

The Disposal of Cremation Ashes in Tourism Settings: Practices, Impacts and Management

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Abstract

Although research into the relationship between tourism and death has predominantly focused on dark tourism, tourism scholars are exploring other forms of association between the two. In this context, this paper focuses on a commonplace but little-researched practice in tourism studies: the scattering of cremation ashes in spaces used for tourism and leisure. This is not a universal practice, and it may only be commonplace in countries with permissive legislation regarding the ‘disposal’ of cremation ashes. After considering the disposal of ashes in historical context, we examine practices of ashes scattering in three types of tourism setting: visitor attractions, areas of managed countryside, and sports grounds/stadia. We explore the range of management responses to scattering, ranging from outright prohibition, to treating the practice as a form of revenue generation. We also consider the dissonance that can arise from ashes scattering, particularly the emotional impact on other leisure users of an encounter with human remains, but also the emotional labour demanded of employees who are required to manage this practice. The paper identifies a number of future research directions intended to throw more light on the practices and implications of scattering cremation ashes in tourism and leisure settings.

Keywords: Cremation ashes, scattering, tourism places, impacts, management, emotional labour

Introduction

The association between tourism and death has long fascinated tourism researchers. This relationship has predominantly been examined through the lens of dark tourism, defined by Stone (2018, p. 191) as ‘the interpretation of death for the modern visitor economy’. The dark tourism literature has focussed on places of (or associated with) death and their presentation and management, along with the motivations and experiences of tourists who visit them (Light, 2017). This literature has drawn attention to the ways in which such visits are a form of ‘meaningful entertainment’ (Biran and Buda, 2018, p.523) which allow individuals to contemplate and negotiate issues of death and dying (for example, Stone, 2011; 2012a; Oren et al., 2019; Sharma and Rickly, 2019; Prayag et al., 2021). In this sense, dark tourism is a form of mortality mediation, and is about ‘life and living, rather than the dead and dying’ (Stone and Sharpley, 2008, p.590).

However, in recent years researchers have sought to go beyond dark tourism in order to tease out broader relationships between tourism, leisure, and death (Kaul and Skinner, 2018). For example, Pratt et al. (2019) examine multiple interconnections between tourism and death, including suicide tourism; dangerous or near-death encounters during travel; the unexpected deaths of tourists on holiday; witnessing the death of others during a holiday; and visiting friends and relatives to attend a funeral. Academic fields closely related to tourism are also exploring broader intersections with death. For example, recent research has examined ‘dark hospitality’ (Hay, 2015), that is, the choice to die in a hotel rather than at home or in a hospice, and ‘last hospitality’ (Filimonau and Brown, 2018), the provision of hospitality services by funeral directors to the deceased and bereaved.

To further advance this debate, this paper examines a neglected aspect of the relationship between tourism and death: the scattering of cremation ashes in tourism and leisure places. This is far from being a universal practice since some countries and religions proscribe or discourage cremation. Furthermore, in some countries where cremation is commonplace there are strict regulations and limitations on the ‘disposal’ (the term adopted within Death Studies for the destination of the body after death) of cremation ashes. However, in other countries (such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and New Zealand) legislation regarding the disposal of ashes is very permissive, allowing the bereaved considerable freedom in deciding the final destination for cremated remains. Furthermore, some countries which have previously adopted strict regulations regarding the disposal of cremation ashes are adopting a more liberal approach. This means that the disposal of ashes in spaces of tourism and leisure is already commonplace in some countries (such as the UK), and will potentially be widespread in other countries in the future.

A range of tourism and leisure spaces may be chosen as the final destination of cremation ashes, including areas of managed countryside, parks, beaches and the sea, visitor attractions, sport stadia, and sometimes hotel grounds. For some, the scattering of ashes in such locations is relatively unproblematic as it is part of people’s desire to link their bodily remains with places which had positive associations and meanings for them in life, and which offer the opportunity for ‘continuing bonds’ (Klass et al., 1996; Klass and Steffen, 2018) between the living and the dead. However, since this practice leaves human remains visible in the landscape (sometimes accompanied by other memorialisation such as wreaths, flowers, or memorials) the effect can be unsettling or disturbing for other people visiting these places in their leisure time. This also presents challenges for tourism and leisure professionals who

encounter (or have to manage) the process, particularly where this was not part of their professional training.

