

Morte e vita. Nuovi equilibri nel paesaggio italiano

Death and life. New balances in Italian Landscape

Questo articolo analizza le modifiche più recenti in spazi funerari rispetto ai nuovi riti, credenze e comportamenti sociali in Italia. Mentre negli ultimi due secoli, la geografia della morte veniva disegnata solo da cimiteri extraurbani, oggi le nuove tendenze agiscono moltiplicando i luoghi all'interno dei contesti urbani. Ci sono diversi fattori che contribuiscono a questo cambiamento. In primo luogo, il nuovo profilo multi-religioso della società italiana contemporanea e la sua crescente laicità stanno amplificando la richiesta di spazi in cui celebrare con un senso di dignità tutti i tipi addio rituali. Questo ha aperto un tipo di mercato per agenzie di pompe funebri o "case funerarie", mai visto prima in Italia. In secondo luogo, una più ampia accettazione sociale della cremazione (recentemente approvato dalla Chiesa cattolica) introduce la possibilità per uno spostamento delle ceneri in case o in cimiteri privati, anche all'interno di ambienti urbani.

This article will analyze the most recent changes in spaces for the dead with respect to new rituals, beliefs and social behaviors in Italy. While in the past two centuries the geography of death was one designed only by extra-urban cemeteries, today new trends are acting to multiply funerary places within urban contexts. There are several factors contributing to this change. First, the new multi-faith profile of contemporary Italian society and its growing secularization are amplifying the request for spaces in which to celebrate all kinds of funeral or farewell rituals with a sense of dignity. This has opened a market for funeral homes or "case funerarie", never seen before in Italy. Secondly, a wider social acceptance of cremation (recently approved by Catholic Church) introduces the possibility for a displacement of ashes in houses or in private cemeteries, even within urban settings.



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Parole chiave: **Architettura funeraria; Pompe funebri; Camere ardenti; Laicità; Cimiteri**
 Keywords: **Funerary architecture; Funeral Home; Farewell Rooms; Secularization; Cemeteries**

Introduction¹

Two different trends are acting in Italy and changing its traditional religious profile and its relationship to death and burials.

The first is the rise of secularization, gradually increasing its strength with urbanization and industrialization (Acquaviva, 1961) emphasizing the differences between towns and countryside, and, above all, between the northern and southern parts of the country (Cartocci, 2011).

In addition, a second factor recently emerged in Italy to radically change its social and religious landscape is the massive phenomenon of migration, totally nonexistent before the second half of the 1980's and now visible and pervasive in all sectors of social and economic life, thus updating the historical multiculturalism of Italian society (ISTAT, 2007; Caritas Migrantes, 2012; Bombardieri, 2011). This article summarizes preliminary research conducted within Bologna and Ravenna, a town which deserves particular attention in relation to sacred architecture of new religious groups in Italy because of the considerable presence of a foreign population in the provincial area (12.16% of the total population - Osservatorio Immigrazione, 2013) and the recent construction and inauguration of one of the first Mosque in the Region.

Farewell Room

Both secularization and emerging multi-faith groups beg for new spaces to celebrate lay farewell and new religious funeral worships

with dignity. The same demand comes from all religious groups recently arrived in Italy following contemporary migration patterns which were previously negligible and/or absent in the country. The lack of adequate space for atheist or non-Catholic citizens for funeral rituals risked to be perceived as a mild form of discrimination towards these groups. This prompted a change in regional laws² which allowed and promoted "Sale del Commiato", namely "Farewell Rooms", beginning with Lombardia, (L.R.22/2003) and Emilia-Romagna (L.R. 19/2004).³ "Farewell rooms" are places in which only a closed casket is accepted and rituals can be celebrated. In Bologna (Emilia-Romagna), a "Farewell Room" has been fitted out in the ancient elliptical Pantheon of Certosa Monumental Cemetery with artistic work by Flavio Favelli (Bartolomei-Praderio, 2010). In Ravenna (also in Emilia-Romagna), as in many other recent funerary architecture,⁴ a farewell room is connected with the new crematorium, close to Candiano Canal, in an evocative architecture by Bruno Minardi which recalls the one of local ancient fishing-cabins dressed up with Cor-Ten steel panels (Bartolomei, 2012).

