

often due to austerity measures restricting the availability of registrar and cemetery staff at weekends.

*We get a phone call on Monday morning saying, we need a Muslim funeral, dug and ready by the afternoon. And often we can say, okay, no problem. But there are times we got to refuse them. There is no choice but to refuse them. With the staff we got it is just impossible. Years ago, we could do it because we had plenty of men [sic]. Now we haven't. (Cemetery manager, Newport)*

Lack of burial space also impacts on local cemetery services. While burial space is in short supply in some cemeteries, overall, demand is falling. Yet, demand for particular faith groups, especially Muslims, is increasing. Also, we observed specific community needs and creative solutions from cemetery managers and personnel to address them. These include creating the possibility to book the complete cemetery for a single lengthy funeral with large numbers of mourners, such as a Caribbean funeral, and a crowd-funding project to develop an Italian-style mausoleum, based on the needs of the local Italian Roman Catholic community and the local cemetery.

*At the cemetery, there is a lot of singing and there are lots of people. And it takes time. Celebrating the person's life. You know that could be 45 minutes. And I have seen that they don't put anything else on the agenda then. There is no-one to be seen. (Male, Christian, Northampton)*

*We did a crowd funding project to build a mausoleum to facilitate above ground burials for our Italian community. The community had come forward to us, and we appointed a community team who worked closely with the cemetery team here. We did an in-house design of the mausoleum, so it met with their specifications. Everything down to the bricks we used, what tiles we used, sizes of the mausoleum to accommodate different types of caskets and coffins. And then, because it was hard to get the money out of capital product, we agreed with the community that they paid a deposit, out of the final cost of what the burial would be. And then we could build the mausoleum. (Male, Cemetery manager, Kettering, Near Northampton)*

Lastly, access and transport are fundamental to people visiting the cemetery or crematoria, whether to attend a burial or cremation ceremony, fulfil ritual or

**Muslim area of the Towcester Road Cemetery in Northampton, East Midlands, England. SOURCE: AUTHORS**



religious obligations, tend a memorial or remember the deceased. Research participants stressed the importance of having enough parking space at the cemetery, especially when large groups attend funerals, as well as the need for easy and regular access by public transport, a necessity for those without cars (typically the poor or elderly). In addition, when visiting the cemetery, visitors would feel more secure if staff were present – a significant issue for those who may already feel vulnerable as a result of age, race-ethnicity and/or religion.

*When I go to the cemetery on my own, I don't stay long, because there is nobody there sometimes. It is frightening. Because there are people walking around, someone may attack you, because there is no-one in the office anymore. (Female, Mauritian origin, Christian, Newport)*

In sum, our research shows that cemetery space needs to be planned in light of population trends for the diverse communities in a given area, as well as the particular religious and cultural requirements of local communities.

### Crematorium provision

UK crematoria are used for the overwhelming majority of funerals in England and Wales, creating high demand for their services and a consequent pressure on time and space. Some religious traditions require the cremation of the dead and prescribe specific ritual practices. Hindus and Sikhs, for example, are cremated after death, with the exception of young children. Prompt cremation is custom in the countries of origin of many, and can also be a desire in the UK. Moreover, resembling open pyre cremations, the dearest and nearest family members may initiate or witness the charge of the cremator or – exceptionally – the full cremation process.

Crematorium managers and users mentioned both challenges and examples of

good practice when catering for (large) groups of people with diverse needs. A key challenge is the issue of time. Typical time allocations of approximately 30 minutes for cremation services do not meet the needs of large groups or lengthy rituals and fixed-time slots can create the feeling of an impersonal service. A number of both professionals and users mentioned feeling being rushed through the ceremony, and finding the proximity of mourners attending the previous or following funerals ‘unsettling’ and ‘disconcerting’.

*The slots at the crematorium are either 20 or 40 minutes. ... it's a bit of a horrible conveyor belt. (Man, British origin, Christian, Swindon)*

Furthermore, short timeslots often do not suit funeral services with a large number of mourners attending. The practicalities of parking, entering and leaving the crematorium and completing an appropriate service within the tight timeslot can be difficult. Solutions included offering Saturday services, or being proactive in offering extended weekday slots where capacity allowed.

