

# *Temporalities of cemeteries: the tensions and flows of perpetuity and change in 'slow' places*

Article

Published Version

Creative Commons: Attribution 3.0 (CC-BY)

Open access

House, D., Beebeejaun, Y., Maddrell, A. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2941-498X> and McClymont, K. (2024) Temporalities of cemeteries: the tensions and flows of perpetuity and change in 'slow' places. *Mortality*, 29 (3). pp. 431-446. ISSN 1469-9885 doi: 10.1080/13576275.2023.2170218 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/110307/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2023.2170218>

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

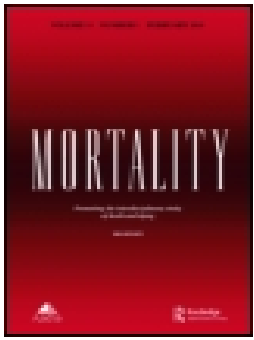
All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

[www.reading.ac.uk/centaur](http://www.reading.ac.uk/centaur)

**CentAUR**

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online



# Mortality

Promoting the interdisciplinary study of death and dying

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cmrt20>

## Temporalities of cemeteries: the tensions and flows of perpetuity and change in 'slow' places

Danielle House, Yasminah Beebeejaun, Avril Maddrell & Katie McClymont

To cite this article: Danielle House, Yasminah Beebeejaun, Avril Maddrell & Katie McClymont (2023): Temporalities of cemeteries: the tensions and flows of perpetuity and change in 'slow' places, *Mortality*, DOI: [10.1080/13576275.2023.2170218](https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2023.2170218)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2023.2170218>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 27 Jan 2023.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)







View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Temporalities of cemeteries: the tensions and flows of perpetuity and change in 'slow' places

Danielle House <sup>a</sup>, Yasminah Beebeejaun <sup>b</sup>, Avril Maddrell <sup>a</sup>  
and Katie McClymont <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Archaeology, Geography, and Environmental Science, University of Reading, Reading, UK; <sup>b</sup>The Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, London, UK; <sup>c</sup>Geography and Environmental Management, University of the West of England, Bristol, UK

## ABSTRACT

Cemeteries in the UK and Ireland are typically viewed as a final 'place of rest' for the deceased where their remains will not be disturbed. This sense is at least in some part created by the norm of in-perpetuity grave rights in these countries. Yet while 'in-perpetuity' suggests fixity, it is defined and managed in varying ways in different settings, including an ultimate fixed term for some graves and cemeteries. Over decades, in-perpetuity cemeteries and cemetery policies adapt to and reflect changes in cultural trends, national and local politics, cemetery management, planning, regeneration, and other pressures on land, as well as the changes that occur in the natural environment in which they are situated. In this article, we explore the rhythms and temporalities of cemeteries characterised by in-perpetuity grave rights, by looking at how the tensions between perpetuity and change are perceived, experienced, and managed by burial service staff and varied communities who use them. In-perpetuity grave rights impact the management of cemeteries, their material form, and how they are used. A focus on the temporalities and rhythms of cemeteries in the UK and Ireland enables a reconsideration of the concepts of perpetuity and change in death and remembrance.

## KEYWORDS

Place-temporalities;  
cemetery; perpetuity;  
minorities; burial;  
management

## Introduction

Cemeteries in the UK and Ireland are widely imagined as providing a final 'place of rest' for the deceased, a place where the remains of the dead will not be disturbed. The cemetery provides place-based collective memorialisation despite the fact that, over time, many graves are neglected by subsequent generations of the living (see Tzortzopoulou-Gregory, 2010). In many UK and Irish cemeteries, the rhetoric and sense of eternal rest has materialised, in part, through perpetual grave rights. In practice, in-perpetuity arrangements for burial mean that the remains of the person laid to rest will not be disinterred, with the purchaser of the plot owning the right to burial unendingly (Rugg & Holland, 2017). Implicit in this idea is a sense of the cemetery as a space of permanence, encapsulated in fixed memorial stones and land preserved from

development into the future within the otherwise changing cityscapes. Yet, as this article will examine, these assumed rights and landscapes are less fixed than they appear; perpetuity is defined and managed in various ways, and cemeteries are continuously evolving and reflect changing laws, norms, and practices at a national and local level. This means that while cemeteries are perceived as permanent, static, and ever the same, especially when closed to further burials, in reality they are inherently places of dynamic rhythm.

Cemeteries, both municipal and private, reflect changes in policy, funding regimes and management contexts, as well as in planning, regeneration, neighbourhood development, pressures on land, demographic change and cultural trends. In the UK and Ireland, they are often places full of wildlife, trees, and other plants, which grow and transform seasonally and slowly over decades (Jones, 2007; Lowenthal, 1979). The fabric and material culture of cemeteries also act as a record of urban expansions, changing trends in memorialisation and dispersal, changing burial and remembrance practices, and expectations of future burial needs (e.g. Garattini, 2007; Rumbold et al., 2020; Venbrux et al., 2009). Whilst the primary purpose of cemeteries is as a space for burial and the disposition of cremated remains, the presence of visitors and their respective rituals and rhythms produce cemeteries as lively spaces (Grabalov, 2018; Nordh & Evensen, 2018; Stevenson et al., 2016). They are emotionally significant to individuals, families, and communities (Francis et al., 2005; Woodthorpe, 2011) and can have competing uses and meanings (Francis et al., 2000; Rugg, 2020; Skår et al., 2018). Recent research has noted the importance of examining their role in multicultural and multifaith settings, highlighting the diverse and changing (spiritual) meanings attached to these places (Hunter, 2016; Maddrell et al., 2018, 2021, 2022). Central in these discussions are various rhythms and flows, of time, people, rituals, and nature, on timescales of days and years, to decades and centuries. These complex contexts, with their multiple spatio-temporal rhythms, are constantly shaping and reshaping cemetery spaces, with perpetual graves providing significant elements of material and symbolic continuity within those ebbs and flows.

