

Accommodation of ash scattering in contemporary Norwegian governance of death and religion/worldview

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.121699>

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 VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
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With the analysis of the scattering ashes in a Norwegian context as its point of departure, the article sets out to explore ash scattering and how it relates to the governance of deathscape and religion/worldview in the public space. Referring to ethnographic study, the focus is on the bereaved and the deceased in the governance process for ash scattering and on critically rethinking the governance of ash scattering from the private actors' experiences. I argue that ash scattering is in the process of establishing a spatial ritual institution, deregulated *vis-à-vis* organized religion/worldview, which, on the one hand, opens up the possibility for the privatization of death and provides ideals of individuality, privacy and discretion, and, on the other hand, this takes place paradoxically not in private but rather within public space.

Introduction

In this article I examine the governance of death and the diversity of religion/worldview in the public space in the context of ash disposal. Based on a qualitative study with the bereaved who have scattered ashes in public natural landscapes in Norway, the article explores the governance process from the perspective of the private actors and how organized and non-organized religions and worldviews impact the governance process. Ash-scattering procedures are decided by the public authorities, NGOs and the private sector when it comes to how

best to develop and manage space and regulate the action. The term 'governance' is used in examining the actual actions taken and how the actions decided upon are or are not implemented (Bevir 2012). The governance of ash scattering sees the deceased and bereaved as part of and parties to a network of stakeholders – the county governor, the crematorium and the undertaker – that needs to be consulted when complying with the Cemetery Act and Cemetery Regulations and with the deceased's and bereaved persons' decisions relating to disposal.

Traditionally, faith organizations have been crucial in developing and performing death rituals and preserving the body or cremated remains in cemeteries or other approved sacred grounds (Walter 2020). Decisions about the final resting place take place within lives guided, formed and constructed by religion/worldview. Worldview in this context reflects the secularization of northern European societies and the concept of refers to values and perceptions without reference to religious belief or practice (Bråten 2021). For the governance of ash scattering, I scrutinize critically the implication of private actors having to deal with the regulations for the deathscape, and having to cooperate with

the other stakeholders in the governance process, while at the same time fulfilling the wishes of the deceased in accordance with their worldview or religious stance. I adopt a dual approach. First, I explore the governance of ash scattering in a Norwegian setting and the role of religion/worldview in its governance. Second, I examine the governance of ash scattering, focusing on the bereaved themselves and how they manage and respond to this when the state lays down regulations and facilitates the interaction between various private and public stakeholders when it comes to the governance of ash scattering.

Ash disposal

Ash disposal is practised both in cultivated and non-cultivated landscapes by the bereaved of various religious backgrounds and religious and worldview positions (Høeg 2019, 2023; Hockey *et al.* 2001). Recently, in a European setting, ash disposal at cemeteries has been transferred to new locations, where it has been transformed. Thus, ash scattering is related to places and settings that we do not usually associate with religious or worldview burial or burial rituals. This means that the informal/formal physical presence of religion is revealed in more ostensibly non-religious places (Hessels 2012). Accordingly, ash-scattering practices do not take place at pre-arranged sites but rather in spaces that are in the process of construction (Høeg 2023; Kellaher *et al.* 2005: 246). Where the natural landscape is the disposal site, it plays a vital role in creating the space. Findings from the same study that this article is based on reveal a spatial dynamic between the cemetery and the ash-scattering place and an interaction between the bereaved and the deceased related to it, while indicating the importance of considering the fluidity of commemorative space that facilitates

an encounter between the bereaved and the deceased (Høeg 2023). The spatial relocation constitutes a site of new and innovative ritualization (Prendergast *et al.* 2006: 881), what Pamela Roberts calls non-traditional rituals, where the 'best place' and 'the right method' are necessary to honour the dead (Roberts 2011: 27).

Religion manifests itself in ash disposal compared to burial. In a European setting, in historically Protestant or Catholic countries, in the decades after the Second World War, churches adapted to cremation (Davies and Mates 2005). Even though the Church of England strongly advises against ash scattering, with a strong directive to bury ashes (Beebeejaun *et al.* 2021: 10), other Protestant churches have accepted ash disposal and post-cremation rituals outside consecrated ground. Characteristic for these post-cremation rituals is that they are under the control of private actors, where the deceased and bereaved take part in the expert control of ash disposal, often in cooperation with other agents (Mathijssen 2017). The bereaved perform the ash-scattering ritual, with or without religious actions or symbols, in contrast to the funeral, so that they themselves mark the last stage of the deceased's life (Dahlgren and Hermanson 2006: 30). In a Swedish context, Hanna Jansson has also found that scattering rituals are influenced by ideals of individuality (Jansson 2019: 17). Similar tendencies in changing death practices have been described as individualization (Prendergast *et al.* 2006; Walter 1994), as reflections of cultural diversity (Hadders 2013; Maddrell 2016) and as the informalization of death (Jacobsen 2009). The pivotal motivation behind choosing ash scattering is to respect the deceased's wishes (Dahlgren and Hermanson 2006: 48; Høeg 2019, 2023).