*This year, due to feedback from families and funeral directors (and actually increased competition), we ended up with enough capacity to extend our service time to one hour. People feel less rushed, groups of mourners can go in and out of the chapel and we can get in to clean it. We have seen decreases in all the [negative] things... It avoids that [mixing] of mourners and generally it makes people feel that they have more time. (Man, British origin, Crematorium manager, Kettering)*

Contemporary cremation ceremonies are often characterised by personalised practices, such as the display of personal photos, PowerPoint presentations, music and videos. Most crematoria are well-equipped to meet these requests. For migrant and minority groups, however, audio and video tools can also be used to enable their wider kith and kin including international



family networks to view, participate in, and even contribute to, the service. The installation of webcams, screens and programmes such as Skype and video recording facilitating this virtual participation.

*She didn't get a visa to attend her father's funeral [in person], but she actually said a poem on the telephone and she was watching on Skype. She was actually live! And somebody made a speech as well from Pakistan I think, so it was very interactive. (Female, British-Bangladeshi origin, Christian, Focus group, Newport)*

Online memorials can also offer an opportunity for national and international networks of family, friends and colleagues to share condolences and memories (Madrell, 2012). In addition to personalised practices, religious and traditional music and symbols play a significant role in many funeral services. Compared to conducting religious ceremonies under the fixed symbols of another religion, typically Chris-

tian crosses, the availability of appropriate portable religious symbols was much appreciated by diverse groups.

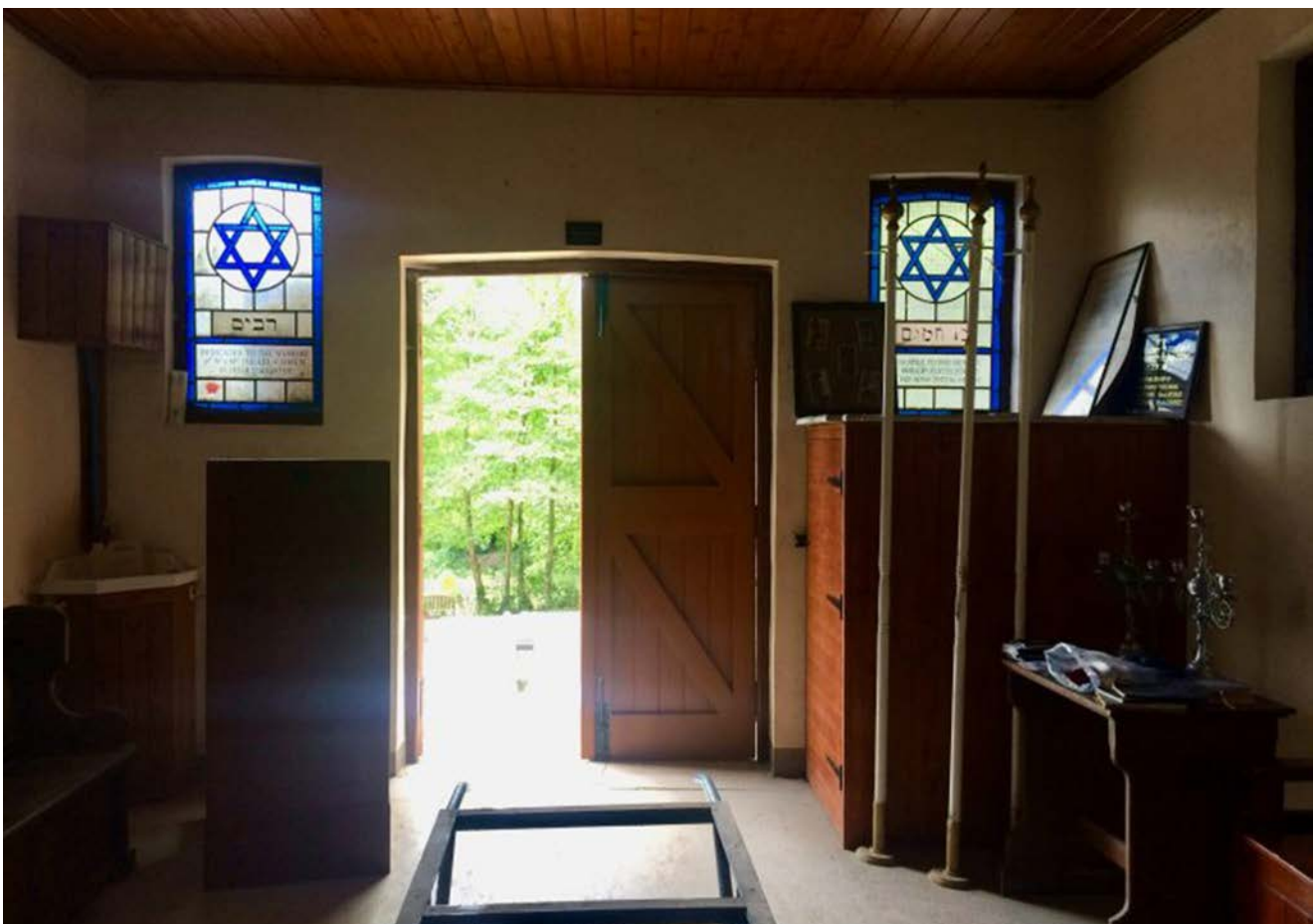
*A number of years ago, they installed a curtain, 'cos there's a cross in the chapel. So if you don't want the cross they cover it. So that's quite good. 'Cos people with no religion at all don't want that. Some people will. (Man, British origin, Baha'i, Swindon)*

