



Vitalising a Cemetery

Exploring the Multifunctional & Restorative Potential of Gufuneskirkjugarður Cemetery

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Alnarp, 15/06/2026



Arnar Þórsson

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Jónína, án þín væri þetta ekki til.

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Abstract

Urban densification is placing increasing pressure on public green space in cities worldwide. Cemeteries, which are historically regarded as monofunctional places of mourning, have begun to attract attention as an underutilised resource in this context, given their park-like qualities and demonstrable restorative potential. This thesis investigates how a suburban Icelandic cemetery can be redesigned as a restorative, multifunctional public space without compromising its role as a place of mourning and remembrance.

The study explores Gufuneskirkjugarður, a 32,1-hectare cemetery in the northern Reykjavík suburb of Grafarvogur. Following a pragmatic Research Through Design (RTD) approach, the project integrates three complementary sources of knowledge: a literature review examining Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and the Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS), alongside research on Nordic cemeteries as multifunctional urban green spaces; a site visit and analysis structured around ART's four components, being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility; and a resident survey in which participants rated five pairs of photographed scenes, each pairing an existing site condition with a digitally altered design intervention, using PRS-derived items.

The site analysis and survey agree on a set of restorative shortcomings: a sparse eastern perimeter hedge that exposes the cemetery's interior to surrounding traffic, a path network whose straight geometry and shared vehicle and pedestrian use undermine both safety and a sense of welcome, an entrance threshold that produces the lowest compatibility scores of any location in the study, and seating areas

that lack the enclosure needed for restorative use. The design proposal addresses these conditions through targeted understory planting along the eastern perimeter, a restructured pedestrian-priority path network, redesigned entrance thresholds, and the introduction of new elements, including a central green square with a water feature, and portal planting at secondary entrances, that support restoration across the site.

The project confirms that ART and the PRS serve effectively as analytical and evaluative tools in cemetery design research. The methodology is transferable to other Nordic and Icelandic cemeteries, which have received almost no empirical design attention to date.



FIG. 1: PHOTOGRAPH OF GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	The need for green space	2
1.2	Addressing the issue	2
2	Methodology	4
2.1	Research through design	4
2.1.1	(Post)positivist knowledge claim	4
2.1.2	Constructivist knowledge claim	4
2.1.3	Transformative knowledge claim	5
2.1.4	Pragmatic knowledge claim	5
2.1.5	Pragmatic design theory	5
2.2	Literature review	5
2.3	Site analysis	6
2.4	Resident survey	6
2.5	Limitations	6
3	Theoretical background	8
3.1	Cemeteries as multifunctional urban spaces	8
3.1.1	Historical developments of cemeteries in Iceland and the Nordics	8
3.1.2	Contemporary roles of funeral rituals and cemeteries	9
3.1.3	Cemeteries as urban green space	10
3.1.4	The restorative potential of cemeteries	10
3.2	People and environment	11
3.2.1	Preference and perception	11
3.2.2	Attention restoration theory	11
3.2.3	Perceived Restorative Scale	13
3.3	Design implications	13
3.3.1	Supporting “being away”	14
3.3.2	Supporting “fascination”	14
3.3.3	Supporting “extent”	14
3.3.4	Supporting “compatibility”	15
3.4	Synthesis	15
4	Study	16
4.1	Site analysis	16
4.1.1	Gufuneskirkjugarður	16
4.1.2	Overall spatial character	18
4.1.3	Being away	18
4.1.4	Fascination	21
4.1.5	Extent	21
4.1.6	Compatibility	21
4.1.7	Preference	22
4.1.8	Design relevance	22
4.2	Survey findings	22

4.2.1	Participants.....	22
4.2.2	Being away.....	23
4.2.3	Fascination.....	24
4.2.4	Extent.....	25
4.2.5	Compatibility I.....	25
4.2.6	Compatibility II.....	26
4.2.7	Cross-cutting themes.....	27
4.3	Synthesis.....	28
5	Design.....	30
5.1	Objective and criteria.....	30
5.2	Additional objectives.....	31
5.3	Design strategy.....	31
5.3.1	Priority intervention areas.....	31
5.3.2	Functional character.....	32
5.3.3	Path and planting strategy.....	32
5.4	Design proposal.....	33
5.4.1	Overview plan.....	35
5.4.2	Detail views.....	35
5.5	Synthesis.....	38
6	Reflections.....	40
6.1	Outcome.....	40
6.2	ART and PRS.....	41
6.3	Methodology.....	42
6.4	Future directions.....	42
6.5	When all is said and done.....	43
	References.....	46
	Appendices.....	50
I	Glossary.....	50
II	The survey.....	51

