

Consumer Environmental Legacy: Body Disposal and Innovative Market Burial Practices

Anselma Lovens¹, Luca Visconti²

¹ Anselma Lovens, PhD fellow @ Università IUAV di Venezia, Italy – Curriculum: Territorial planning and public policies / Pianificazione territoriale e politiche pubbliche del territorio – Department: Planning in complex systems / Progettazione e pianificazione in ambienti complessi – co-founder of Boschi Vivi cooperative <http://boschivivi.it/> – contact: a.lovens@boschivivi.it

² Luca M. Visconti, PhD, Professor of Marketing @ ESCP Europe, Paris, France – Curriculum: Consumer Culture Theory and Consumer Vulnerability, Branding and Brand Storytelling, Luxury.

Abstract

Marketing literature on disposal has largely addressed the environmental impact of consumers on the planet. Yet, this literature refers to decisions that consumers make during their life in terms of how to get rid of their consumptions. Research is instead scant on how consumers keep on affecting the environment after their own death. This paper focuses on this gap and documents increasing concern and demand for more sustainable burial practices in Western markets. Current modes of body disposal (i.e. burial and cremation) have strong environmental impact due to land employment and pollution associated with established burial practices. This ongoing project is at this stage mostly exploratory and aims at: (1) documenting the emergence of new, more sustainable death-care services and (2) identifying eco-friendly body disposal practices at the crossroad between consumers' micro motives and emotions and market macro factors that affect the real opportunities of developing eco-friendly burial services. We suggest that marketing strategies adopted by death-care companies help connect the macro to the micro, and can thus facilitate diffused awareness on that relevant though highly neglected topic.

Methodology: The paper combines two orders of data. First, on the basis of systematic document analysis, we gather a rich amount of secondary data helping identify global megatrends about body disposal. Second, we complement secondary data with two orders of primary data: (1) multiple case studies, which serve to document the variety of eco-friendly body disposal options that already exist on the market; and (2) an online survey directed to unveil consumer awareness, sentiment, and actual behavior in the field.

Expected contributions: The paper's contribution is twofold. First, it advances current knowledge about alternative and more eco-friendly burial practices, their marketization, and the related consumer reception. More specifically, this research provides a reasoned taxonomy of said burial practices at an international Western scale and an illustration of the different ways companies innovating in the field develop their marketing strategy to attract consumer interest. Second, the paper extends literature on consumer disposal by documenting consumers' current attitudes and behaviors in relation to eco-friendly burials. Overall, the paper is both theoretically novel and managerially relevant.

KeyWords

Consumer disposal, death care, environmental sustainability, eco-friendly burial, marketing sustainability

The Environmental Impact of Burial Decisions

Consumer and marketing research have mostly focused on acquisition and consumption of products, services, and experiences (Mac Innis and Folke 2010, 910), since these activities are directly connected to companies' profitability. However, market behaviors also comprehend disposal, that is, any decisions leading to the detachment from material possessions that consumers have formerly acquired, and typically consisting in the choice of either trashing or recycling those possessions (Trudel, Argo, and Meng 2016, 247).

This literature has focused on disposal of consumer goods and on decisions consumers take for material objects they own and dispose of in life. To the best of our knowledge, there is no research connecting consumer decisions about body disposal to consumer environmental sensitivity. Consumer research on death has in fact mostly addressed effects of mortality

salience on consumer choice (e.g. Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005; Mandel and Smeesters 2008) or unpacked the ritualization of death (e.g. Bonsu and Belk 2003; Rook 1985).

This ongoing research project thus addresses a gap in consumer literature by exploring consumer sensitivity and marketers' experience in the context of eco-friendly burial practices. In doing so, our research presents two distinctive angles with reference to existing consumer disposal literature. First, focus is not on consumer goods but on personal body, which we receive at birth (and thus do not trade on the market) and never fully own (body ownership is in fact a highly contested field of discussion, as heated debates on abortion or euthanasia clearly demonstrate; Phillips 2013). Second, consumer disposal literature analyzes decisions consumers take in life, whose implications they can therefore control. Our empirical field instead refers to decisions consumers take for their death, and which they will not be in control of. We expect these specific angles will help advance consumer disposal literature by adding the effects of uncertainty and symbolic legacy.

The research pursues three specific objectives: (1) to identify and classify existing innovative market practices of eco-friendly burials at an international Western scale; (2) to map alternative marketing strategies that these death-care innovative companies use in order to attract consumer interest and orient consumer decision-making; and, (3) to assess consumer current cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in relation to eco-friendly burial practices.