In both cases, the communication of a sense and a meaning to these spaces is not due to religious symbols but indeed only to art (Bartolomei, 2011a). Art strengthens the versatility which is requested of these new spaces for funeral rituals with regards to both symbols, and spatial configurations. Farewell rooms can indeed

act as scenography for different religious rituals and also for lay ones whose liturgy changes from time to time in the attempt to adhere to and celebrate the historical and psychological personality of the deceased (Bartolomei-Praderio, 2010).

"Case funerarie" or "Funeral Homes"

The growing incomprehension of the anagogical and esoteric language of the liturgy, specifically the Christian⁵ one, can be considered one of the main reasons for the need of new liturgies to customize the last farewell. What is required is the possibility to celebrate the specific personality of the deceased (Sozzi, 2001), and thus inevitably reflect the contemporary trend in a renewed attention to the body, which is without doubt one of the most evident tracks of the singularity of each individual life.

Hence, farewell rooms immediately reveal their limits since the casket must be closed; furthermore this is already possible in any public or private space, upon authorization from the municipality.

It is because of this attention to the body that more and more obituaries and morgues recently became spaces for prayer, rituals, sharing of intimate feelings and emotions although these spaces were originally developed for the scientific observation of corpses. In these new conditions, they suddenly show their completely inappropriateness, both in relation to their size and their ambiance.⁶

While in countryside the average size of

familiar houses still allows inhabitants to preserve strengthened traditions and to host the funeral wake, within the urban context, the average apartment size does not allow for a traditional farewell space within the home. In addition, most deaths typically occur in hospitals (Pinkus, Filiberti, 2002; Monti, 2010). Thus, it has become common practice to bring the deceased to hospital morgues and to expose them in that environment for the last viewing.

In this way places built as extensions of legal medicine pavilions in the first decades of XX century, that is places for scientific observation of corpses, suddenly became spaces for last farewell despite their cold and aseptic aspect even contrary to the intimacy and sensitivity of the moment. Furthermore, places thought to be simple depots for corpses immediately reveal their unsuitableness in terms of size when they become filled with whole family groups that come to see and bid farewell to their beloved ones.

It is because of these conditions that many private funerary enterprises are building "Funeral Homes", where corpses can receive "tanatopraxis"⁷ treatment before being exposed to the last viewing. Funeral Homes are undeniably the most relevant news in the Italian market of funerals and in the taxonomy of architectural Italian typologies. In fact, for the first time in Italian history, funeral homes are private buildings which absolve the functions of observation previously typical and proper only of public

institutions. Despite the fact that all regional laws introducing "farewell structures"⁸ underline that they must be open to everyone, funeral homes are indeed the first private structure for rituals in Italy. Inside these structures, it is possible to celebrate those rituals which were once celebrated inside homes as, for example, funeral wakes, or lay last sight to the dead. The funerary Mass however, is not allowed in such spaces, as the Bishop of Modena established as soon as one of the most prestigious funeral home in Italy opened in his Diocese (Bartolomei 2011 b):

"To celebrate the funeral it is required to go into the Parish of the deceased [...]" and, in any case, "it is not possible to celebrate funeral rituals in mortuaries or burial chambers [...] or in other spaces also used for non-Christian or lay rituals".⁹

Completely unknown in the Italian landscape until 1995, there are now more than 100 Italian Funeral homes, the majority within the northern part of the country, conquering sub-urban or industrial areas, declaring a general reference to an unspecified American model of management but without the same possibility of customization. Many cases are merely simple extensions of industrial warehouses where funerary companies store their cars. In Italian Funeral Homes technical spaces are strictly separated from the public ones, and all paths dedicated to corpses are differentiated from the ones dedicated to the public. The first ones are hygienic, sterile spaces, the second ones

are house-like spaces, furnished in what is intended to be a desired style of the middle class, often ceding to a chaotic and kitsch juxtaposition of furnishing and objects.