Figures

1	Photograph of Gufuneskirkjugarður	vii
2	Aerial Photo of Gufuneskirkjugarður	3
3	Gufuneskirkjugarður	3
4	The project’s pragmatic design theory pipeline	5
5	A basalt-column headstone under a birch.	7
6	Excavated ‘kuml’ at Ytri-Garðshorn, Dalvík, Iceland.	8
7	Pallbearers at the state funeral of Davíð Oddsson, prime minister of Iceland 1991–2004, at Hallgrímskirkja, 08/03/2026.	9
8	Runners at Grandview Cemetery, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA.	10
9	Kaplan & Kaplan’s (1989) Preference Matrix	11
10	Attention Restoration Theory.	12
11	Botnstjörn, Ásbyrgi, Iceland 2021	14
12	Kerling, Snæfellsjökull National Park, Iceland 2022.	14
13	Limnhamn, Sibbarp, Sweden 2025	14
14	Austurvöllur, Reykjavík, Iceland 2025.	15
15	Location of Gufuneskirkjugarður	17
16	Reykjavík’s master plan	17
17	Map depicting Gufuneskirkjugarður’s sections.	18
18	Looking over section I’s varying headstones	18
19	The cemetery’s eastern perimeter	18
20	Gufuneskirkjugarður’s catchment and connections	19
21	Gufuneskirkjugarður’s general layout	20
22	Monument for those lost and never found.	21
23	A bench in the cemetery.	21
24	Monument	22
25	Survey scene locations	22
26	Scene Pair Depicting “Being Away” and survey results	23
27	Scene Pair Depicting “Fascination” and survey results.	24
28	Scene Pair Depicting “Extent” and survey results.	25
29	Scene Pair Depicting “Compatibility I” and survey results.	26
30	Scene Pair Depicting “Compatibility II” and survey results	27
31	Gufuneskirkjugarður’s service building overlooking headstones	29
32	Areas requiring design interventions.	31
33	New functional character of Gufuneskirkjugarður.	32
34	Path and vegetation strategy	33
35	Plan view of conceptual design proposal	34
36	Illustration of the southern bosque and lychgate	35
37	Illustration of the northern entrance and propylon	36
38	Illustration of a secondary entrance’s portal planting.	36
39	Illustration of the eastern perimeter’s understory fill.	37
40	Illustration of the living street’s green square	38
41	A bench in Gufuneskirkjugarður nested in sheltering vegetation	41

Abbreviations

ART	Attention Restoration Theory
PRS	Perceived Restoration Scale
PRS-11	Pasini et al's 11-item version of PRS (2014)
RTD	Research Through Design(ing)
SD	Standard Deviation
SLU	Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet)
SRT	Stress Reduction Theory
UN	United Nations

Man is the only creature that knows it will die, and he spends his entire life trying to forget it:

“[The] knowledge of death, the most bitter gift of our surplus knowledge, is already given to us in childhood; on the journey down the river of life the waterfall of death stands high above the valley. Many try to drown it out with their own noise, but the silence afterward becomes doubly dreadful.”

Peter Wessel Zapffe, 1941
Translated by Showler (2024, p. 102)

1 Introduction

The genesis of this project lies in the convergence of personal observations of emerging societal challenges, such as the gradual loss of public space in urban environments following the densification of cities; reflections on death and mourning, including cemeteries and contemporary funerary practices; and newfound academic understanding of the psychologically restorative qualities of historical, cultural and natural landscapes.

1.1 The need for green space

Today, many people experience mental fatigue and shorter attention spans. However, research increasingly indicates that green spaces are beneficial for health and well-being and can reduce stress and support recovery from mental fatigue (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010; Egorov et al., 2016).

In the coming decades, urbanisation is set to increase significantly (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020) and recent UN projections estimate that the share of people living in urban areas in developed countries will climb to approximately 87% by 2050, up from around 78% in 2015 and 70% in 1980 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). If managed effectively, this trend can serve as a positive force for sustainable development, enhancing quality of life and health (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). Poorly planned urban growth, however, may lead to pollution and social ex-

clusion, and harm urban living conditions and public health (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020).

One widely adopted response to unsustainable urban growth is the ‘compact city approach’, which has had a global impact as a planning strategy for sustainable development and as a countermeasure to urban sprawl. Yet, this approach also entails the gradual disappearance of green public spaces in cities worldwide (Swensen, Nordh and Brendalsmo, 2016), as space is allocated to newly constructed residential housing, office buildings, roadways, and other infrastructure (Nordh et al., 2009), and puts urban green space under increasing pressure (Grabalov, 2018). This loss conflicts directly with people’s common preference for relatively natural environments, which relates to the possibility they offer for psychological restoration (van Den Berg, Hartig and Staats, 2007).

1.2 Addressing the issue

Cemeteries, even though they are typically regarded as monofunctional spaces reserved for mourning, and even as being controversial choices for recreation, may soon become among the few remaining bastions of life in free public space (Grabalov, 2018; Długozima, Kosiacka-Beck and Krzykawska, 2025). This, perhaps pessimistic notion, begs the question that this project aims to answer:

How can a suburban Icelandic cemetery be redesigned as a restorative, multifunctional public space without compromising its role as a place of mourning?

