8 | Conclusion

8.1 Introduction
The aim of this dissertation has been to obtain an enhanced understanding of the meanings that different groups of people attach to places of death and/or remembrance in the Netherlands. Different types of such places have been examined, such as roadside memorials (Chapters 2 and 3), Web memorials (Chapter 4), natural burial grounds (Chapter 5) and crematoria (Chapters 6 and 7). The dissertation sought to understand the role that places play in the way bereaved people cope with the death of a loved one. The different studies included in this dissertation adopt a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In this concluding chapter the research questions are addressed and a number of pivotal themes that have emerged from the analyses will be recapitulated. These themes help us to gain insights into what places of death and/or remembrance look like, how they work and what they mean (Foote et al., 1994).

8.2 Place matters
The studies presented in the dissertation have provided several examples of places that matter in coping with death. For different reasons meanings are ascribed to such places and they are experienced as proper (or improper) places for commemorating a deceased loved one. Roadside memorials, for example, are literally ‘in place’ at the site of the accident and ‘out of place’ anywhere else. The exact geographical location where an individual died makes that particular place important for surviving family and friends. That spot in particular is regarded as a place where the deceased was last alive, instead of a place where the person died, and this conveys a strong sense of place. Different forms of communication between the living and the dead that take place at the roadside memorial signify that the bereaved experience the presence of the deceased at the death site. Some bereaved flash their car lights, honk their horn or ring their bicycle bell, as a way of greeting the deceased, when they pass or leave the memorial. For some these places have a sacred meaning - they function as holy ground - whereas for others feelings of anger and sadness dominate.

The study of natural burial grounds demonstrates that the place where human remains are interred is a meaningful place for commemoration. It is the location of the dead body that provides a sacred sense of place. The burial records of the Bergerbos natural burial ground show that since it opened in 2003 several people have reburied their deceased spouse from conventional cemeteries in the natural burial ground. An important aspect of places such as Bergerbos is their ‘natural’ landscape, which makes them an attractive place for the bereaved
to visit and which provides a sense of calmness. The seasonality of nature, which symbolically reflects the seasonality of human life itself, can offer reconciliation with a person’s own mortality, in particular for those diagnosed with a terminal illness. Burial at a natural burial ground is seen as a return to nature, a way to become part of a broader circle of life. Whereas traditional cemeteries contain the dead of a local community, the burial records demonstrate that a large group of people from other parts of the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany are buried at the Bergerbos natural burial ground. Arguably, people choose burial at a natural burial ground not because of emotional ties with that geographical area, but because they opt for what they regard as a proper place for burial.

Individual Web memorials do not provide a physical place connected to the deceased person, but instead a virtual place that enables the bereaved person to establish highly personal places to commemorate the deceased persons, in exactly the way they wish. These virtual places offer many possibilities for celebrating the individuality of the deceased. The Web memorial may comprise pictures and detailed information about the deceased person, personal stories and often music or in some cases even video. Roadside memorials have this function as well. Roadside memorials are also very personal places. We found a wide variety in the design of Dutch roadside memorials, which differs from roadside memorials in many other countries, where memorials in the form of crosses have been noted as most common. Roadside memorials, in particular the permanent ones, and the artifacts that comprise them, refer to the identity of the deceased person or the group to which he/she belonged and things that the deceased liked. The design and composition of both Web memorials and roadside memorials demonstrate the wish for personal places of remembrance and aim to reconstruct the identity of the deceased. This is in line with the quest for new individualized and personal rituals in contemporary society (Wouters, 2002), and with the suggestion of Walter (1996) that the post-modern death is about personal expression and the celebration of personality. This applies for the graves at the Bergerbos natural burial ground as well. Although in the UK the individual memorial trees and grave identities become subsumed into a shared collective memorial landscape after time, the permanent grave markings at Bergerbos preserve the deceased’s identity and provide a place for personal pilgrimage and rituals.

