

Green Death: Challenges for the Czech Legislation

Abstract

Green, eco-friendly or natural burials have been gaining popularity in recent years not only because of the promise of a more environmentally friendly burial, but also for changing our view of death. It introduces technologies, methods and approaches that aim to minimize the environmental impact of burial and funerals, from the treatment of the deceased's body to burial methods to the actual appearance and operation of burial grounds. There are several options to offer but only a few of them comply with current legislation. Fear of death and the human body as well as funeral traditions and societal views on the dignity of and respect for the deceased play a role in this. Among the latest technologies are human composting or terramation and aquamation. One of the easiest and most natural methods of burial is, however, natural in-ground burial, where human remains are placed in a shallow grave without a coffin.

The current legislation in the Czech republic is relatively conservative and permits only two methods of burial, placing the human remains in a grave or tomb on a burial ground and cremation in a crematorium, both subject to strict rules regarding the treatment of the body and coffin. The question arises as to whether these methods are capable of fulfilling the individual right to decide how one's body is to be disposed of after death, particularly in regard to their availability and affordability as well as their environmental impact. Burial grounds and funeral services produce significant amounts of waste, coffins with artificial fibre linings slow down the process of decomposition, and the emissions from cremations have a negative impact on the air and therefore on people.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate under what conditions natural burial practices and new technologies of terramation and aquamation could be permitted in the Czech republic, and how these changes would be reflected in the Funeral Act as well as other related legislation.

Keywords: funerals, Funeral Act, green burial, natural burial, terramation, human composting, aquamation, coffin, cremation, grave, burial ground, conservation burial ground