

Polish Funerals: History and Contemporary Changes

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Abstract

Objectives. The aim of the article is to present history and recent changes in Polish funerals. Contemporary changes are introduced by new actors of this social drama: undertakers, owners of crematoria and masters of ceremonies.

Methods. In the research conducted in 2010-2012 I employed qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews.

Results. The modern funeral rite in Poland is influenced by the burial rituals of the Slavs and the Christian cultural traditions. The Second World War was followed by a period of modest funerals organized by the municipal authorities. Then, the standard ritual with theatrical rules and *decorum* was launched by modern undertakers in the 90s. Funerals – being the most traditional of Polish customs – nevertheless undergo the processes of professionalization and institutionalisation. As the funeral parlour takes control over the body of the dead it shapes a certain standard of the Catholic traditional funeral. This leads on one hand, to the unification of the Catholic burials along with the fading of regional differences. On the other hand, the parlours have rich offerings, which affect the diversification of funerals depending on financial resources and social hierarchy. The dead acquires a social-economic status. The mourners lost their influence on the ritual forms and assumed the role of customers expecting the performance of all services. The burial rite was transferred into the public space, the institutions professionally controlling the ritual. Instead of regional diversification of folk traditions, there are differences between the funeral in the country (and in small towns) and in the city.

Conclusions. A characteristic of the Polish funeral culture is the clash of modernity and premodern persisting customs and beliefs.

Keywords: funeral, tradition, ritual, and corpse.

Introduction

This article was developed based on a two-year empirical study under the project financed by the Ministry of Science and High Education, no. 116081739, ‘Transformations of attitudes and customs of Poles in the culture of burial: Perspectives of representatives of the funeral sphere’. The main goal of the study was to capture the transformations occurring in the culture of burial, in funeral infrastructure, in attitudes and celebrations by Polish Catholics and non-believers from the perspective of funeral representatives. I limited my study to Catholic and lay funerals. Funerals of other denominations and ethnic groups require a separate study and communication with these groups. The collected materials on burials describe how a funeral is organised by a funeral parlour. I assumed that an insight into the secrets of the profession of funeral experts would allow for better

understanding of the modern *post mortem* rituals, and for assessing how the burials developed in the twentieth and twenty-first-century. ‘The knowledge of the professional role of the funeral director – the key player in the drama and body guardian – is crucial for deep understanding of the modern funeral customs’ (Howarth, 1993, p.221).

Methods

In the study I used qualitative methods. These were mainly semi-structured scenario-based interviews (Lofland et al, 2009) with undertakers. This means that I prepared the main topics of conversations but their development depended on how it worked with particular informant. This method is of course limited because the gathered materials are filtered by ‘the facade’ of the roles played by undertakers. They cultivate ‘the micropolitics’ which means strategies by which individuals and groups use their sources of power (Hoyle, 1982). As the ethnographer has always critically to assess gathered materials, I confronted interviewees with other sources. I also tried to understand the way of building the facade in the informants’ discourses following the advice of Jack Douglas (1971).

Favoured by me is the approach of Jean-Claude Kaufmann (2010, p.11), who proposes the method of ‘understanding interview’. I also employed the following methods: questionnaire interviews, observation (semantic analysis) of photos, brochures and advertisements. The collected material covers the transcription of 46 interviews, records of responses to 27 surveys, records of 168 responses to the phone survey, records of observations and field notes, photo documentation of funeral fairs and parlours and one lay funeral, magazines, brochures, leaflets, books by the masters of ceremony, audio-visual materials and funeral gadgets.

Slavic roots

The formula for the modern funeral rite in Poland is influenced by the burial rituals of the Slavs and the Christian cultural traditions. Juliusz Chróścicki (1974) reconstructs the main elements of the Slavic funeral. After the death of a member, the whole family watched him over. Then, he was taken to the pagan graveyard. The grief procession was attended by the hired criers who lamented, tore their clothes and harmed themselves to bloody wounds. The persons who demised with a sudden, rapid death were buried at the crossroads or in the forest. In the northwestern regions of the country the bodies of the dead were burnt. This rite was related to the Łużyce culture, and for the Slavic it was connected with the cult of sun and fire. With the dead, all his objects of daily use were burnt as well. The burnt human bones were washed and placed in special vessels called ash trays. In the Medieval Age, the Church fought against this custom of burying at the crossroads and in the forests. However, just as in other family and annual ceremonies, the Church adopted some of these customs. After the burial, there was a funeral meal. Also, this Slavic element of burial culture has survived until today. Forty days after the funeral, the commemoration ceremonies were conducted.