Acts and regulations, governing and controlling

For the past two decades in Norway, ash scattering in public natural landscapes – landscapes not exclusively used for burial – has become a more socially accepted form of obsequy. Despite the long and traditional cemetery culture influenced by the Lutheran majority church (Church of Norway) and administrated for the main part by the same institution at the municipal level (van den Breemer 2014), a small number of Norwegians are opting out of the cemetery tradition and looking for alternatives to burial places. Ash scattering was legalized in 1996 with the restriction that ashes could only be scattered in public natural landscapes and not buried or stored in an urn on private property. In 2021, 46 per cent of the deceased were cremated but only the remains of around 2 per cent of those who were cremated were scattered (Kremasjonsstatistikk for Norge 2021), the majority at sea. Most of the people who do not want to have a separate grave in a cemetery opt for placement of the urn in the cemetery's garden of remembrance, with a collective memorial on which each deceased person has their name inscribed with information about time of birth and death. Choosing this alternative, the cemetery authority protects and maintains the memorial and tends the area around it without burdening the next of kin with a service fee. The bereaved, for their part, only have to pay for the name plaque, and for the cremation in those municipalities that have a cremation fee.

Ash scattering in Norway is strictly place-regulated. The bereaved navigate between stakeholders to find the 'right' place in the public natural landscape – forest, rivers, fjords, mountains and so on – when it comes to the handling and disposing of

the ashes. Before they can take possession of the urn at the crematorium, the bereaved must cooperate with a network of actors. A minimum of three are involved in the governance of ash scattering, and each of them has duties and types of governance. The crematorium cannot hand over the urn until it has received the permit issued by the county governor's office, and the ashes must be scattered shortly after delivery from the crematorium. The regulations state that it is not allowed to use a portion of the ashes for a variety of purposes, such as incorporating them in objects or jewellery or to scatter one portion of the ashes while burying the other (Askespredning 2022). In line with Denmark and Finland, and in contrast to Sweden, it is not allowed to divide the ashes so that one portion can be buried abroad. However, in Sweden this practice is rarely permitted and almost only when there are religious reasons for it (Jansson 2021).

The deceased or the bereaved must apply for a permit to the county governor, where they have to specify the favoured location or mark it on a map in advance (Askespredning 2022). If the deceased has not applied for this beforehand, the bereaved must prove that it was the deceased person's decision. Once the ashes have been scattered, the bereaved are obliged to report to the crematorium that they have complied with the Cemetery Act and the accompanying regulations when they spread the ashes at the approved place. We do not know whether or in what context major or minor failures to abide by the existing rules and regulations have been discovered. Supervision is, however, scarcely practised, thereby enabling the bereaved relatives to act basically in accordance with what they consider reasonable or to follow the norms and procedure for ash scattering as a formal and social institution.



Ash scattering in the Tønsberg fjord.

The Cemetery Act and the Cemetery Regulations, therefore, allow the individual and the collective to perform ash scattering, but with discretion. It is not permitted to scatter ashes in popular recreational or densely populated areas. When scattering ashes at sea, this cannot be done near beaches or where there is a great deal of recreational traffic (Askespredning 2022). Consequently, the selected scattering site must be sufficiently remote for the application to be accepted. These assumptions of discretion are compounded by the form of governance that provides anonymity. The regulations emphasize the importance of acknowledging the ash-scattering places as natural landscape and not deathscape. To maintain the natural landscape, the ashes should be scattered in such a way that they cannot be found later. Moreover, the regulations require that the deceased person's identity is kept unknown so there will be no visible proof of a deceased loved one's ashes at a particular place. Consequently, it is not allowed to erect a memorial or mark the area in any way.

As the intention is to maintain anonymity at the ash-scattering site, the same applies to the cemetery for the deceased whose ashes have been scattered in the wind. There is no opportunity to have a separate grave memorial for those who have opted for ash scattering nor can their names and personal data be added on a family grave memorial, not even with attached information that ash scattering has taken place. Whilst there is a cemetery register, no official record is available of deceased who have had their ashes scattered, or of the geographical location the ash scattering was performed at.¹ These restrictions can also be understood as modelled around the custom in modern societies to clearly separate the remains of the dead from the living and maintaining areas unassociated with death (Walter 2020).

- 1 Each crematorium keeps a register with the cremation number, the deceased's name, date of birth, date of death, date of cremation, date of ash delivery and place of ash scattering.

The use of and regulations for places and spatial actions open for self-regulation. In the process of managing the ash scattering, the bereaved, and in part the deceased, are the ones who are active agents in the planning and performance. The legal texts that the parties concerned must relate to when they apply for permission do not say anything about faith and worldview organizations and their internal governance of ash scattering, or their boundaries for values and practices. Nor do they mention the possibility of handing the ceremony over to other institutions in civil society or the market (undertakers) to perform. Even though the governance of ash scattering very much follows a policy of deregulation and privatization *vis-à-vis* the religious field, faith and worldview organizations consider themselves relevant to ash scattering. The Church of Norway and the Norwegian Humanist Association (HEF) provide ash-scattering assistance, as do undertakers. Both undertakers and the HEF offer this service on their websites. However, the Church of Norway maintains a low profile here. The Bishops' Conference confirmed that ash scattering and choosing a specific geographic location for it to take place do not conflict with the church's belief in the bodily resurrection and the hope of eternal life (BM 007/12; KM 8/12). Nonetheless, no guidelines for ash scattering have been produced, ten years after the church council decided that they should be developed (P-8/2012 Rundskriv).