We draw upon work on place rhythms and temporalities as a lens through which to explore the role of multiscale temporalities in the experience of 'in-perpetuity' cemeteries. While extensions to or changed demarcations within cemeteries can generate rapid change to the space and character of a particular cemetery, evolving demographics, reiterative practices, and emerging trends represent slower agents of change within their place-temporality. Using a temporal-spatial lens, we examine the tensions of perpetuity and change at cemeteries in Dundee and Cork in order to understand their role as places that record and respond to social and cultural change in increasingly post-secular multicultural societies. This tension – between an idea of the cemetery as fixed and perpetual and the ubiquity of change – reveals novel points of contestation and negotiation that shed light onto their processes of becoming. Although in recent decades, place temporalities have been at the centre of geographical and related research (see, for example, Matos Wunderlich, 2010), cemetery spaces remain overlooked and under-examined within our, particularly urban, environments (McClymont, 2016). Through this study, we explore the social, cultural, and economic tensions of perpetuity and change through the insights provided by local burial service staff and diverse cemetery users, and reconsider the inherent assumptions of these concepts.

## The place temporalities of cemeteries in the UK and Ireland

Building on earlier explorations (Buttimer, 1983; Lefebvre, 1991, 2004; Seamon, 1979), geographical work in the past two decades has sought to recentre and explore the rhythms and temporalities that shape our experiences of place and everyday life. Understanding ‘spatiotemporal patterns, routines, repetitions, scales and flows’ offers important insights into spatial patterns and relations (Mels, 2004, p. 5). When we start to think of places and everyday life through paying attention to rhythms and flows – of people, bodies, mobilities, and nature (Edensor, 2010) – we can see places in all their dynamism and can identify repetitions of movement and action that shape linear and cyclical rhythms ‘through which social life is regulated and experienced’ (Edensor, 2010, p. 10). In cemeteries in the UK and Ireland, the distinct characteristic of *perpetual* grave rights, and how the planning and management of these creates tension in the face of ubiquitous change, is an influential but overlooked factor that shapes the form, aesthetic, and experience of these functional and symbolic places.

Much work on place rhythms has focused on the diurnal or weekly flows of everyday life. Although cemeteries have daily rhythms – people visiting or passing through, graves dug, funerals held, day and night and the changes they bring – they also explicitly have rhythms on longer, slower scales. This is true of all places, but UK and Irish cemeteries are notable in their longevity as a result of the tradition of perpetual grave rights. Not only do they encompass the slow cyclical rhythm of the life course and varied beliefs in an afterlife, cemeteries also connect visitors to the past and the rhythms of long-term societal change and urban expansion: over generations and centuries, not days. Furthermore, perpetual grave rights in the UK and Ireland force both the managers and users of cemeteries to make long-term plans for their management, forcing a gaze into the future as well as the past. Crucially, many rhythms can in fact ensure consistency to the shape and experience of place and landscapes over time, when dynamic processes are stable and reliable (Edensor, 2010).

Place temporalities, which are shaped by the use, functions, meanings and practices of particular spaces, provide an additional frame through which to understand the dynamism of the cemetery space. Planning scholar Filipa Matos Wunderlich explores how urban spaces are often experienced with contrasting senses of time: that cities, or places within them, are felt as ‘fast’ or ‘slow’. ‘[P]laces are “slow” because social activities and movements intertwine harmoniously and are performed in a calm and leisurely manner. Slow places are often experienced as temporary halts in a city, as breathing spaces; they offer moments of silence and encounters’ (Matos Wunderlich, 2013, p. 383). By this definition, cemeteries would be seen as slow; tranquil places of calm and respite within urban environments (Francis et al., 2005; Nordh & Evensen, 2018; Skår et al., 2018) that hold both formal religious meaning to some in areas of consecrated land, as well as less well-defined spiritual and transcendent dimensions. Matos Wunderlich suggests that the tempo of a place ‘varies according to people’s states of mind and affective engagement with social settings, but also the design of urban space’ (2013, p. 385). Mourners’ experience of the ‘absence-presence’ of the deceased influences their relation to the spaces associated with the dead, including their remains, creating particular place-temporalities within cemeteries and other spaces that memorialise the dead (Maddrell, 2013, p. 517). Thus, an important part of the sense of slow flows and temporalities in

cemeteries in the UK and Ireland comes from an awareness by managers, the bereaved, and general visitors, of the ongoing presence of and an obligation to provide sites of eternal rest for the dead. This is 'the dead' in both an individual and generalised sense and these rhythms, therefore, become just as much about preserving the past as securing the future.

Perpetual grave rights across the UK and Ireland, therefore, are an important element that shape the place-temporalities of cemeteries in Dundee and Cork. A sense of perpetuity and connection to past and future works to lengthen the rhythmical cycles that are discussed in current literature on place temporalities. Yet, as signalled above, within these contexts the assumption of perpetual grave rights as universally experienced is so pervasive it is often overlooked as a shaping and defining factor in the production of these places.

### Perpetual grave rights in the UK and Ireland

In Ireland, there is no time limit on grave rights, they do indeed appear to be for 'perpetuity' to mourners and cemetery management. By contrast, in England and Scotland, perpetual grave rights, popularly perceived as un-ending, are in fact defined legally as terminating after 100 years, although in practice graves commonly remain intact beyond this time frame. The tradition for perpetual burial in these countries is in contrast with the decline of burial in general, with cremation rates being 77% in the UK and 19.61% in Ireland, where it is a growing trend (Nordh et al., 2021). Many other European countries practice the short-term re-use of graves (e.g. within 10–30 years of the burial), meaning that perpetual grave rights in the UK and Ireland represent particular cultural and management issues. Furthermore, in-perpetuity burial is a cultural and religious requirement for some people (Maddrell et al., 2018), meaning that opportunities and rules around perpetual grave rights will affect communities unevenly.

