The Building of Crematoria in the Czech Republic: A Social and Ideological Issue

Abstract:

Contemporary Czech society has the highest cremation rates in Europe, a fact which is connected with deeply rooted Czech anticlericalism and a path dependency of funeral rituals established during the communist era. This paper is concerned with the building of crematoria in the Czech lands, which took place in several 'waves' during the 20th century few of which can be linked purely with the increase in the social demand for cremation and other practical reasons; indeed ideological causes and issues have often proved to be much more significant. In addition to 'progressive' anticlericalism directed against the Roman Catholic Church, nationalist 'competition' over crematoria between Czechs and Czech Germans took place during the interwar period. After World War II, the communist ideological approach was imposed on the people of Czechoslovakia although, in most cases, the practical consequences were eventually willingly accepted by the majority. A more rational approach to the construction of new crematoria was taken only relatively recently, i.e. in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s and later. Today's crematoria, both old and newly built, primarily serve social demand on a purely commercial basis in a similar way to those in Western European countries.

Keywords: *crematorium, cremation movement, religion, anticlericalism, Czechoslovakia 1918-1992, Czech Republic 1993.*