Theoretical approach

The concept of governance reflects the change of the role of the authorities from 'government' to 'governance'. Governance addresses the process of governing and cannot be reduced to regulations under the law and legislation. It places less emphasis on the state and more on regional, private and

voluntary organizations and stakeholders. This means that governance explains the new ordered rule of key participants outside formal governmental agencies (Rhodes 1996; Rosenau 1997). Rather than focusing on legislation, governance addresses the social practices (Bevir 2012: 1). The British political scientist R. A. W. Rhodes maintains that governance refers to self-organizing and inter-organizational networks that complement markets and bureaucracies (Rhodes 1996: 652). Governance arises out of the control of ongoing engagement or guidance of an activity that aims to attain a specified objective (Rosenau 1997: 146). In this respect there is an interdependence which calls for dialogue and sharing to accomplish the activity. On the other hand, there is also a dynamic between those who seek control over an activity and those who are to be controlled. Consequently, exploring the ash-scattering decision and the ash-scattering action can provide insight into liberalization and restrictions in a practice within a social context.

Religious beliefs and practices are a crucial consideration for some when making end-of-life arrangements. Religion/worldview may be activated in light of the deceased's decision, even though there is no wish to involve any institutional religion/worldview in organizing or performing ash scattering at the site. When the bereaved are the ones who must realize the deceased's wishes, their values or beliefs and organized and non-organized religion/worldview may also tie into the performance of the disposal. Investigation of the system that a particular country recognizes as the mechanism for coordination of religious activity has been an important topic over the last decade for scholars investigating religious diversity (Bader 2009). Migration and globalization have fuelled the interest in investigating how states facilitate the governance of

religion in a contemporary religiously diverse setting. Tuomas Martikainen argues that states appear to have a growing interest in regulating religion ‘in order to suppress or promote certain forms of religious behaviour’ (Martikainen 2013: 129). Veit Bader emphasizes what actually happens ‘on the ground’ when the state governs religion (Bader 2009: 41). He calls for descriptions of actual practice that may or may not be guided by laws and regulations, how the norms are followed or how the practices undermine the laws and regulations which have been laid down to regulate religion (p. 39).

While often omitted in the literature on governance of religious diversity, urban areas and cities occupy an important position in this research. In empirical studies, the focus on the urban as opposed to the rural can be explained by the fact that cities have a large degree of religious diversity and have become vital concentration points for the movements and flows of religions (Tremlett 2021: 21). More significantly, cities combine religious diversity with a concentration of political and social resources (Fer and Malogne-Fer 2017: 156). Religious groups in cities, particularly in multi-cultural contexts, struggle to appropriate modes that demonstrate their presence and power (Engelke 2012). The local and national governance of religion very often means acting to coordinate the religious groups’ activities and territory. Governance of religious diversity emphasizes mechanisms of coordinating action through spatial strategies (Griera 2020). When it comes to shared place management for religious groups, urban consultative faith bodies in cities may function as instruments of institutionalized participation (Martínez-Ariño 2019: 424).

When the national governance of religious practices outside urban areas

has been examined, the mechanism of coordinating place and action shifts sharply towards organized religious activities and established religious institutions. Notable examples of this type of research are works on pilgrimage (see Maddrell 2013) and religious tourism (see Bremer 2006), and religious festivals (Costa 2001) and marches (Fer and Malogne-Fer 2017). With the exception of these studies, the existing research on governance of religion/worldview has not exhibited an interest in places in natural settings, particularly non-institutional places. Moreover, religious activities practised by private actors independently of established religious organizations have all too often been somewhat ignored in governance studies, as have particular rituals motivated by worldview stances in the public space and nature.

Research questions and methodological approach

The governance processes will be investigated through a study of bottom-up experiences. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork involving observation of how the deceased and bereaved operate within the management of ash scattering, I address the following questions:

- Is ash scattering a mechanism through which religious/worldview governance is ordered or subverted, and if so, how?
- Does the governance process facilitate or resist the deceased’s and bereaved’s decisions over actions, or what kind of restrictions or liberties are there when fulfilling the deceased’s last wishes?

An examination of the fieldwork among bereaved people who scattered ashes shows how their experiences shed light on both the Norwegian governance of death-scape and the governance of religion/

Table 1. The interviewees

Interviewee	County	Age	Deceased	Area of disposal	Funeral ceremony
Astrid	Agder	70s	Parents	Sea	Church of Norway and HEF
Elisabeth	Møre and Romsdal	40s	Mother	Sea	Private
Turid	Oslo	60s	Father	Sea	Church of Norway
Linn	Akershus	70s	Husband	Sea	Private
Susan	Hordaland	50s	Husband	Sea	Church of Norway
Grete	Vestfold	60s	Mother	Forest	Church of Norway
Janne	Agder	40s	Father	Sea	Church of Norway
Ada	Akershus	80s	Husband	Sea	Church of Norway
Kari	Oslo	60s	Brother	Sea	Catholic Church, France
Ola	Sogn and Fjordane	70s	Wife	Sea	No
Per	Møre & Romsdal	70s	Wife	Sea	Church of Norway

Note: The names are fictional. To maintain confidentiality, only the county is referred to, no other recognizable geographical details being provided.

worldview in the public space. Taking a self-governance perspective on disposal, I highlight implications of the ‘deathscape’ in the natural landscape and the role of religion/worldview in the governance process.