The UK Burial Act of 1857 has been interpreted for nearly a century as providing in-perpetuity grave rights, despite an original intention to allow grave re-use (Francis et al., 2005; Rugg, 2020; Rugg 2016, p. 95; Rugg & Holland, 2017). In the late 1970s, the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order (1977) stipulated that rights of burial were for a maximum period of 100 years, with the exception of Commonwealth War Graves (CABE, 2007, p. 3). Death studies scholars Julie Rugg and Stephen Holland emphasise that grave re-use is legally permitted and was common practice in historic churchyards in England, but they note 'In the UK, there are in principle strong moral objections to the undue disturbance of bodies. The notion of disturbing a grave for the purpose of reusing that grave for further burial carries particular resonance with regard to the sanctity of the grave and a desire to let the dead "rest in peace"' (2017, p. 11). Recent legislation in Scotland has, however, enabled grave re-use. The Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act, 2016 now allows the sale of rights to a grave for 25 years with the onus on the owner to restate an interest on a 10-yearly basis. If interest is not restated and no burials take place in a grave for 100 years, a process exists for it to be taken back by the burial authority following a period of consultation (Fairbairn, 2017; Scottish Parliament, 2017). Yet despite this, plots in municipal cemeteries in Dundee are still currently sold in-perpetuity. The burial service is aware of the legislative change but considers it has sufficient burial space for the next few

decades (personal communication with burial service manager, 26 November 2020), so see no need to make such a drastic challenge to cultural norms.

Ireland shares the tradition for in-perpetuity graves rights with the UK, but set within the specific context of Roman Catholic norms, i.e. a theological preference for burial, although cremation has been permitted by the Vatican since 1963. When discussing the length of grave-rights in Cork during the research, we were often met with surprise and shock that elsewhere in Europe graves were re-used. The Rules and Regulations for the Regulation of Burial Grounds 1888, with amendments in 1919, 1929, and 2013, provides a legislative framework for burial in Ireland (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021). Within the 'Rules', in perpetuity grave rights are alluded to, or assumed, alongside rules on burial depth and grave registration. Furthermore, it is prohibited to remove or disturb human remains from a grave unless in very specific circumstances and with clear legal permissions (Rules and Regulations for the Regulation of Burial Grounds 1888, copy obtained through Dublin Cemeteries Trust). Within the Rules, local government Burial Boards are given jurisdiction for the cemeteries within their areas, and their regulations must adhere to the 1888 Rules and amendments in the management, sale, and development of burial plots to serve their community. Cork City's Right of Burial form grants the exclusive right of burial in a plot to a named person and their successors 'in perpetuity for the purpose of burial' (Grant of Right of Burial form, City of Cork). In Cork, an exception to perpetual grave rights occurs for 'social' graves, or what they label 'non-perpetuity graves', where plots provided for those in need are owned by the local authority rather than a family.

## Methods

This research is part of a larger project exploring cemeteries and crematoria gardens as public spaces of belonging across North-West Europe, with a focus on experiences of inclusion and exclusion of migrants and established minorities in towns (Maddrell et al., 2022). Both Cork and Dundee have a similar size population and foreign born/ethnic minority populations (14% of 125,657 people and 10% of 148,750 people respectively), facilitating comparison. In addition to secondary research on local and national cemetery, crematoria, and other dispersal regulations and statistics, we undertook field visits to the cities, visiting the cemeteries and crematoria to map their assets, design features, and regulations, as well as undertake observations of users at the sites.

We carried out eight stakeholder interviews in each location with those working in the burial and funerary services to understand the main issues and developments for cemetery management and burial, for those in the both the public (burial service, cemetery managers, planners) and private sectors (funeral directors, stonemasons, crematoria managers). Eight further stakeholder interviews with representatives from migrant and minority communities were undertaken across the two case studies to establish their experiences and priorities. Finally, we undertook focus groups and biographical interviews with majority and minority users of the cemeteries (a total of 22 people across the two cases) to triangulate the stakeholder data with user insights and experiences. All interviews took place between September 2019 and November 2020. These transcripts were coded using Atlas.ti to identify the main themes and to undertake comparative analysis across the dataset. This study had ethical approval from the University Research



Ethics Committee University of Reading UREC 19/52 - Cemeteries and Crematoria as public spaces of belonging in Europe - and minor amendments in light of C-19 approved 1/5/2020 under the same number 19/52.

## Planning for perpetuity in cemeteries

The idea of grave rights as being in-perpetuity can lead to a sense of cemeteries as slow, as places that are preserved, never-changing. Yet the idea of everlasting grave rights presents planning and management issues that do not exist in countries where grave re-use is the norm (Nordh et al., 2021), which in turn shapes people's experiences of using them. Davies and Bennett (2016, p. 98) summarise:

[A] central issue for this sector, [...] is how to integrate 'deathscapes' (Kong, 1999) within the urban fabric. Such integration must account for the permanency of cemeteries within an otherwise dynamic land use system, continually responding to pressures such as urban expansion, consolidation and shifting community values and expectations.

Whilst our two case studies have different histories in regard to how and why the practice of perpetual grave rights came about, they now share the management issues and cultural expectations that arise from perpetual grave rights within cemeteries.

In the rest of the article, we explore these management issues and people's experiences of them: the continual need for burial space; the possibility of advanced plot purchase; the costs of plots and cemetery maintenance; and the legacy of headstones. Our findings reveal a tension between the certainty of change within cemeteries and the commitment to preservation. The ways burial services and cemetery managers respond to the issues that arise due to perpetual grave rights in fact demonstrate the need for constant adaptation and change at cemeteries but may conflict with people's sense of the temporal nature of the cemetery.