The aim of this paper is therefore to develop an initial exploratory analysis of this largely overlooked connection between tourism and death. We focus on practices of scattering cremation ashes in tourism and leisure settings; the challenges this creates for the tourism sector; and the responses of organisations responsible for managing those settings. Differing national regulatory frameworks, combined with diverse social, cultural, and faith-based views, have created uncertainty around ashes scattering, as people are often fearful that they may be transgressing regulations or social norms. This makes the practice often furtive, even secretive, and thus difficult to research. To tackle this, we adopt an exploratory research framework combining personal observation; use of media reports; more informal conversations with death professionals and with people who have undertaken ashes scattering or who have considered it for themselves; and discussions with tourism professionals.

Through examining the scattering of cremation ashes in places of tourism and leisure we seek to contribute to a broader understanding of the intersections within contemporary societies of mortality, grieving and remembrance, tourism and leisure, and public space. In particular, by focusing on the ways in which places of tourism and leisure can have meaning and significance for the dead and bereaved, we illustrate how tourism is implicated in issues of death and dying in ways which go beyond visiting places associated with death and the dead. This, in turn, highlights broader changes relating to death and disposal in which the dead are increasingly mobile (Marjavaara, 2012), and consequently, visible. Furthermore, this paper widens our understanding of the desequestration of death (Walter 1991, 2019) and the ways in which death and the dead are no longer hidden or absent. Instead, processes of bodily

disposal are moving out of sequestered professional contexts into a range of public spaces. This, in turn, raises issues about the emotional competences required for the management of grieving and bereavement in professions with little direct connection to death and dying. Finally, we seek to highlight the importance of sensitive management of the mobile dead. We are entirely sympathetic to the wishes of the deceased and bereaved to dispose of ashes in a place of their choice and which has meaning for them. At the same time, we recognise that practices of disposal can have impacts on other people (tourists, other leisure users, employees) potentially leading to tension. It is therefore important to develop management practices which reduce the potential for dissonance, whilst satisfying the wishes of all parties.

This paper begins by considering cremation and the disposal of cremation ashes in their broader context. We then examine the nature of scattering practices in tourism and leisure settings, and the ways in which managers have responded to these practices. The paper then considers the implications of scattering for tourism employees, particularly with regard to the emotional competencies required for dealing with grief and the bereaved. We conclude by identifying various directions for future research into ashes scattering in tourism and leisure settings.

Cremation and Ashes Scattering as a Mode of Body Disposal: Growth and Complexity

The materiality of cremation ashes plays a role in the complexity of scattering processes which affect tourism spaces. Cremation ashes are dry, fluid, odourless, and portable (Prendergast et al., 2006; Mathijssen, 2017) meaning that the dead are potentially highly mobile (Kellaher et al., 2010). Though subject to different forms of national regulation and

socio-cultural prescription, ashes removed from crematoria may relatively easily end up in a wide range of locations. Furthermore, the final resting place for ashes need not be a single location as they can be divided and scattered in multiple places (Prendergast et al., 2006).

The choice to remove cremation ashes from crematoria and scatter them elsewhere is complicated by the varying popularity of cremation in different contexts. In Europe, burial in the ground was the principal form of disposal until the twentieth century. Modern interest in cremation in a Western context emerged from the 1850s, championed by the medical profession as a more sanitary mode of disposal posing fewer risks to public health. In the UK, for example, the Cremation Act (1902) legalized the practice, but recourse to cremation advanced slowly and did not take hold until the second half of the century; cremation rates did not exceed 50% until 1968. Today in the UK, 78% of people choose to be cremated (The Cremation Society, 2022), resulting in 470,000 sets of human ashes each year. Across Europe, recourse to cremation has increased substantially, though marked national differences in rates reflect the attitude towards cremation of the predominant religious beliefs: the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches favour burial (Rugg, 2020), as do Islam and Judaism.