The studies on roadside and Web memorials show that bereaved people perform personally meaningful rituals at the (virtual) places they have established. People go beyond the traditional mourning practices and spaces provided by authorities of the church and the state. The creation of the memorials enables the bereaved to take the construction of meaning into their own hands and express their emotions freely in the way they wish. In the case of roadside memorials, the anonymous roadside is transformed in a meaningful place by the establishment of a memorial. In other words, space is transformed into place, that is, space
imbued with meaning. Our study of post-modern crematoria shows a similar development in the design of crematoria. Most of the sub-modern crematoria in the Netherlands, crematoria built from the 1970s to around 2000, have been described as blank, discrete and modest buildings that could hardly be distinguished from other types of building. Consequently, crematoria were regarded as uniform buildings without a sense of place and identity, which makes them ‘non-places’: places that are regarded as rather meaningless. The architects of crematoria in Haarlem, Leusden and Zoetermeer designed unique buildings that can be distinguished from other kinds of building. They are no longer ‘non-places’, but instead notable buildings that communicate to the outside world the fact that they perform a special function. These post-modern crematoria differ fundamentally from the enclosed, dark and stuffy sub-modernist ones. The buildings have a semi-enclosed architecture; the use of natural light and views of nature that surrounds the buildings create uplifting places, which seems to fit with contemporary death rites that celebrate the identity of the deceased.

One of the conclusions of this dissertation is that places matter in the process of coping with death. What the places investigated in the different studies share in common is that they provide personal places for remembrance, where the bereaved can conduct rituals which may help them to make sense of death. We argue that several places of death and/or remembrance may constitute a memory network, serving the needs of the bereaved in several ways. Our study on individual Web memorials indicates that many people who have set these up also have other places of death, such as a grave, an urn and/or roadside memorial. Some earlier studies on roadside memorials (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Hartig & Dunn, 1998) argue that the roadside memorials could offer a physical place to bereaved people whose loved one was cremated and consequently might not have a grave to visit. This is in accordance with the view of Ariès (1974), who contends that “cremation excludes pilgrimage” (p. 91). Our study on roadside memorials demonstrates that those who set up roadside memorials also had other meaningful places of death and remembrance (e.g. a grave or an urn, an individual Web memorial, a home altar, and/or a formal bedroom). Respondents indicated that visits to the grave are regularly combined with a visit to the roadside memorial. Some thought that the roadside memorial was more meaningful as it is more personal than a grave, since the memorial marks the place in the core of daily life, where the deceased person was last himself or herself, whereas a grave could be seen as an anonymous spot in a rather distant cemetery. For other bereaved, the place of interment has a sacred meaning and provides a private place for memorialization, whereas the place where their loved one died may evoke raw feelings of anger, sadness and pain. Therefore, multiple meanings are attached to different places of death and commemoration. For that reason, we argue that both roadside and individual Web memorials are extensions to the existing (traditional) landscape
of memorialization. This suggests that establishers of these memorials are looking for something more.

8.3 For whom do these places matter and why?
In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the meanings attached to places of death and remembrance, we examined for whom these places are meaningful and which deaths are commemorated at these places. In the literature, a distinction is made between a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ death. Although many different perceptions exist as to what could be considered a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ death across cultures and times, there are many similarities. In particular, while modern societies have apparently been successful in controlling circumstances surrounding death, the deaths that occur suddenly, unexpectedly, violently or without warning, before a fulfilled life could be achieved, away from home and without opportunity for closure, are considered as ‘bad’ deaths (Seale & Van der Geest, 2004).

In our study of roadside memorials, we have made a distinction between spontaneous roadside memorials and permanent memorials. Friends and classmates, who are the main establishers of spontaneous memorials, seem to have a more pressing and urgent need to memorialize the accident and loss of a member of their social group than do parents. Parents, however, tend to feel a need to have a more enduring, longer-term means of commemorating their loss. This is a way of ensuring that the deceased is not forgotten. To continue the bond between the living and the dead is part of the bereavement. While spontaneous memorials, established in particular by friends and classmates, clearly convey to an outsider that it is a place where someone has been killed in an accident, permanent memorials clearly identify who has been killed through the deceased’s biography. This reconstructs and fixes in time the personality of the deceased. By transforming the site of death into a place of care and nurture, parents are able to re-establish and maintain their identity as nurturers and caregivers even after death. Parents often have an intense sense of guilt because they were unable to prevent the death of their child.

We found that in particular parents establish Web memorials in remembrance of their deceased child, especially for newborn or stillborn babies. The creation of a personal Web memorial enables the mourners to (re)construct and preserve the identity of the deceased person, and to make him/her a part of their own lives (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). Some Web memorials invite other mourners to share their own memories of the deceased, so that a shared construction of the deceased persons can be created. It is through conversations with others who knew the deceased that a lasting biography is constructed. For the establishers this is a way in which the deceased is not forgotten. This is in keeping with the
‘continuing bonds’ theory of Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996), which is about integrating the memory of the deceased into the ongoing lives of those bereaved, instead of breaking ties between the bereaved and the dead and letting go.