In order to reach these objectives, the project relies upon a mixed method approach. First, on the basis of systematic document analysis, we gather a rich amount of secondary data helping identify global megatrends about body disposal. Second, we complement secondary data with two orders of primary data: (1) multiple case studies (Eisenhardt 1989), which serve to document the variety of eco-friendly body disposal options that already exist on the market; and (2) an online survey that is directed to unveil consumer awareness, sentiment, and actual behavior in the field.

We believe this paper contributes both theoretically and managerially. Theory-wise, we expect to advance understanding of consumer disposal choices. We locate eco-friendly body disposal practices at the crossroad between consumers' micro motives (e.g. ecological responsiveness) and emotions (e.g. fear, symbolic legacy, and uncertainty) and market macro factors that affect the real opportunities of developing greener burial services. From a managerial viewpoint, we provide a reasoned, updated representation of eco-friendly international burial practices. We also suggest that marketing strategies adopted by death-care companies help connect the macro to the micro, and can thus facilitate diffused awareness on that relevant though highly neglected topic.

This topic is relevant since the impact of consumer decisions about body disposal is massive. On the one hand, established modes of body disposal (i.e. burial and cremation) have strong negative environmental impact due to land employment – which is subtracted to alternative uses – and pollution associated with established burial practices (DEFRA, 2006; Santarsiero et al. 2000). On the other hand, the worldwide crude mortality rate as of 2016 is 7.8 per cent (CIA World Factbook 2016). As such, changes in consumer-aggregated behavior in the field of body disposal decisions have terrific environmental implications. Relevance of eco-friendly burial practices is further supported by CSIRO's (2012) megatrend analysis, which also warns about the necessity of doing more with less (i.e. optimizing use of natural resources, as land occupied by traditional cemeteries), preserving biodiversity, and providing sense to consumers (e.g. via

customization, experience). As our empirical data documents, eco-friendly burial practices comply with these megatrends.

Body Disposal in Consumer Research

We derive our conceptual framework from two streams of studies. The first explicitly deals with the pragmatics and semiotics of death. Several disciplines – including anthropology, history, social and (trans-)cultural psychology, sociology, urbanism, and many more – have dealt with the tangible implications of death as well as with its emotional and symbolic meanings. While an extensive overview of this literature largely exceeds the aims of this paper, we nonetheless start by paying homage to this rich field of studies, which illuminate the rational (pragmatic) and symbolic (semiotic) aspects of eco-friendly burial options.

The second, and more pertinent, stream of studies is that of consumer disposal choices, which to date however fails to acknowledge body disposal. Consequently, we merge these two streams of contributions in order to elaborate our conceptual framework.

The Pragmatics and Semiotics of Death

Philippe Ariès' (1975) historical analysis of Western attitudes towards death is a fundamental reference for any scholars interested in understanding the socio-cultural mechanisms framing the individual and collective relationship with death, from the middle ages to the present. Among the many transformations that the human interpretation of death has passed through, Ariès documents substantial changes in the way death is managed (i.e. its pragmatics) and interpreted (i.e. its semiotics). On a pragmatic level, the most notable shift is that of confining death outside living's spaces, which coincided with the confinement of cemeteries outside the cities for sanitary reasons. While this practice largely in vogue in the 16th through the 18th century has progressively changed, we still experience a clear partition between the spaces of the living and those of the dead. On a semiotic level, changes have been even more profound: (1) death has moved from a natural to a religious occurrence; (2) it has shifted from something largely accepted to a real taboo (Feifel 1963; Walter 1991); and, (3) it has progressively disappeared transitioning from a domestic/social phenomenon (Pincus 1976) to a private event, and eventually from a private event to something that is forbidden even to the dying, who is expected to mystify his/her condition.

The materiality of death is particularly important since it allows inspecting the individual and collective deep meanings and teleology associated to death (Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008). Still today, death exceeds human capacity of directly perceiving it, and thus limits our ability of representing and visualizing it (Bauman 1992). The materiality of death – through bodies, burials, cemeteries, etc. – shortens the representational gap since it 'materializes absence' as well as allows 'recovering presence' (Hockey, Komaromy, and Woothorpe 2010). The necropolises offer rich insights on the populations of the past, and vibrantly illustrate their relationship with death as much as their way of living by reproducing, among others, gender or social distinction (Meskell 1999). Contemporary cemeteries stand as collective spaces where individual memory intertwines with social representations of death and life.