*When we arrived at the crematorium that day, I hadn't even thought about anything. But they had a CD playing with the Aum Nama Shiva, and this was done by an orchestra. It was a really nice arrangement. They had like the Hindu Ohm at the front. And one of the big things, they have got a Shiva murti, the god statue, which is all in place there. (Female, Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

Few crematoria can accommodate large group of funeral attendees, making it necessary to accommodate overspill. Larger

**Jewish funerary chapel in St Woolos Cemetery in Newport, Wales.**

SOURCE: AUTHORS





anterooms and televised relays on big screens can allow a large number of funeral attendees to witness the ceremony, even if they cannot fit into the main chapel.

*In 2013 we rebuilt the smaller chapel. That now seats 135, plus the room for standing for 50 [in the anteroom], plus we have speakers on the outside, should our capacity be exceeded, so people can still hear the service taking place. And what we find with the Hindu services that we do on the weekend is that it reduces the stress for the family. They know there is going to be plenty of car parking for everyone, and there is no crossing over with anyone as well. (Man, British origin, crematorium manager, Kettering)*

In contrast, there are a small number of migrants with no kin locally to arrange and pay for funerals. Crematoria managers reported a small but growing number of public service funerals for young East European migrants who moved recently for short-term work, often without supporting family networks. These were predominantly young Poles whose death was unanticipated and for whom no funeral finances were available (funeral costs are covered by taxes in Poland, making private funding unnecessary). Poles are predominantly Roman Catholic and favour burial, but either public service funeral budget constraints and/or families in Poland being unable to afford and organise the repatriation of bodies has resulted in their cremation, allowing ashes to be sent back to their families in their country of origin. Negotiating these provisions and arrangements sometimes requires the services of a translator in order to liaise with the next of kin in other countries. Cemetery and crematorium provision not only involves managing space and time, but also facilitating emotional and spiritual needs and people's sense of those needs being understood, accepted and met. It also includes considering the impact of provision on the social and financial situation of mourners. Research from the case-study towns

suggested that different groups are not equally provided for.