Cremation disposes of the body through the application of extreme heat which reduces the coffin and its remains to inert matter that generally includes larger bone fragments. Contents of the cremation chamber are subject to a process of 'cremulation' which reduces those remains to 1.4-4kg of finer powder. In the UK, each set of cremated remains is poured into a plastic container (with the dimensions of a large sweet jar). The Cremation Act 1902 did not prescribe modes of disposal of ashes, perhaps due to a presumption that ashes would be interred (Parsons, 2005). This created a very liberal regulatory context in the UK, with the

only legal restrictions relating to accessing private property and some restrictions around watercourses. Thus, from the offset, families in the UK have been able to define their own preferences, but there is no requirement for cremation authorities to record this information. In the UK, the incidence of scatterings in gardens of remembrance (rather than interment of ashes) attached to crematoria or churches was the most popular option (Bishop of Lancaster, 1958), and by the 1970s over 80% of cremated remains were disposed of in crematoria grounds (Davies and Guest, 1999).

However, the removal of ashes from official sites of disposal in the UK has a long history. For example, the register for Stonefall Crematorium, Harrogate (opened in 1937) indicated that in the earliest years of operation ashes were taken away for private disposal in around a third of cases, mainly for interment in other churchyards, but the register also logged scatterings on the moors and at sports venues (Rugg, 2013). By 2016 an estimated 70% of ashes were removed from UK crematoria and disposed of elsewhere (Bennett, 2016; see also Prendergast et al., 2006). Families therefore take responsibility for deciding how (and where) to dispose of c.325,000 cremated remains in the UK each year. Consequently, the dead are increasingly mobile, a process which has been termed ‘post-mortal mobility’ (Marjavaara, 2012) or ‘necromobilities’ (Jassal, 2015). Some ashes are retained at home until a decision about their final destination is made, something to which the bereaved dedicate considerable thought and attention (Kellaher and Worpole, 2010). Others can be reformulated through a range of innovative practices (Rumble et al., 2014) into paintings, tattoos, jewellery, ceramics, vinyl records, or even sent into space (Cutting, 2009).

While in other contexts the scattering of ashes outside of formal designated sites has been much more highly regulated, some countries are relaxing these restrictions. In Italy, Law 130

(2001) permitted the dispersal of ashes for the first time (Breschi et al., 2018). The Norwegian Funeral Act (2012) allowed families to dispose of cremated remains outside of formal facilities, although the practice is attended by a complex bureaucracy and scattering must be marked on a map in advance, and take place away from any populated or tourist location (Hadders, 2013). In the Netherlands, revisions to the Corpse Disposal Act during the 1990s allowed families to take ashes away from the crematorium, and now dispersal can take place in any location. Officially permission should be sought from the land owner but in practice this rarely takes place (Mathijssen, 2017). Furthermore, people may choose to ignore regulations and undertake scattering in a covert manner.

In other faiths where cremation is an accepted means of disposal, cultural prescriptions restrict locations for disposal of cremation ashes. For Hindus, the expectation has been that ashes are scattered during a ceremony into a river system in India. The cremated remains of Buddhists are usually interred in a grave or columbarium. However, even in these faiths practices are changing. Faced with severe practical and financial barriers in repatriating ashes to India for scattering in rivers, Hindus are seeking alternatives, scattering ashes in watercourses in the USA, in the sea in Norway, and both Hindus and Sikhs can now scatter ashes into a designated site on the River Soar in the UK (Maddrell, 2011). Some Buddhists dispose of ashes into the sea. While these practices are led by religious prescription rather than an association with tourism spaces, they illustrate a further diversification in practices in scattering ashes which can impact what are, for other people, spaces of leisure and tourism.