Pompa funebris – the characteristic feature of Polish funerals

The most intensive ritualisation of the funeral in Europe took place in the seventeenth-century. In Poland, *pompa funebris*, also called *apparatus funebris*, were held at that time (Chróścicki, 1974, p.8). These were the royal, baron and gentry funerals. It needs to be noted that not everyone could afford such a funeral. In the burial culture – as in life – we deal with classes as

well as the differences in lay and clerical funerals, and the differences in terms of sex and age. The procession moved from the church to the graveyard, under the triumphal gates specially constructed for this purpose, or a procession moved around the Church to the place where a grave was prepared. Sometimes, a grave had a mourning flag hung over it. The coffin portraits removed from the coffin were hung in the churches. The churches have been changed into family mausoleums decorated with the images of 'ancestors' (Chróścicki, 1974, p.76). Then, a funeral meal was held as a 'happy meal accompanied by, for example, fireworks and a music band' (Chróścicki, 1974, p.52) as well as brawls and a drunken party. The consumptive extravagance during the funeral meals, the said excessive food consumption reminding of *potlatch* in the archaic cultures is according to Nola (2006, pp.182–190) a part of *contraria face re* – a reversal of normal behaviour, which is characteristic for the liminal time, the time of chaos. The period from death to the funeral often lasted for several months. Despite the fact that by that time there already existed the convergences in liturgy, analogies in customs, funeral 'models', and guidelines that the funeral preparations should take no more than one month (Chróścicki, 1974, p.43), the ostentation of Sarmatia funerals was known throughout Europe.

The evolution of burials in the post-war Poland

Tony Walter (2005) characterises models of 'funeral organisation' by which he means: "management of the corpse until its final disposition, once medical practices at the hospital or other place of death have been completed" (Walter, 2005, p.173). There are three patterns: the commercial where control of the dead is granted to the businessman, the municipal where the public officials in state administration departments handle the funeral, and religious where the church takes the power over a body. In the Polish People's Republic there were few private funeral parlours and the monopolist – the municipal departments of state bureaucracy - didn't have traditions how to dispose of the dead. This institutional control interacted with national cultural history (Walter, 2005, p.187) where the position of the Catholic Church as the bearer of national identity played the main role. Folk customs and beliefs were integrated with Catholic practices. Catholic priests, being predominantly from villages, were rooted in archaic rituals. After the Second World War was a period of modest, ritually impoverished funerals organised in the towns by the municipal funeral parlours and in the villages with the traditional neighbouring assistance. Because of the war's devastation, closed borders with the West and difficulties made by municipal parlours and state to several private companies which survived the war, the period of the Polish People's Republic saw a shortage of materials for producing coffins and artefacts. The undertakers who worked there insisted on laic funerals, but, because the Catholic Church played a big role even during the communist regime, mainly only official funerals of public and military people were not religious. As mentioned by an owner of a funeral business, in the past the modest coffin was transported to the church with a modest car like Tarpan or Żuk, and then, four male members of the family or neighbours took the coffin and carried it to the church and the graveyard.

In the 1990s, the commercial model of disposing the dead is developing. During this period of the emergence of private funeral parlours, the burial assumes splendour, a rich decorum is added: musical settings, diversification of wreaths, changes in the appearance of coffins, assistance of elegant employees of the parlour (instead of drunken gravediggers in felt boots) and many other requisites. The municipal funeral parlours started to be privatised which is a long process lasting in XXI century. Older people assume that the municipal funeral parlour is cheaper, so they often choose it. Although its services are not always cheaper, it rather offers more modest expenditure for lower prices. Its presence regulates the prices on the funeral market.

In the twenty-first-century, some traditional elements of the village funeral related to the control of the corpse start to disappear, taken over by the funeral parlour. These include: keeping the corpse at home, 'empty nights' (watching over the dead), taking the coffin from the mourning house, foot processions with the coffin on the shoulders, and funeral meals in houses. With the year 2000, elements of the multimedia were added (videos and photos of the dead), the memorials in a digital version. 'Smolensk funerals' – funerals organized by the state after the crash of the aeroplane in Smolensk with the president and other Polish officials – strengthen even more the aspirations to splendid funerals and modern caravans. The fashion for rectangular plates with the dead data has developed. It is a period of the greatest ritualisation of post-war funerals. From 1 March 2011, funeral benefit has been reduced. This affects the giving up from some of the elements of the funeral (less flowers and candles, less caravans), which has become slightly more modest.