The materiality of death also permits the emergence of associated rites and rituals (Bonsu and Belk 2003), which structurally imply the presence and use of specific focal objects. Ritualization of death embeds meanings, for example interpreting death as a passage (not the end of something but the transformation into something else). Death rites and rituals support symbolic regeneration of vitality (Metclaf and Huntington 1991). In sum, the materiality and ritualization of death are expressions of a society's cultural legacy, a dense sign shedding light on our preoccupation for the loved ones that passed away as well as for the society in which we live and that we pass down to the next generations.

Consumer Disposal and Death

Attention for the immediate economic implications of consumer behaviors has led researchers to focalize on the determinants of consumer choice and on the variable susceptible of affecting that choice. Consequently, research on how consumers make disposal decisions has remained quite scant (Macinnis and Folke 2010). Growing preoccupation for the environmental impact of materialism and over-consumption (Banerjee and McKeage 1994) has however spurred interest in consumer disposal.

Existing research has developed four main orders of contributions. First, scholars, in particular those of critical studies descent, have identified specific types of consumers more actively engaged in eco-friendly behaviors. Of particular relevance is the stream of eco-feminism, which rejects anthropocentrism and documents feminine eco-friendly market behaviors exerting a transformative impact on respective families, workplaces, and society at large (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001). Other studies further propose to draft the psychographics of 'green consumers', who should be more reactive to ad hoc communications (Shrum, McCarty, and Lowrey 2013).

Second, researchers have started unpacking the drivers of consumer disposal choices. In the context of clothing disposal, disposal choice is stimulated when consumers donate to charities more than to family and friends (Bianchi and Birtwistle 2011). As such, this study proves that the recipient affects disposal choice. Also, the extent to which disposed objects are relevant to the consumer self does matter. Identity-linked products, regardless of their nature, are in fact more likely to be recycled than trashed (Trudel et al. 2016). And even the perceived reduced distinctiveness of a consumer's possession, which derives from imitation, increases consumer's likelihood to dispose of that object (White and Argo 2011).

Third, researchers have explored the creative strategies that consumers adopt to divest and dispose, that is, the different types of disposal practices. The four most documented disposal practices include: (1) donation, that is, the gratuitous transfer of a property to a new owner, who is sometimes designated as the 'legitimate heir' since he/she is expected to take good care of the object (Herrmann 1997); (2) sale, that is, any ownership transfers regulated via the market, whose meaning may nonetheless differ according to the sale channels being used (Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005); (3) creative recycling, when disposed objects are transformed into new objects serving new functions (Holt 2002); and, (4) elimination, that is, the termination of an object's life cycle (Macinnis and Folke 2010).

Fourth, scholars show that disposed objects may be emotionally charged, both positively (positive valence deriving from associations between the object and the consumer's sense of self) and negatively (negative valence stemming from dissociation between the object and the consumer self; Lastovicka and Fernandez 2005). When objects are more than objects, disposal

is not only a matter of ownership transfer (donation, sale, elimination) but also a matter of emotional and symbolic detachment. McCracken (1986) observes that the way consumer dispose of meaningful objects is through consumption rituals. Ritualization provides the emotional elaboration that consumers need to dispose of things that are meaningful to them. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) document three types of disposal rituals, including iconic transfer (when the deep meanings are abstracted from the disposed object, which thus becomes an empty vessel, and re-embedded into a new iconic object), transitioning place (when objects' meanings are reduced by decontextualizing the objects and locating them in a neutral place to be then disposed), and cleansing (through which private meanings are stripped away and the disposed object is recommodified). The importance of cleansing also emerges in Cappellini's (2009) analysis of food leftovers reuse. She shows that families need to develop specific coping strategies to revert 'polluted' food into 'clean food'. In doing so, she proves that an obstacle to creative disposal derives from consumer interpretation of recycling as 'dirty', which should be read in light of Mary Douglas' (1966) theorization of dirtiness as 'being out of place'.

Consumer research on disposal has not directly addressed body disposal, with scholars at most addressing organ donation (Belk and Austin 1986). Consumer disposal research, however, provides fertile ground to interpret body disposal and eco-friendly burial practices. This phenomenon in fact also induces reflection in terms of what consumers may be more sensitive to eco-friendly burials (micro level of consumer analysis), what variables affect their body disposal choice, the alternatives they consider, and the ritualization of eco-friendly burial practices.

Methodology

The project is based on a mix-methods approach.

First, we used systematic document analysis (Bowen 2009) to cover a large spectrum of academic and managerial documental evidences about the state of the art in the death-care industry at an international Western scale. Document analysis is "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires the data to be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge." (2009, 27) The documents we reviewed include textual and visual data generated from systematic literature review, funeral agencies' websites and commercial documents, online blogs and forums discussing burial practices, cremation and funeral associations' reports and any additional material extending understanding on the phenomenon.