Overall, changes in legislation and cultural and faith-based prescription are multiplying and complicating ashes scattering practices internationally, in ways which increasingly have implications for tourism and leisure spaces. Rumble et al. (2014, p.244) argue that this

practice demonstrates a marked shift away from the disposal of the dead in private and sequestered spaces towards ‘a more managed process of *dispersal* into environments inhabited by the living’. This represents another example of the de-sequestration of death (Walter, 1991, 2019) which, it has been argued, also underpins the phenomenon of dark tourism (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). Through the scattering of cremation ashes, death and the dead move from being hidden and absent to becoming present and visible in public spaces. However, unlike dark tourism, the focus is not on the ‘Significant Other Dead’ (Stone, 2012b, p.1566), that is, those whose death was in some way extraordinary. Neither do the dead become spectacle through a ‘touristification’ process as is the case with dark tourism (Stone, 2018, p.201). Instead, through the scattering of cremation ashes it is the ‘ordinary’ dead – whose identity may be known only to the scatterer – who become present in public settings. As Walter (2019, p.389) argues with regard to Western contexts, what is being seen is the emergence of the ‘pervasive dead’ and new ‘body/spirit/mourner’ systems in which human remains are an integral part of everyday environments. In turn, this is related to the creation of new forms of ‘continuing bonds’ (Klass and Steffen, 2018) with the deceased, which are sustained through these spaces.

It should also be noted that it is not only human ashes that are disposed of through scattering. The cremation of pets is increasingly commonplace (Desmond, 2021): in 2013, 1.46 million pets were cremated in the USA alone (Soteriou and Smale, 2015). In some cases, pet ashes are scattered in same way (and in the same types of location) as human remains.

Scattering Cremation Ashes in Tourism and Leisure Settings: Practices and Problems

Through these changing practices the ‘pervasive dead’ (Walter, 2018) are becoming evident in tourism and leisure settings. As discussed, cremation ashes are easily portable and dividable, and thus can end up in a range of places. The location chosen is usually connected in some way to the biography of the deceased (Rumble et al., 2014; Gibson and Frost, 2019). Indeed, Kellaher et al. (2010, p. 134) note that ashes are disposed of in spaces that ‘carried associations with lives previously lived, whether everyday life or key life course transitions such as weddings’. Furthermore, it is common for people to specify what they wish to happen to their ashes after their death (Prendergast et al., 2006). Therefore, the place at which cremation ashes are scattered draws ‘meaning from its association with life rather than from its demarcation as a death space’ (Rumble et al., 2014, p. 254). Scattering is carried out in places where in life people had positive connections, usually associated with leisure time, hobbies and interests, activities, holidays, and time spent with family and friends.

In a Western context at least, three broad categories of tourism and leisure settings are commonly used for the disposal of ashes. First, they are scattered at visitor attractions, including castles, historic buildings, gardens, piers, and theme parks, which had significance for the dead whilst they were alive. Those people who volunteer at an attraction may also request that their ashes are scattered there. Sometimes scattering is closely associated with fandom and the deceased may have requested that their ashes be disposed of at a location associated with a celebrity or person of renown. For example, many fans of Jane Austen request that their ashes are scattered in the grounds of the author’s house in Chawton (Hampshire, UK) (Andrews, 2008). Steam train enthusiasts often ask for their ashes to be placed into the firebox of a steam locomotive (often one that has special significance for

them) so that the ashes are blown out over the surrounding countryside¹. Many heritage railways offer this service to volunteers or enthusiasts.

A second popular location is areas of countryside that are extensively managed for outdoor recreation, including national parks, country parks, woods and forests, beaches and the sea, and nature reserves. For example, the ashes of surfers are often scattered in the waves off the shore and a carefully choreographed 'paddle-out' ceremony has developed globally as a ritual of mourning and farewell among the surfing community (Gibson and Frost, 2019). Scattering in such locations again reflects the wishes of the deceased but also reflects a desire to return human remains to nature (Kellaher et al., 2010), a practice termed 'bioremediation' (Krupar, 2018, p.267). Such practice relies on natural processes (predominantly wind, rain, running water, or tidal action) to bring about dynamic dispersal of ashes from the location where they were deposited. In remote areas (such as hill tops) these forms of scattering may go unnoticed, but at popular or iconic locations the volume of scattering may be extensive enough to be clearly visible in the landscape.