Contemporary funerals

Still, current funerals are splendid when compared to, for example, funerals in Germany, the Czech Republic or Great Britain. An expensive coffin made of solid wood is purchased, and often three funeral vehicles are ordered: for the coffin, flowers and guests. A diversified decorum of the funeral parlour is chosen. This is influenced by the role of social prestige. A funeral in Poland is an important family event, integrating the family, professionals, neighbours and friends or relations. The inhumation – in addition to other family rituals, such as the wedding – is an opportunity to meet in a wider family group. Burial plays an important social function: it is a manifestation of the social status of the dead and the financial status of the family, and also its religious denomination. Therefore, it is often the case that even if the dead is a non-believer or non-practising Catholic, his family chooses the religious ceremony. In Poland, 95% of funerals still follow the Catholic ceremony and 5% are secular. The standard for Catholic funerals in Poland was established only after it had been introduced by the modern funeral parlours. The main actors have changed: the parlour assistance group in addition to the priest and even more masters of ceremony who substitute or accompany the priest. The number of cremations in Poland is increasing with multiple possible funeral scenarios. New fashions are emerging, such as photos at the coffin giving the funeral a more individual character. Therefore, the ritual of transition during the funeral changes constantly depending on the cultural, social and economic factors. As in the case of 'Smolensk funerals' the impact of the media on the rituals of the burial can be noticed as well as the influence of public funerals of important individuals. The new digital technologies also enter the sphere of family rituals. While in many countries of Western Europe (e.g. Great Britain, Germany) the funeral is simplified and compressed, in Poland there is an expansion of ceremony and its decorum is more similar to 'euphoric' American funerals. Following the establishment of this standard, the funeral parlours and institutions play a conservative role and cultivate the established standard.

A funeral in Poland is still a very religious ceremony. However, a major role in this ceremony is played by the consumptive culture. An even wider availability of parlours finds acknowledgement among the customers. A worthy burial in the understanding of the Poles is a splendid and public funeral. Despite the promotion of lay funerals in the media and the Internet, these account for only about 5% of all funerals. In comparison to the West, there are only few elements of the individualistic culture, but their emergence needs to be noted. Already, the wide choice of funeral accessories changes the position of mourners, to become consumers forced to make choices. There is a small proportion of thematic funerals (e.g. motorcyclists, fire-fighters, sports fans funerals) very popular especially in the U.S. There is also a small proportion of alternative burials popular in the West.

Poland has very much in common with USA in regard to the process of viewing the body during funerals. But there is the difference in the attitude towards preparing the dead. Embalming in Poland is not popular, due to a different attitude than in the U.S. to the corpse of the dead and death itself. As Christie Davies (1996, p.61) proves, Americans choose to deny death through the disguise of embalming. The dead are supposed to look alive, which involves turning away from the processes of decay. The commercial model in America is fetishising the body beautiful (Walter, 2005, p.178). Also Protestant Christians “tend to separate body from soul; the dead body holds little or no spiritual significance, so viewing the body holds no spiritual significance” (Walter, 2005, p.181). In Poland, there is the acceptance of death although mainly in the sense of martyrology and religious sense (Kubiak, 2014). The corpse is sacred and regarded as the temple of the soul. Undertakers opposing embalming said that embalming takes away the dignity of the dead body and that by embalming the dead looks like a doll. In Poland, viewing the body is regarded as religious obligation, whereas in America it is a social requirement. The funeral meals, being an important element of the rituals and family integration distinguish Poland from the customs of many European countries (e.g. Germany, Czech Republic). Care for graves, frequent visits to the cemeteries along with multiple flowers, candles and other elements of decorum distinguish Poland from the habits of the Western European countries and the U.S, particularly from Protestant countries.