The ethnographic study, based on in-depth interviews with eleven bereaved persons who have scattered the ashes of one or two parents, siblings or a spouse, includes visits to the places where the interviewees scattered the ashes together with relatives and friends. These were places that some of them could return to later and spend time there. With one exception, everyone in the sample scattered the ashes at sea. The interviewees had different social backgrounds, ages (from 35 to 70) and genders (nine females, two males). The bereaved and the deceased also represent different religious preferences or do not consider themselves to be religious but hold to a secular worldview. Among twelve of the deceased, seven were affiliated with the Church of Norway, three were members of

a Protestant church from abroad, one was a member of the Norwegian Humanist Association (HEF) and one did not have any religious or worldview affiliation. The bereaved persons’ worldview/religious affiliation was for the most part the same as the relevant deceased person’s: eight were affiliated with the Church of Norway, three were members of a Protestant church from abroad and one did not have any religious or worldview affiliation.

The fieldwork was carried out in several regions of Norway (south, east, west and central Norway) during 2017 and 2018. The studies also include legal texts, information and documents from the public authorities, and circulars and media material. The interviewees, places and other personal data have been anonymized so that they are not traceable, and the study was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to ensure compliance with relevant privacy regulations. The interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo11 and salient conceptual categories were

identified and analysed for illustrative purposes.

Governance of the last wish

The deceased's wish to be cremated and then to have their ashes scattered is a legal precondition for the action, but then the self-governance process starts for the bereaved, where they have to address and cope with this wish. With the exception of one informant who had experienced the ash scattering of her cousin, and another who had experienced cremation and ash scattering in India, none of the bereaved, nor the deceased in life, had taken part in ash scattering before. Given this lack of experience, they were unsure about how to adapt to the regulations, cooperate with the state and local authorities and at the same time comply with the wishes of the deceased in relation to choice of place and action.

No one in this study consulted an undertaker or a ritual master (minister or a humanist celebrant). To the extent that the bereaved addressed questions concerning the place, they turned to the personnel at the crematorium or the county governor. One of the bereaved (Grete) sought advice from the Church of Norway's municipal office. These stakeholders were seen as the experts in the network of governance for the bereaved. Even though there was uncertainty, the bereaved in general expressed a strong desire to carry out the deceased's wish. The trust the deceased had placed in them to undertake disposal outside the cemetery and to do it at the right place filled them with a sense of responsibility when it came to performing such a non-traditional act in a non-traditional deathscape.

The bereaved interviewees in this study were occupied with taking the ash scattering seriously, while also expressing law-

abiding attitudes. Learning about the regulations and acting according to them was a key issue for them in the ash-scattering process. All in all, they appeared to be well informed. Cooperating with the county governor and crematorium and complying with these stakeholders' clarification of the regulations also appears to have been important. Even though almost all of the bereaved in this study complied with the legal steps in the application procedure and coordinated with the other stakeholders in the process of governance to perform the ash scattering, some of them recused themselves from the regulations governing space and practice. The bereaved Susan and Kari did not apply before they scattered the ashes, Grete put her mother's name on her father's tombstone, Susan and Kari divided the ashes and scattered one part in Norway, and Linn threw the easily dissolvable urn in the sea instead of boating out and scattering the ashes at sea. All knew that this was not in accordance with the regulations. Given this information, one could conclude that they do not accept state control and think the authorities have nothing to do with where the cremated remains are to be spread or stored. Alternatively, the bereaved may be in opposition to some parts of the regulations or think they are too strict. The interviewees argued in favour of their practice in line with particular social circumstances related to their family, financial situation and a desire to live up to the prevailing Norwegian norm of public death. These conditions forced them to break the prescriptions but not necessarily to criticize the Norwegian governance of deathscape and cremated remains.

Astrid's criticism of the regulations is moderate. Complying with them trumped her desire to scatter the ashes in a forbidden area. Obtaining legal access to the place where Astrid's father had decided that he

wanted his ashes to be scattered was no easy task. His spatial strategy was to find a place away from the cemetery and rather a place where he had his vacation cottage, in the mountains where he had spent much time and felt attachment, the place where he had built his cottage on his own. The strategy for finding the right ash-scattering place became complicated when his application was rejected. The reason for the refusal was that the cottage was in an area with other cottages and therefore did not meet the requirements for a disposal area. In the meantime, Astrid's father had passed away, and Astrid, her mother and Astrid's husband had to decide on another place for the ash scattering. Astrid disagreed with the strict governance of the regulations and thought that the area should have been accepted even if they were not sufficiently isolated. Instead of filling in a new application for a more remote place in the same mountain area or breaking the law and spreading the ashes there anyway, they oriented themselves away from the mountains to the sea. Astrid and her mother decided to scatter the ashes on the sea nearby where Astrid had her summer cottage and from where her father loved to row to go fishing. A few years later, Astrid's mother's ashes were scattered at the same place.

Grete and her deceased mother, Anne, have two critiques of the regulations. They find fault with the strict place regulations, adding that ash scattering should be possible on private property. When it comes to practising the regulations, Grete and Anne changed the wish for the place of ash disposal from private to public nature. Their initial desire was to scatter Anne's ashes in the preferred area, which was her garden. Breaking with the regulations was too drastic for them. They wanted to be law-abiding and comply with what the various stakeholders in the governance

process were trying to convey. Instead, they found a place in the forest, supported by the advice they received from the county authority and the Church of Norway's municipal office. But then they could not follow the regulations any further.