## Continual need for burial space

In-perpetuity grave rights place policy and financial burdens upon local authorities and cemetery managers as well as practical challenges. One major issue is limited plot space within localities. In places where graves are not re-used there is a need for the constant planning for the provision of new grave space. Cemetery provision is of course influenced by a series of factors, including land ownership and value, as well as changing trends that shape the demand for grave space such as cremation. Yet if sites grant rights in perpetuity, once a cemetery is full there is little further capacity for expansion at that site when possibilities like burial on previous walkways have been exhausted. New sites must be allocated to meet future demand unless grave re-use is granted as a pragmatic-rationalist solution (see Davies & Bennett, 2016; Rugg & Holland, 2017).

In Ireland, burial space is managed by local authorities and, as they are providing a service the majority of people use (due to high burial and low cremation rates), in Cork City they review burial capacity annually. Furthermore, as discussed with a representative of Cork's burial service, they plan for a long lead in time between future need and the delivery of new burial ground due to lengthy processes of land purchase, planning, and necessary construction and infrastructure. Other research has shown that elsewhere, including the UK, there is often no clear strategy to local authority planning for burial

provision and cemeteries due to a lack of legal obligation to provide space for death (Allam, 2019; McClymont, 2014; Rugg, 2020).

Both Dundee and Cork have undertaken cemetery expansion to address the issue of limited burial space; Cork built seven new or significantly expanded cemeteries in rural areas surrounding the city between roughly 2002 and 2007, and Dundee developed a large cemetery in 2015 in the east of the city where need was greatest. However, in Dundee, the issue had reached a critical point. A member of staff from the burial service explained: ‘Go back six years we were managing [grave availability] on a yearly basis, we were looking to see what we could do year on year, what ground was available for sale [as grave plots]’. As mentioned above, it is now possible in Scotland to limit burial to a 25 year lease. Yet due to this new cemetery, in Dundee burial land is once again plentiful and the burial service do not see a need to implement fixed-term burial rights. A representative from the planning department at the local authority elaborated on their motivations to build the new cemetery:

[There] was a recognition over the years that the capacity within the established cemeteries in Dundee was limited. There was then a recognition that there was a capacity to the west of the city, and there was a need for provision in the east, to give people a choice to bury their loved ones reasonably close to where they were from and where their connections were.

The developments of new cemeteries represent the need to plan for future demand for burial space and the value of place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992; McClymont, 2018). Allocating sites that are easily accessible to local communities can be challenging as areas become increasingly urbanised, especially given the financialisation of land for housing. Cemeteries are primarily a place for remembrance and local and easy access to these spaces is important but largely unconsidered in planning metrics of access to social infrastructure. Underlying these issues is a temporal sense of continuity in place across life and death for the deceased and their bereaved through the cemetery; the place-temporality is slow and extends far into the past and the future.

Yet place attachment can be complicated by in-perpetuity graves. Cork has four large 19<sup>th</sup> century cemeteries in the centre of the city, and as a representative from the burial service explained ‘they are reflective I suppose of the make-up of the society at that stage. Things have changed rapidly in the last 20, 30 years, in terms of diversity across the city, and the multicultural nature of the city’. Because of the perpetuity of grave rights, that right to burial in these plots remains with the deed holder, these plots are never put into re-use and there are no plots available to purchase in these inner-city cemeteries. All the rights to burial in these plots were purchased decades ago and some have been in families for many years, passed down to younger generations or more distant relatives as people pass away. Burials still take place in these cemeteries, but these are second or third interments into family plots, or, occasionally, first interments in plots that were purchased many years ago and have been unused. Therefore, the communities that have place attachment to these cemeteries by having family buried there, living locally, or another reason, are in most circumstances unable to choose burial there. Cemetery staff explained to us that in these cemeteries they have had instances where people have requested burial in ‘non-perpetuity’ or social graves, in order to secure burial in that cemetery: ‘You’d be surprised, some people who can’t buy a grave because there isn’t any

say look, I just want to be buried here'. But outside of this relatively rare request, people from inner Cork are now buried in the surrounding rural cemeteries.

As mentioned, burial is a cultural and religious requirement for some, meaning that certain communities are more affected by the availability (or lack) of burial space than others. In the UK and other parts of Europe, while many have practiced repatriation of the dead for decades (Ahaddour et al., 2019; Gardner, 1998; Jassal, 2015), migrant communities are increasingly seeking disposition of their dead locally (Beebejaun et al., 2021; Maddrell et al., 2021; Swensen & Skår, 2019). In Dundee, the Muslim communities have negotiated burial space over many decades (see Ansari, 2007 for work in this area). The oldest Muslim burial ground is a small corner of a Victorian inner-city cemetery dating to 1967. As the community established and grew, the need for more burial space became clear, and two large sections were created at a new municipal cemetery built in the early 1980s. However, in 2014 Dundee's Muslim communities collectively purchased and built a *private* Muslim cemetery, adjacent to a municipal cemetery but regulated by a Trust they established, in order to meet and secure their future burial needs. A Dundee imam we spoke to explained:

You could say that there was need for future as well. The lairs [plots] or the ground [at one cemetery] was being used up, so they thought you know what we might as well start discussing it and getting our own space. So if we have the space from now it will last for a long time in the future. In the next 10 years anyway we'd have had to get new space so we can start the process, the earlier the better.

Driving these actions is the need to secure eternal, perpetual grave rest, grounded in a sense that quick burial and other cultural and religious needs can be better guaranteed by the Muslim communities. However, a Dundee woman in her 60s, originally from Bangladesh, expressed reassurance in the culture of in-perpetuity burial in Scotland and municipal responsibility to maintain cemeteries:

I think the deceased feel good here [the Muslim section of a municipal cemetery] as the place is taken care of, it's not going to be abandoned or overgrown. I don't think [the Council] will destroy or relocate the graves. As for the graveyards which are full, the Council doesn't re-use graves so I am hopeful that my grave will remain in Dundee for thousand years, no one will destroy it, and I will find peace in the grave that I deserve.