The privatisation of the funeral market and its consequences

With the emergence in Poland in the 1990s of the infrastructure of private funeral parlours and businesses producing coffins and the whole range of accessories, the modernisation of funeral rituals and habits commenced. As the funeral parlour takes control over the body of the dead, the directors of the parlours come to shape funeral culture and even determine a certain standard of the Catholic traditional funeral. This leads on one hand, to the unification of the Catholic burials along with the fading of regional differences. On the other hand, the parlours have rich offerings, which affect the diversification of funerals depending on financial resources and social hierarchy. The dead acquire a social-economic status (Sanders, 2009) through the selection of clothes, type of coffin, decorum in the form of artefacts such as the quantity and splendour of wreaths, plates with a photo, the whole multimedia presentation devoted to his life, hired trumpeter, violinist or a whole orchestra, elegant hearse, a meal for his honour, and the grave. There is a diversification in the splendour and costs of the funeral. The ritual is closely connected with the economy. ‘Death and its properties appear to be antithetical to the work of doing capitalism. (...) Yet we know it is a social (if not wholly physical) fact that the two do indeed coexist and often look as if they do so quite amicably. There is no shortage of means for profiting from the death of human beings’ (Sanders, 2009, p.447). The burials can be organised within the limits of a funeral benefit but can also cost several tens of thousands zlotys and more. The processes of professionalization and institutionalisation (Howarth, 1993; Davies, 2006) empower the parlours to control both the corpse and the whole ritual process, replacing the folk customs that survived through the Polish People’s Republic.

At first, in the 1990s, the owners of parlours had to negotiate with the hosts, persuading them into entrusting the corpse of the dead to the professional service of funeral experts. Gradually, by introducing more and more services, the funeral parlour took on the complete organisation of the ritual of transition. Watching over the dead, which in the country and in small towns is traditionally accompanied by saying a rosary and sprinkling the body in the coffin by the priest, takes place in the farewell room of the parlour, cemetery chapel or hospital chapel. In the city, the guests gathered in a chapel are silent and listen to the mourning music or watch the pictures of the dead that are

displayed on the screen. The transposition of the last farewell from a house to the space of institutions has caused this ritual to be compressed and limited to about two hours before the funeral, whereas the 'empty nights' are forgotten. Transport of the coffin and guests in cars and buses replaced the foot processions. Prepared and properly clothed funeral assistants literally relieved the relatives and neighbours from the burden of carrying the coffin and the wreaths.

The musical setting introduced by the businesses in the form of professional musicians (trumpeters and fiddlers) or sound gear for playing the tracks from discs caused the disappearance of the local singers and criers. It is one of these elements of former customs whose disappearance is regretted. It stood for an active participation by the local community in the last farewell, as well as the celebration of the folk work. It was believed in the country that 'the one who sings prays two times stronger' (Kupisiński, 2007, p.232). The funeral meal in the house has been replaced by the modern catering provided at local depots and recreation rooms or a meeting of the guests at a restaurant specialising in funeral banquets. The mourners lost their influence on the ritual forms and assumed the role of customers expecting the performance of all services. The burial rite was transferred into the public space, the institutions professionally controlling the ritual. The disappearance of folk customs has also been affected by the Christianisation of the Polish rituals. As a result, a close bond with the dead fades away along with the home beliefs and customs.

The ritual of transition controlled from the beginning to the end by a funeral parlour undergoes aestheticisation and even more makes the death itself unreal. The dramatic character of the ritual of transition—formerly dynamic by contact with the decomposing body, a mournful lament and singing of the local choirs—developed by the funeral parlours, becomes quiet and sublime. Even the last dramatic accord like throwing lumps of earth on the coffin has been replaced by a subtle placing of a grid on the grave and padding it with the wreaths. Only when the family leaves, this 'dirty' part of the ritual, with its meaning of final disposal of the corpse, is done by the diggers. This custom has been taken over from the funeral tradition of the U.S. Some parlours introduce innovations that even better hide a threat of life ending and reduce the traumatic character of the mourning. They propose new services and accessories every time, which are a new 'commodity' without foundation in the symbolic and become one more element of *teatrum* where the mourners are only spectators. For example, the Lower-Silesian businesses introduced a custom of wearing white gloves by the funeral assistants, which are then thrown into the grave before it is buried. A parlour in the Kujawy-Pomerania region proposes a custom of letting out the pigeons while the coffin is being lowered into the grave. There are new technologies offered by undertakers, like: embalming, 'diamonds' created from the hair and ashes, and the transmission of funerals on-line. Services for funeral planning are being promoted but Poles, despite buying the grave before one's death, have the confidence that a family will arrange the ceremony according to the relatives' wishes.