We were not interested in any forms of quantitative analysis (e.g. frequency counting; Downe-Wamboldt 1992) on the corpus of data document analysis generated. Our aims were in fact to derive both insights about megatrends in the burial industry and to identify the variety of eco-friendly alternatives that are to date available on the market. As such, we analyzed and interpreted the data in line with established interpretative research standards (Miles and Huberman 1984; Silverman 1993; Spiggle 1994). The presentation of our findings provides a maximum of details specific to our field context. By carefully clarifying the field, we foster

transferability of our results and meet the criterion of applicability used to assess the quality of case study reports (Lincoln and Guba 1990, p. 57).

Second, we complement secondary data with two orders of primary data: (1) multiple case studies (Eisenhardt 1989), which served to further document the variety of eco-friendly body disposal options that already exist on the market; and (2) an online survey that is directed to unveil consumer awareness, sentiment, and actual behavior in the field.

The questionnaire assisting the survey consisted of 19 questions divided in four core sections: (1) the first section included questions to understand respondents' attitude to the environment and their ecological sensitivity; (2) the second section explored respondents' preference for specific forms of burial practices (e.g. ashes dispersion, cremation) and their actual decisions (e.g. what they had already decided about their body disposal); (3) the third section elicited information about respondents' interest in eco-friendly ashes burial/dispersion services and about their motivations (this section assessed both personal interest in these practices and acceptance of eco-friendly burial services on the market, regardless of personal interest); and, (4) the last section included socio-demographic questions.

We diffused the questionnaire through Boschi Vivi project's website, social networks, and newsletter. From January 2016 to August 2017, we collected a total of 402 responses, with 376 questionnaires that are complete and valid. Respondents vary in terms of (1) sex (with 57% of women), (2) age (ranging from 20 to 88 years, 47% are between 36-60, 40% between 20-35, and 12% 61 or beyond), (3) residence (with 80% of respondents from the North of Italy:), (4) marital status (68% married/cohabiting, 42% single, 11% divorced/widow).

Preliminary Findings

In line with our research objectives, our preliminary findings are organized in three main sets: (1) a taxonomy of existing eco-friendly burials solutions at an international Western scale; (2) the identification of alternative marketing strategies that death-care innovative companies use in order to attract consumer interest and orient consumer decision-making; and, (3) consumer current cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in relation to eco-friendly burial practices.

State of the Art: David and Goliath

Burial and cremation are by far the two dominating burial practices in the West. Though varying across cultures, since the Stone Age, burial has been the most common practice. It presents three main environmental problems: (1) use of chemicals and contaminants for the caskets (Spongberg and Becks, 2000); (2) if the coffin is not chemically treated, then body leaking is faster and raises problems of water contamination (Spongberg and Becks, 2000); (3) land use and management (e.g. maintenance needs of cemeteries, -the restrictions of the land usage for other activities; Canning and Szmigin, 2010).

From the late 18th century population increase and decrease in mortality exacerbated these problems, and made cremation more popular. In the West, cremation is today constantly growing, also under governments' encouragements. For example, Italy has moved from 4% to 19% over the last twenty years (1997-2017), yet remains definitely lower than the European average (37% in 2017) (www.SEFIT.eu). Cremation has also negative environmental impact, mainly due to energy consumption and toxic emissions. These effects are however more

manageable via regulations (e.g. EU's standards about minimum temperatures to respect in the crematorium) and constant technological improvements (DEFRA, 2006).

