

CANADIAN URBAN CEMETERIES

Exploring uses for the living in spaces for the dead

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

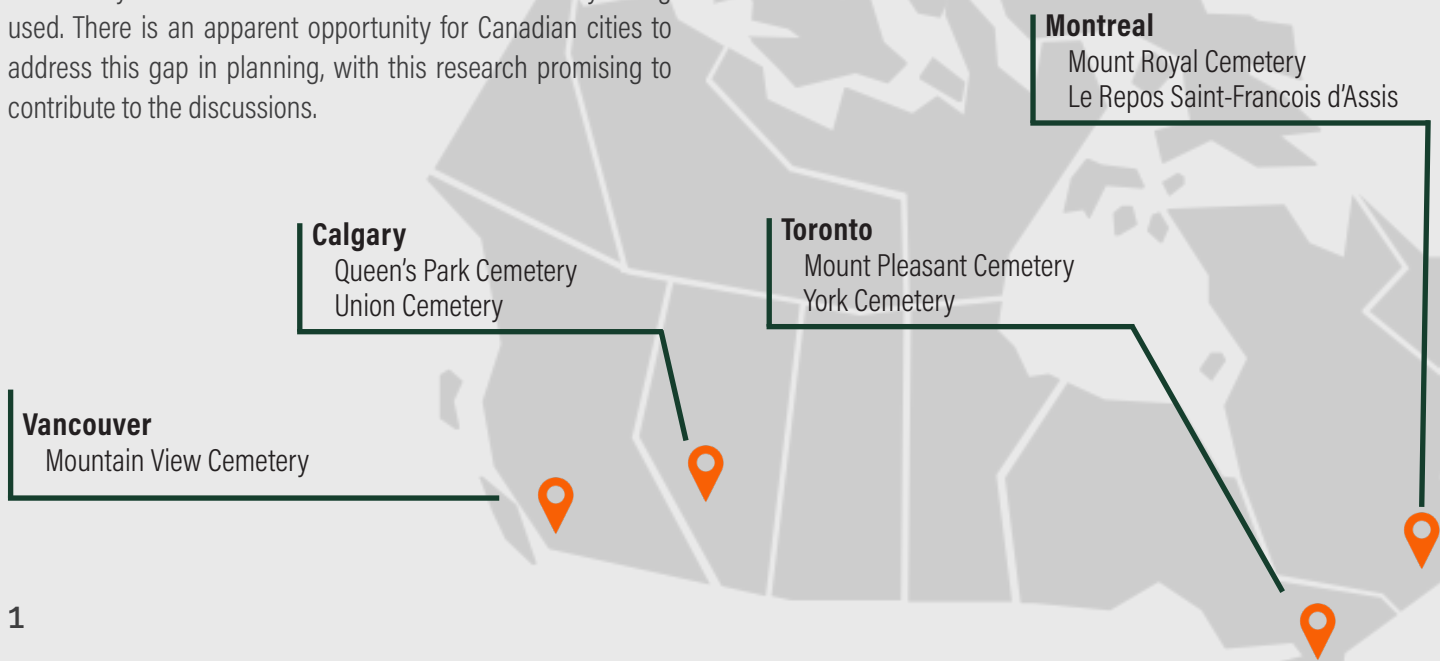
Research has demonstrated cemeteries have great potential to act as a form of green space for public use. Despite this potential, urban cemeteries in North America are often excluded from urban and green space planning strategies. In addition, cemeteries have limited official use and purpose for urban residents beyond the traditional purposes of interment and mourning. This study aims to determine if planning documents in Canadian cities account for how cemeteries are being used by the public. In doing so, city planning documents are analysed for their degree of inclusion of cemeteries, and selected cemeteries in Canada are examined to determine how they are being used by the public through a social media analysis. The study reveals that cemeteries are usually mentioned in city planning documents, but they are not consistently treated as multi-purpose sites to be used by the public. The social media analysis reveals that each of the study cemeteries are being used by members of the public for many different purposes. Therefore, it appears that city planning documents do not necessarily account for how cemeteries are actually being used. There is an apparent opportunity for Canadian cities to address this gap in planning, with this research promising to contribute to the discussions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Are Canadian urban cemeteries included in city planning documents, and if so how?
2. Are Canadian urban cemeteries currently being used as multi-purpose spaces beyond interment, and if so how?
3. To what extent do municipal city planning documents account for how cemeteries are currently being used by the public?