The roadside memorial is also a way of communicating with other bereaved people. Through the placement of personal items at the site or by maintaining the site, others see that the site is visited and that the deceased is not forgotten. Individual Web memorials provide access to a community of bereaved people. Web visitors are primarily strangers and/or people who have experienced a similar loss and who express their (emotional) support for the founder(s) and his or her family. This fits Wouters’s (2002) notion that “public expressions signal a rising need to find more public recognition of personal mourning and that, via … rituals, participants are seeking to assert membership of a larger symbolic or ‘imagined’ community” (p. 2). Parents can be typified as ‘disenfranchised grievers’, as the loss of a small child, in particular new-born or still-born babies, is often felt to be underestimated in contemporary society, since the grief of a parent often differs from what is considered as a normal response to the loss of a person who did not live or lived only briefly (Doka, 1989). Web memorialization offers an alternative ritual for a group of grievers who are inadvertently excluded from traditional grief and mourning rituals.

Overall, the virtual Web memorials and the roadside memorials provide an additional network of support for ‘disenfranchised grievers’ and people commemorating what is called in the literature a ‘bad’ death. Whereas the deceased commemorated in Web memorials were in particular very young children who died unexpectedly, the deceased honoured by a roadside memorials were older, seeing that they were involved in traffic and part of the ‘bad’ death was the place where they died, as they died away from home. The traffic deaths provide the bereaved with a place for commemoration by definition, whereas Web memorials offer a place to the surviving relatives of other ‘bad’ deaths.

We proposed earlier that those who establish roadside and/or Web memorials are looking for something more. In the event of sudden and often inexplicable loss, it is not possible for bereaved people to prepare for and come to terms with death. These memorials can help those bereaved in addressing unfinished business with the dead, to express their loss and to come to terms with the death of their loved one. They provide a place for the bereaved to communicate with the outside world about what they consider to have been the unacceptable deaths of victims who were too young to die. In general the Dutch roadside memorials symbolize the fragility of existence and lost innocence. This is communicated in particular through the artefacts featured in memorials for the young and for female victims, including stuffed toys, butterflies, ladybirds, angels and personal memorabilia.
The parents of newborn or stillborn babies are one group of users of Bergerbos natural burial ground that we could identify. The manager of the burial ground stated that the emotional engagement with the bereaved persons is most essential in the concept of natural burial grounds. Natural burial grounds offer bereaved people a place where they can express and talk about their grief. The manager explained: “It is very common that when someone dies…., even good friends don’t know what to say any more. It is even so that they avoid parents. For example, if a child is killed in a traffic accident and the friends do not have the courage to visit the parents, do not know what to say …. Here, we just cry with them”. A Christmas celebration is organized annually and it is possible for the bereaved to meet for coffee at Bergerbos every Sunday afternoon. This is a way of getting together and talking to people. Consequently, Bergerbos provides a place for increased opportunities for social interaction and creates a community of bereaved. However, the number of burials of dead babies is decreasing. Arguably, this is the result of the stricter rules concerning materialized memorialization at Bergerbos. For bereaved parents the marking of the grave of their (stillborn) baby is an important way to integrate him/her socially into the world of both the living and the dead. It helps them to constitute the social identity of their child as well as their own as parents (Klass et al., 1996). The grave is a physical object that helps to sustain an ongoing relationship between parents and their lost baby. At conventional cemeteries it appears that parents in particular have a pressing need to be active at the grave, to bring or do something, to redo and rearrange, to express the ongoing sense of loss that characterizes parental grief. At many cemeteries the boundaries of activities considered appropriate were expanded to accommodate the parents’ expressions of mourning (Francis, Kellaher & Neophyte, 2003). This is not the case at Bergerbos, where strict regulations to maintain its natural character are implemented in order to restrict the range of objects featured at the graves.

Baby boomers are the most important group of people who are now interested in burial at Bergerbos and are expected to become a large group of potential consumers in the future. The burial records of Bergerbos show that the average age of death is about 63 years (both for men and women), compared to the average life expectancy of 78 years for men and 82 years for women in the Netherlands in 2008 (Statistics Netherlands, 2010). According to the manager of the natural burial ground, of the people who are buried at Bergerbos, many were diagnosed with cancer and, together with their spouse, choose this new concept of burial provision. According to the manager: “They come here and in particular at this time of the year [spring], at the birth of new nature, they are struck by a feeling that makes them think: ‘This is it, this is what makes it acceptable. Here I can come to terms with what has
happened. This is a positive place’. The trees, bushes, the birds, the squirrels, everything is alive, and this creates a different atmosphere from a cold place”.

