

# Profane-sacred Attributes in The Design of Funeral Services in Yogyakarta and Solo, Indonesia

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**Abstract.** Funeral services are part of public facilities with deep meaning for the mourners to 'say goodbye'. In Indonesia, funeral services are regulated in Spatial and Regional Planning<sup>1</sup> that adapts to the local context and culture. However, the development of funeral services encountered various obstacles in the availability of adequate facilities and have 'less-meaning' in small towns. The death of a loved one causes psychological distress for the family and those left behind. This problem underlies study related to the meaning of profane-sacred values in funeral services. The method used is a qualitative study with a storytelling approach through observations at funeral homes and crematoriums in Yogyakarta and Solo, Indonesia. This study shows that the profane zones of funeral services can manifest in flexibility, continuity of space, relief of spatial dimensions, and clarity of circulation. The 'chaotic' phases of mourning can be neutralised with monochrome colours to create an atmosphere of consolation. Meanwhile, sacred zones can be applied rigid, angular, and centred as a form of honour. Landscape interventions may aim to neutralise a grief situation and potentially be an aspect of natural healing. Moreover, landscape planning around the main building can address sustainability and environmental balance. The results of this study are expected to provide a discourse that funeral buildings are not only seen as 'a space of activity', but beyond that, it has a significant role in healing aspects in bereavement conditions.

Keywords: Profane-Sacred, Design, Funeral Services, Indonesia

## 1. Introduction

Funeral services are becoming essential in many countries nowadays, given that the death curve tends to increase recently. Previous studies of European cemetery projects placed funeral services as part of permanent land use that creates a natural urban system. "...cemetaries, as a complex structure, are comprised of essential elements: burial space, vegetation (soft scape), architecture, and spatial elements (hardscape) are situated in the local landscape (context).." (Długozima, 2020). Moreover, planning for communal cemeteries in Indonesia has been regulated in policies related to green open spaces as stated in regional regulation number 1 of 2013 concerning funerals and crematoriums. In metropolitan cities of Indonesia, such as Jakarta and Surabaya, the municipality's efforts to provide modern funeral services have been successfully implemented. However, funeral services encountered various obstacles in the lack of cremation furnaces and other supporting funeral services in small cities like Yogyakarta and Solo.

Apart from funeral activities, the cremation process is an alternative in handling corpses driven by lack of cemeteries in some areas, hereditary beliefs, medical reasons, and the impact of a pandemic. The process of handling corpses other than funerals services cannot be separated from public facilities such as crematoriums and columbariums. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup>Rencana Tata Ruang Wilayah (RTRW) in English means Spatial and Regional Planning

mourning services are usually designed with a universal design concept regardless of ethnicity, race, and religion. In Indonesia, crematoriums are managed by social and religious organisations whose operation must obtain permission from the municipalities in each city. Thus, the design process must involve the site's context and culture.

In human history, the practice of corpses cremation has ancient origins with evidence of relics of prehistoric sites dating back 8000 years BC dominated by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. In Europe itself, cremation became common in the Ancient Greek and Roman empires. The cremation was a common practice in regions of Ancient Greece and into the Roman Empire until the spread of early Christianity, which forbids the ceremony to eradicate the influence of Greco-Roman pagan rituals in favour of the doctrine of resurrection (Maroussis, 2012). In Indonesia, cremation has started since prehistoric and after independence, and most practices follow Hinduism-Buddhism traditions. Cremation has become an alternative practice in the modern era, considering land efficiency and medical reasons.

Feelings of grief often distract a human's psychology, especially the family and relatives. A bereavement is a form of depression, which usually resolves spontaneously over time. The bereaved person may experience anxiety, insomnia, inertia, hyperactivity or a feeling of helplessness (Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2020). In addition, the various expressions and responses of the bereavement condition need to be considered in the design to reduce the psychological burden on the mourners. This study aims to determine what indicators need to be considered in designing profane-sacred space in the funeral building. The findings in this study are expected to provide recommendations in designing funeral facilities, especially in Indonesia.