This question, in turn, leads to this project's main objective: to produce a scientifically informed design proposal for adapting a suburban cemetery in Reykjavík, Iceland, to be multi-functional and to cater to the needs of the deceased, mourners, and recreational users.

Some of Iceland's oldest landscaping customs are thought to derive from Icelanders' practices around burial sites and their desire to create a safe and comforting environment for the dead and those who mourn them (Sæmundsen, 2018), and cemeteries can be multifunctional and accommodate low-impact recreation, restoration, and social life without compromising their core purpose (Swensen, Nordh and Brendalmo, 2016; Grabalov, 2018; Lai, Scott and Sun, 2019) or their sacred character (Długozima, Kosiacka-Beck and Krzykawska, 2025).

The project's secondary objective is to explore the feasibility of using theories from environmental psychology, namely Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) and the Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS) (Hartig et al., 1997) as analytical frameworks during the design process.



FIG. 2: AERIAL PHOTO OF GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE)



FIG. 3: GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR (SIGURÐSSON, 2015)

2 Methodology

This project follows a pragmatic research-through-design approach: a process in which theoretical insights, empirical findings, and spatial experimentation develop in dialogue with one another (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). The basis for a set of design criteria that will inform the design proposal is a literature review, a resident survey, and a site analysis.

2.1 Research through design

Landscape architecture combines scientific research and creative practice, and design can serve as a valid research method when conducted systematically and evaluated against academic standards (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). In their paper on Research Through Design(ing) (RTD) in landscape architecture, Lenzholzer, Duchhart, and Koh (2013) organise RTD strategies according to Creswell's (2009) framework of knowledge production's four knowledge claims: (post)positivist, constructivist, transformative (then called advocacy/participatory), and pragmatic (Creswell, 2009; Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Brink, 2016, p. 59; Creswell and Creswell, 2023, p. 16). These approaches are not strictly separate and can complement one another within a single research path. This chapter situates the project within the Research Through Design(ing) tradition, using Creswell's four knowledge claims as an organising framework, and explains why a pragmatic combination of these claims best suits the aims of this project.

2.1.1 (Post)positivist knowledge claim

(Post)positivist RTD generates quantifiable and generalisable design knowledge through hypothesis testing and experimental methods (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). Nordh et al.'s (2009) study on pocket parks demonstrates this approach by quantifying environmental components, such as grass coverage, prominence of different vegetation, perceived park size, et cetera. They correlated these environmental components with psychological ratings of ART's components, and their method yielded measurable design guidelines and actionable parameters. This thesis integrates (post)positivist insights through ART and PRS, offering empirically validated design hypotheses that can be tested within the specific context of Gufuneskirkjugarður.

2.1.2 Constructivist knowledge claim

However, (post)positivist knowledge alone cannot address the socio-cultural particularities that shape how cemeteries function as public spaces, and constructivist RTD addresses this gap by generating qualitative, context-embedded knowledge about meanings, interpretations, and aesthetic values (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). An example of this approach is Nordh's (2017) qualitative study of Gamlebyen cemetery. In their research, they conducted semi-structured interviews with cemetery visitors to explore how the cemetery's natural features and cultural-historical aspects contributed to visitors' sense of restoration (Nordh, 2017).

2.1.3 Transformative knowledge claim

The transformative knowledge claim explores how research can empower communities and promote social transformation (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). Swensen, Nordh, and Brendalmo's (2016) research on activities at Gamlebyen cemetery, which combined observations with short semi-structured interviews, is one example. Grabalov's (2018) mixed-methods study in Malmö cemeteries, which included systematic observations, social media analysis, and questionnaires, is another.

2.1.4 Pragmatic knowledge claim

Pragmatic RTD, with its flexibility to combine claims (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013), suits cemetery design, which must meet technical, legal (Iceland, 1993), socio-cultural (Rae, 2021), and community needs (Długozima, Kosiacka-Beck and Krzykawska, 2025). Długozima, Kosiacka-Beck, and Krzykawska's (2025) study, an example of pragmatic RTD, uses field observations, usage traces, interviews, and more to assess aesthetic preferences

before integrating them into a spatial concept that includes zoning, vegetation, and accessibility. Their paper demonstrates how empirical findings, both quantitative and qualitative, must be translated through designing into spatial proposals that can be evaluated and refined.

2.1.5 Pragmatic design theory

This project mainly operates within the pragmatic knowledge claim: the literature review on ART and cemetery multifunctionality provides (post)positivist design guidelines that can be operationalised, and the resident survey generates both constructivist and transformative insights into local perceptions, meanings, and aesthetic values that pure technical research cannot capture. These knowledge claims converge in the design process to produce design criteria that serve as "full" integrated knowledge products, accumulating technical, experiential, and contextual understanding rather than producing isolated "partial" knowledge (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). The studies reviewed in sections

3.3.1–3.3.4 suggest that the most rigorous cemetery design research draws on multiple claims in combination: quantifying restorative components, interpreting cultural values, and engaging community perspectives before integrating them into a design.