### ***The possibility of advanced plot purchase***

Building on the availability of burial space, in turn, policies on the possibility of purchasing plots in advance of a death can help mitigate future financial burdens on a family and secure one's own wishes for their own burial. In Dundee, changes in advance purchase policy have been directly shaped by land and plot availability. A few years prior to the development of the new cemetery, land availability had been so limited that advance purchase was prohibited. A member of staff from the burial service explained:

We got to the stage I made the decision we wouldn't sell any lairs unless it was for a pending interment. 'Cause before anybody could come in, buy one at any time. We gave them the option if they purchase a lair they can get the one they want to use and they can get one either side, but yeah we made that call a number of years ago when it was getting a bit touchy for space. And then it took maybe five year to get things up and running for the new cemetery.

Now space is no longer a critical issue due to new cemetery space, pre-purchase of plots is once again possible. In these cemeteries, the sense of permanence and place-temporality is reinforced by the possibility of buying a plot and securing a final resting place in advance of a death for an individual and for certain communities. Yet adaptation in policy on plot purchasing, driven by a lack of space due to in-perpetuity grave rights, resulted in rapid change: not only to policy but also to imagined future timelines.

In Cork, it was previously possible to advance purchase plots in City Council cemeteries, but as plot availability reduced that policy was rescinded, and it was then only possible to purchase a plot for an immediate interment. In the County Council however, the neighbouring authority has plentiful grave space, and advanced purchases and multiple plot purchases are permitted. Yet, this changed again for many residents when in 2019 the City and County Council boundaries were redrawn and nine of the County cemeteries were moved within the City Council jurisdiction. Overnight the possibility for advanced purchase of plots at those cemeteries was stopped (interviews with three cemetery registrars). One Traveller woman in her 50s explained how in the past it was possible to buy several adjacent plots to create a large family plot:

[N]ow [the cemeteries sell] a single plot but they're digging down farther. So for a lot of Travellers, this is something new, cause they would have bought family plots. And a lot of Travellers as well, not so many young Travellers but a lot of old Travellers, would have plots bought in the graveyards that have family members in, and like that's been stopped as well.

This policy change is not simply impacting on personal finances and choice, but the way communities connect to the space of the cemetery. It changes the cemetery's position as a fixed point or destination within wider life stories.

### ***The cost of plots and cemetery maintenance***

Cork and Dundee have relatively expensive burial costs in comparison to cities in other European countries. As stated above, burial and cremation rates differ greatly between these two countries (Nordh et al., 2021), but the price of a plot for burial of either a body or cremated remains is largely similar in these cities. There are many factors that influence cost across Europe (and beyond) including legal rules on the disposal of ashes and different provision in welfare systems, but the perpetual rather than fixed-term rental period of plots in Scotland and Ireland is undoubtedly a factor in their high prices (Rugg & Holland, 2017).

The constant need to provide more burial space, and the need in turn to maintain these spaces, places a financial burden on the authorities that manage them, which is often pushed onto the consumer. In Cork City Council cemeteries, the cost of a plot is either €1,800 or €2,000, depending on whether it is mid or end of row. In Dundee City Council cemeteries, until recently the cost of a plot was £656 plus a title deed fee of £69. Dundee City Council recently introduced a 'perpetuities fee' as a one-off charge designed to assist with the maintenance costs of the grave and cemetery (interview with burial service representative). This fee of £632 is charged to next of kin when a lair is purchased, in addition to the plot and title deed, to a total of £1,357. In times of austerity and financial pressure for local authorities across the UK, the cost of maintaining cemeteries in-perpetuity is hard to prioritise, and for Dundee the solution was found in charging families

more for burials. Yet for many a dignified burial is a way of showing respect to the deceased and is part of the mourning process. One Church of Scotland minister we spoke to pointed out that the financial burden of burial is not only in the cost of the plot but, due to in-perpetuity grave rights, a financial commitment for the long-term. She explains, 'we are putting a lot of pressure on people and we're also maintaining that pressure to go back to the gravestone, to go back to it. So not only are they paying for it and that kind of thing, there's an ongoing responsibility for somebody who maybe can't afford it'. As we shall explore in the next section, perpetuity comes with a burden: part of practices and traditions which are hard to escape from despite their high costs.

### *The legacy of headstones*

The memorials which are placed upon in-perpetuity graves both create further management challenges for cemetery managers and next of kin, but also deeply shape place-temporalities and aesthetics. Headstones and memorials are added and re-inscribed as people pass away and join relatives in family plots. Cemetery grounds are expanded and redesigned, and aesthetic trends in grief and memorialisation are always evolving. Headstones vary in their fashion and style (Bradbury, 2001), as well as through regulation and trends in cemetery design from the nineteenth century to the contemporary lawn cemetery (Francis et al., 2005; Johnson, 2008). Over periods of family and community change, headstones can act as anchors to past and to place, and as a material record of community and heritage. In Dundee, a white Scottish woman observed a culture of several generations staying in the city which was reflected in cemeteries. She described,

[P]eople have family plots where several members of the family are buried, from what I've seen, [there's] a culture in Dundee of going to particular cemeteries because families here tend to... several generations of families stay in the city and so on, so that becomes very very important for them. That's where people are.

Yet for others, over decades it can become unclear who within a family holds the deeds or is responsible for the upkeep of a grave memorial. This demonstrates slow, unseen change in families and places across generations, as people move and place attachments are weakened, but also the slow changes in the materiality of the cemeteries, as memorials become overgrown or lack regular maintenance.

In contexts where fixed-term grave rights are the norm headstones are removed once the lease on the grave expires. Although the issue of unsafe memorials can still exist, the challenge is distinct for perpetual graves and cemeteries (Nordh et al., 2021). The costs and scale of the grave estate managed by local authorities is vast (CABE, 2007), especially in England where responsibility for closed Church of England churchyards also falls to the public sector (Church of England, 2017; Historic England, 2022). This ongoing responsibility for grave maintenance was encapsulated by a Christian Australian woman in her 50s living in Dundee: 'am I expecting the local Council to look after, to maintain the grounds? ... if I die before my husband, am I expecting him to look after it? And then when he dies... you know, we don't have kids, so...'. She added, 'if you've got a grave, then what sort of tending is there, and is it right to expect other people to look after it?'