SITE SELECTION

This study considers four Canadian cities with large populations, high density, and that represent a geographic spread across Canada: Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary. Within each city, one to two cemeteries were selected to examine more closely.



METHODS

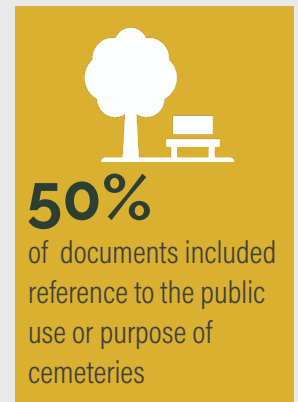
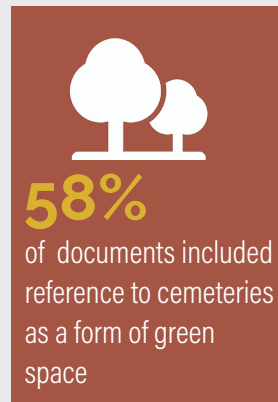
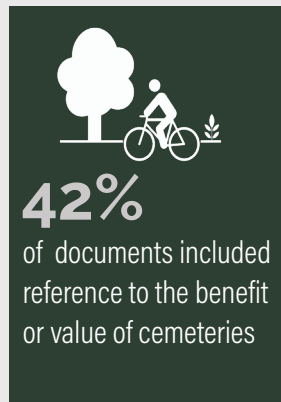
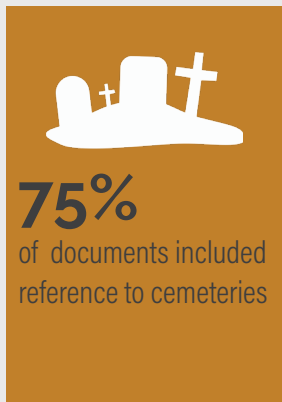
Document Analysis

A document analysis of municipal planning documents was used to determine to what extent cemeteries are included in each of the four study cities' regulatory framework. For each city, the documents examined included municipal development plans, relevant secondary plans, and any relevant recreation plans, green space plans, open space plans, or park plans. Twelve documents were included in total. Each document was manually scanned to find references to cemeteries and key themes informed by the literature review.

Social Media Analysis

To obtain an idea of the reasons people visit urban cemeteries in Canada, and therefore the purposes the cemeteries are serving, photographs from Instagram, together with their corresponding text descriptions and comments, were collected and analysed. The material from Instagram was categorized to determine the most popular representations of purposes for visiting each of the seven study cemeteries. Posts were grouped into seven categories and 28 subcategories related to the purpose suggested by the post.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS



The document analysis demonstrated city planning documents differ substantially in their inclusion of cemeteries. Most planning documents mentioned cemeteries and most documents considered cemeteries a form of green space. Beyond this, the degree of inclusion for cemeteries varied widely.

The document analysis showed cemeteries are generally, but not always, viewed as a form of green space in city planning documents. Although 58% of the documents referred to cemeteries as a form of green space in some way, what this meant in terms of planning inclusion differed drastically. If a document included cemeteries as a form of green space, it did not necessarily mean the document supported the public use of cemeteries. Some documents identified cemeteries as a form of green space to be used for specialized uses or institutions with no mention of public usage. Other documents included cemeteries as a form of recreational green space along with parks and sports fields to be used by the public for a variety of purposes.

Of all the cities' planning documents, the City of Calgary's Municipal Development Plan and Open Space Plan were the most inclusive of cemeteries. The plans, especially when viewed together, clearly describe how cemeteries are included in planning strategies and priorities, including a statement for the purpose cemeteries serve (City of Calgary, 2002, 36):