Inside Italian funeral homes, private farewell spaces constitute of a wake room, arranged to expose the deceased and an anteroom where family members can sit and express condolences away from the intimate emotional density of the space where the last viewing takes place.

Contemporary Italian funeral homes, as American models, offer common spaces for coffee breaks and lunches, but, on the contrary of their American precursors, the degree of customizability of their chambers is restricted to monitors where pictures and videos can roll, and where music can celebrate and represent deceased's personal tastes and profile. The remaining furniture is unmovable and permanent.

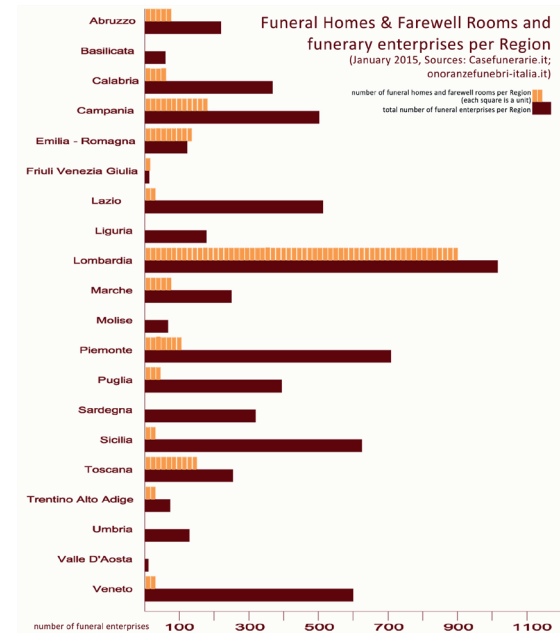
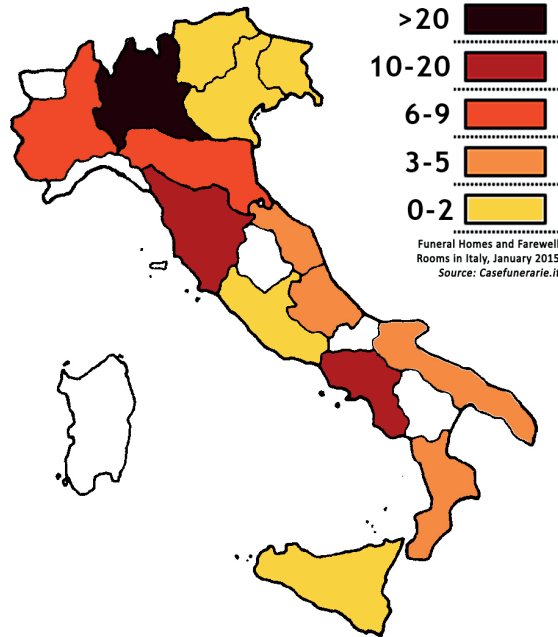
If, on one hand, the lack of customizability definitely distinguishes new Italian funeral homes from American models, on the other hand the lack of architectural care distances them also from most advanced European models, that is especially Spanish ones, which have been already recognized as examples of outstanding contemporary architecture.¹⁰

The lack of a meaningful design for funeral home architecture in Italy appears to be the result of various aspects I will attempt to enumerate:

a. The undeniable overcrowding and inappropriateness of contemporary morgues is not enough to establish an alternative, neither in behaviors, nor in spaces: architecture struggles to find a program, ie design layout, which is without tradition for this kind of use.

b. In addition to the expenses involved in building a funeral home, the legal process is severely severed since legislation is different from Region to Region. Italy lacks an overall national regulation¹¹ for funeral homes and thus implicitly discourages the construction of new ones.

c. Public debate on new spaces for funeral rituals is extremely recent and highly localized (it varies from city to city) in Italy. The Participatory Design for Ferrara new farewell citadel¹² and "Tanatospace", the first exhibition on funeral homes in Italy,¹³ cannot be considered the beginning of a wide public awareness even though there was some interest within national media.¹⁴ Furthermore, funeral enterprises continue to struggle to open new offices or branches in urban areas because of the antagonism of inhabitants who are afraid of a consequent devaluation of their properties: an economical effectiveness of superstition.