Pragmatic RTD requires careful documentation and transparent argumentation about methodological choices and their sequencing (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013). This thesis follows an explicit sequence: the literature review establishes the theoretical framework and generates preliminary design guidelines; the site analysis applies that framework to Gufuneskirkjugarður cemetery and identifies specific spatial conditions that require a design response; the resident survey captures local perceptions and needs that neither the literature nor the site analysis alone can provide; and these three inputs converge in design criteria than inform a design proposal. By grounding designing within a structured research process that combines multiple knowledge claims (Lenzholzer, Duchhart and Koh, 2013), this project demonstrates that design can yield academically rigorous, transferable

knowledge about how cemeteries might serve as restorative public spaces without compromising their core functions.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review establishes the project's theoretical backbone. It examines Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan, 1995) and the Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS) (Hartig et al., 1997), as well as Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) Preference Matrix to identify the environmental qualities that support psychological restoration. In parallel, the literature review goes over research on cemeteries as multifunctional urban green spaces, with particular attention to Nordic cemeteries.

Sources were identified through database searches in Scopus & SLU's Primo, supplemented by backward reference tracking and Icelandic repositories for culturally specific material. The principles that inform the site analysis, survey, and design proposal are derived from the two bodies of literature.

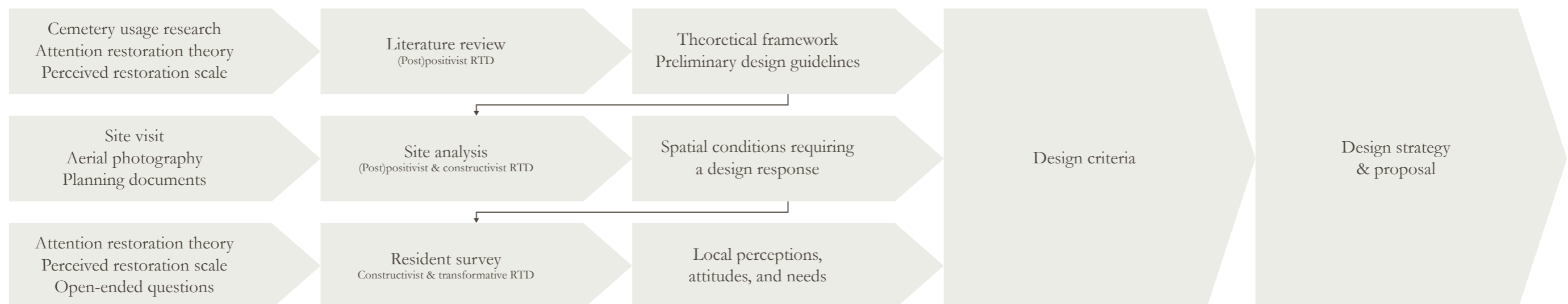


FIG. 4: THE PROJECT'S PRAGMATIC DESIGN THEORY PIPELINE

2.3 Site analysis

The site analysis, conducted during a site visit in March 2026, documents the current physical, spatial, and experiential conditions of Gufuneskirkjugarður cemetery and assesses them through the theoretical lens established in the literature review. In a field observation, environmental elements associated to restorativeness were documented through notes and photographs. To ensure the on-site analysis remained theoretically grounded rather than merely descriptive, it was guided by ART's four components and the preference matrix's four factors. Existing planning documents, aerial photography, and geographic information data also informed the analysis.

2.4 Resident survey

In March 2026, a questionnaire was distributed via social media, to capture local perceptions, attitudes, and needs that cannot be inferred from theoretical literature alone, with a focus on residents living in the vicinity of Gufuneskirkjugarður by promoting the questionnaire through local community groups. The questionnaire combined closed-ended items, such as Likert-scale ratings (Likert, 1932) with open-ended questions. Thematic sections covered demographic background, current use of and familiarity with the cemetery, perceptions of its restorative qualities, and attitudes toward recreational use of the cemetery.

To assess perceived restorativeness, the survey incorporated items from Hartig et al.'s

(1997) PRS, and its later revisions (Purcell, Peron, and Berto, 2001; Pasini et al., 2014) that were translated into Icelandic, covering the four ART components: being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility (Kaplan, 1995).

The questionnaire included five scene pairs, each depicting an existing location within Gufuneskirkjugarður. Each pair consisted of an unaltered photograph of a real site condition and a digitally altered version of the same scene in which a specific design intervention was introduced, such as added perimeter vegetation, a water element, or shelter planting.

Both images in each pair are rated against an identical set of PRS-derived items, so that the effect of a proposed intervention can be assessed by comparing responses to the unaltered and altered conditions. To prevent participants from cross-referencing a scene with its counterpart, the ten scenes were presented in a randomised order that differed for each participant. Once a participant submitted their responses to a scene, they could not return to revise them.