A third category is sporting venues. These may be places where the person who died participated in a sport, such as a golf course or football ground. Alternatively, the place chosen for the final disposal of ashes might reflect fandom and personal identity. As Vaczi (2014) notes, fans of a particular sports team have long requested that their ashes are scattered or buried at their team's stadium. In these cases, the deceased are requesting a connection with a place that was meaningful to them in life, but also signalling their membership of a broader community of fans.

In some of these sites – notably large sporting venues – the disposal of ashes is carefully managed, often through the provision of dedicated gardens of remembrance for fans. This means that those scattering the ashes can feel comfortable that what they are doing is permitted and acceptable in the designated space. However, outside of those types of leisure/disposal spaces, as noted above, the situation is less clear. Consequently, ashes scattering often takes place surreptitiously. Even in the UK, where legislation is remarkably permissive in terms of where ashes can be scattered (Kellaheer et al., 2005), many engaged in scattering are unclear or uncertain about the legal situation, and assume that their actions are illegal or at least transgressive (Prendergast et al., 2006; Kellaheer et al., 2010). Consequently, ashes scattering sometimes takes place covertly under cover of darkness (see, for example, Hockey et al., 2007a). On some occasions, scatterers may surreptitiously break into a managed site in order to scatter or bury ashes at night (see Vaczi, 2014). Scatterers may even deliberately avoid getting permission for ashes disposal. For example, the unauthorized disposal of ashes at Jane Austen’s former home in Hampshire was reported to be commonplace (Andrews 2008), and the illicit disposal of ashes at Disney theme parks by paying visitors is reported to take place about once a month, despite Disney’s strict prohibition of the practice (Schwartzel, 2018).

Whether covert or overt, people tend to create their own practices in a form of vernacular bodily disposal. This leads to the dead becoming visible in tourism and leisure spaces, and this is where issues and tensions can arise. Ashes may be thrown into the wind, poured into water, or tipped onto the ground or vegetation. However, in the absence of wind or moving water, ashes are often not easily dispersed and remain visible in the landscape. Furthermore, this visibility can be augmented by practices of informal, semi-permanent memorialisation (such as flowers, windmills and chimes, toys and small gifts, and cards)². In some cases, a

more permanent memorial (such as a cross or a memorial stone) may be installed (Hockey et al., 2007b). In areas of managed countryside ashes may be covered with stones, or small cairns (Lindon, 2015). Mourners may also leave the container which contained the ashes (Malm 2013). Evidently, in such cases, the bereaved are at ease with the public expression of their loss, irrespective of any possible impact on other people.

The final disposal of ashes has long been associated with ceremony. Understandably, those scattering ashes feel that the moment should be marked by some form of ritual (see Vaczi, 2014). This may be religious in nature, but is more likely to be secular, drawing on symbols that had relevance to the deceased and their relatives (Gibson and Frost, 2019). Ceremonies may be informal and improvised, being devised by the mourners themselves. Alternatively, various ‘off-the-shelf’ ceremonies are available online (for example Scattering Ashes 2022a). Furthermore, relatives of the deceased may also gather on the anniversary of a death or scattering (Kellaher and Worpole, 2010). These are specific forms of practice and experience that unfold in tourism and leisure places which are poorly-understood.

Little is known about how visitors to tourism and leisure settings respond to the encounter with cremation ashes, memorial objects, or the act of scattering itself. Where ashes scattering is undertaken covertly, particularly if in a remote location and/or if the remains are quickly dispersed, then it may pass un-noticed. In other cases, the visible presence of ashes may have a much higher impact. However, in a context where death and the dead are largely sequestered from public view, and/or are culturally held to belong only in ‘appropriate’ locations, an encounter with human remains in tourism spaces has the potential to cause disquiet (Rumble et al., 2014). It is an encounter with mortality that is unanticipated and potentially discordant with the expectations of a holiday or of leisure time. These kinds of