## 2. Previous Studies

### 2.1. Funeral Services: Activities and Facilities

According to Sørensen (2009), two categories of 'bodies' are present at funerals: corpses and mourners. The corpse has thus assumed the role of 'a dead thing' and, more crucially, 'a powerless thing' without potency. Thus, the corpse is detached from its role as an 'agent'. Some further action is taken by others who grieve, move, and even react to the corpses. The earliest stage in handling the corpses starts from the morgues located in the funeral home before it is finally cremated or buried. According to Dartey *et al.* (2021), a study on workers and visitors in morgues plays a vital role in mortuary design. However, working in a mortuary is a highly stressful experience (Sirohiwal *et al.*, 2011). The experience of stress should be reduced by manifesting a design concept that creates an atmosphere of inner peace for workers respectfully.

The modern and ideal mortuary concept could protect the users from possible diseases from a dirty and unhealthy environment (Sirohiwal *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the morgue area should have management of the disposal of various types of waste products, so the cleanliness must be adequately maintained. The hygiene factor is essential, considering that the handling of corpses should be careful. Then after the corpses are clean-prepared, the next activity will be moving to the funeral home.

Accessibility, connectivity, and identity are needed in designing funeral services to answer the possibility of further development in the future. The efficiency of the funeral service will reduce the burden of the bereaved family. After a few days, the corpse is given consolation following the family's religious beliefs, and then the next process is cremation. A crematory means a structure containing a furnace or retort used to cremate human remains (Benmoshé, 2017). In Indonesia, not all cremation processes are carried out indoors, and some traditions carry out cremation outdoors, such as Balinese, Indian traditions and adherents of the Confucian sect.

Several driving factors make the trend of cremation in developing countries an alternative to handling corpses, considering that the cause of death recently demands hygiene. The cremation can be seen as one of the modern strategies in mortuary services and is explicitly promoted as the most rational and 'clean' way (hygienic, spiritually pure). Also, crematorium design influences the user's behaviour and emotions and can amplify feelings of awe or anxiety or even reduce sadness (Klaassens & Groote, 2013). In this study, the crematorium design needs to consider the behaviour factors of family, relatives and building users in every activity.

After the cremation process is complete, the next step is to scatter the remains of the ashes or store them in the columbarium. A columbarium is a spatial arrangement in a building intended and used to accommodate the remaining ashes from the cremation process. Moreover, the family usually visits the columbarium to commemorate the event or release the longing. Not all cremated ashes are stored in public columbarium facilities. Some families keep the ashes at home, and others throw the ashes into the sea.

## 2.2. Profane and Sacred in Architectural Discourses

The human life cycle cannot be separated from the profane and sacred values. Humans try to respond to transcendent entities through what they see, including architectural works (Wardhani, 2016). The profane is not profound as 'non-sacred' but becomes a dialectic of vertical and horizontal relationships (Mangunwijaya, 2009). For example, humans spontaneously feel a fundamental appreciation of the 'highs' and 'lows' in architecture. The high is associated with everything noble, safe, and ruling around, while the low is associated with unsatisfied reality, danger, and subordinate (Wardhani, 2016). The profane-sacred hierarchy is the essence of the sinful journey of life that gradually leads to the sacred.

The sacred approach is the analogical relationship between divine and cosmic order. In addition, the sacred space is a break or transition between the profane world of the non-sacred. It provides a space for the physical, human, and spiritual to connect (Mishra & Dave, 2019). At the same time, the profane approach explains the human and artistic order, which includes a ritual context (Schuon, 2003, p.119). For profane experience, space is homogeneous and neutral; there are no gaps that qualitatively distinguish the various parts of the mass (Eliade, 1987)

Moreover, the symbolism in the sacred elements is universal, allowing this approach to embodying spiritual states and psychological characteristics, regardless of metaphysical truths and historical facts of religion (Schuon, 2003). Thus, every sacred space implies hierophany, a sacred disturbance that detaches a region from the surrounding cosmic environment and makes it qualitatively different (Eliade, 1987).

In this study, profane-sacred discourses eliminate religious values and focus on 'zoning values' in each funeral activity. In addition to examining profane-sacred space through various symbolisms, the flow of activities can also be a direction for design interventions. Thus, using a storytelling approach in funeral activities will reflect self-actualisation, which was original as part of 'body', and then turned into an 'idea'.