It's a family tomb, and we've engraved our mother's name [Anne] below [her husband's name] because, in one way, they belonged to each other. But here it was also a little part of the tradition that mum was a part of. The place [on the tombstone] would forever be empty if her name wasn't there. And they belonged together, and they were the only ones for each other. (Grete)

The strategy to disconnect from the cemetery and search outside it for ash scattering expresses ideals of individuality, such as have been found in several other studies exploring ash scattering (Jansson 2019; Prendergast *et al.* 2006; Walter 1994). On the other hand, individualization allows Grete to critically review the cemetery tradition. Not leaving any footprint at the churchyard would represent a break with a strong cemetery tradition. Her support for the cemetery tradition made her unwilling to be suppressed by the regulations. Individualization led her, in this sense, to act traditionally, whatever the cost might be for the daughter. Consequently, they decided to engrave Anne's name on her husband's gravestone, just as the tradition is for deceased couples in Norway, even though it is forbidden to have an engraved monument without the cremated remains or body is buried in a cemetery. When the interview was conducted, there was no evidence of supervision of or sanctions for this decision.

Both Susan's and Kari's beloved deceased were cremated abroad, where half

of the ashes were buried in a cemetery and the other sent to be scattered in the wind in Norway. None of the bereaved applied for permission to scatter the ashes. They knew it was not in accordance with the regulations, but the family situation was a strong argument for breaking the law.

So, we all approved [the decision]. There was never any discussion about it. I did confer a little with a [crematorium] about the legality. We should have applied to the county governor, but the decision was so close to [the scattering of the ashes] that we didn't do anything. But we are very law-abiding otherwise, heheh. But there was no chance of anything else when we had come this far. Doing [the scattering of the ashes] had such a high value ... It's strange to think that we were so agreed on this, because it was quite radical, and different from what is common in Norway ... No one had any scruples about dividing the ashes, for example. I would like to believe that from ancient Christian times it was not something conventional, though, but none of us thought about it. (Kari)

Kari and her family, she stresses, are generally law-abiding people, but under these circumstances she was in favour of being pragmatic. Kari's brother Harald died in Spain while on vacation. Half of his ashes were brought to Norway by his French daughters so the family could scatter them at sea near their summer house. Kari and her siblings were concerned about Harald's daughters' needs. The circumstances with two fatherless daughters and their wish regarding the ceremony guided them. They thought it was a good idea when the daughters suggested scattering the ashes

in an environment that both Harald, the daughters and the rest of his close family in Norway were attached to. Kari is also surprised by her Christian family and their acceptance of ash scattering. For Kari and the rest of Harald's Norwegian family, scattering his ashes was not considered to be a pagan or a non-Christian act, even though Kari admits that scattering his ashes is unusual in Norway.

The restrictive regulations around the scattering of ashes can lead to considerations that outweigh the essence of the law. Linn wanted to avoid expenses, which led her to make a decision she was not sure was in compliance with the regulations or not. To scatter the ashes, they arrived at an outcome she found reasonable because her son had a strong throwing arm, and her daughter-in-law researched the area near where they live.

There were many cousins who wanted to join in, so there were a lot of us. If we were to rent a boat, it would have cost a fortune! None of us knew anyone who had such a big boat! (Linn)

Her daughter-in-law found a desolate site where the water was deep. Then her son managed to throw the urn so far out that the ashes would not be taken by the currents and deposited on the beach.

Discretion and anonymity

The decision to reject the cemetery and prefer ash scattering does not involve any more stakeholders in the governance process than strictly necessary. This is not restricted to the cases where the bereaved performed ash scattering in an illegal area, performed the act without having applied for a particular place beforehand or divided the ashes. Maintaining discretion is a recurring theme in stories of ash scattering

in those cases where the bereaved know or assume – correctly or not – that what they are about to do is not permitted or is breaking norms (Kellaheer *et al.* 2005; Prendergast *et al.* 2006; Hockey *et al.* 2007; cf. Roberts 2011; Jansson 2021). Discretion was important when they planned what they were going to do, but particularly so when out at sea and choosing the right place to perform the act.

Kari's experiences with ash scattering reflect the importance of discretion, which is characteristic of the ash scattering among the informants. When Kari and her siblings discussed a suitable public place by the sea for scattering the ashes, they took several factors into consideration. They wanted to avoid any inconvenience for both themselves and others. According to Kari, the intention was to scatter the ashes in a peaceful place without disturbance from others. The participating relatives went out early when few people were at sea or in the harbour and there was little chance of meeting acquaintances. If they were spotted, they hoped that no one would understand what they were doing. Out there, they could find a place where they could sit on a rock during the scattering. After they had sat and looked out over the sea for a while, Harald's siblings and daughters went down to the water's edge and took a handful of ashes and threw them in the wind. Harald's brother-in-law sang 'You raise me up', and they had a sing-along hymn and said a prayer. Kari mentioned that any people sleeping in the boats nearby might have heard the song.

Susan represented the opposite. Even though she did not apply to the county governor, she did not want to hide this special event from those who happened to be where the group of mourners were. In contrast to the other participants in this study, many people took part in the

ash scattering at sea. The relatives, friends and colleagues were not prepared for the high waves; the bad weather and sea sickness decided them in not popping the champagne on board but waiting until they had reached the harbour.

Privatization

The mechanism for coordinating action can be characterized as privacy for the majority of the participants in the study. The deceased's thoughts and wishes for the 'deathscape' are kept within the inner circle of the closest family or the deceased's partner, as is also the regulation of the decision-making relating to the ash-scattering site. When and where the ash scattering is to take place is a piece of information for only the trusted and closest relatives. What to do at the place and eventually how to develop an ash-scattering ritual were discussions held amongst the bereaved spouse and closest family. After the scattering, the self-imposed privacy of the ash scattering very much disappeared. Then the theme was addressed with those who wanted to hear.

