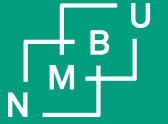


NFKK 2022 Congress, Tampere, 15.09.2022



The role of urban cemeteries as public spaces: Some insights from Oslo and Copenhagen

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Outline

- **Background:** PhD research on urban cemeteries as public spaces
- **Cases:** Cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen
- **Study:** An analysis of cemetery strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen
- **Implication for practice:** Visions for the future



**Background: PhD research on urban cemeteries
as public spaces**

Vestre cemetery, Copenhagen (photo by Pavel Grabalov)

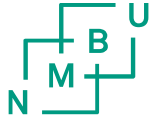
Background: Cemeteries on the opposite sides of the Baltic sea



Staroe cemetery, Kaliningrad, Russia



Assistens cemetery, Copenhagen, Denmark



Background: PhD project

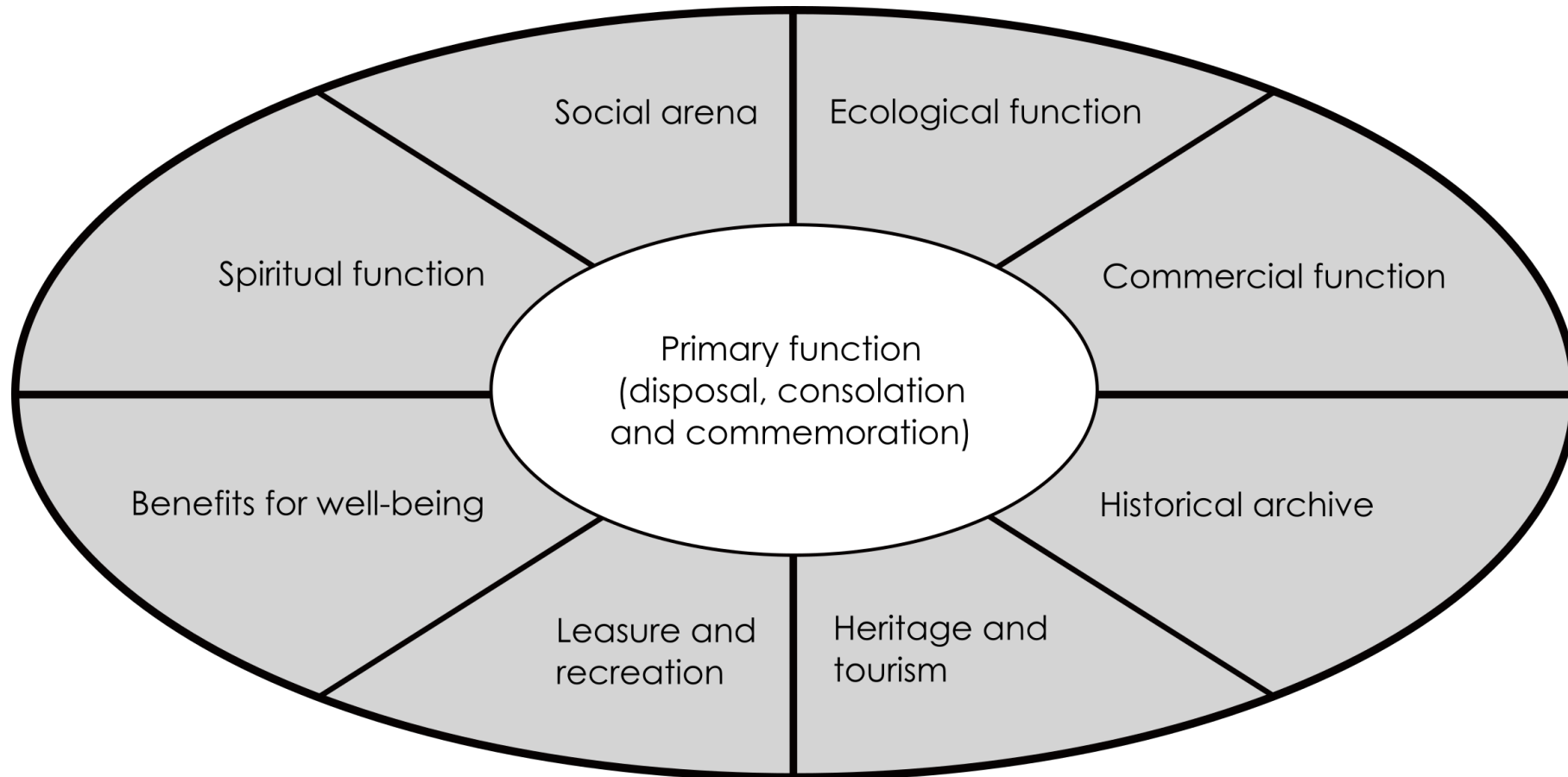
- Master degree in urban studies (Malmö University).
- PhD project (2017-2022) “**Urban cemeteries as public spaces**: A comparison of cases from Scandinavia and Russia”.
- How do **planners and policymakers** define the role of urban cemeteries? How do **people** use and perceive them? What can we learn through a cross-cultural **comparative** lens?
- **Interdisciplinary research**: human geography, urban planning, landscape architecture, public health.
- Main supervisor: Helena Nordh.