Over time, however, the meanings associated with places of death and/or remembrance change. Spontaneous memorials eventually become more permanent, disintegrate and/or are removed. Our respondents stated that the roadside memorial plays an important role in their bereavement, but that this role changes over time and visits gradually become less frequent. This is reflected in the composition of the memorials as well. We found that fresh flowers, candles, notes and loose photographs, which feature in spontaneous roadside memorials, become replaced by longer-lasting objects such as artificial flowers, flowering plants, solar-powered lights and affixed photographs. While the composition indicates a degree of processing through the stages of bereavement, arguably the symbolic meanings of these objects do not change, even though the material form of the main structure of the memorial and associated ephemera becomes more durable. This is a strategy employed by the bereaved to continue their bonds with the dead in a more enduring and endearing way. Analysis of the Web memorials shows that although it seems that the memorial loses its purpose over time as activities and visits become less frequent, they continue to be important. Only a few were closed down during our research period. Over time, the purpose changes as it gradually develops from an actively visited and updated site into a more static tribute in virtual space (Peelen & Altena, 2008). Our studies on roadside and Web memorials show that it is difficult for the establishers to remove a memorial that was initially established to continue the bonds with a deceased loved one, as it implicitly suggests that the surviving kin are breaking the bonds with him or her. It could be seen as if the bereaved are losing the deceased person for a second time.

8.4 Contested place meanings

Our studies have shown that a range of meanings are attached to the places investigated. These meanings are not necessarily shared by everyone. For example, roadside memorials may evoke tensions between private and public interests. Mourners often assume that they can construct a memorial for private purposes in a public place for as long as they need it there. This may lead to conflicts with other actors involved, such as authorities or road users. Within the Netherlands, policies regarding roadside memorials are not uniform, but differ as several parties function as road owners: the national government (the Dutch Directorate for Public Works and Water Management), provinces, municipalities, and in a few cases water boards or private parties. The authorities in general showed themselves to be tolerant and respectful towards the idea of allowing roadside memorials. The two main reasons seem to be ethical and pragmatic in nature. Governments are in doubt as to whether they have the
informal, ethical right to interfere in matters that seem to be of such fundamental nature to
the bereaved. At the other end of the spectrum, on the pragmatic side, they foresee problems
for their employees who, if official permission was not obtained, would have to communicate
the news to the relatives that the memorial would be removed, and act accordingly.

In some instances, those who set up the roadside memorial faced problems with
people who live near it and were disturbed by it. In one case the neighbours were bothered by
the gathering of youngsters at the memorial and the size of it. Eventually the municipality
removed parts of the memorial to reduce its size. The mother of the boy memorialized by this
monument commented: “Once, the municipality broke down a reed roof [which we placed
above the memorial]. ….. They cleared part of the side, and the emotional objects that were
placed there were treated like rubbish. I was furious. It was like, do you know how it felt, like
desecration of a grave”. There can be contestation between bereaved people over the range of
objects appearing at roadside memorials, since the material objects placed at the memorial
convey an image of the deceased’s life story and social identity. A mother, for example, had
difficulties with a picture of her son, in which he was wearing a Lonsdale sweater, being
placed there by a friend of his, because in the Netherlands Lonsdale is associated with
extreme right-wing political ideas. Although our study of roadside memorials indicates some
conflict situations, in general only a few establishers we interviewed received complaints,
experienced vandalism or theft at their roadside memorial, or had experienced trouble with
the authorities. This implies that these private expressions of grief in public spaces are
tolerated, and possibly are experienced by outsiders as places with a special purpose.