Facing the giant, two alternative body disposal practices are emerging: (1) private storage, which implies keeping hashes at home or transforming them into jewels; and (2) the emergence of greener and more poetic public cemeteries (e.g. Natural Burial Grounds – NBGs), which add to the public space model of traditional cemeteries a socially enhanced experience of the commemorative practice. We focus on greener public cemeteries since they constitute the alternative business model to traditional cemeteries but we acknowledge private storage as an option that a minority of consumers prefers pursuing. Today, death-care practices have multiplied, integrating with traditional ones but introducing a completely different logic. Notably, innovators in this field leverage upon the ecological utility of cemeteries. Originated in the 90s, green cemeteries leverage upon growing environmental sensitivity and exploit opportunities deriving from new technologies. Differences across alternative green body disposal practices can be observed according to the treatment of: (1) the body itself, (2) the coffin that raises particular environmental preoccupation, and (3) the spaces of body storage and commemoration. First, with reference to the body, beyond burial and cremation today greener practices propose cryomation and resomation, which dispose of the body through liquid nitrogen cooling technology and dissolution potassium hydroxide technology respectively. Second, alternatives to traditional coffins include the Infinity burial suit (a biodegradable handmade garment infused with a biological mix of two different fungi and other microorganisms that facilitate body decomposition, toxin elimination, and transfer of nutrients to the surrounding soil) the Capsula mundi (a biodegradable shell containing the hashes or the body in fetal position that feeds a tree seed chosen by the deceased before his/her death) and Urna bios (biodegradable urn with a seed included, just for ashes). Third, greener modes of body storage are NBGs, which were first launched in the UK in 1993 and then rapidly exported abroad. This highly documented alternative (Carubia 2013; Clayden 2011; Clayden et al. 2010; Davies and Rumble 2012; Hockey et al. 2012; Wilson and Chiveralls, 2013) commonly implies designing a green area that becomes part of the landscape, where living and dead are brought together. NBGs generally avoid using tombstones and any other forms of visible human intervention. With reference to the Italian context, which we could more directly analyze, Boschi Vivi Project (BVP) is a pivotal experience of NBG started in 2015. This nonprofit practice provides the natural burial of ashes in forests and a service of integrated forest management (Lovens 2016a; 2016b). BVP attributes to each member a tree located in a forest obtained in concession by a public or private owner. Differently from many NBGs, in this case the fees are reinvested in forest maintenance, following a principle of circular economy (Lovens, Caldarice, in press).

In sum, alternative body-disposal practices can be classified according to two dimensions (figure 1): (1) the private versus public setting that body/hashes storage implies; and (2) the selling arguments that companies use to persuade their customers (poetic ritualization versus eco-friendliness). This classification reflects a company-centered perspective (where company store hashes and the communication/positioning strategy they use). As such, it does not reflect the real environmental impact of these alternative practices. Should we indicate which of these practices are more likely to express a more positive environmental impact, we would indicate those in the lower right cell, since they imply higher scale (being public systems of burial) and landscape maintenance.

Fig. 1 – Mapping the Innovative Commemorative Practices

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ashes jewels 	R i t u a l	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional cemeteries • Ashes dispersion in sea/nature
Personal/individual sphere		Public/collective spaces
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urna Bios • Capsula Mundi • Infinity Burial Suit 	E c o f r i e n d l y	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cryomation and Resomation • NBG • BVP

State of the Art: Goliath’s Marketing Strategies

After identifying and mapping the alternatives to traditional burial services, we additionally analyzed the different marketing strategies and practices among those innovative competitors. In the interest of brevity, we summarize our key findings in table 1.

These alternative companies all share a strictly personal interaction with their current and prospect customers. Instead of an indirect marketing approach, which is more common for traditional body disposal service providers, these players develop direct-to-consumer marketing actions. Three of them are particularly noteworthy: (1) co-designing the offer through active interactions with prospect customers; (2) customer education, which is necessary since environmental impacts of traditional body disposal practices are mostly unknown and new services are sometimes complex to explain; and, (3) customer entrepreneurship, which occurs whenever innovative players turn to crowd-funding. While these marketing actions are somehow similar to those adopted by mainstream players, they differ for the social and environmental impacts they favor and for the educational and sensitization effects on the population.

We also observed that countries with longer tradition in green body disposal practices tend to develop a two-layered marketing approach. Each company develops its positioning and

marketing strategy independently, yet it is also part of a network of other green companies expressing joint efforts to establish shared (quality) standards and foster development of the whole green body disposal system.

Table 1 – Alternative Marketing Strategies across Green Body Disposal Practices

Innovative practices	Main mktg tools	Target and geograph. exposure	Products	Prices	Key arguments
Crimation / Resomation	Web site, video	BtoB (partners), research	Not yet	n.a.	Environmentally cleaner alternative to traditional burial and cremation
Ashes jewelry	Web site, online sales	Online buyers	Standard & customized jewels	100-2000 €	Tomorrow traditions, Live.Love.Remember
Bios Urn	Web site, social networks, storytelling (video-interview of pioneer users)	People in 5 continents, 66.000 like (fb)	Urn & seed	145 €	Come back to life, catalyst for growth, affordable price
Capsula mundi	Design exhibitions, media, crowdfunding, toolkit	English speaking countries, 42.000 like (fb)	Urn (in future: biodegradable capsula for bodies)	380-420 €	Nature transformation cycle, limit the environmental impact
Infinite burial suit	Web site, storytelling: video of the “first adopter”, toolkit	Where natural burial is allowed	Suit & formal planning consultation	1300 €	Come together with the earth, no damage to the environment
NBGs	Web site, umbrella associations	Local people mainly	Commemorative place maintenance, burial service	400-1000 €	Contact with nature, alternative to traditional cemetery
BVP	Web site, social networks, off-line events (vis a vis, storytelling), crowdfunding	Local people mainly	Commemorative forest maintenance, burial service, ceremony consultation	430-7000 €	Environmental friendly, contact with nature, circular economy, alternative to traditional cemetery

With all due differences, all innovative death-care projects reduce the gap between life and death, and between nature and human beings. Their marketing strategy thus better responds to

micro and macro changes in consumers' attitudes towards death as well as meets consumers' increasing expectations in terms of environmental friendly solutions. In front of environmentally-sensitive customers, innovative companies highlight that a change in consumer aggregated behavior – also when it comes to decisions about body disposal – can lead to major environmental improvements.