In Dundee, this issue has been acute. A representative from the burial service explained: 'we were spending and spending repairing all these memorials, it got to the

stage where we didn't have the resources to go back to revisit all these memorials that had been posted [with wood as a temporary measure to secure them]'. In response, they decided to prioritise the unsafe memorials through zonal risk assessments, targeting the busiest parts of the cemeteries and securing the most dangerous headstones first. Additionally, they introduced a registration scheme for stonemasons through which they must adhere to regulations on memorial foundations and other safety aspects. The local authority was striving to preserve these graves, driven by a sense of respect and obligation, yet the changes in community and family across generations meant that it simply was not clear which private citizens were responsible for their upkeep. A Dundee woman Minister reflected, 'There is a, sort of a, a sense of sadness in some way that the [headstones] that are falling over are usually the older ones where there's nobody around now that knew that person then. You know. It becomes sort of history and therefore neglected'. Despite the materiality of a cemetery being preserved and maintained, something is experienced as lost when friends and family are unable to visit, remember, and perform rituals.

This has been a particular issue for certain communities that have been shaped by migration and change. The Jewish cemetery in Cork, which had a large space for the future burial need of the community, recently sold much of their unused land to the local authority to expand a municipal cemetery. As the Jewish community declined after its peak in the 1930s, due mainly to younger people moving away, they did not need the burial space they had planned for (interviews with cemetery registrar and elderly Jewish community member). The synagogue in the city closed in 2016, and the new Taharah house built at the Jewish cemetery as part of the acquisition arrangement is very infrequently used (this has been the experience elsewhere in the UK including Dundee, and cities such as Newport, Wales, (Chadha, 2006; Maddrell et al., 2018)). However, the cemetery, containing over 100 graves, remains in perpetuity. A representative of the City Council burial service explained 'The deal is that the Council maintains it, upkeep it, as part of the deal, so it won't be forgotten and it won't go into disrepair which is a good thing'. Yet despite its maintenance, the rhythms and flows of mourners are near absent from this cemetery, and this affects the experience of the place and the formation of its materiality, as well as its place-temporalities, slowing the sense of time within it even more than at an 'in-use' in-perpetuity cemetery. The absence of direct daily interactions with this space, which is situated adjacent to a busy cemetery, hints at not only passed individuals but past communities and diaspora mobilities.

In the context of continuous change and the reality of international migration, we heard a desire for permanence and stability through the materiality of headstones and memorials which act as a fixed point or anchor to post-death memory, extending the temporal frame of attachment and relationality. A Dundee woman originally from Bangladesh in her 60s explained:

Headstones are necessary to identify a grave. Maybe my children and grandchildren would come to visit my grave many years after my death, and with the headstone they can find my grave. My grave could be lost amongst other graves without a marker. A headstone is important to me, so my children and grandchildren can identify my grave in the future.

When confronting almost certain change across generations, when family may no longer be living locally but also when the cemetery may have changed in its materiality, the

ability for future generations to find a grave through the headstone is important. And this speaks to the place-temporalities understood and experienced at a cemetery. Maddrell (2013, p. 511) explains how inscriptions on memorials claim: 'a right to be part of that particular place-temporality, a rhetorical claim to the attention of the viewer'. A stonemason in Cork observed this in his work: 'everyone wants granite now, no one wants limestone anymore'. On one level, this comment is about changing trends and tastes – granite is now the fashion – and perhaps reflects greater wealth and the ability to import it cheaply. But on another it reflects a desire for perpetuity. Granite is much more durable than limestone; and customers are explicitly seeking more permanent memorials to their loved ones. People are considering their grave and its care in a long timeframe; they are aware of its presence years and even centuries into the future within this seemingly perpetual and slow place.

## Conclusions

The place-temporalities of cemeteries in the UK and Ireland with in-perpetuity grave rights encompass diurnal, annual biological, calendric cultural, short-term and long-term flows and rhythms. As such they can be seen as 'slow places', due to their apparently perpetual nature and their perception as a timeless space of spirituality and remembrance, and in the case of Cork and Dundee, within a wider bustling cityscape. These rhythms have varying temporalities, sometimes slow and incremental, like the slow change to the material dimensions of a cemetery as memorials and headstones deteriorate, or the expansion of graves as plots are sold and used. Other times they can be faster or ephemeral, especially those associated with time-specific practices, such as the congregation of and dispersal of mourners after a funeral. At the same time, the materialities and practices of a cemetery can be long-lived, and give the sense of the everlasting, even if that is not the reality. Headstones made of stone have a permanence that can survive centuries, although stone and textual inscriptions weather and fade; rituals such as visiting and maintaining the graves of ancestors, practicing continuity in family bonds and place-identity, construct a sense of perpetuity while they last, but evidence shows that these too typically ebb and fade over time. Therefore, our focus on the temporalities and rhythms of cemeteries in the UK and Ireland open up the concepts of perpetuity and change in death and remembrance and reveals overlooked tensions between them. This prompts a necessary reconsideration of place temporalities on a longer scale, as well as reflecting the interweaving of continuity and stability and the micro and macro scales of evolving social-cultural trends. The practices and materialities of and at cemeteries can embody and construct change *and* create increased demand for assured continuity-in-place for the dead, including through in-perpetuity graves.