For several of those who had scattered ashes, other rituals and arrangements connected to the passing express the privatization of death and bereavement. Ola did not have an obituary, and Astrid and Linn had one in the aftermath of the funeral ceremony with the customary obituary text: 'the ceremony has taken place in private [in Norwegian "in silence"]'. For others in the sample, the scattering of ashes took place in the extension of death as a public event. In the sample, all but one (Ola) had a funeral ritual for the deceased loved one. These funeral ceremonies were conducted under the direction of the Church of Norway, with the exception of Astrid's mother, where there was a secular humanistic funeral ritual (HEF), and two had private

ceremonies just for invited people. One of the private ceremonies was conducted right after the ash scattering (Linn), which the closest family designed and performed on their own. Another family (Elisabeth's) held the private ceremony, which the deceased had designed, prior to the ash scattering.

Regardless of the motives for ash scattering, where the ashes were scattered, the kind of ash scattering ritual or why the deceased or bereaved wanted a particular place, ash scattering, in a broad sense, is covered by privacy. When Astrid found that the place for the ash scattering her father had applied for had been rejected and they had to look for another place to scatter his remains than in the area of the mountain cottage, her mother mentioned an anonymous memorial garden place in the cemetery as another possible option. Once when they attended a funeral and passed by the memorial garden in the cemetery, she pointed it out and told Astrid that this could be a deathscape if their application for the ash-scattering place should be rejected.

The privatization of the deathscape characterizes the perception of the place where the ashes have been scattered. The ash-scattering place in the public natural landscape is portrayed as 'their' place. Several of the interviewees stated that few people outside the family know where the ash-scattering place is; there are no signs there and no one can see if the bereaved visit or tend the place. Those who had returned to the scattering site to commemorate the deceased were there alone or only with the people who took part in the ash scattering. As far as the interviewees knew, no other relatives or friends of the deceased had visited the place. However, the privatization of the space does not stop the mediating of the memory of the bereaved and for some

it is also a site of commemoration (Høeg 2023). For those of the interviewees who did not visit, have rituals for or tend the place with commemorative objects, their images of the place were marked in their memory regardless of whether the ashes had disappeared into nature or been taken by the currents. However, some of the interviewees need to have a private memorial to replace a physical grave. Among places to put the private memorial, the favoured public area was in proximity of where they have their cottage or on other private grounds. The bereaved Elisabeth wanted something more than just the memory of her mother. Instead of having a grave to visit, Elisabeth wanted to connect with the ash-scattering place by means of a material object. She ordered a bench after receiving permission from the public authority to place it on public ground. The memorial bench has been sited so she can sit down and look at the ash-scattering place. Even though the bench is directly addressed to her mother with a bench plaque bearing her name, it is available to everyone. However, those who want to use the bench are not informed about why it has been placed exactly as it has been with a particular view. The ash scattering at a particular place is a piece of information the children and the spouse of the deceased keep to themselves.

Ash scattering does not necessarily represent a deliberation on the tradition of having a physical symbol of the deceased. Ola also wants a private memorial, like Elisabeth, outside a cemetery and outside his private grounds. He intends to erect a monument in a natural landscape for his beloved deceased wife. This will not be given to the public as Elisabeth's memorial bench has been. It is intended to be on private property but accessible to anyone who happens upon it. He has already received permission from the landlord to put it on his

land. When he can raise enough money for the memorial, it will be situated within view of the ash-scattering site.

There may be a wish to make up for the lack of a grave in a cemetery, but then this will be in the form of a private memorial with relevance only for the spouse and the closest relatives. Janne manages to connect with her father by being in contact with the sea (Høeg 2023). However, she sees that it could have significance if she were to make a memorial in public for her sibling and stepmother. Her stepmother, the wife of Janne's deceased father, had complained about a lack of a memorial, stating: 'Now, we have nowhere to go.' To which Janne responded: 'Yes, but can't you make a place?' Janne says that she and her stepmother have talked about a memorial not far from where her stepmother's cottage is located near the sea. Janne explains the possible siting in the public space:

A bit of a secret place, then, which we can mark in one way or another. Yes, such a distinct place of remembrance. If we want to remember him, we can go and sit there. (Janne)

In contrast to Elisabeth, Ola and Janne, who see the importance of a private memorial in public natural space, Ada placed a memorial bench on her private property. She sits and looks out towards the ash-scattering site, and from time to time she places a rose on the bench as a memorial for her beloved deceased husband. Like Elisabeth, Ola and Janne, the memorial is in the vicinity of the ash-scattering place.

Burial and cremation

Burials are, for some, seen as deeply embedded in the Christian culture, both when it comes to the urn and full-body graves. The preferred Christian way of disposal

has been traditional full-body burial. The Church of Norway has never banned cremation, even though some ministers have rejected or approached cremation with scepticism since it was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century (Alfsvåg 2006). Today, the church neither prohibits nor encourages cremation but leaves it up to the private actors to decide. The church gives the deceased the same funeral ceremony regardless of cremation or not.

The bereaved and deceased religious/worldview path is very much related to the traditional Christian institution, which in most cases is the preferred ceremony alternative when death has occurred. In 2016 and 2017, 90 per cent and 92 per cent had a church funeral ceremony in the Church of Norway and 1.41 per cent and 1.32 per cent had a ceremony conducted by the Norwegian Humanist Association. Among the participants in this study, it differs widely how the Church of Norway is relevant for death and furthermore for the ceremony and even more for the decision about ash scattering as the best deathscape.

