Natural Burial Ground Bergerbos: An Alternative Place of Burial in the Netherlands

Abstract:

Natural burial grounds represent an alternative to traditional cemeteries and are slowly being adopted in the Netherlands. In this paper we examined how the management of natural burial ground Bergerbos has interpreted and implemented this new type of burial space in the Netherlands by using four interlinked features proposed by Julie Rugg. Bergerbos argues to offer, besides environmentally friendly burials in woodland, complete freedom to arrange burials. In practice, however, strict regulations are implemented to retain the site's natural character. Another purpose expressed by the management is the emotional investment into the deceased. Through regular meetings and Christmas celebrations a community of bereaved is created. Bergerbos serves besides the community, other parts of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany as well. The most particular interpretation of natural burial grounds is woodland. In the Netherlands, the graves are located in mature woodland, whereas in Britain individual commemoration trees marking each grave will become woodland in due course. This different interpretation affects the site's ability to protect the deceased individuality, whereas the grave markings at Bergerbos provide a context for pilgrimage for as long the burial rights exceed, in the UK individual memorial trees and grave identities become subsumed into a collective memorial landscape after time

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