Background: Cemeteries as special places

The presence of death in physical settings makes **the role of cemeteries exceptional and complex**. Cemeteries:

- hold “**emotional significance**” (Rugg, 2020);
- simultaneously contain landscapes of **emotion, commerce and community** (Woodthorpe, 2011);
- contribute to **green infrastructure, civic identity and local place attachment** (McClymont, 2016);
- provide space not only for the disposal of human remains but also for **recreation and cultural encounters** (Skår, Nordh, & Swensen, 2018);
- function as **restorative environments** that support relaxation, reflection and contemplation (Nordh, Evensen, & Skår, 2017).

Background: Cemeteries' multifunctional role



Background: Multifunctional cemeteries in dense cities



- Cemeteries’ meanings and functions shape a complexity that requires a **sensitive framework for planning and management**, especially in cities.
- Cemeteries are often “**planning’s ‘skeleton in the closet’**” (McClymont, 2014).
- The role of cemeteries **varies in time and across cultures**.
- **Densification** as a mainstream planning strategy might change the role of urban cemeteries which call for better articulation of cemeteries’ qualities.

Cases: Cemeteries in Oslo and Copenhagen



Østre cemetery, Oslo (photo by Pavel Grabalov).



Alfaset cemetery, Oslo (photo by Pavel Grabalov).



Nordre gravlund, Oslo (photo by Pavel Grabalov).



Vestre cemetery, Oslo (photo by Helena Nordh).



Bispebjerg cemetery, Copenhagen (photo by Pavel Grabalov).



Vestre kirkegård, Copenhagen (photo by Pavel Grabalov).