Bearing in mind the deceased's distancing from the traditional Christian space and the cemetery, and their introducing a new burial space, most of the bereaved explain that ash scattering and the church funeral ceremony merge for the deceased. The deceased's wish for ash scattering was not viewed as an impediment to the decision to have a ceremony under the auspices of the Church of Norway. For the deceased, and also for some bereaved, ash scattering was not viewed as being in opposition to Christian beliefs and values. They saw the new and non-traditional spaces and disposal to be consistent with the Christian funeral ceremony and with the minister as the celebrant, and for some, also with using the cemetery space.

Some of the deceased distanced them-

selves from the strong connection between Christian culture and burial. Their negative attitudes and sentiments relating to this tradition guided them along other religion/worldview paths. For four of the deceased and three of the bereaved, cremation was associated with the absence of church control, and ash scattering was seen as even more in opposition to the church's long and established control over the burial tradition.

The negative connection to the full-body burial and soil, and likewise the positive connection to cremation and water, was essential for Ola's wife. Hinduism and Hindu burial practices directed Ola and his deceased wife away from burial to cremation. They had experienced open pyre cremation in India several times, and this had fascinated Ola's wife. However, this did not lead her to reject or criticize the Christian faith. Ola emphasizes that she was not against any religions and related not only positively to Hinduism but also to Islam when they lived in India. This did not make her change her affiliation. She was a member of the Church of Norway and did not intend to leave it. However, the church burial tradition was not in harmony with her view of death and eternal life.

Ola's wife knew she was stricken with an ultimately terminal illness. During her remaining months they planned how she would be laid to rest. She decided she wanted to be cremated and to have a resting place outside the cemetery. Ash scattering was aligned with the best end-of-life practices. In addition to her fascination with India and Hindu cremation, and also the spreading of ashes on water, Ola explains why she turned her back on the cemetery:

She didn't want to lie on any land (soil). She wanted to become part of

the sea ... I think what she was afraid of was that she would be forgotten if she was buried. In Danish there is a saying 'dead and buried'. (Ola)

According to Ola's concept, the sea has kept her alive and not dead and forgotten. The sea shaped and mediated the relationship between water and her soul. When Ola visits the ash-scattering place, he relates to a place where she is. The three times he has boated out to the ash-scattering place, he feels that her soul is still there.

Astrid is an informant who has rejected traditional burial and the cemetery. Like Ola's wife, Astrid strongly linked cremation with non-Christian tradition. For her, cremation represented a secular worldview. She had scattered the ashes of both her mother and her father, and considered herself an atheist affiliated with the Norwegian Humanist Association. Astrid viewed cremation as a statement of her parents' process of loosening their ties to the Church of Norway. Moreover, opting out of the cemetery was a way of undermining the validity of religion. In Norway, the Church of Norway operates most of the cemeteries even though Norwegian cemeteries are considered to be public places open to all burials, including members of other Christian confessions, other religions and people with no particular worldview or religious affiliation. The historical shift from an exclusive Christian space to an inclusive one has had no significance for Astrid. For her, the Church of Norway still has a dominant symbolic power over the cemetery space.

Astrid's secular worldview in general, as related explicitly to the burial ground, led her to prefer ash disposal in the natural landscape. For herself, she explained that she wanted to be cremated and 'do not mix some church into this'. In saying this,

she revealed that she associated cremation as in contrast to Christian theology and traditional Christian burial culture. Finding the right place for her father and, after some years for her mother too, and planning for a funeral ceremony, can be characterized as a personal process that moved her away from Christianity towards a secular worldview and practice.

Discussion

When mourners perform ash-scattering rituals on their own, they are using substantive rights. Inevitably, this involves a redistribution of power away from the formal stakeholders: the county governor (state), the funeral providers (market), the crematorium workers (local authority and professions), the ritual masters (professions) and the cemetery workers (trades) and over to private actors. The timeframe for ash scattering, the control over where the ashes can be scattered and the ash scattering itself are examples of how historical legacies inherent within the Church of Norway are now under the purview of governance and self-organization (Rosenau 1997). Self-governance leaves it to the bereaved to decide whether to cooperate with the network of stakeholders more than strictly necessary. It is up to the bereaved to decide when and how to involve themselves with the requirements laid down in the regulations, and what to deal with on their own. This study shows that in the governance process, even though the bereaved are delegated the power to choose the place and perform the act, as private actors in the field of ash scattering, they are very much under the influence of individualization (Prendergast *et al.* 2006; Walter 2020). The deceased's wishes to have their ashes scattered are strongly related to the ideals of individuality (Jansson 2019), which can be a challenge for the bereaved.

Governance can be broadly defined as a system of rules and norms which is played out on the ground (Bader 2009: 41). The governance of ash scattering applies to both the deceased and the bereaved in their ash-scattering actions, which reveals a shared standard of acceptable behaviour. A central norm in the process of governance of ash scattering, seen from the experiences of the bereaved, is privacy. The choice of ritual and place are private decisions that are very much the deceased's own. While contributing to the ash scattering and establishing the site, the stakeholders involved (the state, market, NGOs) seem to be deregulated *vis-à-vis* the organized religion/worldview path. Religious and worldview organizations have not succeeded in reaching out to the bereaved with services, ideas or programmes that could be used to support and guide the disposal and application of rituals. The actors deal with the situation privately in a public space. The governance of the ash scattering leaves it up to the bereaved to decide the involvement of these civil-society stakeholders. In this study, none of the 'private actors' used or knew of anything the Norwegian Humanist Association (HEF) or the Church of Norway could contribute. Even though the deceased had a funeral under the auspices of the HEF or the Church of Norway, these religious and worldview organizations were not regarded as relevant institutions.