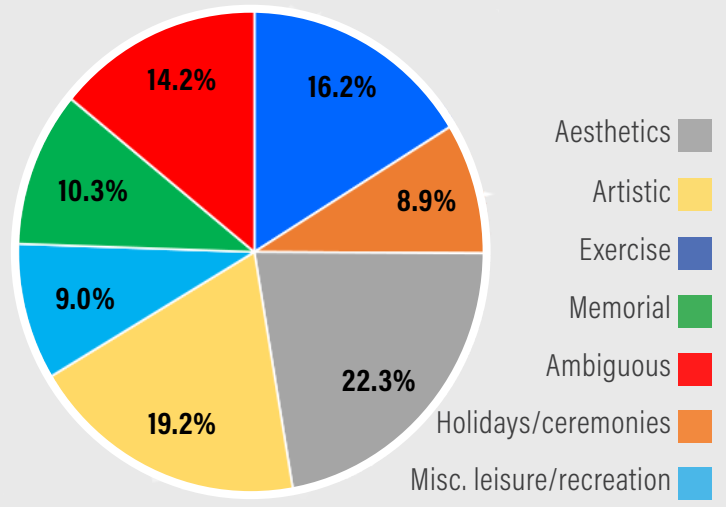
The primary purpose of this land base is for cemetery services, however, non-conflicting passive recreation (walking, cycling, nature observation, and heritage research), heritage landscape conservation, and environmental health are often incorporated as secondary uses.¹

1. City of Calgary (2002). Open Space Plan.

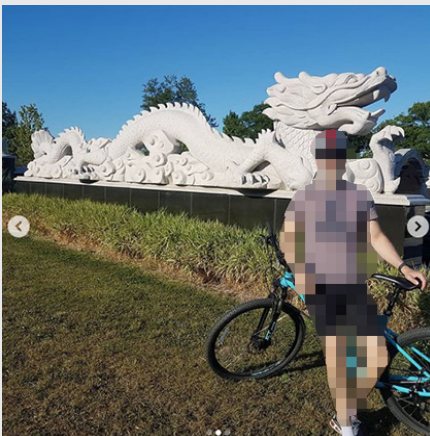
SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The results of the social media analysis demonstrated the public is using cemeteries for a wide variety of purposes (example images below). Many of these purposes are similar to those that are supported by parks or other types of green space: exercise, recreation, leisure, etc. Each of the cemeteries was also used for traditional purposes, including visiting graves and commemoration. This implies each cemetery was able to serve traditional purposes related to interment and memorial while also supporting uses for the wider community.

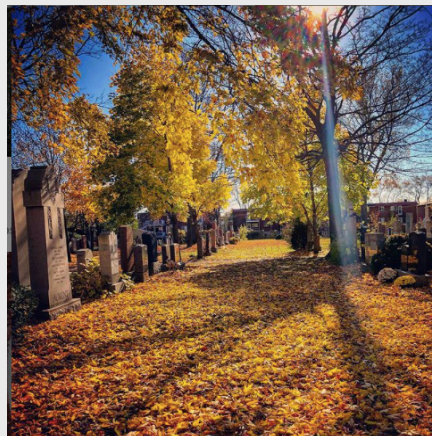
The captions from the social media posts contained diverse, insightful qualitative data. Users' captions often noted their appreciation of cemeteries and the values they associated with cemeteries. In addition, captions and comments sometimes alluded to the complex nature of cemeteries and the uncertainty of using them as a public space.



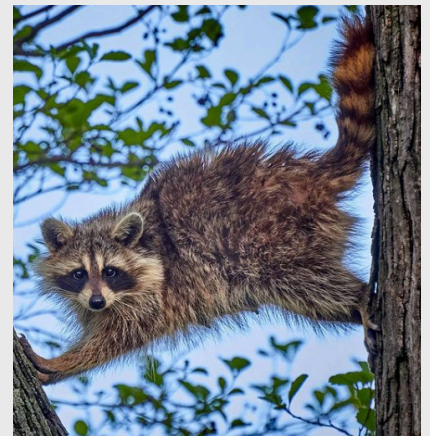
CATEGORY DISTRIBUTION FOR THE POSTS IN ALL SEVEN CEMETERIES



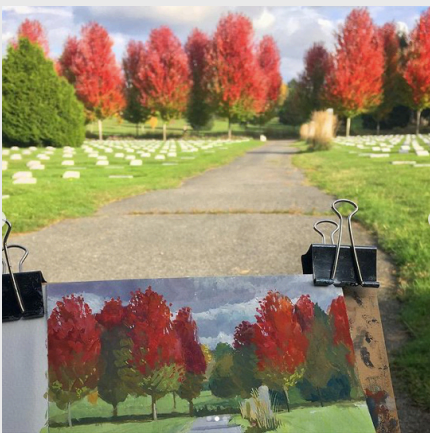
CATEGORIZED AS 'EXERCISE'
YORK CEMETERY (TORONTO)