Surviving customs and beliefs

During my study, the directors of funeral parlours noted the disappearing customs, especially those related to the house rituals. These survived in the villages and small towns distanced from the modern cooling rooms, parlours and hospitals. Also, in the situation of death at home, the older hosts continued the traditions of home rituals. My interlocutors met with the archaic procedures continued in the country. These are related to the beliefs that the soul will not leave the body after death, but stays there or close to it until the whole ritual of transition is completed. All the activities, from cleaning and wearing, to the funeral meal, are devoted to cleaning, liberating and forgiving the sins of the soul (requests for forgiveness made on behalf of the dead, Biegeleisen

(1930, p.204) and preventing any damage that the soul could make against his relatives and neighbours. A belief in a harmful impact of the dead affects the family members who remember multiple magical rules in the presence of the corpse. A family watches over the dead after washing him and dressing with formal clothes, in the companionship of coming neighbours, although it rarely lasts for the whole night. They say a rosary together, which is sometimes led by those who specialise in it. Every mourner says farewell to the dead by kissing him on the hand or forehead and sometimes speaking to him. The deceased's household becomes a place where the forces of the afterlife enter.

There is the time governed by other rules, dangerous for the surrounding. At this time, the rules of death's time should be followed, and precautions facilitating the transition of the soul to the other side and protecting the hosts against 'an aggressive dead' should be taken. Household members cover the mirrors and TVs, so that the soul of the dead is not able to see itself in them – 'as it will not be able to leave the body' (Zadrożyńska, 1988, p.141). As stated by Fischer (1921, p.137), the basis of magical procedures related to the mirrors is 'an idea that the shadow, the picture reflected in the mirror or water should be identified with a human soul', which makes the departure more difficult and attaches to the place. If the mirror would reflect the corpse 'there would be two dead in this house' (Fischer, 1921, p.137), which would soon cause the death of a relative. The hosts stop all the clocks that register the ordinary time of the human life. For the dead the time has ended and for the mourners it is being stopped in this liminal phase of the ritual of transition.

While taking the coffin with the dead out from the house – always with his legs in front – the coffin should hit the threshold three times. These magic rules protect against a return of the soul of the dead, which would otherwise haunt the relatives (Kupisiński, 2007, p.205). The threshold, as a boundary point, plays a significant role in all family rituals. Further, the stools and tables are overturned, especially those where the coffin was laid so that the soul of the dead would not stay on them (Kupisiński, 2007, p.205). The noise caused by these forces the soul to follow the body. The doors of all household rooms are opened so that the dead can say goodbye to all his property. Also, the animals are instructed on the death of the master so that they do not follow the coffin (Kupisiński, 2007, pp.196–197). The bees are instructed by attaching a black rag to every hive (Biegeleisen, 1930, p.200). Then, the foot procession goes to the nearest figure, chapel or cross, where the people pray. From there, usually the guests move to their cars. All these folk beliefs and customs are associated with the ambiguous attitude toward corpse and fantasies, which are connected with a dead body. Cadaver fascinates people and at the same time makes them fearful. The idea of aggressive dead is very common in many cultures (Thomas, 1991). Archaic forms of mourning and practices around corpse tend to survive in rural cultures in contrast to modern urbanized communities (Nola, 2006, p.10).

Cremation

Cremation is growing and in 2012 reached 15%, with 30 crematoriums in 2014. The percent of cremations in 2011 for Poland was about 15%. The factors affecting the increase of cremations are the reduced funeral costs (the price of a cremation funeral is generally lower, although many factors are included, such as transport to crematoriums), a higher number of crematoriums, the promotion of cremations by some business owners, a higher number of exhumations in order to bury the dead in one grave, multiplication of the dead – cremations of dead-born children and infants, possible addition of the urn to the family grave, decreasing space in the cemeteries and its price. The prices for cremation service are from PLN 600 to 760, although the whole ceremony depends on the price of the urn, cremation coffin, and space availability in the

cemetery, priest charges and transport. The urn may cost from PLN 150 to 2,000. The crews for urn transport are smaller as one or two persons rather than four are sufficient. It is also cheaper to store the urn in the parlour, instead of storing the body in the refrigeration room, and the brickwork costs are lower as well. The factors contributing to continuously low numbers of cremations in Poland compared to Western Europe or just the Czech Republic are: the association – especially for the post-war generation – with the extermination camps, lists of bishops concerning cremation, the list concerning the Mass with the coffin, the influence of some representatives of the clergy against cremation, social pressure in smaller towns and in the country as well as the domination of the traditional burial model. Religion plays an important role, as in Catholic and Orthodox countries there is a smaller percentage of cremations in contrast with Protestant countries. People aged 20 to 30 years, as well as individuals with higher education opt more often for cremation instead of the traditional burial. In 2001, in a study concerning the attitude of Poles to death, CBOS (Centrum Badania Opinii Publicznej) also included a study of the attitudes towards cremation. Of Poles, 44% were for cremation, whereas in 1994, the supporters accounted for 37%. The persons who accepted cremation had a higher education, better financial status and resided in the cities. The biggest support for cremation is among persons in managerial positions, among office staff, students and pupils. Women more often accept cremation. The support for it drops with age. It is rarely accepted by farmers, pensioners and senior citizens.