#### *Unequal provision across migrant and minority groups*

Some people felt that their needs to have religious symbols or washing facilities for the deceased are not fully understood. For example, Hindus in Swindon felt under-represented in the religious landscape as a whole, including funerary provision:

*We had to highlight there is a 12,000 Hindu population across the town, and these are the needs. So it was not very easy to convince and highlight. I think maybe because we are the minority, nobody understood the requirements. (Man, Indian origin, Hindu, Swindon)*

Also, groups had different degrees of provision in local cemeteries:

*We wanted to make provision for the Baha'is of Northampton to be buried at the cemetery. It was easily arranged, because of the lady that was there then. She was very sympathetic. I think we have been very fortunate actually. Because cemetery space is in quite short supply. Not far from ours, there is the Chinese space, and a Jewish one, and an Islamic one. But some of them are struggling [with insufficient burial space]. For the size of the town, we have been very fortunate. (Woman, British origin, Baha'i, Northampton)*

Likewise, provisions for diverse ash scattering rituals are infrequently addressed. Hindus and Sikhs, for example, seek to fulfil the religious prescription that cremated ashes should be dispersed in the Ganges or over moving water. Yet, their needs tend to be overlooked.

*We said: "Look, you provide all these graveyards and everything, for the Christians, the Muslims and anybody else. What have you done for the Sikhs or the Hindus?" We have been dealing with this for the last four years now. I've been attending meetings with the Welsh government and everything, and we are trying to get a location where*

*we can build a place to scatter. Because at the moment, you have to hire a boat. And obviously, that is an extra expense. (Man, African origin, Sikh, South Wales)*

Burial costs in England and Wales have increased significantly in recent years. This imposes a particular financial burden on those whose faith requires the burial of the dead, such as Jews, Muslims and Orthodox Christians, and those who are strongly directed to use burial, such as Roman Catholics. Further religious requirements can incur additional costs, for example where Muslim graves are organised so they occupy double grave plots or special kerbs to allow for varying body positioning within the grave according to different regional practices. These additional costs can exacerbate funeral costs, especially in cases where costs are already high due to a cultural norm of large scale funeral hospitality.

*As you might need a different coffin to lay the deceased on his/her side, and need double burial space the price goes up extensively. (Man, Pakistani origin, Muslim (Shia), Newport)*

These issues need to be addressed more directly if services are going to be able to truly and equitably reflect the needs of the whole local community, rather than maintaining the status of 'outsiders' for people of migrant descent.

### *Diversity within diversity*

As the above examples illustrate, there is not only variation between different religious or ethnic groups, but also significant diversities within them. This 'diversity within diversity' is the result of differences in characteristics such as age, generation, gender, ethnicity and country of birth or heritage. Service providers need a nuanced understanding of diversity in order to accommodate the diverse cemetery, crematorium, and remembrance needs of people living in a multicultural society.

*I understand that for them, we are all the same. He is black African, I am black African. But I don't necessarily follow the Zimbabwean culture, as my Dad is Malawian. (Woman, Malawian origin, Christian, Northampton)*

To cater for diverse funeral needs, it is helpful to have an overview of specific wishes and needs of particular groups. At the same time, it is important to not make assumptions based on previous engagements with those from a particular country or religion, and to be attentive to the wide variety of funeral needs that exists within communities. Women might have different preferences to men, and younger generations could have different preferences or knowledge of rituals compared to older/ first generation migrants. Likewise, traditions change and adapt, and are responsive to cultural influences beyond their own community, including challenging traditional gendered roles or assumptions.

*We actually asked the priest whether we could [give speeches and witness the cremation] as women. And he said, you know, [the deceased] hasn't got a son, he can't go out to find a son, so there is no reason why a daughter wouldn't be able to do it. But our religion is very male orientated, and some people said it shouldn't be woman. (Woman, British-Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

Regarding faith groups, it is important to be attentive to differences between prescribed religion, the rules established by religious texts or leaders, and lived religion, the way religion is practiced by people themselves. Not everyone follows the same teachers and prescriptions. For example, Hindu participants reported different views about ash disposal practices, with older generations favouring repatriation of ashes to the Ganges, whereas women and younger generations reported being in favour of dispersal near their current home and/or children, for example at a river at a

stately home which the family frequently visited for outings, or a local river:

*We used to have the river Ganges, flowing water. But I said to my children, you know what, just do it down the stream at the back of the house or in the garden. That will be fine for me. (Woman, Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

Some participants were aware of the consecration of the River Soar in Leicestershire<sup>2</sup> with water from the Ganges allowing ash scattering, or the possibility of making similar local facilities in agreement with the Environment Agency (Maddrell, 2011).