Transformations in cemeteries

Secularization and multi-faith societies are challenging the architecture and the organization of cemeteries, which in Italy, for the most part belong to municipalities

Fig. 1 funeral homes and farewell rooms in Italy: regional distribution. (source: Casefunerarie.it, January 2015)

Fig. 2 Actual distribution of Funeral homes and farewell rooms in Italy (January 2015) in relation to regions. (Sources: www.casefunerarie.it; www.onoranzefunebri-italia.it)

(Bertolaccini, 2004). Urban cemeteries are becoming mosaics of different burial traditions, organizing themselves in a “Cluster geometry” (Bartolomei, 2012). The main cause of this new fragmentation in the inner space of ancient cemeteries is due to the possibility offered by the National Law (DPR 285/1990)¹⁵ to foreign communities and to all religious groups other than Catholic to ask municipalities for special burial places in cemetery zoning. This law appears to favor minority groups since it is assumed that Italian cemeteries will remain predominantly catholic. However, this is not the case in Italy today, due to both secularization and the waning political power of Catholicism which has definitively lost its qualification as State Religion in 1984 with the revision of Lateran Pacts (Cavana, 2009).

Karl Scheffler seems to be almost a prophet when, in his 1913 work “The Architecture of Metropolis”, states: “soon there will be no Catholics, Protestants or Jews cemeteries at all but only civic central cemeteries, as soon as epochal tendencies will gain the upper hand. The Church loses more and more its dominion over the cemetery, since, instead of the blessing of the priest, seeks only the public display of the body. Municipalities get the upper hand on the legacies”.¹⁶

If, on one hand, the fragmentation of cemeteries reflects that of towns, from another point of view it collaborates to reduce their cultural and spiritual identity, discouraging their use and favoring new rituals and places for burial.



Fig. 3 The new crypt for ashes in San John The Baptist Parish in Montecalvo (Bologna – Photo by Luca Melechi)

On the other hand, if within lay spirituality, the private custody of ashes or their dispersion in nature can be interpreted in several cases as an escape from unsatisfactory burial alternatives; catholic parishes have begun to demonstrate a particular care for mortal remains and special places for urns within churches. This option is of particular interest with respect to theological and liturgical considerations (Chenis, 2006) because of the evidence and somewhat visible closeness you might perceive between the living Church and the celestial one in the same place of Eucharist.

This choice to favor ashes chapels could be promoted by other religious groups or lay associations hence re-introducing the dead inside towns and permitting again the living to dwell closer to the tombs of the fathers, thus re-discovering an ancient tradition.

Conclusions

Despite their different origins, vocation and identity, which this paper would like to focus on and distinguish, both farewell rooms, new Italian funeral homes and colombariums for ash storage show new and deep changes in the relationship between “the city of dead” and “the city of the living”. Specifically, this fracture appears to be at the beginning of a crisis, opening to a new sort of melting among the dead and the living whose premise is the dissolution of the Napoleonic cemetery. Its ashes seem able to generate a new dispersion of the dead among the living.

This inverting trend which since the time of Enlightenment, ostracized dead from urban boundaries, founding death as one of the most significant taboo in European Society (Aries, 1975).

The indirect results of secularization and of new emerging multi-faith societies allude to a possible the reconciliation between death and life which is the most important result of this new way of Italian death.

1. This paper constitutes a revised edition of the one has been selected and presented at the 2014 Architecture, Culture and Spirituality Symposium (ACS6) in Toronto.