tensions have been evident around vernacular forms of memorialisation in mountain landscapes (Maddrell, 2010). The potential range of emotional responses encompasses empathy, interest, apathy, unsettlement, discomfort, distress, and even disgust. Such responses are partly similar to those experienced by tourists who intentionally visit a place of death. However, a key difference is that visitors to dark sites are anticipating particular types of emotional experience, and indeed negative emotional responses are a part of making-meaning among visitors to such places (Nawijn et al., 2015; Zheng et al., 2020; Sigala and Steriopoulos 2021). However, unexpected and unwanted encounters with death (in the form of cremation ashes) can generate negative emotions which are problematic for site managers who are concerned with creating positive and memorable experiences (Tung and Brent Ritchie, 2011). An encounter with human ashes may exaggerate the distance between expectation and experience (Ryan, 1997) leading to dissatisfaction, and experiences which are memorable for the wrong reasons.

In addition, the intention to scatter cremation ashes in a particular location may necessitate long-distance travel, itself a specialist form of tourism related to death (see Pratt et al., 2019). In some cases, such travel may take the form of a sacred journey or even a pilgrimage that is redolent with meaning for mourners (Digance, 2006). In Germany, where ashes scattering is tightly regulated, citizens sometimes travel to Switzerland (where rules are more relaxed) in order to scatter ashes, particularly around Lake Constance (Canning and Szmigin, 2010). The repatriation of ashes is well-developed among diasporic communities from Asia (Rugg, 2020). Specialist companies can arrange this service (Scattering Ashes 2022b) but in many cases relatives will do this themselves, although again uncertainty about the legality of the procedure means that ashes are often transported hidden in ordinary luggage (Jassal, 2015).

Managing the ‘Pervasive Dead’ in Tourism Spaces: Challenges and Strategies

The scattering of ashes in tourist locations introduces new challenges for managers of such sites and those who visit and work there, including whether to control the practice, and how to support tourists and tourism employees whose work might include encounters with material mortality, and the grief of families seeking to scatter ashes.

Managing the Practice

The managers of tourism and leisure places can respond to the scattering of ashes in a variety of ways depending on the degree of control they have over the site. Where admission is controlled (for example at visitor attractions or sport stadia or where a charge is made for entry) a more interventionist approach to management can be adopted. Conversely, at sites which are unbounded and free to access, management options are more limited and often confined to voluntary guidance.

A first strategy is to permit (or at least tolerate) ashes scattering. This often part of a ‘hands-off’ approach in which organisations have no clear policy regarding scattering. It effectively involves turning a blind eye to scattering and its impacts. This approach is adopted in many areas of managed countryside. For example, in most of the UK’s National Parks the only condition of scattering is that the permission of the landowner is required (Scattering Ashes 2022c), although in practice this is rarely sought. Similarly, in the UK no permission is needed to scatter ashes on a beach or into a river beyond a recommendation to minimise the impact on wildlife and other watercourse users, and to avoid casting a wreath or other forms of memorabilia into the water (Environment Agency, 2020).

A second strategy is to prohibit ashes scattering altogether, a stance adopted by many popular visitor attractions. This is usually to minimize the impact on staff and visitors, but the environmental impact of ashes is also a concern (Vidal, 2009). Cremation ashes can have elevated concentrations of phosphate and calcium (Scattering Ashes 2022d), and if concentrated in a small area they can impact plant life, especially in fragile environments. Large sports clubs spend considerable sums on preparing grass pitches and thus wish to avoid the imbalanced input of nutrients. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Welsh conservationists have advised against scattering ashes in environmentally sensitive mountain environments. In the UK, the Woodland Trust (a charity dedicated to the preservation of native woodland) prohibits scattering at certain environmentally sensitive and protected sites (Scattering Ashes, 2022e). Faith and cultural issues are also significant in some contexts. For example, in New Zealand it is culturally inappropriate to scatter ashes on sites sacred to the Maori, or which they use for food collection such as watercourses or beaches (see Auckland Council, 2021). Obtaining permission can be a complex process involving multiple organisations such as the Department of Conservation, individual park management, and the local iwi representing Maori people (McLachlan, 2016).

