

## **A place for both the dead and the living**

Helena Nordh, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Docent lecture 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2023

In numerous projects, I have explored how people perceive and use the urban landscape. I have asked questions such as: What qualities or places are important to people? Where do people go, and why? My research arena has primarily been the green urban landscape and it has been aimed to inspire landscape architects in their work with protecting, developing and designing inclusive green urban environments that promote human health and well-being. However, my research has also contributed beyond landscape architecture to disciplines such as environmental psychology, geography and social sciences more broadly. In this presentation I have chosen a rather narrow focus, I will present and discuss a place that I think most of you are familiar with and therewith can relate to. It is a special kind of green space that has caught my research interest for more than ten years. It is a place for the dead, but also for the living. It is a place where private grief and memorialisation of deceased relatives is materialised through tombstones, plaques or symbolic artefacts. It is also a place that some of us visit to experience nature, contemplate or go for a walk. I will talk about *the cemetery*.

Cemeteries in Sweden, are publicly accessible spaces, with privately owned graves. They have many qualities similar to parks, but they are also very different from parks in that their primary function is burial of human remains. Most cemeteries are park or garden like places, often well maintained with neatly cut hedges and lawns. But there are also forest or woodland cemeteries that contribute to biodiversity. Most cemeteries are designed by landscape architects but developed through co-creation with cemetery workers, belief communities and individual plot holders. They are cultural landscapes placing the contemporary society in a fascinating historical perspective.

Urban cemeteries face many challenges that affects how they will develop in the future. These challenges relate to changes in burial practices, densification, multicultural societies and climate change. All these challenges pave way for interesting research projects. In this presentation, I will present the results from some of the studies that I have conducted over the years focusing on use and experiences of cemeteries in a contemporary Scandinavian context. Please join me on an intriguing, maybe provocative and hopefully memorable talk.