Local diversity

The local diversification existing in Poland should be noted. Funeral rituals have clear differences between the city and the country, and the local ones where the customs are introduced by the funeral parlor (and the cemetery administrator) and the parish priest. The family of the dead is ‘between the mayor and the parson’, where the mayor represents the funeral parlor. The parish priest decides whether to agree to the Mass with the urn, mournful watching-over of the coffin in the church, or to the foot procession. The custom of procession is also decided by the mayor of the town. In many parishes, the priests are not against introducing the urn to the mourning Mass. Burial in Poland is an opportunity to integrate the scattered family, and the priests often understand the difficulties that would arise from arranging the funeral for a few days. There are also parish priests, such as in Gdansk and Gdynia, who disagree with the introduction of the coffin in the church, citing hygiene and comfort. For the reasons of convenience, some priests also are against the foot processions, which were an important element of traditional funerals. In Wrocław, in turn, there is a custom of conducting the mournful Mass with an open coffin.

There are clear differences between the funeral in the country (and in small towns) and in the city. In the country, death is a social phenomenon where the ritual of transition is attended not only by the family, but also by a large group of neighbors. They are invited to the funeral meal, which assumes a type of a large feast (from 60 to 100 people). Although it was formerly organized in the family house, it is currently held in the country recreation rooms, depots, where the catering is ordered. As the heads of parlors in small towns say: ‘the funeral meal should be held, as it is a common custom. Funeral meals in the country need to be affordable. Lavish hospitality beyond your means’; ‘They bargain for the coffin, but a meal for 70 people is necessary to bury the dead with pride’. In the city, the funeral meal is held among a strict group of the closest family, in a restaurant. In the country, the oak coffin is ordered with decorative fittings and a lace laid to the outside. In the city, it is not matter of which wood the coffin is made, but how it looks, and the pine coffins are most commonly chosen. In the village, it is rare to order lay and cremation funerals, whereas in the

city the number of cremations is increasing and a lay funeral is no longer something ordinary. The thing that distinguishes the country funeral rituals is maintaining certain archaic beliefs and customs.

Conclusions

A characteristic of Polish funeral culture is the clash of modernity and persisting pre-modern customs and beliefs. The funeral parlour assumes control over the corpse. Breaking the tradition of the war period, municipal funeral parlours and the state ideology of lay burials give the emerging parlours a fresh origin to see a need to reapprove the ritual. The ritual also proves itself in a long-term perspective. The business owners derive from both the Sarmatia and folk traditions as well as declare the traditionalism of the proposed rites and artefacts. The most archaic forms that have survived until today are: the custom of displaying the corpse (practised in a funeral parlour instead of watching over the dead in his house), placing personal objects of the dead into the coffin, a ceremonial procession, and in the country, the custom of taking the coffin out from the house (accompanied by home customs), burning a fire in the form of candles in the cemetery, and the funeral meal. From the primary acts of the Indo-European burial, almost all criers have disappeared and it is rare to meet any groups of funeral singers.

When it comes to globalisation, the funeral market in Europe has a major impact on the funeral accessories, stylistics of coffins, urns and hearses. What is more, expansive American businesses and funeral corporations entered the European funeral market (Laderman, 2003; Habenstein, 2007). At the same time, in pointing to both globalisation and local variations, researchers emphasise the need to study the whole context of the cultural phenomena. The Polish burial culture due to the religious connections shows many similarities to Italy. The Italian market—just as Poland – favours tradition and resists extravagance (appearing, for example, at the French fair). Therefore, the stylistics of funeral accessories at the fair in Bologna and in Poland is very similar and balanced. At the same time, thematic, individualistic, secularist elements are adopted in the cremation rites, such as urns in the shape of a football for fans or books with a pen for writers. Since the reduction of the funeral benefit, the mourners often bargain for the prices. Not only among the attendants of funerals, but also based on my experience with people from various spheres, the consumers talk about the level of service, standard or quality of products. Still the funeral - despite multiple novelties from the West – is the most traditional of Polish customs.

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