*For Hindus and Sikhs, our big problem is scattering of the ashes. We're supposed to put the ashes in running water, like a river or a canal, but in the UK, I don't think there is any designated site you can go to. (Man, Sikh, Swindon)*

*The environmental agency's meeting was very, very productive. The environmental agency outlined the place where the river met, and it was flowing into the main, and they said, if you go to that point and do the rituals, and off they went. And now what the environmental agency has done is, they put it all together, for the rest of the local Sikh community to know. (Woman, Indian origin, Sikh, South Wales)*

Non-ecclesial or 'secular' funerals, usually attributed to the majority population, are often seen as 'personalised', whereas the funerals of minority and/or religious groups are often portrayed as 'traditional'. Within religious groups, however, death practices are tailored beyond religious prescriptions, influenced by personal, social and cultural wishes (Mathijssen, 2017). Hindu and Sikh cremation ceremonies, for example, can include popular music songs and personal photographs, and some Muslim graves have been decorated with elaborate floral tributes to 'Dad' or 'Sister'.

Those service providers with knowledge of diverse funerary customs can assist bereaved families in conducting funerary rites according to religious and personal needs. What was identified as an 'Irish' firm of undertakers was praised by several respondents for their knowledge of, and sensitive guidance on, diverse religious practices:

*The funeral directors were really good. With our funerals, there is ceremonies that take place. You are meant to put things in the mouth of the deceased and they knew. So they were like: "Do you want us to leave the mouth slightly open, so you can do that?" Whereas, when you are in that state, you don't think about those things. But they knew, so they could prompt that. So that was very, very helpful. Stressing, but needed. Little things like that really helped. (Woman, Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

In addition to those who only have loose ties to their inherited faith tradition, those without any religious affiliation have desires and needs that have to be met. Secularisation or change not only occurs within Christian communities, but also within other faith groups. Some migrants and minorities are changing and re-inventing their funerary and remembrance practices in response to the legal and cultural context in England and Wales. This includes constraints such as public health regulations, and liberties such as the freedom to collect ashes from the crematoria and disperse at chosen sites. This evokes creativity among individuals, families, communities and service providers.

### *Changing patterns of repatriation*

Repatriation from England and Wales to the country of origin was commonly practised by first generation migrants from South Asia during the late Twentieth Century. Due to increasing family ties within England and Wales and successive generations living here, those belonging to established minorities are

## 2

For ash scattering facilities in Leicester see <https://scattering-ashes.co.uk/boats-scattering-ashes/soar-leicester/>.



increasingly choose to bury, inter or scatter ashes locally, rather than burying the body or taking the ashes to the country of origin or heritage. Theological debates about international repatriation and the costs and practicalities of transporting the deceased back to the country of origin or heritage also influence local disposition. However, there is evidence of regional repatriation within England and Wales e.g. a Muslim burial council collecting the deceased from London to be buried near family in Northampton.

*I think there is a cultural change where people are [...] no longer sending bodies to Pakistan. They're saying: "No, we want to have our loved ones buried here". And this has made a big difference [to our burial service] (Man, British origin, Muslim, Huddersfield)*

*There are Hindu people in this country for three generations. So people settled and brought up here obviously they will not be repatriated to India. But first generation*