The Consumer View

Based on 376 valid questionnaires, our third and last finding refers to a preliminary assessment of consumers' understanding of and interest in greener body disposal practices, with particular attention for NBGs that constitute the greenest alternative on the market (scalable and with positive effects in terms of land management).

Respondents show strong preference for cremation (91%) and ashes dispersion (92% of those interested in cremation). However, only 4% of them have actually declared their last wills, mostly due to resistance to dealing with any death-related matter (67%) and people's limited understanding of applicable regulations (32%). People interested in both cremation and ashes dispersion express particular interest in the NBG model (97%), since it allows contact with nature (58%) and helps prevent hydrogeological risks and maintain forests (26%).

We also checked motives of resistance to cremation and ashes dispersion in forests. Motives are strictly personal, since all of them have no ideological opposition to cremation and ashes dispersion. Instead, they express preference for other locations for ashes dispersion (sea, 75%; owned land, 13%) or storage (home storage, 13%).

Last, we collected insights about what people usually do in forests – mostly collection of natural products (35%), trekking (33%), and sport (9%) – and the extent to which they would maintain their habits in forests part of NBGs. 90% of them declare that they would not change their habits, even in commemorative forests where ashes are dispersed. The perceived compatibility of these different activities within the same forest is particularly notable since it suggests that greener body disposal practices attenuate people's avoidance of death-related issues.

Discussion

This ongoing research project provides four preliminary findings. First, we identify and map green(er) alternatives to traditional death-care services. Second, we detect analogies and differences in the marketing strategies of said green death-care practices. Third, we explore customers' interest in, sensitivity for, and understanding of burial practices and their environmental impact. Fourth, we detect three main macro factors that can facilitate or limit the real opportunities for innovators in the industry: (1) environmental sensitivity (currently, a positive trend), (2) technology; and, (3) regulation (currently, with scant supranational coordination that limits the diffusion of innovations and the internationalization of innovative companies). At the micro level, the main variables accounting for consumer decision-making are: cultural and psychological resistance for death-related issues and consumer competence (i.e. understanding) in the field of body disposal practices.

These preliminary results advance consumer disposal literature in three main ways. First, they fill a gap due to scant research on body and death disposal. The phenomenon is instead of the greatest importance for both its universality and environmental impact. We thus contribute by offering a comprehensive exploration of the state of the art in this domain/industry. Second, we also provide a process model that sheds light on the body disposal chain: (1) decisions about body disposal (burial, cremation, criomation, resomation); (2) decisions about material accessories accompanying body disposal (Capsula mundi, coffin, infinite burial suit, etc.); and, (3) decisions about body/ashes management/storage (private/public storage, dispersion, dispersion in monitored environments, etc.). Third, we contribute to the even more specific literature on factors limiting virtuous disposal behaviors. We not only detect key macro and micro factors that are likely to affect collective and individual disposal behaviors, but also provide empirical evidences about practices that can help diminish consumer resistance in death-related issues. Common practice assumes that life and death domains, as well as their spaces, should be kept separate. Beyond original hygienic motives, in line with Ariès (1975), we argue that this has long represented a collective exorcism against the evidence that death is part of life. Our data shows that NBGs allow for a more reassuring relationship with death – both our own and that of others. We posit that it depends on three main mechanisms: (1) NBGs attenuate separation between life and death (reconnection), which may help downplay death; (2) NBGs materialize death, make it more attemptable (at least we can experience trees, if not the abstraction of death), and thus less ambiguous; and, (3) through said materialization death is transformed into living, positive elements.

Finally, our research provides some managerial and policy implications. We clearly pinpoint the death-care market by identifying alternative business models (dominant/emergent and then different types of emergent models; fig. 1) and marketing strategies (table 1). We then provide insights about ways to attenuate consumer resistance to death-related communications. We show that reconnection, materialization, and transformation can prove effective. We also see market opportunities related to innovative body disposal practices associated to the emergence of new professions, and thus new jobs. In the context of NBGs, for instance, we document the emergence of ‘forest undertakers’ and ‘laic speakers of ceremonies’. Policy-wise, we highlight key macro and micro factors that policy makers should take into account when designing environmental actions and regulations.

