Legal and Economic Issues of the Polish Funeral Industry

Abstract:

Between 2010 and 2012 I researched Polish funerals, interviewing funeral directors and other representatives of the funeral industry. I also discussed with them the critical problems of the funeral industry. There were qualitative methods employed in the form of semi-structured interviews. The main problems I outline are legal and economic issues. They concentrate around the following topics: cremation as the developing form of disposal and initiatives to change legal possibilities (such as regarding the scattering of ashes), the challenges of new technologies, advanced funeral planning, funeral insurance, forms of legitimising funeral houses, the consequences of a criminal case – the so called "skin hunting affair" in Łódź, economic problems of the funeral market and the problem of funeral advertising. Present Polish law on cemeteries and the legal mandate for the deceased dates from 1959, and duplicates provisions enacted even earlier in 1932. The legislation primarily takes into account Catholic burial regulations, neglecting other religions, secular funerals and alternative forms of disposal. A new law would enable an evolution of funerals, consistent with ensuring respect for the family and the body of the deceased, allowing a personalised approach to the last rite of passage, and could eliminate present shortcomings in the funeral market. After World War II there was a period of modest funerals organised by municipal units. Then a standard ritual, with theatrical rules and decorum, was launched by modern undertakers in the 1990s. There are new technologies offered by undertakers, such as embalming, "diamonds" created from the hair and ashes of the deceased, and multimedia funerals. With a lot of resistance, marginally, the funeral planning service is developed.

Keywords: *funeral industry, legal issues, funeral market, the challenges of new technologies.*