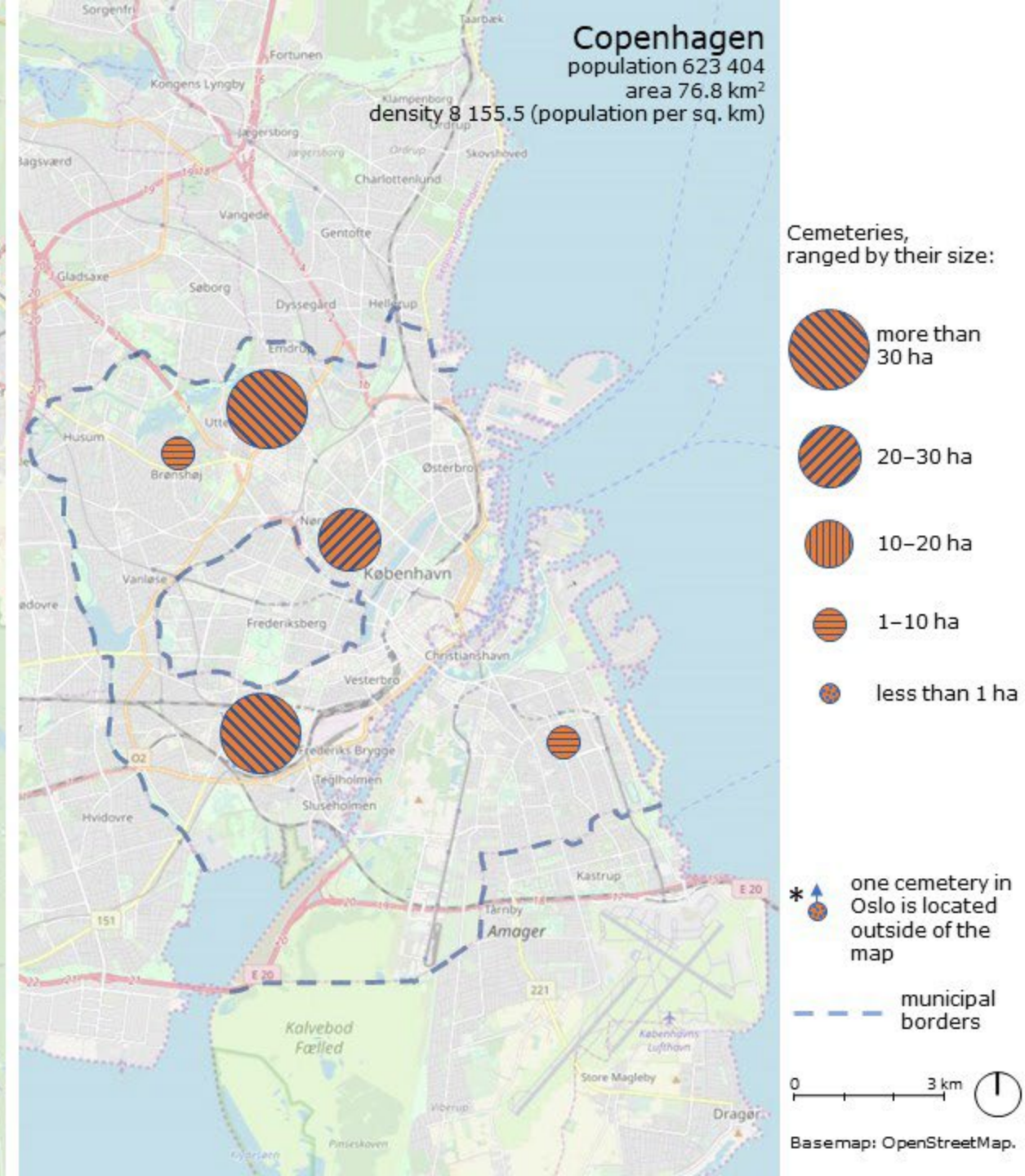