## 3. Methods

The method used is a qualitative approach with field studies at two funeral homes and one crematorium in Yogyakarta and Solo to identify the primary zoning accommodating funeral services. The field survey was conducted at the *Perkumpulan Urusan Kematian Jogjakarta (PUKJ)* funeral home (CS1), *Yayasan Wahana Mulia Abadi* crematorium (CS2), and *Thiong Ting* funeral home (CS3) below (see figure 3.1.):



Figure 3.1. Case Studies (field survey, 2021)

When interviewing key persons, the data collection method used field sketches, documentation, and voice recordings. The presentation of the analysis uses a storytelling approach to provide an in-depth interpretation of the flow of activities. "...Stories construct chains of spatial operations, creating a representation of space and implying local order.." (de Certeau, 2011). Telling stories about the activities can trigger further knowledge performance through various explorations on the transformation of space zones. In this study, the author acts as a "storytelling agent" who observes the flow of activities by obtaining information from other agents such as officers and visitors. The author limits interaction with the deceased's family as a form of respect for the mourning conditions. The research scheme can be seen in figure 3.2. below:

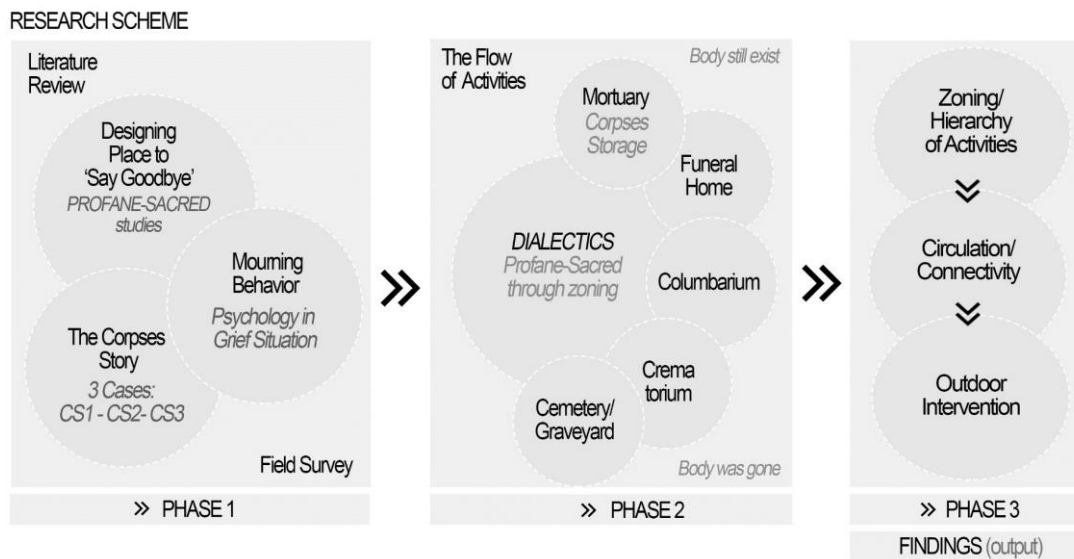


Figure 3.2. Research Scheme (Author, 2021)

#### 4. Discussion and Results

Funeral services are known to serve multiple functions for bereaved persons. There is also a common, intuitively reasonable assumption of positive associations between funeral activities and bereavement adjustment (Birrell *et al.*, 2020). Funeral services in Indonesia provide death services ranging from cleaning of corpses, funeral activities, cremation, storage of ashes, processing of death certificates, and celebration of specific commemorations. The meaning of profane-sacred elements can be found in every meaning of activities at funeral services. However, more than that, profane-sacred studies in a universal context can harmonise between tangible and intangible aspects of a design. The stages of analysis are as follows:

#### 4.1. Profane-Sacred Symbolism: Colours, Shapes, and Metaphors

The cremation process involves several different stages within the various elements of the program, indicating an inherent tendency to ceremonial and ritual experiences. Crematoriums serve two primary purposes: facilitating the cremation ceremony and process and providing a memorial place for loved ones (Maroussis, 2012). The spatial layout that manifests in CS1 consists of a hall with various possible partitions that adjust several activities. As for CS2, circulation and movement are limited, so it can only accommodate a two-burner cremation procession. As for CS3, circulation and movement are more flexible, and the space is clearly defined. After tracing the flow of activities, the discussion continues on the profane-sacred symbolism in each building.

Profane-sacred symbolism is also expected to embody colours, shapes, and other metaphors. Mediation in architecture is illustrated as 'the middle zone', 'bringing together different parties and oscillating between discrete entities' (Nanji, 2016). The sacred architecture was created as a physical and symbolic 'mediator'. In CS1, white and blue dominate the façade and interior. Meanwhile, the combination of natural materials dominates the building elements in CS2. The impression of old-style on the concept of ancient Dutch and "Chinese *Peranakan*" architecture can be found in the cremation furnace area, the roof, and the main fence in front of the main building. After the renovation in 2021, the impression is closer to the white monochrome colour's dominance by replacing the floor material from natural stone colours with white ceramics. In CS3, monochrome colours and glass materials give a modern impression. The combination of Chinese ornaments is dominant, starting from the gate, roof, column to the ceiling.