This design prevents direct visual comparison between paired images in the moment of rating, so that each scene is evaluated on its own terms rather than relative to its pair, and reduces the risk of demand characteristics, whereby visible pairing might lead participants to anticipate that the altered version is the intended improvement. It also distributes any order-related effects, such as response fatigue and anchoring, randomly across participants rather than allowing them to accumulate systematically.

The five scenes are each anchored to one of ART's four components: being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility (the last covered by two scenes), and the alterations in each pair are designed to target the specific restorative quality associated with that component.

This paired approach draws on a visual preference assessment approach used in Nordh et al.'s (2009) study on pocket parks, which tested how specific environmental elements affected restorativeness ratings. By pairing a documented site condition with a designed alternative, the survey does not simply measure how residents perceive the cemetery as it stands, but tests whether targeted interventions rooted in ART principles would meaningfully improve its perceived restorativeness; thereby grounding the design criteria that follow in empirical evidence rather than theoretical inference alone.

Closed-ended responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, and open-ended responses through thematic coding, inspired by Nordh's (2017) qualitative study of a Nordic cemetery. The findings are presented in Chapter 4, subsection 2, and will directly inform the design criteria in Chapter 5, subsection 1.

2.5 Limitations

Several limitations apply to this project's methods. The most pervasive is seasonal: the site visit, all survey photographs, and the digitally altered scenes were all produced in March 2026, under winter conditions characterised by leafless vegetation and snow cover. This

seasonal timing should be kept in mind when interpreting both the site analysis and the survey findings.

The photographic simulation method does not convey a place's full sensory character. Sounds, smells, temperature, and movement are absent from a static photograph, and participants' ratings of the altered scenes may therefore not fully reflect how the scenes would truly be experienced.

The survey sample is skewed toward the bereaved and regular visitors: 71% of respondents confirmed having a friend or loved one buried in the cemetery, which means that the survey captures this group's perceptions with greater depth than it does for recreational users or newcomers.

The site analysis, though grounded in the theoretical framework established in the literature review, also inevitably involves subjective judgment in the assessment of spatial and experiential qualities.



FIG. 5: A BASALT-COLUMN HEADSTONE UNDER A BIRCH (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

3 Theoretical background

The theoretical foundation for the design proposal draws on two bodies of literature. The first concerns cemeteries as multifunctional urban spaces: what they are, the functions they serve for the living, and the evidence for their restorative potential. The second introduces the environmental psychology frameworks used to analyse and operationalise that potential: Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) Preference Matrix and Kaplan's (1995) Attention Restoration Theory (ART), along with the Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS), initially developed by Hartig et al. (1997). Together, these bodies of literature inform a research-through-design approach and generate the design implications required to proceed with a design proposal.

3.1 Cemeteries as multifunctional urban spaces

Cemeteries occupy a peculiar position in the urban fabric: they are simultaneously among the oldest planned landscapes in many cities and among the most overlooked in discussions of urban green infrastructure. To understand how a cemetery might be redesigned to serve broader restorative and social functions, it is necessary to first understand what cemeteries are, how they came to take the forms they have today, and what roles they already fulfil for the living. This section traces the historical development of cemeteries in Iceland and the

Nordic countries before examining the contemporary significance of funerary rituals, the established evidence for cemeteries as urban green spaces, and, finally, their restorative potential, or the qualities that make them not just places of burial, but places of recreation and psychological restoration.

3.1.1 Historical developments of cemeteries in Iceland and the Nordics

Sanitation concerns and urban crowding have significantly influenced the development of cemeteries. In ancient times, Romans and Jews typically buried their dead outside city walls. During the medieval and early modern period, Christian burial customs took place in churches and churchyards, leading to overcrowded city churchyards that became public health hazards that prompted a shift from traditional churchyard burials to the development of planned cemeteries (Encyclopædia Britannica, no date). In practical terms, cemeteries are designated areas for burying or entombing the



FIG. 6: EXCAVATED 'KUML' AT YTRI-GARÐSHORN, DALVÍK, ICELAND (ELDJÁRN, 1954).

dead, but they encompass much more than just the internment of the deceased or addressing public health and sanitation concerns. They're complex and fascinating places that have historical, cultural, personal, social, and sacred importance in their communities, as they offer culturally sanctioned and sacred places for the living to remember their dead (Rae, 2021; Encyclopædia Britannica, no date).

Historically, burial was often a family affair, with many cultures carefully choosing burial sites based on spiritual, ancestral, or geomantic beliefs. The cultural significance of cemeteries varies widely, and in some regions, such as Japan and Mexico, they serve as sites of remembrance and celebration, whereas in others, they are more austere or even avoided (Encyclopædia Britannica, no date). Icelandic burial customs can be said to derive from the convergence of two cultures: Germanic paganism on one hand, and Christianity on the other (Eldjárn, 1974, p. 143). Between 870 and 1.000, during the Norwegian settlement of Iceland, people were typically buried in low mounds called *Kuml*, in accordance with then-contemporary pagan customs (Jochens, 1999; Georgsson, 2006). These mounds were generally situated close to farmsteads in Iceland, though never within the home field (Eldjárn, 1974, p. 143). However, the gradual spread of Christianity was already underway at the time, setting the stage for the Christianisation event of the year 1.000, known locally as *Kristintaka* (Vésteinsson, 2000), which is when the oldest known Christian-style graveyards start to appear in Iceland (Zoëga and Sigurðsson, 2010; Kristjánsdóttir, 2015). This culture shift happened in parallel to the emergence of the first