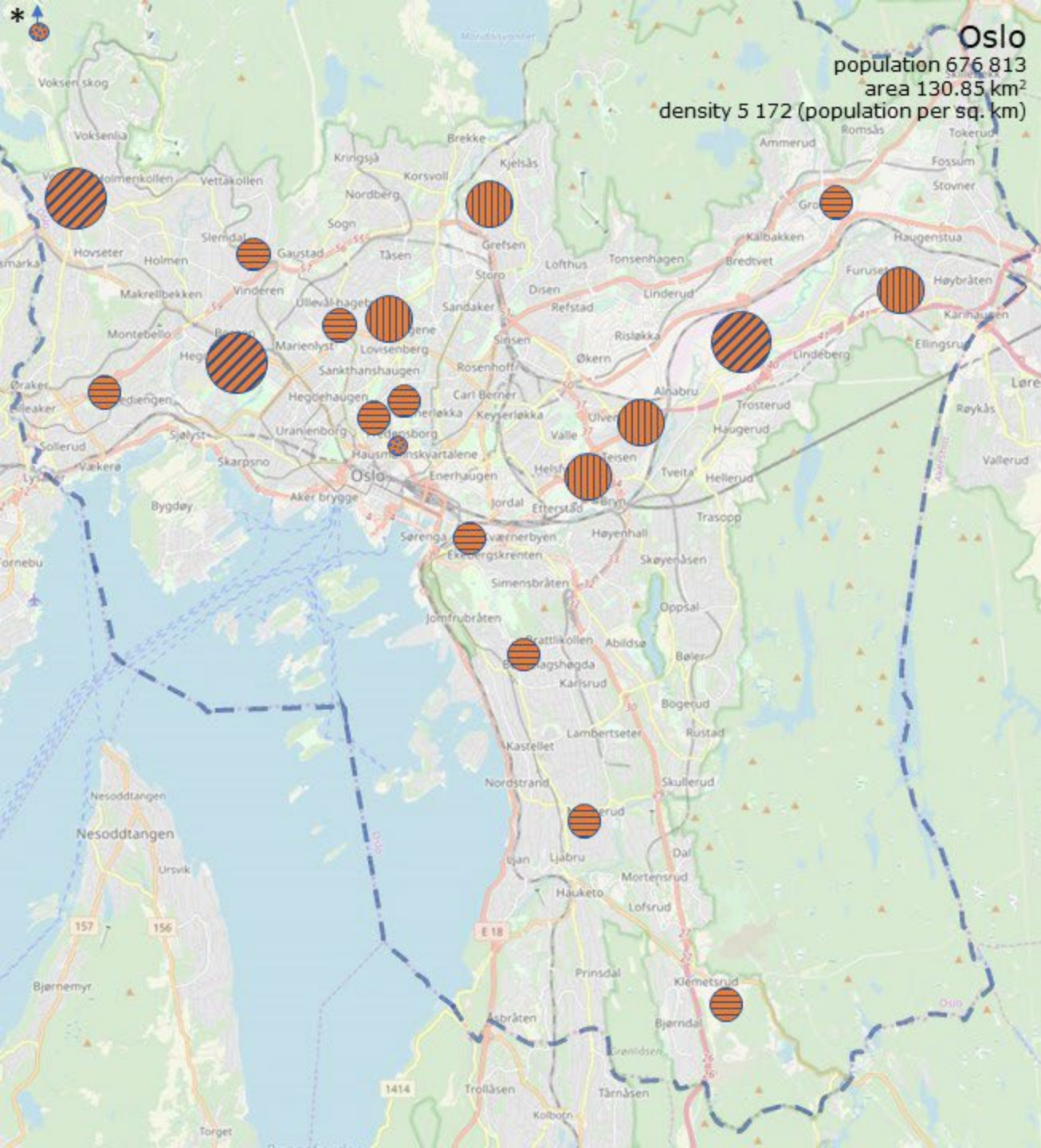