Interior colour is a ubiquitous component of every architecture design that strongly characterizes commercial environments and significantly impacts psychological functioning and satisfaction on the people living in these environments (Costa *et al.*, 2018). Monochromatic colours are sacred elements that keep the assumptions of colour closeness to certain beliefs. "*Empty white rooms have become the default solution because there is an assumption that we should not be exposed to symbols of other people's faith if that can be avoided.*" (Crompton, 2013). Monochrome colour is dominated in these three case studies. This gives the impression that monochrome colours, primarily white, are the colour choice most often found in funeral services designs.

Minor combinations such as natural colours dominated by grey and brown or oriental ornaments such as red and gold do not obscure the meaning of sacred space but provide a balance so that it is not monotonous. In addition, combinations of more than one colour are found in commercial use spaces such as admin rooms, cafeterias, and casket sales. This illustrates that a 'profane space' can provide relief for visitors, releasing the sacred zone that seems formal and rigid. The findings of this study contrast with studies in Japan, especially in Kanagawa, Osaka, Shizuoka, and Sendai, where the impression of a funeral building has darkish colour tones such as brown and black (Susanto, 2017). This may be affected by the intervention of philosophy and cultural context in designing funeral services in various countries.

The existence of a vertical element reveals the direction to the Supreme. *Diafan*, which means 'light that penetrates' will result from the choice of light and transparent construction on the funeral home to provide much openness. In addition, the role of light also affects the sacred quality of the room. The principle of light as the presence or representation of a symbol of grace becomes a religious appreciation because 'light comes amid darkness'. The term darkness in this study is not interpreted as 'something terrible' or related to sin, but sadness and raging feelings caused by death. Natural light in CS1 and CS2 enters the building because of the many open windows and doors. Meanwhile, the artificial lighting in CS3 dominates the main activities of the funeral so that the atmosphere becomes more

intimate and private. Natural lighting in the CS3 building is obtained through an expansive terrace, making it easier for visitors to get out of the funeral ceremony if they cannot contain their grief anymore.

#### 4.2. Circulation: Rituals Between Indoor and Outdoor Space

Circulation arrangements, both inside and outside the room, have a significant role because the diversity of activities makes the funeral service building complex circulation. First, the vehicle circulation in CS1 and CS3 distinguishes between the corpse's arrival and the visitor parking area. However, in CS2, vehicle circulation is not separated between ambulances and visitor's vehicles. This causes the arrival of ambulances and visitor's vehicles to occur simultaneously and often leads to sadness. The sketches of various activities in three case studies can be seen in figure 4.1. below:

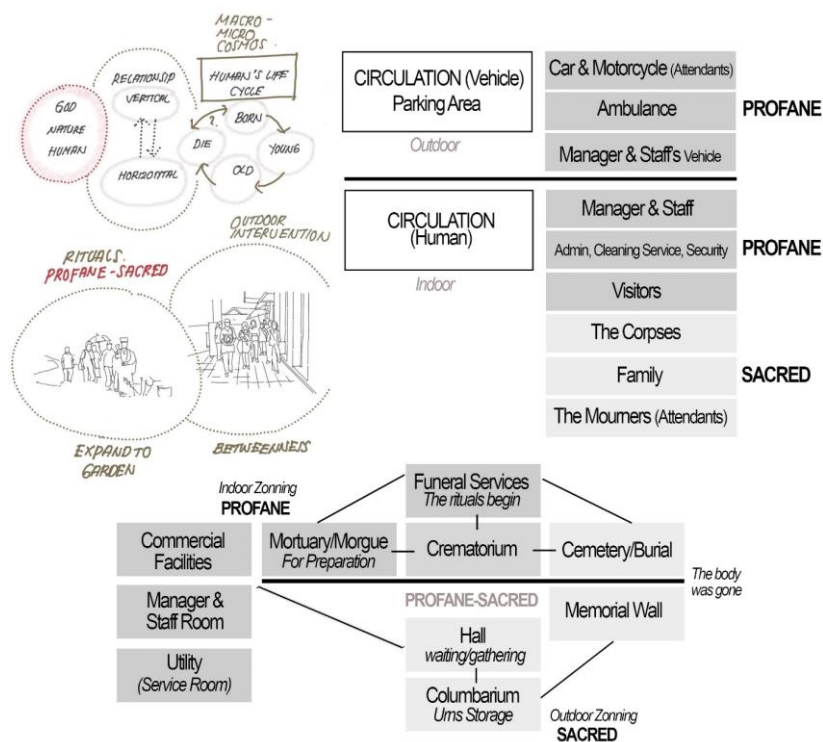


Figure 4.1. The circulation and transition based on field data (Author, 2019)