A third strategy is to permit ashes scattering but with conditions to limit the impact on other leisure visitors or the environment. However, these conditions are usually advisory, voluntary, and difficult to enforce. Most national parks in the USA permit scattering of ashes with conditions such as ashes must be scattered not buried (and scattering should avoid accumulation at a single point); scattering must take place out of sight of places where the public gather; scattering should be a minimum distance from any water; ashes should not be accompanied by any markers, plaques or memorials; and a permit may be necessary for

larger gatherings (Skidmore 2015; Scattering Ashes 2022f). Many large sports stadia now have dedicated gardens of remembrance, which often include other artefacts associated with the sport's (or a specific club's) history. This allows fans to have their ashes scattered at the sports ground they attended as a fan and with which they often have long-standing familial connections (Vaczi, 2014; Scattering Ashes 2022g).

However, in national contexts where there is little regulation of ashes scattering, decisions about scattering at particular venues are often made on an individual basis by managers. In the UK organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage lack central policies on ashes scattering, and decision-making is delegated to individual property managers (Scattering Ashes, 2022h). Conditions may include scattering where ashes will not be visible to other visitors, a prohibition on memorials accompanying the ashes, and restricting scattering to certain times of day (such as early morning, or around/after closing time (see Williams, 2011)). Some visitor attractions set aside a dedicated area where the ashes of volunteers can be scattered or buried³. Sports stadia and race courses which do allow scattering of ashes may not permit it on days when matches or events are held (Scattering Ashes 2022i). Some offer the service of a chaplain who can support the bereaved in the disposal of ashes (Scattering Ashes, 2022g).

A fourth strategy is to treat ashes scattering as a revenue-generating activity. In popular tourist areas, private boat operators offer a service where the bereaved can charter a boat for a set period to carry out a scattering ceremony on a river or at sea (Scattering on Water, 2022). Similarly, some heritage railways in the UK allow the bereaved to hire a steam train and coaches for exclusive use so that the ashes can be placed in the steam locomotive's firebox at

a chosen point (for example West Somerset Railway, 2022). For charitable organisations, such actions may be an important additional source of revenue.

Supporting Employees and the Bereaved

Tourism managers and employees are increasingly having to manage visitors' encounters with human remains, and liaison with bereaved individuals and families. For example, employees may be asked to remove ashes that have been scattered in public view (see Schwartzel (2018) in the case of Disney theme parks) or dismantle ephemeral memorials. Little is known about how tourism/leisure employees manage their emotions in such contexts but it is likely that some will find the experience distressing. In an analogous situation, Hay (2015) reported that staff working in hotels where somebody had chosen to die were emotionally affected by the experience. Furthermore, at those attractions which permit ashes scattering, liaising with the bereaved involves other challenges requiring particular skills and attributes, including empathy, sensitivity, and emotion management which are akin to those required in nursing and healthcare (Filimonau and Brown, 2018).

This can represent an emotional challenge for managers, employees and sometimes also volunteers. Professionals working in the 'death care industry' (Jassal, 2015, p.486) are experienced in dealing with the dead and the bereaved. Their work is underpinned by emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), that is, their employment requires the adoption of particular emotions (Bianchi et al., 2016). For such employees, emotion management and the practice of kindness and compassion is a daily part of their employment (Bailey, 2010): indeed, for funeral directors, an ethic of care for the bereaved is central to their professional identity (McCarthy, 2016).

However, many tourism and leisure professionals do not have equivalent experience or training, and most tourism organisations or attractions will not have staff with specific skills in dealing with the dead or bereaved. Tourism and leisure employees may be poorly prepared and equipped for this form of emotional labour, and consequently may find the experience challenging. This in turn has welfare and wellbeing implications which managers may need to address. Managers face an additional burden since, in the absence of the necessary skills among their staff, they may have to oversee the scattering process themselves. This challenge can be exacerbated when, as sometimes happens, the bereaved ask an attraction to provide some form of ceremony (or say a few words) to accompany the scattering.⁴ These are unique forms of emotional labour which, up to now, have been largely unacknowledged within tourism and hospitality research (for example, Lee and Madera, 2019).