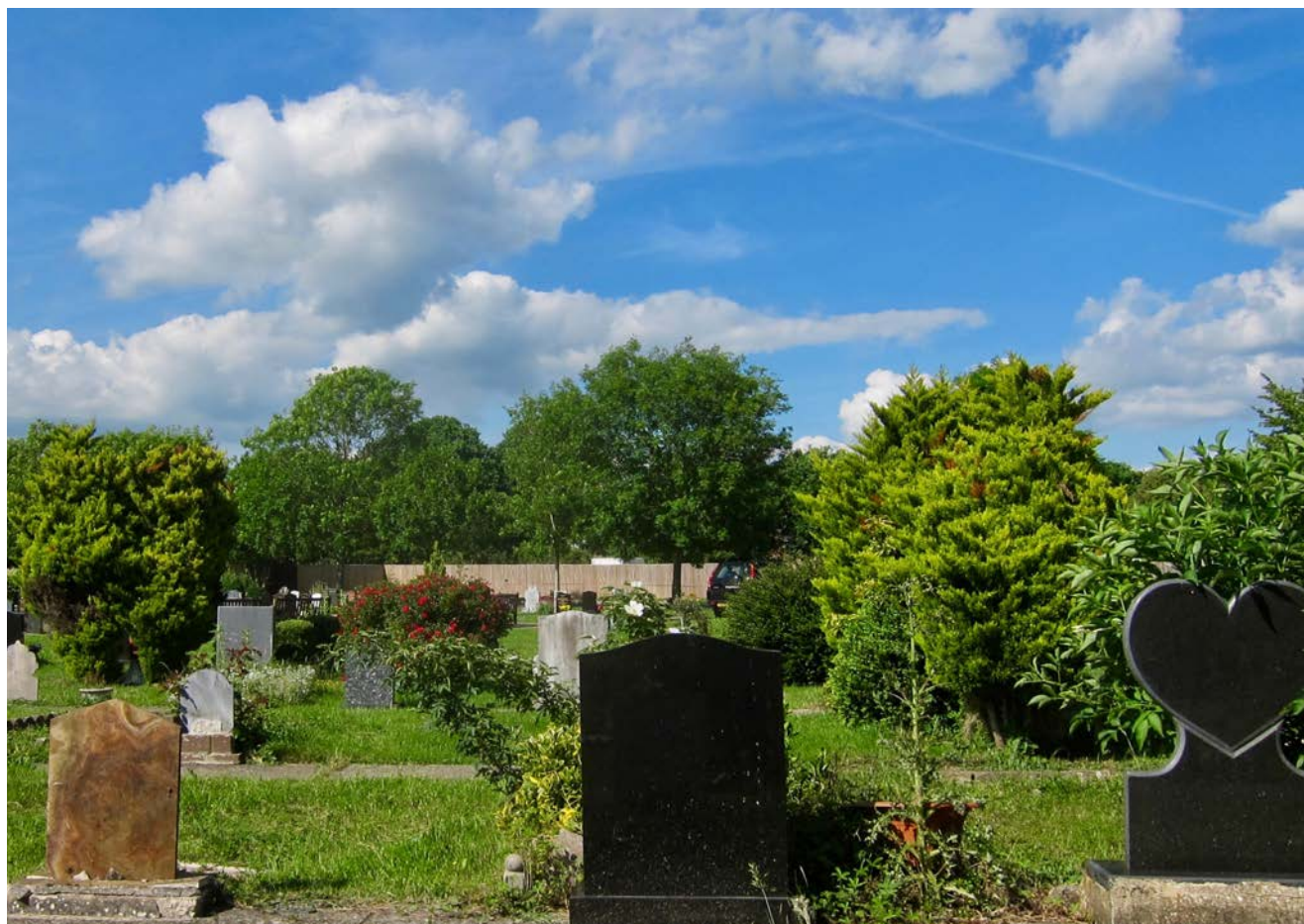
*or second generation definitely would want to do that. (Man, Indian origin, Hindu, Swindon)*

Whereas local burial and disposal is increasing relative to repatriation, variety exists within and between groups. Those with ties abroad, including land and close family, might choose to repatriate. Also recent migrants, especially those who saw themselves as temporary migrants, may prefer to bury the body or take the ashes to the country of origin. This, for instance, comes to the fore among more recent European migrants. Whereas Roman Catholic migrants from East and Southern Europe traditionally bury the deceased, our research shows that many choose to cremate the deceased, easing the transport of the cremated remains back to the country of origin:

*I know a handful whose ashes have been taken back, the most recent being another friend in London. He had no relations in*

**Muslim graves at a cemetery in Leeds, Yorkshire and the Humber, England.**

SOURCE: AUTHORS



*the UK and his next of kin, his niece, still lives in Lithuania. (Woman, Lithuanian origin, Christian, Newport)*

### *Self-help and Fostering dialogue and understanding between professionals and communities*

Some faith groups are supporting their own funeral needs through various cooperative initiatives, such as Hindu and Sikh liaison with the Environment Agency to provide ash scattering points on designated rivers, and burial schemes organised by Muslim and Jewish communities. Burial schemes often require a nominal annual fee and cover all members of the household. At the time of a death, the burial cooperatives liaise with the family and coordinate all the funeral needs and requirements.