In this series of mourning activities, it is appropriate to consider the sensitivity of feelings that affect the continuity of rituals. In some funeral practices, the visitor's reaction is emotionally traumatic. "...the reaction articulates as profound horror, the most potent cause of which is the corpse, because it traumatically reminds us of our materiality.." (Sørensen, 2009). Feelings of sadness will cause psychological disorders for a person. The relationship between the atmosphere of 'inner calm' and the flow of circulation can also be approached by distinguishing the circulation of arrivals between corpses, mourners, and administrators.

The circulation in the CS1 building is linear, from parking facilities to funeral homes with one-gate access. In the CS2 building, circulation is concentrated on the cremation process and limited to only the closest family. Two-gates access has been implemented in the CS3 building, and the separation of ambulance circulation is also clearly defined. The circulation of mourners can be regulated continuously as some rituals may expand inside out. The orientation of the main entrance is expected not to obscure mourners and can be found quickly and clearly. The arrangement of two-gates access may be appropriate, considering

that 'chaos' is most likely an extreme response from family and relatives who tend to be 'hyperbolic'.

Furthermore, the cremation process often begins with crying and screaming hysteria in the committal chamber, the intermediary room between the family and the cremation oven. The committal chamber marks the vital moment of transition in the procession where the corpse is committed to the furnace. This is the final 'area' where the bereaved can be with the corpse at its last moment, providing space to gather at the door of the incinerator for a final farewell (Maroussis, 2012). In this situation, the sensitivity of family and relatives creates a more intimate and private space. Based on the field survey, the agencies involved in this zone are families, cremation officers, and the bodies themselves who have been prepared for the burning process. This zone is crucial so that the layout design of the committal room is expected to be a structure-free hall to provide a feeling of relief without the intervention of vertical elements.

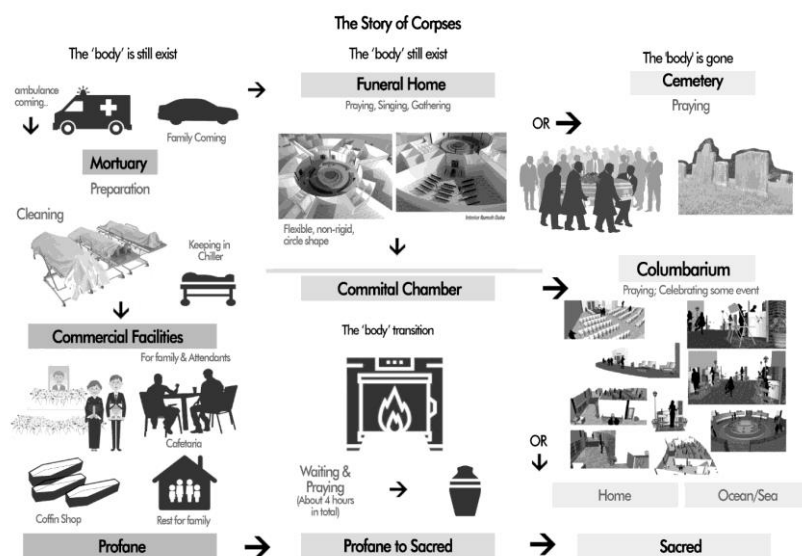


Figure 4.2. profane-sacred zones based on field data (Author, 2019)

After observing the three case studies, the profane-sacred zone in funeral buildings can be seen in Figure 4.2 above and Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1. Activities, Space, and Values (source: field survey, 2021)