From the experiences of the bereaved, how they take part in the inter-organizational network of ash scattering and how they organize themselves signal that ash scattering promotes certain actions and impedes others (Martikainen 2013: 129). With the exception of a strong desire for personal independence, the interviewees in this study accepted state regulations and the different stakeholders' roles as the experts in network governance. They

expressed law-abiding attitudes, but not without reservations. The interviewees indicate that the governance restricts them, and the restrictions suppress and promote certain practices and sites. The strict place regulations made Astrid and Grete choose another location than they first wanted. However, few argue against the legislation but view this kind of disposal as a private or personal issue, not a general societal problem. Other informants' strategies are to handle the situation within the framework of the restrictions, such as by putting a bench in a public space, a monument or a private memorial no others will view as a memorial, and then not disclose the violation of the rules. Another group violated the restrictions and conducted ash scattering in accordance with the family and financial situation, and in support of the cemetery tradition, but with a high degree of discretion.

Even though ash scattering is becoming deregulated *vis-à-vis* the religious field in the governance process, religion/worldview paths connect with end-of-life arrangements. This study shows that the faith and worldview beliefs of the bereaved may motivate cremation and ash scattering. For some, this is a way to distance themselves from Christian beliefs and ideas. For others, the Christian tradition exists in harmony with ash scattering. However, specific actions that promote religious or worldview sentiments and responses to the situation are subverted (Martikainen 2013). The bereaved restrained themselves from singing, praying loudly or leaving any material token of what was taking place at the ash-scattering site. The interviewees emphasized discretion. The governance of ash scattering is designed around anonymity and discretion. They did not lay claim to the place through auditory and visible actions, nor did they try to attract

any more attention than was strictly necessary from anyone other than the parties involved. They avoided choosing a place where someone could see them. The interviewees understood the opposite as inappropriate behaviour in the public space. Kari emphasized that ash scattering was only for those involved, pointing out that the participants wanted to be invisible and unheard. They were not interested in displaying the place or their ritual actions to non-involved people, thus signalling that both death and religion/worldview belong to the private sphere. For Susan, this provoked her to break with what she understood to be the prevailing norms. Instead, she and the participants in the ash scattering displayed for passers-by that they were acting out a particular event.

For the majority of the participants in this study, however, the way they coordinated activities and territory nurtured privatization. Also, the regulations and the stakeholders who are assigned the management of the ash scattering are open to privatization. Most of the decision-making process for the bereaved is within the realm of the closest family or the spouse. However, even though ash scattering in the forest and at sea can be understood as a way of privatizing death and bereavement, the study shows that this privatization may have some limitations. Anne added a non-privatized dimension to ash disposal in her wish to have her name on the tombstone. This case demonstrates an opposition to a negative legal consequence of ash scattering that does not make death or bereavement visible by not accepting the traditional use of symbolic artefacts (tombstones) in traditional places for interment. We can say the same about the desire to scatter ashes in populated areas. Astrid's father wanted his ashes to be scattered in a populated cottage area, not an unpopulated area in

the mountains. Astrid and her family were critical of the regulations' ban on disposal in areas where people live or have their vacations. When it comes to the value of having a public funeral for the deceased, the bereaved exhibit different attitudes towards privatization. Some interviewees did not regard death as only a private matter, as their interaction with religion and worldview organizations demonstrates. For others, ash scattering did not involve anyone other than those directly affected by the death. Services, ceremonies and different ways of ritualizing the last farewell after the ash scattering were carried out and viewed as a private matter, like the act of scattering the ashes itself.

Conclusion

Ash scattering as a ritual space has become increasingly institutionalized in the Norwegian context. Examination of the fieldwork among bereaved people who scattered ashes, the implications of the 'deathscape' in the natural landscape and the role of religion/worldview in the governance process show that these death-related actions are very much in the hand of the private actors. The governance of ash scattering is deregulated *vis-à-vis* faith-based and worldview organizations. It becomes privatized in the sense that it is the deceased and the bereaved themselves who decide where and how to scatter the ashes. It is also private actors, not undertakers or cemetery workers, who perform the act in public. The study shows that ash scattering has religious and worldview relevance. For some, ash scattering can be perfectly fine combined with the church funeral service, but for others, both cremation and ash scattering represent the liberty of Christian culture related to death and a way to express their secular worldview or other religious orientations. The experiences of

the bereaved and the deceased with ash scattering show that the Norwegian governance of deathscape and the governance of religion/worldview in the public space was restrictive for them. Some adapted to the regulations without agreeing to them, and others defended the breach of the rules on the basis of family situations, burial traditions and economy. Three central characteristics of ash scattering are shown in relation to governing from the private actor's perspective – ideals of individuality, privacy and discretion, which all seem to be the handmaids of governance of ash scattering in public space. ■

Dr **Ida Marie Høeg** is a professor of sociology of religion at the University of Agder, Norway. Her research focuses on religious changes in Norway, particularly on how gender, ethnicity and religious/worldview identity are negotiated and constructed in space and ritual actions. Her studies about religious transmission, religious changes in life courses, religion and death and commemorations are published in several international books and journals.



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