As the scattering of cremation ashes in tourism and leisure places is expanding the range of spaces in which the dead are visible, the boundaries of professional ‘deathwork’ are becoming blurred. Dealing with the dead is less confined to medical and death professionals (see Stone, 2018). Instead, managers, employees and volunteers who are far removed from the death care industry are increasingly involved in direct encounters with the dead and bereaved in the course of their work. The implication is that some form of training and development in managing death and disposal may be necessary for tourism and leisure professionals.

Conclusion

Many regulatory restrictions and faith-based prescriptions regarding the disposal of the dead remain. However, in this paper we have sought to explore the implications of the desequestration of death (Walter, 1991, 2019) and the emergence of the ‘pervasive dead’ (Walter, 2019) for tourism and leisure spaces, particularly where people wish to create forms of continuing bonds (Klass and Steffen, 2018) with their deceased loved ones by scattering their ashes in places significant to them. While this is perhaps more a feature of Western societies, Rumble et al. (2014, p. 257) argue that ‘[s]ince the mid-nineteenth century, planning policies for the dead have been premised on their physical removal from spaces occupied by the living... This is now being challenged, or at least supplemented, by the new concept of dispersal of remains into natural and everyday environments’. Certainly in some countries it has become commonplace to scatter cremation ashes in tourism and leisure settings, but this practice is unquantified and little-researched. Furthermore, the often covert nature of ashes scattering makes this a difficult topic to research. Visitors who feel that they may have transgressed legal regulations or societal norms, and managers of tourism sites who tacitly condone scattering and/or lack guidance from regulatory bodies, may be equally unwilling to draw attention to, or discuss, what is occurring in such sites. Nevertheless, the growth in ashes scattering in tourism and leisure sites, though variable internationally, is raising challenges for the tourism industry as a whole, as well as for national tourism and heritage bodies, and individual visitor attractions. Our aim has been to draw attention to these practices and explore their implications for spaces of tourism and leisure.

The scattering of cremation ashes in tourism and leisure spaces is an unexplored research field, but one which potentially has major implications for tourism management. A wide

range of issues thus form the basis of an agenda for future research. First, researchers could explore in more detail the actual practices of scattering. This would illuminate why people chose certain locations, either for themselves or for their loved ones. A further key point is to consider the kinds of (often secular) ritual that accompany the process of scattering. This would enable a fuller understanding of the impacts on tourism spaces and other visitors, but could also illuminate whether such practices are associated with thanatopsis - reflection or contemplation of life and death - thereby pointing to commonalities with dark tourism.

A second focus could be on how other users of these spaces respond when encountering cremation ashes. Little is known about how visitors respond to ashes and their emotional responses when they encounter the dead 'intruding' into places where they have come to relax and enjoy the location. A third issue is understanding the environmental impacts of ashes scattering. This, in turn, may point to how scattering can be more effectively managed in different types of environments. A fourth topic concerns the ways in which managers and employees deal with managing authorized scattering, and also the encounter with unauthorized scattering. In particular, do tourism workers feel that they need additional training for dealing with the dead in this way (and, if so, what form might it take)? Finally, more research is needed into how organisations responsible for managing tourism and leisure sites currently deal both with requests to scatter ashes, but also with unapproved, covert scattering. In particular, the questions arise of whether these organisations have appropriate policies and operational responses, along with the kind of support or guidance that is available (or might be required) from national representative bodies.

Our hope is that future research will provide the data to enable a fuller understanding of practices of ashes scattering and its implications for tourism and leisure spaces. We fully

understand people's wishes to be scattered in such places, and support the wishes of families and loved ones to be respected. However, at the same time we argue that there is a need to support managers, employees, and volunteers with appropriate strategies and training. Only when the implications of ashes scattering in tourism spaces are better understood can such practices be more effectively managed in a way that satisfies the interests of all parties.

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¹ Personal observation by one of the authors who is a volunteer on a heritage railway.

² Based on observations by all three authors.

³ Personal observation by one of the authors, based on volunteering experience.

⁴ Formal interview with an attraction manager, undertaken as part of a separate research project. We are grateful to Anya Chapman for sharing this with us.