Perpetuity shapes both the management of cemeteries and their material and physical form through the need to be, at least notionally, planning 'for eternity'. Issues highlighted in this article such as the continual need for burial space, the possibility of advanced plot purchase, the costs of plots and maintenance, and unsafe memorials, are profoundly shaped by in-perpetuity grave rights. Yet we have seen it is precisely planning for eternity which has driven much, at times rapid, change at cemeteries, alongside and intertwined with changes in the wider social, political, and cultural contexts. Furthermore, these policies intersect with social issues around the need for families to maintain the graves



they own or are responsible for, placing a financial and social burden on relatives, which is heightened when relatives have moved from the area local to the cemetery. The challenge for cemetery management sits in the tensions between the continued expectation of in-perpetuity burial (which varies within faith and cultural communities) alongside trends towards cremation and very real pressures on land availability. Despite creating a legacy of burden from the past into the present, as discussed, in-perpetuity grave rights are about safeguarding the future, raising challenging questions about how and when cemeteries in the UK and Ireland are allowed to change.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the staff and communities in Cork and Dundee who generously supported this research and shared their experiences. Thank you also to the reviewers for their constructive comments and the journal for their support.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was funded by the Humanities in the European Research Area under their call Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe (2019-2022). The project name and number was 'CeMi: Cemeteries and crematoria as public spaces of belonging in Europe: a study of migrant and minority cultural inclusion, exclusion, and integration', HERA2.078.

## Notes on contributors

**Danielle House** is a senior research associate in the School for Policy Studies at the University of Bristol. Her research and practice spans memory and memorialisation; enforced disappearance in Mexico and Latin America more broadly; migrant and minority experiences of cemeteries and crematoria; urban regeneration and health in the UK; and community-based research projects.

**Yasminah Beebejaun** is Professor of Urban Politics and Planning at the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London. Her work is concerned with feminist and anti-racist approaches to planning theory and practice. Her articles have been published in many journals including *Environment and Planning C*, *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, *Planning Theory*, *Planning Theory and Practice*, and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*. She is co-editor of *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City*.

**Avril Maddrell** is Professor of Social and Cultural Geography at the University of Reading. She is a feminist geographer, with research interests in spaces, landscapes and practices of death, mourning and remembrance; diversity issues; sacred mobilities; and historiography. She is author/co-author/editor of numerous books, including *Mobilities in Life and Death* (Springer/ IMISCOE 2023 forthcoming); *Deathscapes. Spaces for death, dying, mourning and remembrance* (Ashgate, 2010), *Consolationscapes* ..... (Routledge 2019); *Memory, Mourning, Landscape* (Rodopi, 2010); and *Contemporary Encounters in Gender and Religion* (Palgrave 2017).

**Katie McClymont** is an associate professor and programme leader in Urban Planning at UWE, Bristol. Her teaching and research interests include community participation, heritage, and planning theory. Recent projects include work exploring cemeteries in multifaith and multicultural urban



settings, the unspoken and intangible values of community assets, and the impacts on design quality of post-consent planning decisions.

## ORCID

Danielle House  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6171-9922>

Yasminah Beebeejaun  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4744-0751>

Avril Maddrell  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2941-498X>

Katie McClymont  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5517-3262>

## References

- Ahaddour, C., Van den Branden, S., & Broeckaert, B. (2019). "God's land is vast". Attitudes and practices of moroccan muslims regarding burial and repatriation of the deceased. *Mortality*, 24 (1), 32–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2017.1413543>
- Allam, Z. (2019). The city of the living or the dead: On the ethics and morality of land use for graveyards in a rapidly urbanised world. *Land Use Policy*, 87, 104–137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.104037>
- Altman, I., & Low, S. M. (Eds.). (1992). *Place Attachment*. Plenum Press.
- Ansari, H. (2007). Burying the dead: Making muslim space in Britain. *Historical Research*, 80(210), 545–566. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2281.2007.00432.x>
- Beebeejaun, Y., McClymont, K., Maddrell, A., Mathijssen, B., & McNally, D. (2021). Death in the peripheries: Planning for minority ethnic groups beyond "The City". *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 0739456X2110432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X211043275>
- Bradbury, M. (2001). Forget me not: Memorialisation in cemeteries and crematoria. In J. Hockey, J. Katz, & N. Small (Eds.), *Grief, mourning and death ritual* (pp. 218–225). Open University Press.
- Buttimer, A. (1983). *The practice of geography*. Longman.
- CABE. (2007). Cemeteries, churchyards and burial grounds. (Briefing Note, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment).
- Chadha, A. (2006). Ambivalent heritage: Between affect and ideology in a colonial cemetery. *Journal of Material Culture*, 11(3), 339–363. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183506068809>
- Church of England. (2017). *The maintenance of monuments in closed churchyards*. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/maintenance%20of%20monuments%20in%20closed%20churchyards.pdf>
- Davies, P. J., & Bennett, G. (2016). Planning, provision and perpetuity of deathscapes: Past and future trends and the impact for city planners. *Land Use Policy*, 55, 98–107. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2016.03.029>
- Department of Rural and Community Development. (2021). *Burial regulations*. <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c206d2-burial-regulations/>
- Edensor, T. (Ed.). (2010). *Geographies of rhythm: Nature, place, mobilities and bodies*. Ashgate Publishing.
- Fairbairn, C. (2017). Reuse of graves. (Briefing paper number 04060, 6 June 2017). House of Commons Library.
- Francis, D., Kellaher, L., & Neophytou, G. (2000). Sustaining cemeteries: The user perspective. *Mortality*, 5(1), 34–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/713685994>
- Francis, D., Kellaher, L., & Neophytou, G. (2005). *The secret cemetery*. Routledge.
- Garattini, C. (2007). Creating memories: Material culture and infantile death in contemporary Ireland. *Mortality*, 12(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270701255172>
- Gardner, K. (1998). Death, burial and bereavement amongst bengali muslims in tower hamlets, East London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, xxiv(iii), 507–522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.1998.9976647>