Nordic cemeteries, which, like the Icelandic ones, were established for the burial of Christians (Nordh, 2017). Following the adoption of Christianity, funerals became ecclesiastical affairs: graves were situated in, beside, or within designated areas around churches, and family members played a passive role while the clergy took over their previous responsibilities and oversaw the funeral (Stefánsson, 1975, p. 78).

3.1.2 Contemporary roles of funeral rituals and cemeteries

Cemeteries establish their role in human society through their capacity to facilitate physical contact with death and mortality (Haaland and van den Bosch, 2015; Grabalov, 2018). Funerals and associated death rituals serve vital functions for the living, offering the bereaved meaningful ways to connect with the loss of a loved one through the physical presence of the deceased. Studies on modern death care practices show that direct engagement with the body, such as washing, dressing, and viewing, can have therapeutic benefits by allowing mourners to perform final acts of care and begin the grieving process. These activities help maintain an intimate connection with the deceased before final disposition, often treating the body as if the person still retains awareness and preferences. Such engagements enable mourners to express care, preserve the deceased's identity, and support their own emotional healing (Mathijssen, 2023).

Beyond individual therapeutic benefits, funerals serve important social and communicative roles. They provide structured settings for families and communities to acknowledge

death, express wishes, and fulfil perceived obligations to the deceased. For many, organising wills and funerals is a more manageable form of death-related preparation than facing the unpredictability of dying. In contrast, when such planning and communication do not occur, those grieving often face increased stress, guilt for not knowing the deceased's wishes, and regret over unspoken words (Wilson et al., 2024).

Cemeteries function as special, sacred places of personal, emotional, and spiritual reclamation, thereby significantly extending their role beyond the funeral itself. For the bereaved, cemeteries provide places where they can recompile shattered selves, and many report a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment at the end of a visit, describing unrest that builds between visits and can only be relieved through

return visits to a grave. While most people initially encounter cemeteries at the ritualised moment of loss, the ongoing engagement with cemeteries helps to manage grief over extended periods of time. These spaces also offer personal landscapes of memory and mourning, often becoming places of regular return and contemplation, and for tending and regenerating relationships with the deceased, as well as for maintaining their identity. Which may make these places more alive and more actively engaged with than many other places (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou, 2020).

The cemetery provides what many describe as a unique atmosphere of quiet that offers the private time and space needed to address grief: “[At the cemetery] ... you're in a different frame of mind, and the pace of life is different” (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou, 2020,



FIG. 7: PALLBEARERS AT THE STATE FUNERAL OF DAVÍÐ ODDSSON, PRIME MINISTER OF ICELAND 1991–2004, AT HALLGRÍMSKIRKJA, 08/03/2026 (GUNNARSSON/VÍSIR, 2026).

p. 143). For many visitors, coming to the cemetery allows them to offload their grief at the graveside, providing emotional catharsis in a space that, though public, permits quiet crying and contemplation (Francis, Kellaher and Neophytou, 2020).

Thus, understanding what mourners look for in a cemetery, like privacy, tranquillity, a feeling of care and purpose, and the chance to grieve privately, is crucial before exploring how these spaces can also cater to the wider public. This helps prevent one user group's needs from undermining another's.

3.1.3 Cemeteries as urban green space

What makes cemeteries public space? Does sharing many of the conventional parks' aesthetic qualities, such as lawns, dense vegetation, diverse tree species, and a network of paths (Nordh, 2017) make a cemetery one? In accordance with Mehta's (2013, p. 20) definition of public space, Swensen, Nordh, and Brendalsmo (2016) consider "public space as the space that is open to the public, which generates public use, and active or passive so-

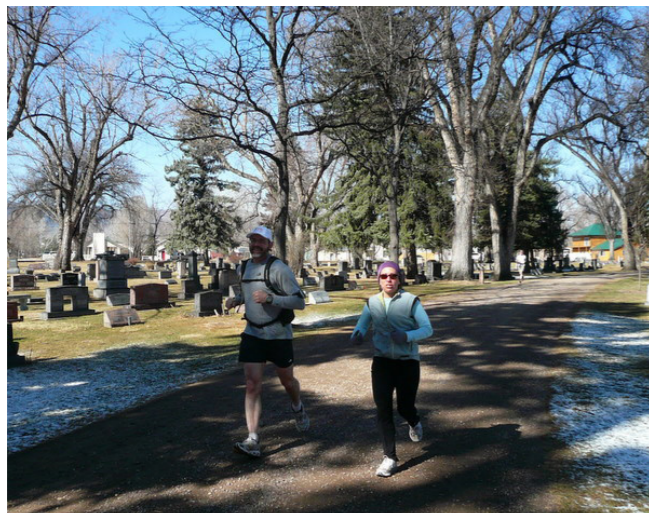


FIG. 8: RUNNERS AT GRANDVIEW CEMETERY, FORT COLLINS, COLORADO, USA (WONG, 2009).

cial behaviour, and where people are subject to the general regulations that govern the use of space", and Nordic cemeteries fall neatly within this definition.