2. The matter of the protection of health is attributed by the Constitution to the State – which sets out its basic principles – and to Regions which lay down the rules of retail. Emilia Romagna, L.R. 19/2004; Marche, L.R. 3/2005; Puglia, L.R. 34/2008; Veneto, L.R. 18/2010; Piemonte, L.R. 15/2011; Friuli Venezia Giulia, L.R. 12/2011; Abruzzo, L.R. 41/2012; Campania, L.R. 7/2013.

3. See also: Sereno Scolaro, 2013

4. The same solution in Bologna crematorium, in a different architectural style (Bartolomei, 2012 b)

5. Already denounced by the Italian Conference of Bishops (CEI) in 1983, that is twenty years after Sacrosanctum Concilium (CEI, 1983)

6. As it has been recently shown by a 2009 research on hospital morgues, coordinated in Piemonte by Rossana Becarelli, available at <http://www2.ares.piemonte.it/cms/umanizzazione-documenti.html>

7. Embalming treatments are forbidden in Italy.

8. Only Veneto, Friuli-Venezia-Giulia and Abruzzo have now a legislation which distinguish funeral homes from farewell rooms.

9. Antonio Lanfranchi, Vescovo di Modena e Nonantola, *Istruzione sul luogo di celebrazione dei Funerali*, 2011, June the 24th; [eng. trans. “Instruction on the place where to celebrate funerals”]

10. Recently Spanish funerary architecture reached outstanding and already famous results, such as the Municipal Funeral Homes in



Fig. 4 Architecture for ashes inside St. Joseph Church in Aachen (Germany - Photo by Tino Grisi)

Terrassa and in León (both by BAAS Architects, respectively 2002 and 2001, and the one in Pinoso, by COR asociados, 2010. BAAS' works have already been published in M. Felicori, *Gli spazi della memoria: architettura dei cimiteri monumentali europei*, Luca Sossella editore, Bologna, 2005 [Eng. Trans. "Spaces for remembrance. Architecture of Monumental European Cemeteries"]; The Phaidon atlas of contemporary world architecture, Phaidon Press, London, 2005, p. 209, p. 216.

11. For a complete and up-to-date analysis of Italian laws on funerary policies, cfr. S. Scolaro, *Manuale di Polizia Mortuaria - La disciplina nazionale e regionale*, [eng. Trans. "Manual of funeral law - National and Regional legislation"] Maggioli Ed., Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna, 2013.

12. This program had as his result an architectural competition which has been won by Tomas Ghisellini Architetti (<http://www.comune.fe.it/index.phtml?id=3143>). All architectural proposals have been published in "La cittadella del Commiato a Ferrara", edited by Ferrara Municipality, 2012

13. Bologna Urban Center: 2013 from June 25 to July 20

14. Tanatospace exhibition has been the object of a national radio broadcast "Fahrenheit" on 2013, June 25th, [FahreScuola: Tanatospace a Bologna - engl. trans.: "Fahreschool: Tanato-space in Bologna"). The exhibition was also presented in an article on national newspaper "Avenire", 2013 July 11st, p. 22.

15. DPR 285/1990, art. 100 : "1. Cemetery zoning [...] may provide special and separated wards for burial of dead people professing a religion other than Catholic. 2. To foreign communities who claim for a special department for the burial of the bodies of their contrymen, an appropriate cemetery area can also be given in licence by the mayor"

16. K. Scheffler, *L'architettura della metropoli e altri scritti sulla città*, [eng. trans. "Metropolis architecture and other writings"] a cura di R. Mercadante (Milano: Franco Angeli ed., 2013, p. 125) [Original Edition in Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1913]. This work was already known in Italy thanks to M. Cacciari's essay "Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città in Sombart, Endell, Scheffer e Simmel", [eng. trans. "Essays on big city in Sombart, Endell, Scheffer and Simmel"] ed. Officina, Roma, 1973

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