- Grabalov, P. (2018). Public life among the dead: Jogging in Malmö cemeteries. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 33, 75–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2018.01.027>
- Historic England. (2022). *Management of historic cemeteries*. <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/cemeteries-and-burial-grounds/management/#Section6Text>
- Hunter, A. (2016). Deathscapes in diaspora: Contesting space and negotiating home in contexts of post-migration diversity. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(2), 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2015.1059472>
- Jassal, L. K. (2015). Necromobilities: The multi-sited geographies of death and disposal in a mobile world. *Mobilities*, 10(3), 486–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2014.912049>
- Johnson, P. (2008). The modern cemetery: A design for life. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(7), 777–790. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649360802383154>
- Jones, O. (2007). Arnos vale cemetery and the lively materialities of trees in place. *Garden History*, 35, 149–171. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/25472382#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25472382#metadata_info_tab_contents)
- Kong, L. (1999). Cemeteries and columbaria, memorials and mausoleums: Narrative and interpretation in the study of deathscapes in geography. *Australian Geographical Studies*, 37(1), 1–10. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-8470.00061>
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (Translated from the French by D. Nicholson-Smith). Basil Blackwell.
- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Time, space, and everyday life* (Translated from the French by G. Moore & S. Elden). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Lowenthal, D. (1979). Environmental perception: Preserving the past. *Progress in Human Geography*, 3(4), 549–559. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030913257900300404>
- Maddrell, A. (2013). Living with the deceased: Absence, presence and absence-presence. *Cultural Geographies*, 20(4), 501–522. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474013482806>
- Maddrell, A., Beebeejaun, Y., House, D., Jedan, C., Kmec, S., Knapskog, M., McClymont, K., Nordh, H., Venbrux, E., Priya Uteng, T., Westendorp, M., & Wingren, C. (2022). *A roadmap for inclusive cemeteries and crematoria in diverse societies*. University of Luxembourg. <https://cemi-hera.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CeMi-report-English-def.pdf>
- Maddrell, A., Beebeejaun, Y., McClymont, K., McNally, D., Mathijssen, B., & Dogra, S. A. (2018). Deathscapes and diversity in England and Wales: Setting an agenda. *Revista d'Etnologia de Catalunya*, 43, 38–53. <https://raco.cat/index.php/RevistaEtnologia/article/view/358690>
- Maddrell, A., McNally, D., Beebeejaun, Y., McClymont, K., & Mathijssen, B. (2021). Intersections of (infra)structural violence and cultural inclusion: The geopolitics of minority cemeteries and crematoria provision. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 46(3), 675–688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12437>
- Matos Wunderlich, F. (2010). The aesthetics of place-temporality in everyday urban space: The case of Fitzroy square. In T. Edensor (Ed.), *Geographies of rhythm: Nature, place, mobilities and bodies* (pp. 45–58). Ashgate Publishing.
- Matos Wunderlich, F. (2013). Place-temporality and urban place-rhythms in urban analysis and design: An aesthetic akin to music. *Journal of Urban Design*, 18(3), 383–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2013.772882>
- McClymont, K. (2014, June/July). Planning for the end? Cemeteries as planning's 'skeleton in the closet'. *Town and Country Planning*, 83(6/7), 282–285. <https://tcpa.org.uk/collection/town-and-country-planning-journal/>
- McClymont, K. (2016). 'That eccentric use of land at the top of the hill': Cemeteries and stories of the city. *Mortality*, 21(4), 378–396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2016.1151865>
- McClymont, K. (2018). 'They have different ways of doing things': Cemeteries, diversity and local place attachment. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 39(3), 267–285. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2018.1459519>
- Mels, T. (Ed.). (2004). *Reanimating places: A geography of rhythms*. Ashgate Pub Ltd.
- Nordh, H., & Evensen, K. H. (2018). Qualities and functions ascribed to urban cemeteries across the capital cities of Scandinavia. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 33, 80–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2018.01.026>

- Nordh, H., House, D., Westendorp, M., Maddrell, A., Wingren, C., Kmec, S., McClymont, K., Jedan, C., Priya Uteng, T., Beebeejaun, Y., & Venbrux, E. (2021). Rules, norms, and practices: A comparative study exploring disposal practices and facilities in Northern Europe. *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228211042138>
- Rugg, J. (2016). Cost, choice and diversity: Policy issues in burial and cremation in England. In L. Foster & K. Woodthorpe (Eds.), *Death and social policy in challenging times* (pp. 91–109). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rugg, J. (2020). Social justice and cemetery systems. *Death Studies*, 46(4), 861–874. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1776791>
- Rugg, J., & Holland, S. (2017). Respecting corpses: The ethics of grave re-use. *Mortality*, 22(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2016.1192591>
- Rumbold, B., Lowe, J., & Aoun, S. M. (2020). The evolving landscape: Funerals, cemeteries, memorialization, and bereavement support. *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying*, 84(2), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222820904877>
- Scottish Parliament. (2017). *Burial and cremation (Scotland) act 2016*. [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/20/pdfs/asp\\_20160020\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/20/pdfs/asp_20160020_en.pdf)
- Seamon, D. (1979). *A geography of the lifeworld: Movement, rest and encounter*. Croom Helm.
- Skår, M., Nordh, H., & Swensen, G. (2018). Green urban cemeteries: More than just parks. *Journal of Urbanism*, 11(3), 362–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2018.1470104>
- Stevenson, O., Kenten, C., & Maddrell, A. (2016). And now the end is near: Enlivening and politizising the geographies of dying, death, and mourning. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17(2), 153–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2016.1152396>
- Swensen, G., & Skår, M. (2019). Urban cemeteries' potential as sites for cultural encounters. *Mortality*, 24(3), 333–356. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2018.1461818>
- Tzortzopoulou-Gregory, L. (2010). Remembering and forgetting: The relationship between memory and the abandonment of graves in nineteenth-and twentieth-century Greek cemeteries. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 14(2), 285–301. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10761-010-0109-7>
- Venbrux, E., Peelen, J., & Altena, M. (2009). Going dutch: Individualisation, secularisation and changes in death rites. *Mortality*, 14(2), 97–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270902807508>
- Woodthorpe, K. (2011). Sustaining the contemporary cemetery: Implementing policy alongside conflicting perspectives and purpose. *Mortality*, 16(3), 259–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2011.586125>