References

Ariès, Philippe. *Western attitudes toward death: from the Middle Ages to the present*. Vol. 3. JHU Press, 1975.

Bobby Banerjee and Kim McKeage (1994) "How Green Is My Value: Exploring the Relationship Between Environmentalism and Materialism", in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 21*, eds. Chris T. Allen and Deborah Roedder John, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 147-152.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Mortality, immortality and other life strategies*. Stanford University Press, 1992.

Belk, Russell W. and Mark Austin (1986), “Organ Donation as a Function of Extended Self and Materialism,” in *Advances in Health Care Research*, ed. M. Vankatesan and Wade Lancaster, Dayton, OH: Association for Health Care Research, 84–88.

- Bianchi, Constanza, and Grete Birtwistle. "Consumer clothing disposal behaviour: a comparative study." *International journal of consumer studies* 36.3 (2012): 335-341.
- Bonsu, Samuel K., and Russell W. Belk. "Do not go cheaply into that good night: Death-ritual consumption in Asante, Ghana." *Journal of Consumer Research* 30.1 (2003): 41-55.
- Bowen, Glenn A. "Document analysis as a qualitative research method." *Qualitative research journal* 9.2 (2009): 27-40.
- Canning, L., & Szmigin, I. (2010). Death and disposal: The universal, environmental dilemma. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(11-12), 1129-1142.
- Cappellini, Benedetta. "The sacrifice of re - use: the travels of leftovers and family relations." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 8.6 (2009): 365-375.
- Carubia J., 2013 Sustainable End-of-Life Arrangements: An overview. Proceedings of The National Conference On Undergraduate Research (NCUR) 2013 University of Wisconsin La Crosse, WI April 11 – 13, 2013.
- CIA World Factbook. (Search for 'People and Society')." 2016, retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xx.html> (last vis. 11/08/2017)
- Clayden, A. (2011). Reclaiming and reinterpreting ritual in the woodland burial ground. *Sacred places in modern western culture*, 289-294.
- Clayden, A., Green, T., Hockey, J., & Powell, M. (2010). From cabbages to cadavers: Natural burial down on the farm. *Deathscapes: Spaces for death, dying, mourning and remembrance*, 119-138. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Davies, D., & Rumble, H. (2012). *Natural burial: traditional-secular spiritualities and funeral innovation*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- DEFRA (2006). Cremation temperature. AQ19 (06) Amendment of PG5/2 (04), [online]. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Retrieved July 22, 2008, from <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/ppc/localauth/pubs/guidance/notes/aqnotes/pdf/aq19-06.pdf>
- Dobscha, Susan, and Julie L. Ozanne. "An ecofeminist analysis of environmentally sensitive women using qualitative methodology: The emancipatory potential of an ecological life." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 20.2 (2001): 201-214.
- Douglas, Mary T. (1966), *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept, of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Downe - Wamboldt, Barbara. "Content analysis: method, applications, and issues." *Health care for women international* 13.3 (1992): 313-321.
- Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. "Building theories from case study research." *Academy of management review* 14.4 (1989): 532-550.
- Fahlander, Fredrik, and Terje Oestigaard, eds. *The materiality of death: bodies, burials, beliefs*. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008.
- Feifel, Herman. "The taboo on death." *The American Behavioral Scientist* (pre-1986) 6.9 (1963): 66.

Ferraro, Rosellina, Baba Shiv, and James R. Bettman. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die: Effects of mortality salience and self-esteem on self-regulation in consumer choice." *Journal of Consumer Research* 32.1 (2005): 65-75.

Hajkowicz SA, Cook H, Littleboy A. 2012. *Our Future World: Global megatrends that will change the way we live. The 2012 Revision.* CSIRO, Australia.

Herrmann, Gretchen M. "Gift or commodity: What changes hands in the US garage sale?." *American ethnologist* 24.4 (1997): 910-930.

Hockey, Jenny, Carol Komaromy, and Kate Woodthorpe, eds. *The matter of death: Space, place and materiality.* Springer, 2010.

Hockey, J., Green, T., Clayden, A., & Powell, M. (2012). Landscapes of the dead? Natural burial and the materialization of absence. *Journal of Material Culture*, 17(2), 115-132.

Holt, Douglas B. "Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding." *Journal of consumer research* 29.1 (2002): 70-90.