Compared to other public spaces, cemeteries often support a higher density of flowering plants (Andersson, Barthel and Ahrné, 2007; Kowarik et al., 2016), and Nordic cemeteries in general are notably more vegetated than their counterparts in, for example, Mediterranean countries (Nordh, 2017). Nordic cemeteries also tend to be enclosed by hedges, stone walls, or fences, and the hedges are frequently used to create internal walls and rooms within their cemeteries. All of these qualities make them attractive to people for purposes beyond visiting a grave (Nordh, 2017). Grabalov (2018) observed people visiting urban cemeteries for many reasons besides visiting graves, such as walking a dog, jogging, cycling, playing with children, and even having a picnic, and noted that these activities do not seem to conflict with other uses. But, even though recreational activities can coexist with commemorative functions when users behave respectfully, social norms can make such activities questionable for some visitors (Swensen, Nordh and Brendalsmo, 2016; Grabalov, 2018).

Park-like cemeteries, with rich vegetation and varied ground contours, have also been found to be preferred over cemeteries lacking these qualities (Długozima, Kosiacka-Beck and Krzykawska, 2025). This aligns neatly with the fact that Nordic cemeteries are characterised by their park-like qualities: lawns, dense vegetation, diverse tree species, and networks of paths, with gravestones typically arranged in a grid-like pattern (Nordh, 2017).

It must also be noted that the standard of their maintenance matters significantly to visitors: a neglected cemetery signals a lack of care and meaning, undermining its role as a place for both the deceased and the living (Berglund, 1994), and a well-tended cemetery can become an attraction in itself (Grabalov, 2018). Despite their potential, empirical studies examining which specific types of cemetery landscape design best support mental restoration and reflection among visitors remain scarce (Nordh, 2017).

3.1.4 The restorative potential of cemeteries

Nordh (2017) investigated people's perceptions of urban cemeteries as restorative spaces and explored how cemeteries' combination of nature, culture, and history contributes to psychological restoration. Their research was conducted at Gamlebyen cemetery, a five-hectare cemetery in Oslo, a 15 minutes' walk from the city centre, containing 7.000 graves, of which 200 hold historical value. The cemetery exhibits characteristics typical of a Nordic cemetery, such as a park-like design with hedges, bushes, flowers, lawns, and diverse tree species, including a notable avenue of old chestnut trees and newly planted silver birches. The cemetery is enclosed by fencing with three main entrances and features a traditional grid-pattern layout of paths and graves (Nordh, 2017).

Nordh (2017) revealed that all four of ART's components were present in visitors' natural descriptions of the cemetery, and that it was perceived by visitors as a restorative environ-

ment. Its natural, cultural, and historical elements, such as trees, vegetation, birds, graves, and headstones, served as a source of fascination; the cemetery provided an experience of being away, functioning as a refuge from the city where visitors could achieve psychological distance from everyday life; extent was evident in visitors' appreciation for the cemetery's order and maintenance standards, enclosed spatial quality, and its variety of plants; compatibility emerged as visitors described using the cemetery intentionally for relaxation, reflection, and contemplation, with some participants explicitly stating that the cemetery better suited their needs for restoration compared to conventional parks. This was attributed to how the combination of the cemetery's restorative elements and a present respect for the deceased and mourners created a calm atmosphere that supported inwards reflection and contemplation (Nordh, 2017). ART and its four components are discussed further in chapter 3.2.2.

Nordh (2017) chose ART as the primary analytical lens for their research because it accommodates both built and natural features, making it particularly well-suited to contextually rich environments like cemeteries, and because it corresponds strongly with visitor experiences. During their study, other themes emerged that were out of ART's scope, including descriptions of natural beauty and environmental preference that could not be clearly linked to specific restorative components of ART, and were perhaps more in line with Ulrich et al.'s (1991) Stress Reduction Theory (SRT). Though it is not explored further in this study, it suggests that SRT's emphasis on

positive affective responses may also help explain cemeteries' restorative potential.

Despite the evidence that cemeteries possess genuine restorative qualities, there remains a lack of empirical research examining which specific design features and spatial configurations best support restoration in cemeteries (Nordh, 2017; Swensen, Nordh and Brendalmo, 2016).