Creating a context of mutual understanding and respect within communities and between communities and service providers improves the experiences and provisions around death for both. While many professionals effectively supported bereaved individuals, families and communities and their diverse needs, understanding and provision was uneven, varying by cemetery/crematoria provider and funeral directors. There was a widespread awareness of the core needs of key minority groups: cemetery managers, for instance, were well educated on Muslim burial needs and funeral directors were often praised for their tailor-made services. However, in some cases a lack of understanding or an unwillingness to meet the needs of specific migrant and minority traditions was reported. The motives behind certain wishes were unclear to some professionals, or not deemed 'necessary'. Consequently, bereaved families felt that their cultural needs were misunderstood or marginalised:

*I understand that there is a lot of cultures and traditions, and that sometimes you have to settle for this. But we also have*

*the responsibility of introducing our cultures [and] our ways of living to people for people to understand. And some funeral services are not tailor-made for the Black African. When we cry, for example, we can be really 'hysterical'. They probably won't understand. Or if I was to bring my drum ... they will get the shock of their life. So that's things that they wouldn't understand. (Woman, Malawian origin, Christian, Northampton)*

It is also important for communities to be informed about and understand funerary systems in the UK. Increasing practical knowledge, such as knowing when to call a doctor and undertaker, when an autopsy and coroner's report might be required, where and how to register a death, and public health regulations relating to having the deceased at home, will reduce stress for mourners at what is already a difficult time.

*There needs to be something, like a step by step plan, just so you know the steps. Not even for Hindus necessarily. Just something accessible, so a person would know where to go when someone passes away. I kind of Googled, but there was not one place where you could just see: you take the death certificate from the doctor, you take it to register, then you contact the funeral director. I was lost, getting this piece of paper from the doctors, not knowing what to do with it. (Woman, British-Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

Migrants may be unaware of the expectation that families pay for funerals, burial or cremation. Likewise, they may be unaware that local authorities have a legal requirement to provide basic funerals for those who have no provision under their 'environmental health' remit. Literal and cultural translation can help with these processes. Where local authorities and services provide information on legal procedures and religious practices these often benefit from translation into key migrant/minority languages. Likewise, focus groups highlighted how commu-

nities can play a pivotal role in giving service providers insight to the meaning and significance of religious and cultural practices.

*So the first burial that was going to be there, I rang up the Council and said “there is going to be a Baha’i funeral”. And they were very pleased to know [...] It is a relief that somebody knew what was going to happen. (Woman, British origin, Baha’i, Northampton)*

Furthermore, trusted members of a community, who are familiar with the systems and confident in dealing with officials in English can play an important role as mediators for families.

*One of our community members died in an accident and I was actively involved in repatriating the body to India. So I formed a task force liaising with police, hospitals, cemetery services, Indian high commission, the airlines, everything. The police department also has a community liaison officer. And I would say that only 1-5% of those liaison officers across the country have knowledge about all the faiths, so the police force was very happy for us to make a task force and be the source of contact. (Man, Indian heritage, Hindu, Swindon)*

Fostering collaboration between professionals and communities enhances mutual understanding between service providers and communities regarding specific needs; identifies the key stakeholders from both parties; informs planning processes; and helps to co-design cemetery and crematoria spaces to cater for diversity. A number of local initiatives to meet the needs of migrants and minorities have been welcomed by members of the wider community, for example the possibility of witnessing the body going into the cremator, the use of moveable religious symbols, TV screen relay into overspill areas for large funerals, and webcam links facilitating virtual attendance/participation.