Cherry tree blossom in Bispebjerg cemetery, Copenhagen (photo by Helena Nordh).






Cases: Cemetery contexts




	Oslo	Copenhagen
Population	677 139	623 404
Number of cemeteries run by the city (total cemetery area)	20 (186 ha)	5 (130 ha)
Responsibility of cemetery provision on the city level	The collaboration between the Church of Norway and the municipality of Oslo	The municipality of Copenhagen
Grave tenure	20 years	20 years
Allowed committal practices	Burial, cremation	Burial, cremation
Cremation rate (national cremation rate)	76% (44%)	95% (85,5%)
Physical committal form	Coffin graves, urn graves, common areas for interment of ashes, columbaria (since 2021). Possibility to apply for scattering of ashes over nature or the sea	Coffin graves, urn graves, common areas for interment of ashes, columbaria. Possibility to apply for scattering of ashes over nature or the sea



Cemeteries, ranged by their size:

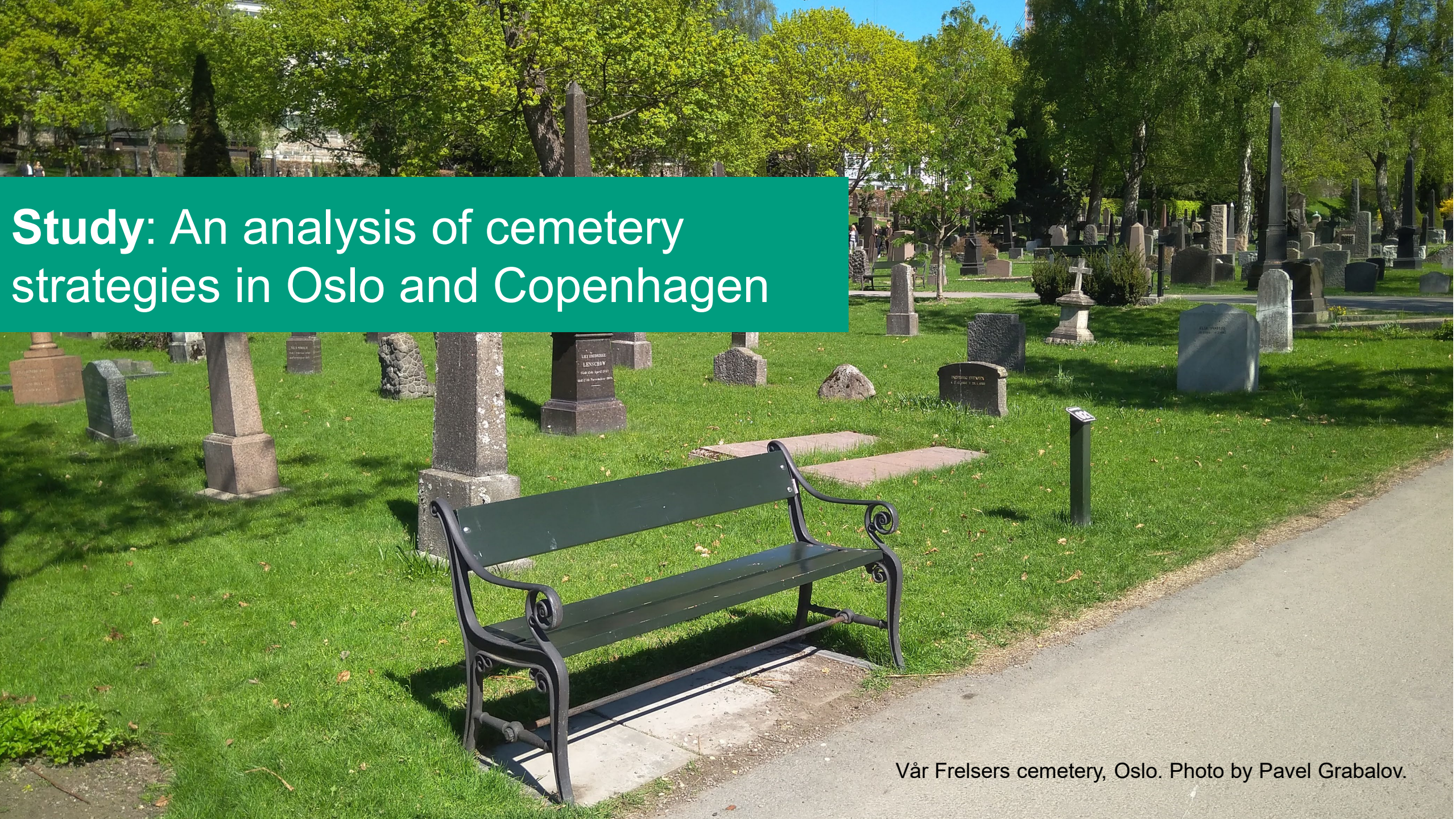
-  more than 30 ha
-  20–30 ha
-  10–20 ha
-  1–10 ha
-  less than 1 ha

*  one cemetery in Oslo is located outside of the map

 municipal borders



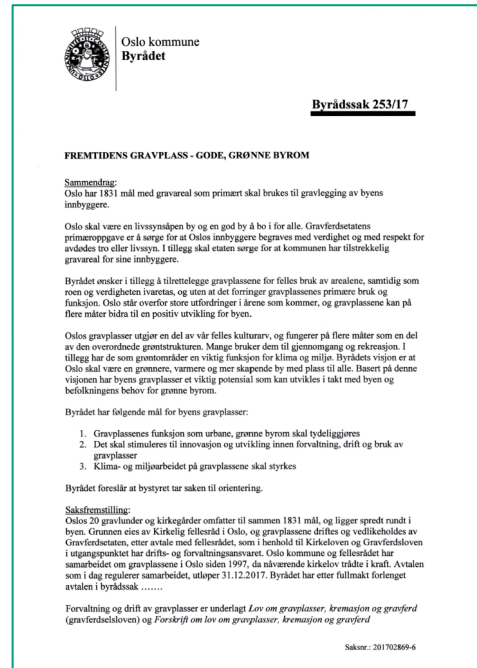
Basemap: OpenStreetMap.