In the design of crematoria the bereaved do not have control. These buildings are
designed by architects, who are consequently influential actors in funerary architecture. For
example, the architecture of the crematorium at Haarlem, apart from its layout which is
unique in the Dutch funerary tradition, does not necessarily reflect the aesthetic preferences
or needs of different groups of users of the crematorium. The Haarlem crematorium is
constructed from austere and rough materials, and is described by its architect, Herman
Zeinstra, as a ‘Spartan building’. According to the manager, younger highly educated people
in particular appreciate the crematorium. The manager has had the experience several times
that if an older woman in her 70s visits the crematorium with her children, who are in their
40s and 50s, often the mother does not like the crematorium, whereas the children do. One of
the staff members explained that baby boomers have a different outlook on things and
therefore appreciate the unusual crematorium more, whereas elderly visitors often prefer cosy
buildings. Generally, it seems that some experience the light, transparent building as
liberating and uplifting, whereas others experience it as cold and lacking a warm ambiance.
The case of the crematorium in Haarlem shows that besides the architect, the manager and staff also play an important role in the design and functioning of the crematorium. When people started to complain that the room where the family gather before the commencement of the service looked like a hospital room, because of its white bare walls bereft of decor, the staff refurbished the room with paintings, curtains, atmospheric lighting and plants. The staff thought that the original interior design was not conducive for receiving the bereaved family. They had different ideas about the use of the crematorium as well. Whereas the architect’s idea was to avoid the modern planning principle of an efficient one-way routing and instead to introduce an informal and unstructured movement of people, a method of routing was implemented in Haarlem which was intended to run the crematorium more efficiently and to keep groups apart. According to one of the staff members, the Haarlem Crematorium was ahead of its time. Overall, the study of the crematorium in Haarlem reveals that there are different groups of actors involved, both professionals and laypeople, who have their own agendas and where power relations play a role.

Just as different groups of people may think differently about how a crematorium should look, the users of natural burial grounds may also have different ideas about how these burial grounds are defined. In some cases this has caused tensions between different users of Bergerbos. These ideas may differ from the way the owner has interpreted and implemented the concept as well. In order to be clear about the rules and regulations, the opening sentence of the 2010 information leaflet of Bergerbos states, “Important! Don’t make a churchyard out of Bergerbos!” On the following pages there is an appeal to obey the rules and regulations in order to retain the natural character of Bergerbos. Occasionally meetings are organized and lists provided to inform people about plants that are native to the woodland in this area. Plants that are not allowed will be removed from the graves. One grave at Bergerbos illustrates that tensions do not occur solely between management and users, but can occur at one single grave as well. The family and family-in-law of a deceased man fought symbolically about the ownership, control and power over his grave. Against the wishes of one family who wanted a ‘natural’ grave, the other family placed a permanent marker and ‘kitschy’ items.

8.5 Discussion and future directions
In this dissertation the focus has been placed on different types of place related to death and/or remembrance. Studying these places provides new understandings of the place of death in contemporary societies. In modern times, death and mourning appear to be socially and spatially hidden from public view. It is suggested in the literature that the place of death is shifting in contemporary societies. We may wonder, based on the outcomes of the overall
study, whether death has become a more visible life event. The results of our study indicate that the worlds of the living and the dead are no longer strictly separated. Although boundaries between these worlds do still exist, it seems that they have begun to blur and are therefore less evident.

Roadside memorials, which are frequently seen in the Netherlands, place death and mourning in a very visible way within the public domain. The individual Web memorials are another example of private expression of grief in a public place. Both places show that expressions of grief are not restricted to the private life of individuals, but can become part of the daily lives of many others. The Bergerbos natural burial ground is another example of how places of death and/or remembrance are no longer separated. The burial ground does not have of a fixed perimeter and a gate enclosing it from its surroundings. It is accessible to the public at all times and according to the manager many people come to the natural burial ground for a walk or to cycle through it.

Sub-modern crematoria could be described as buildings that were hiding death, because they were located on the periphery of an urban area and their architecture did not differ from other buildings. Our study demonstrates that post-modern crematoria are noticeable buildings and that their architecture communicates the message to the outside world that they perform a special and important function. Although these crematoria are distinctive buildings, they still hardly refer to the functional purpose of cremation, namely the disposal of bodies. Other features of these post-modern crematoria seem to hide death as well, from both the outside world and from the users of the crematorium. For example, the buildings have a semi-enclosed architecture, with walls to enclose them from the outside world. In these crematoria, a modernist planning principle has been implemented, consisting of a system of routing for groups of mourners in order to keep groups apart. In this way, the funeral services are kept separate from the views of different groups of users and are hidden from the gaze of the public. What is new in the layout of these post-modern crematoria is the explicit inclusion of the incinerator as a public space. The charging of the coffin into the cremator is an example of a ritual that acknowledges death rather than keeping it hidden. Despite the fact that the majority of people still do not want to accompany the coffin to the incineration space, the number of bereaved who are present for the incineration is increasing.