### *Planning for cemeteries as spaces of encounter*

Cemeteries and crematoria gardens are public spaces with various functions that offer a variety of uses in urban spaces. Their primary use is for the remains of the dead and the conduct of personal or religious rituals, including the placing of material ritual items or mementoes such as prayer beads, candles and flowers. As such, they are of ultimate importance to individuals, families and communities, as they include the precious remains of loved ones, are ‘sacred to the memory of’ the deceased, and are sites of religious significance for many; they are also where many continue to talk to and express their ongoing attachment to, and care for, the deceased (Francis et al, 2005; Maddrell, 2016). In this regard, cemeteries can be understood as important spaces of comfort (Price et al, 2018).

At the same time, cemeteries are also seen as part of the green infrastructure of towns and cities, and used as spaces for leisure and recreation, as well as impacting on civic identity and local place attachment (McClymont, 2016). Therefore, cemeteries can be understood as having potentially competing functions. Moreover, they can be seen as social worlds which have their own shifting communities (Francis et al, 2005), being sites of encounter and interaction where different types of people meet, either in person or through encountering the graves and material artefacts of remembrance.

*I’ve found people when I’ve gone there. I’ve always bumped into somebody that’s just come there to visit their dad or somebody. Quite often someone I know. (Man, British-Pakistani origin, Muslim, Huddersfield)*

In other words, cemeteries and crematoria are places that matter beyond their practical and symbolic functions, but their different meanings and uses can cause friction. Despite this complexity, they



are typically overlooked in local authority planning. Future planning needs to consider the functional, symbolic, social and leisure aspects of cemetery spaces within a diverse multicultural society, including the comfort and safety of visitors and the mediation of different user needs and interests. For example, the social potential of a cemetery could be enhanced with services such a café, information point or a flower shop, which also increases personnel on site.

*People often come from a long way. In London they have a flower shop and a café. I think it is good, because sometimes you get there, you have arrived there 45 minutes early and it is nice, rather than sitting in Tesco's, to go there and have a coffee. (Woman, Indian origin, Hindu, Northampton)*

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that whilst there has been increasing understanding of the cemetery, crematoria and associated funerary needs of the diverse communities in England and Wales, more remains to be done. Both service providers and migrant and minority communities have evidenced examples of good practice, but ongoing dialogue and understanding of local needs and constraints are central to improving current services for mourners and for planning better diversity-ready facilities and services in the future. It has also highlighted discrepancies between more sophisticated diversity 'readiness' in cemeteries/crematoria in large cities with significant minority populations relative to the towns in this study, despite having a similar proportion of minority population. These discrepancies can perpetuate or even create a sense of post-colonial marginalisation for the bereaved and on behalf of the deceased. The confluence of different practices in cemeteries etc., e.g. unfamiliar religious rituals and secular leisure pursuits, can foster misunderstanding between individuals and communities sharing the space, undermining the sense

of citizenship and belonging for both parties. Within a multicultural society these factors combined make diversity-ready cemeteries and crematoria a political priority for politicians, planners, providers, and both majority and minority communities. It is hoped that this study will provide an agenda for future practice and further scholarship.

An agenda for diversity-ready cemeteries and crematoria requires forward-thinking policy making and formal urban and rural planning based on population and cultural trends. There are opportunities for local authorities to work across boundaries to collectively provide diversity-ready cemeteries. While some minority communities have worked collectively to address their needs e.g. funeral collectives, this study also evidenced how service providers and communities have worked together to meet the practical and religious cemetery and burial needs for migrant and minority groups, e.g. mechanisms to facilitate same day burials and community-led public meetings being organised to challenge changes to municipal policy without consultation. Furthermore, in order to create diversity-ready cemetery and crematorium provisions, service providers should actively engage with and listen to the diverse needs of individuals and families as well as community groups and figureheads.

Diversity-readiness also requires a three-way informed understanding between providers, majority and minority users; this can be developed and maintained through a variety of channels including education, information, liaison meetings, interfaith groups, open days / fetes, and cemetery volunteer groups. This in turn can ease social and cultural encounter and engagement within the public space of the cemetery or crematorium. While the detail of what is required for diversity-ready cemeteries and crematoria is complex and relational, i.e. it will vary

locally according to existing infrastructure, practices and emerging population and cultural trends, it relies upon openness to and respect for the needs of others, other citizens, other neighbours.

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