A photograph of a cemetery with a black metal bench in the foreground, surrounded by various gravestones and green trees. The scene is bright and sunny, with lush green grass and trees in the background. A teal banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

Study: An analysis of cemetery strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen

Vår Frelzers cemetery, Oslo. Photo by Pavel Grabalov.

Study: An analysis of cemetery strategies in Oslo and Copenhagen



*”Future cemeteries – great green urban spaces”,
2017*



*”Policy for development of Copenhagen’s
municipal cemeteries towards 2065”, 2014*

Study: Qualitative analysis of the documents and interviews

Type of data	Oslo	Copenhagen
Strategic documents	"Future cemeteries – great green urban spaces"	"Policy for development of Copenhagen's municipal cemeteries towards 2065"
Interviews (10 people) from:	Cemeteries and burials agency	City operations bureau
	Department of culture and sport	Technical and environmental administration
	Landscape architect	Landscape architect
	Community church council	

- Grabalov, P. & Nordh, H. (2020). "Philosophical park": Cemeteries in the Scandinavian urban context. *Sociální studia / Social Studies*, 17(1), 33–54.
- Grabalov, P. & Nordh, H. (2022). The future of urban cemeteries as public spaces: Insights from Oslo and Copenhagen. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 23(1), 81–98.

Study: Similar visions but different focuses



- **More public** cemeteries with a **more diverse** role.
- **Oslo**: cemeteries' potential to improve urban environment and climate (“green shift”).
- **Copenhagen**: cemeteries' contribution to social life and the urban fabric (“liveability”).

Implications for practice: Visions for the future

Høybråten cemetery, Oslo (photo by Pavel Grabalov).

Implications for practice: “Proper” recreation?



- Both Oslo and Copenhagen cemeteries are used for recreational purposes.
- Systematic observations of people’s **activities** in two cemeteries in Oslo, Gamlebyen and Østre (Evensen, Nordh, & Skår, 2017): visiting a grave, crossing, walking dog, jogging, strolling, socialising, having picnic.
- The scope of activities **varies** across cemeteries because of location and surroundings, physical design features, etc.



“More life in cemeteries”



“But there is a trend in Copenhagen where they went even further”

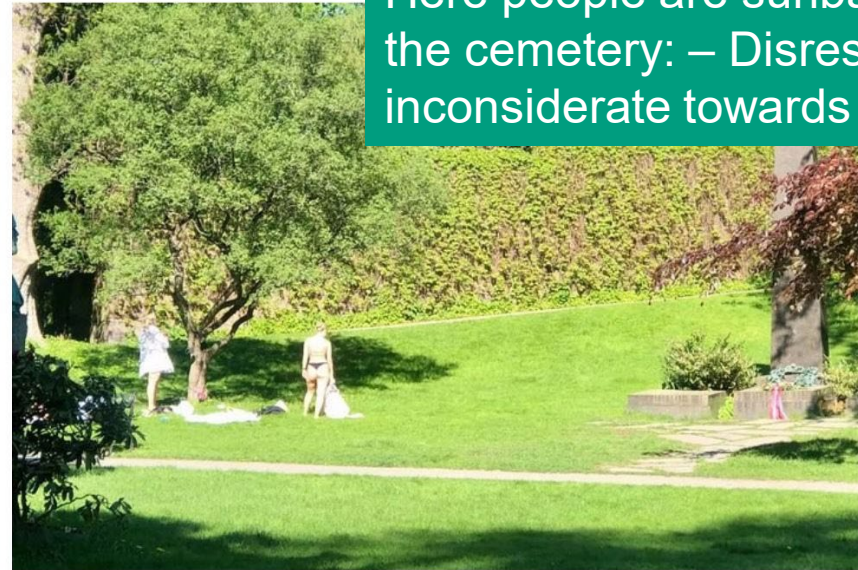


“We would like to keep the death in distance”

Implications for practice: “Proper” recreation?