Case Study	Building Section	Room/Space	Activities	Values
C1; C3	Funeral Home	mortuary	handling corpses and preparation	profane
		chiller	corpses storage	profane
C1; C2; C3		hall (praying)	funerals service – praying and rituals – family gathering	profane-sacred
C1; C3	Supporting Facilities	commercial facilities	cafeteria – family inns – casket shop – mini-mart	profane
C1; C3		service, mechanical engineering room	maintenance	profane
C2	Crematorium	committal chamber	cremation – ash & skeleton separation	profane-sacred
		hall (for waiting)	waiting and family gathering	profane

Case Study	Building Section	Room/Space	Activities	Values
C1	Columbarium	urns storage	storage – praying and rituals	sacred
-		memorial wall	praying and rituals	sacred
-	Cemeteries	graveyard	praying and rituals	sacred

### 4.3. Outdoor Intervention: Cemetery and Environmental Sustainability

A cemetery is established to be used for the final disposal of human remains and their memorials (Benmoshé, 2017). In Indonesia, cemetery complexes are part of urban public facilities that are expected to support the natural system of urban regeneration. Cemeteries in Indonesia consist of public and family funerals in each sub-district regulated in the green open space legislation. The preservation of buildings can benefit the urban environment, such as water absorption and endemic plants that support contextual sites.

In big cities, where there is no longer any vacant land in the city centre, new graves are starting to spread to the city's outskirts (Hariyono, 2015). Currently, burial complexes in Indonesia tend to be located in suburban areas because of urban land limitations. As for the three case studies selected, the burial process was carried out separately and was not integrated with supporting funeral services. For CS1, the location is on the city's outskirts but far from the location of CS2 (for the following process, which is cremation). In CS1, the funeral home was not accompanied by cremation purposes, so the subsequent cremation was carried out in the CS2 building. This also happened in CS3, where the cremation process did not occur in one location but moved to other locations. These mourning processions are expected to support allocating a series of activities in the same place regarding efficiency aspects.

In addition, a sustainable environment can also be supported by the presence of a columbarium and memorial wall. The columbarium serves as a repository for ashes, acting as a continuous place of return, rest and reflection to remember the beloved one (Maroussis, 2012). Columbarium usually has a strong relationship with the natural context, creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere. The appropriate term for describing a walled garden with sacred values and representing the romance of pure love is *Hortus conclusus*. *Hortus conclusus* is a closed garden, a typology of gardens surrounded by fences, walls, buildings or dense vegetation (Plevoets & Patel, 2021). *Hortus conclusus* is also used in poetry and visual arts as a metaphor for heaven or a symbol of love and purity. The term *Hortus conclusus* can give some idea that the landscape design around the funeral building can offer a 'garden of paradise' or garden of Eden's concept. The symbolism of 'love' in landscape planning may answer the healing aspect after a situation that implies sadness has ended with surrender and sincerity of self-acceptance.

Experience as a mourner manifests several conditions that can be considered in the design of funeral services. The results of this study are in line with previous research, which states that architecture explores how various rituals of daily life are framed in space by the buildings we inhabit. It penetrates beyond traditional assumptions to deal with something more implicit: how buildings shape and reflect our experiences of which we remain unconscious (Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2020). From the discussion above, the behaviour of mourners forms a profane-sacred zone in funeral facilities, and these rituals provide a 'story' of unconscious hierarchical transitions. The findings of this study are also in line with a previous study by Mishra & Dave (2019), which states that the attributes of a sacred space consist of space and volume, scale and proportion, light and shadow, colour, and connection with nature.



## 5. Conclusion

As part of urban life, funeral services become 'a place to say goodbye' and transcend self-awareness. Through a storytelling approach, this study shows that the behaviour of mourners forms a profane-sacred space in funeral services. The profane space manifests flexible form, continuous, and clarity of circulation. The mourning conditions in the sacred zone are neutralised with monochromatic colours to create an atmosphere of consolation. Furthermore, profane spaces are found in funeral homes supported by commercial facilities such as family inns, admin rooms and cafeterias, which are dominated by more colour tones.

On the other hand, sacred space can manifest in rigid, tilted, and centred forms considered a series of worship and reverence. Landscape interventions may neutralise bereavement conditions and act as 'a natural healer'. In addition, the landscape can also address aspects of the sustainability and environmental balance of the site. The results of this study are expected to be a discourse for an architect to create an integrated atmosphere both tangible and intangible in future funeral services. The limitation of this research is that the discussion only focuses on the meaning of profane-sacred space in funeral services through the flow of activities. Further research can observe that the physical environment, such as colour, material, and surface texture, may influence the behaviour of persons in mourning situations.

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