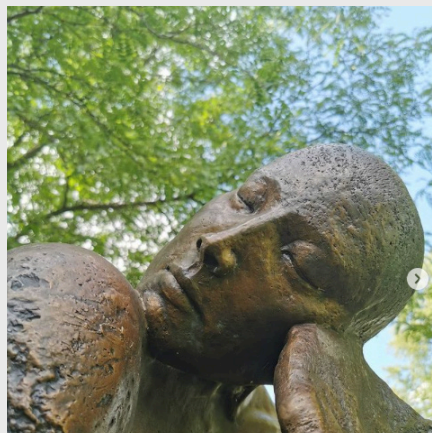
CATEGORIZED AS 'AESTHETIC'
LE REPOIS CEMETERY (MONTREAL)



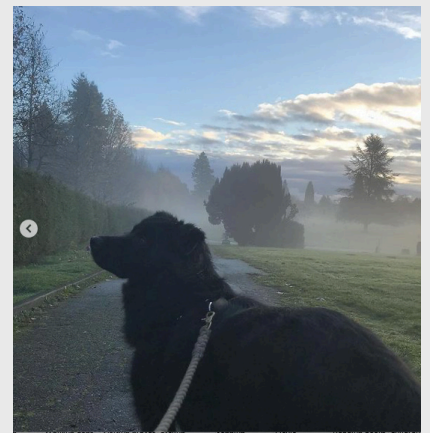
CATEGORIZED AS 'AESTHETIC'
MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY (TORONTO)



CATEGORIZED AS 'ARTISTIC'
MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY (VANCOUVER)



CATEGORIZED AS 'AESTHETIC'
MOUNT ROYAL CEMETERY (MONTREAL)



CATEGORIZED AS 'EXERCISE'
MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY (VANCOUVER)

DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

SCALE	RECOMMENDATION
Small Scale	Use signage and share information about public use of the cemetery (e.g., indicating acceptable activities, welcome signs) to help people feel comfortable using the site.
	Install benches, garbage cans, and other amenities to improve the site for public use.
	Clearly indicate distinct private and public parts of the cemetery (if applicable) to mitigate conflicting uses.
Medium Scale	Implement revenue-generating activities (e.g., guided walking tours, spaces/sites to be rented for events) to help secure the financial viability of the site.
	Improve accessibility to ensure the site is used by people of all ages and abilities.
	Create walking paths and networks to support some of the most popular public uses (walking, dog walking, exercise).
Large Scale	Ensure cemeteries are included in city planning documents and strategies, including:
	Treat cemeteries as a form of green space and include cemeteries in green space planning (therefore having green space policies and strategies apply to cemeteries).
	Acknowledge cemeteries' unique value as well as the values it shares with other green spaces. In particular, acknowledge the ecological and historical value of cemeteries.
	Allow cemeteries to be used as multi-purpose spaces and promote them for public use.

KEY FINDING

The key finding from this study is the apparent gap between the regulatory framework regarding cemeteries and the experiences of the general public. The regulatory framework did not consistently acknowledge, value, or plan for cemeteries as multi-purpose spaces, whereas each cemetery was found to be valued and used by the public for multiple purposes. But, when a planning document did discuss the value of a cemetery, there was some alignment with the values indicated by the public.

NEED FOR PLANNING INCLUSION

This study suggests that counter to arguments in the literature, city planning strategies may be less important for influencing whether or not cemeteries function as multi-purpose spaces. Nonetheless, it is important for municipalities to account more thoroughly for cemeteries and to integrate them in their planning documents. Such integration will allow cemeteries to continue supporting multiple functions, ensure their longevity and viability, and mitigate issues related to multi-purpose cemeteries.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATION

The primary recommendation of this study is to officially recognize cemeteries as public spaces. Planning documents should include cemeteries as a form of green space, promote them as sites for public use, and acknowledge their historical and ecological value. Recommendations at the small and medium scale offer additional measures to mitigate issues associated with multi-purpose cemeteries. These issues need to be addressed for cemeteries to function as multi-purpose spaces long-term while minimizing potential issues and conflicting uses.