Her soler folk seg i bikini på gravlunden: - Respektløst og hensynsløst overfor de pårørende

Here people are sunbathing in bikini at the cemetery: – Disrespectful and inconsiderate towards the relatives



NYTER SOLEN: Lørdag formiddag brukte folk Vår Frelsers Gravlund ved Hammersborg til å sole seg. Foto: Petter Stocke-Nicolaisen

Implications for practice: “Proper” recreation?

“Where is the limit for what it is OK to use cemeteries for”

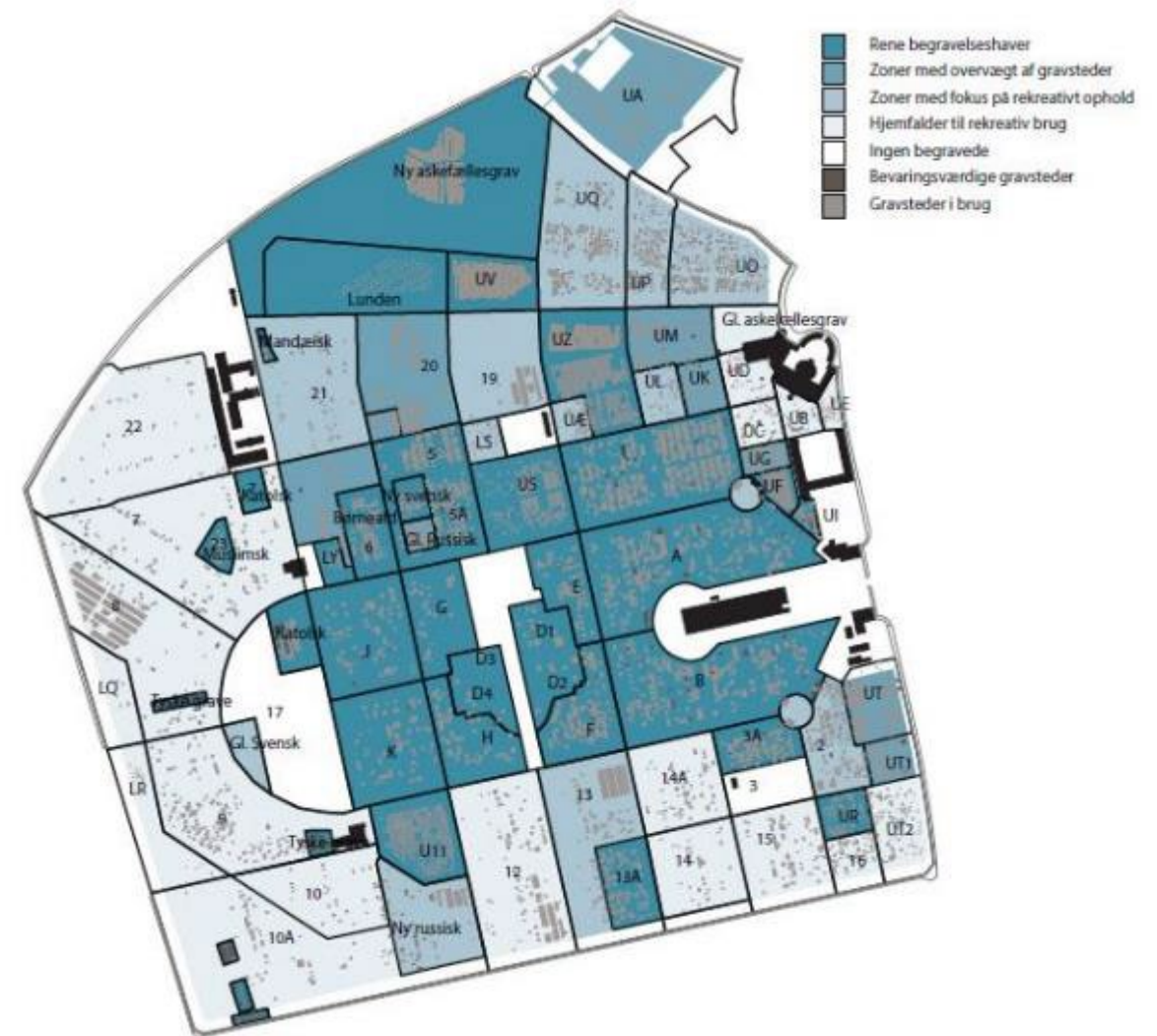


The cemetery is a place where we commemorate our loved ones. Have people lost respect for this? Jogging, walking dogs and having a picnic in a cemetery is disrespectful and inappropriate.

My parents are buried here and I think they would have liked to be surrounded by people having picnic, walking their dogs or small children running around.

Implications for practice: Design to balance functions

- **Zoning** of cemeteries into “burial” and “recreational” parts.
- Zoning can be supported by vegetation, park infrastructure (benches, etc.) and lighting.
- How to avoid **segmentation** of a cemetery?



Implications for practice: Better access through information