One of our concerns in Chapter 7 was whether the routing principle is experienced negatively by the users of a crematorium. It is arguable that people who are mourning and distressed should be freed from the responsibility to make a choice on where to go next, and can instead focus on the service. People can at least pretend that at that very emotional moment the whole crematorium revolves around the service for their loved one. The original design of the architect of the Haarlem Crematorium, offers another angle which a future
study could examine, that is, how bereaved people might experience the use of a crematorium that does not employ functional routing through the building but instead allows an informal and unstructured movement of people in order to create a more individualized landscape of mourning.

The studies in this dissertation have shown that there is a quest for personal death rites and a community of support. The establishment and the use of the different types of memorial are examples of this, as the public space enables the mourners to communicate about and with others about their loss, and this seems particularly important for the commemoration of a ‘bad’ and disenfranchised death. Here, the studies have focused on the people who have established memorials, but what about the people who have not? A possible direction of research would be to look into those who do not establish a roadside memorial and to ask why not. What are meaningful places of death and/or remembrance for them? How do bereaved people who set up a (roadside) memorial differ from the ones who do not? In this way a more general understanding of the meanings ascribed to and the use of places of death could be produced.

Our studies on Web memorial showed that deceased women have a higher likelihood that such a memorial is established than men. This finding differs from studies in the US that have indicated that in particular men are honoured by Web memorials (De Vries & Rutherford, 2004; Roberts & Vidal, 1999-2000). For an explanation, we looked at the relationship between the deceased person and the bereaved who created the memorials in Chapter 4. We found that children, who comprise a small proportion of the total of establishers, were more likely to memorialize females, that is their mothers, than males. This finding is difficult to interpret as little research has been conducted on relationship differences in memorialization trends. Similarly, Chapter 2 indicates that the odds of being memorialised by a roadside memorial are higher for females, although the coefficient is not statistically significant. A suggestion for further research is to examine whether the sex of the deceased and/or the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased is related to the places that may help mourners to cope with their loss.

As earlier studies on natural burial grounds have shown (Clayden & Dixon, 2007; Rumble, 2009), the reasons why people choose natural burial are many. However, since our study of the Bergerbos natural burial ground revealed differences between its interpretation compared to the most common implementation of this burial ground provision in Britain, it is interesting to form a better understanding about the motivation of Dutch people for choosing natural burial. In Chapter 5, we already provide the suggestion that in the Netherlands the ‘natural’ landscape plays a more distinctive role in the decision-making than the concern for environmentally friendly burials.
Furthermore, throughout the Netherlands more and more initiatives are being taken to develop natural burial grounds, either privately owned or as a part of conventional cemeteries. Nevertheless, in terms of number the Netherlands lags far behind the UK. This could have to do with the fact that the existing natural burial grounds are all located in mature woods. It is expected that it would be very difficult to change the planning specification for land officially designated as nature in a very densely populated country such as the Netherlands, where space is relatively scarce and natural landscapes are protected. Therefore, it could be interesting to examine different types of natural burial grounds in the Netherlands in terms of their landscape and habitat objectives, for example the creation of woodland on former agricultural land, or burial in wildflower meadows or orchards, which are types being implemented in Britain (Clayden, Green, Hockey & Powel, 2010).

This thesis has focused on the meanings that are ascribed to places related to death and remembrance and the role they play in making sense of death. It is interesting to consider similar questions relating to different places of dying, such as the home, an institutionalized setting or unusual places, for example within nature. As Western societies are increasingly ageing, it looks as if more people will end up dying in institutions. The hospice movement offers a more homely place where people can die in greater tranquillity. As Worpole (2010) has stated, various contemporary hospices have successfully settled and integrated into their neighborhoods, and this indicates that the place of dying is more integrated within the world of the living. However, a planning principle of the hospice makes patients enter the hospice through the front door, but once they have died, they are transported via the back door to the mortuary, which implies that these buildings designed for the dying are hiding death. An extension to this thesis would be to examine the design and layout of hospices, to see whether they provide a suitable place for dying and how they deal with spaces for the living and the dying.

To conclude, research into places of death and remembrance, and potentially places of dying, enhances our understanding of the meaning ascribed to these places, and how they can help people to make sense of death. These insights enable societies to deal with final places and, where possible, to promote the well-being of the bereaved.

References


Roberts & Vidal, 1999-2000