Lastovicka, John L., and Karen V. Fernandez. "Three paths to disposition: The movement of meaningful possessions to strangers." *Journal of Consumer Research* 31.4 (2005): 813-823.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Egon G. Guba. "Judging the quality of case study reports." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 3.1 (1990): 53-59.

Lovens A. (2016a) Private Initiatives in Forests: Sustainable Lifestyles (and -why not-Sustainable "Deathstyles"). EURA 2016 – City lights. Cities and citizens within/beyond/notwithstanding the crisis, Turin, 16-18 June 2016.

Lovens A. (2016b) Boschi Vivi, servizi cimiteriali e forestali integrati. Un'occasione per la valorizzazione dei boschi e la ri-funzionalizzazione di aree fragili. *Culture della sostenibilità*, 17:70-80.

Lovens, A. and Caldarice O. (forthcoming) Planning Strategies for Multi-Sectorial Integration: The experience of Boschi Vivi (Italy) Resilience cities series, book 5 Circular Urban Metabolism: Generating Co-Benefits Through Urban Resilience Transition, ed. Springer (in press).

Mac Innis, Deborah J., and Valerie S. Folkes. "The disciplinary status of consumer behavior: A sociology of science perspective on key controversies." *Journal of Consumer Research* 36.6 (2009): 899-914.

Mandel, Naomi, and Dirk Smeesters. "The sweet escape: Effects of mortality salience on consumption quantities for high-and low-self-esteem consumers." *Journal of Consumer Research* 35.2 (2008): 309-323.

McCracken, Grant. "Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods." *Journal of consumer research* 13.1 (1986): 71-84.

Meskell, Lynn. "Archaeologies of life and death." *American Journal of Archaeology* (1999): 181-199.

Metcalf, Peter, and Richard Huntington. *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual.* Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Miles, Matthew B., and A. Michael Huberman. "Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods, Beverly Hills." (1984).

Phillips, Anne. *Our bodies, whose property?*. Princeton University Press, 2013.

Pincus, Lily. *Death and the family: The importance of mourning*. Vintage Books USA, 1976.

Rook, Dennis W. "The ritual dimension of consumer behavior." *Journal of Consumer Research* 12.3 (1985): 251-264.

Santarsiero A., Cutilli D., Cappiello G., Minelli L., 2000. Environmental and legislative aspects concerning existing and new cemetery planning. *Microchemical Journal* 67 (2000) 141-145

SEFIT (2008) *Libro bianco sul settore funerario italiano*.

Shrum, L. J., John A. McCarty, and Tina M. Lowrey. "Buyer characteristics of the green consumer and their implications for advertising strategy." *Journal of Advertising* 24.2 (1995): 71-82.

Silverman, David. "Interpreting qualitative data: Strategies for analyzing talk, text and interaction." London: Sage. Swain, A. & Jones, G. (1993) Intensity and Frequency dimensions of competitive state anxiety. *Journal of Sports Sciences* 11 (1993): 533-542.

Spiggle, Susan. "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research." *Journal of consumer research* 21.3 (1994): 491-503.

Spongberg, A. L., & Becks, P. M. (2000). Inorganic soil contamination from cemetery leachate. *Water, air, and soil pollution*, 117(1-4), 313-327.

Trudel, Remi, Jennifer J. Argo, and Matthew D. Meng. "The Recycled Self: Consumers' Disposal Decisions of Identity-Linked Products." *Journal of Consumer Research* 43.2 (2016): 246-264.

Walter, Tony. "Modern death: taboo or not taboo?." *Sociology* 25.2 (1991): 293-310.

White, Katherine, and Jennifer J. Argo. "When imitation doesn't flatter: The role of consumer distinctiveness in responses to mimicry." *Journal of Consumer Research* 38.4 (2011): 667-680.

Wilson, L., & Chiveralls, K. (2013) *Tradition and change in contemporary burial practices: cemeteries and sustainability* (Doctoral dissertation, TASA-The Australian Sociological Association).

Web sites:

<http://www.irtl.co.uk>

<http://resomation.com/>

<https://www.cremationsolutions.com/>

<https://urnabios.com/>

<http://www.capsulamundi.it/>

<http://coeio.com/>

<https://www.greenacreswoodlandburials.co.uk/>

<http://www.friedwald.de/>

<http://www.naturbestattung.at/>

<http://www.naturbestattungen.de/>

<http://www.memorialecosystems.com/>

<http://www.robpc.ca/>

<http://www.sydneynaturalburialparks.com.au/>

<http://wellington.govt.nz/services/community-and-culture/cemeteries/makara-cemetery/about-makara-cemetery>

<http://boschivivi.it/>