- Making cemeteries **more visible** and accessible both physically as well as in citizens' minds.
- Raising **awareness** about cemeteries qualities and appropriate behaviour, e.g. through social media.
- Promoting cemeteries cultural and environmental **values**, e.g. through educational excursions.

Implications for practice: Right to the cemetery?

- From the **right to the city** (Henry Lefebvre and David Harvey) to the **right to the cemetery**.
- Which activities can take place in cemeteries? Which user groups are invited and who is excluded? Who decides this and on which grounds?
- **Primary functions** of cemeteries should be a key to this question.

Henri Lefebvre

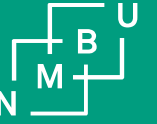
The Right to the City



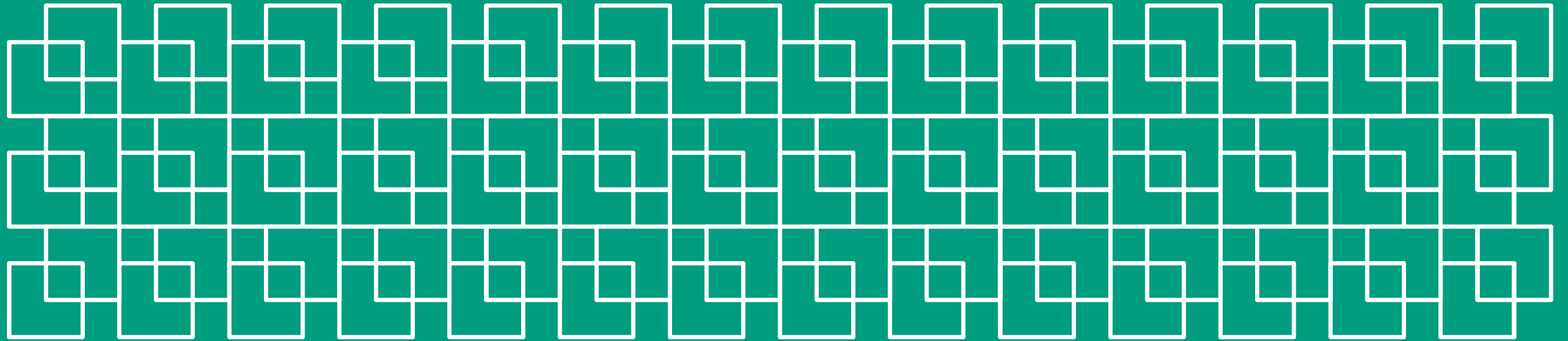


“The presence of the dead among the living will be a daily fact in any society which encourages its people to live”.

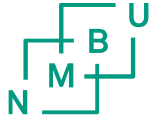
A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction (1977) by Alexander, C., Ishikawa, S., Silverstein, M., Jacobson, M.



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