3.2 People and environment

Urban life in general, and urban stressors such as traffic noise, fear of crime, and crowding, create psychological demands that motivate people to seek contact with natural environments. If such contact occurs, it can not only facilitate psychological restoration that alleviates built-up stress, but also support mental health and our ability to function more effectively in daily life (van Den Berg, Hartig and Staats, 2007; Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010). The natural environments in question are not necessarily distant wilderness or dramatic landscapes, but ordinary, everyday nature that is, or should be, close to where we live, and include parks and open spaces, streets with trees, backyard gardens, nearby fields and forests, and even cemeteries (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Ulrich et al., 1991; Kaplan, 1995; Ouellette, Kaplan and Kaplan, 2005; Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010; Packer and Bond, 2010; Nordh, 2017). All of which can be tiny or expansive, right outside the window or farther away, and may be either carefully managed or left relatively untended (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

Understanding how people perceive, prefer, and benefit from natural and everyday environments is essential to designing and creating spaces that support human well-being (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010). This understanding rests on two foundational concepts: preference and perception, which explain how people evaluate and extract information from their surroundings (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010), and ART, which provides a framework for understanding how natural environments help people recover from mental fatigue and maintain their effectiveness in daily life (Kaplan, 1995).

3.2.1 Preference and perception

Preference, or environmental preference, refers to people's evaluative responses to different settings, or what they like or favour in their surroundings. This response is often regarded as superficial or subjective, but research shows that these preferences are not random or purely based on the individual; rather, they follow predictable patterns across diverse populations and indicate that people prefer environments they perceive to support human needs and purposes (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

DIMENSIONS	UNDERSTANDING	EXPLORATION
2D	Coherence	Complexity
3D	Legibility	Mystery

FIG. 9: KAPLAN & KAPLAN'S (1989) PREFERENCE MATRIX

Perception, in this context, involves how people process and extract information from their environment. This occurs at multiple levels. People rapidly assess both the two-dimen-

sional patterns, such as textures, elements, and their grouping, and three-dimensional aspects, or what it would be like to be in the space. When viewing a scene, people make very rapid judgments about how well they understand it and whether they would feel safe, lost, or intrigued if they were there (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

The relationship between preference and perception is organised around two fundamental human needs: understanding and exploration. Understanding refers to people's desire to make sense of their surroundings and comprehend what's happening around them, which provides a sense of security. Exploration involves the drive to expand horizons, to discover what lies ahead, and to seek new information and challenges (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

These two needs translate into four specific informational factors that influence preference: coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery. Coherence refers to an orderly, organised setting with clear areas and recurring themes that make a place easier to understand in two-dimensional views. Complexity refers to the richness and variety of visual elements that stimulate interest and encourage exploration at the two-dimensional level. Legibility concerns the presence of distinctive, memorable features that help people orient themselves and navigate three-dimensional spaces. Finally, mystery involves subtle cues that suggest there is more to discover, inviting continued exploration within three-dimensional environments (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

Research demonstrates that natural environments consistently receive higher preference ratings than built urban environments, and this preference reflects more than romantic idealisation; it serves important adaptive functions (van Den Berg, Hartig and Staats, 2007). Even small amounts of coherence, legibility, complexity, or mystery can strongly shape how comfortable people feel in a setting, yet many environments lack these features (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

3.2.2 Attention restoration theory

ART provides a detailed framework for understanding the psychological benefits of nature and is grounded in the idea that human cognitive skills have evolved to function in natural settings. The theory focuses on directed attention, a finite cognitive resource that is crucial for daily activities, and namely, its counterpart, fascination, which is effortless and not subject to capacity limitations (Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 1997; James, 2017).

Directed attention is a voluntary mechanism that allows people to focus on tasks that don't inherently capture interest and operates through inhibition, the effortful suppression of competing thoughts and distractions to maintain focus on a given task, which is essential for problem-solving, appropriate social behaviour, and managing daily demands. (Pennebaker, 1992; Kaplan, 1995). However, this mechanism is susceptible to fatigue, and prolonged mental effort leads to a state where the capacity to ward off distractions diminishes. This fatigue can negatively affect human functioning and emotions, with height-

ened distractibility and irritability, as well as impaired concentration and impulse control (Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 1997).

Restoration occurs when one can replenish the cognitive resources needed for directed attention. This requires a mode of attention alternative to directed attention; one that does not rely on effortful focus. This effortless or involuntary attention can occur only when the environment supports it, and natural environments are particularly effective at supporting the restorative experience through its four integral components: being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility (Kaplan, 1995).

Being away refers to situations in which environments provide distance from routine demands and from thoughts or distractions that require directed attention, and allow one to set aside their pursuit of particular purposes (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Physical distance alone is not sufficient for enabling this sense of being away (Hartig, Mang and Evans, 1991).

For restoration to be effective, the environment should also have sufficient extent, and its capacity to afford restoration is reduced if it lacks this quality (Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 1997). Extent relies on the ability to organise perceptual and conceptual elements of the environment into a coherent mental image and is a function of both connectedness and scope. Connectedness refers to how we perceive elements in the environment to relate to one another and their setting, and scope, which describes both the physical and psychological scale of one's environment, or in other words, how one perceives their physical and immediate surroundings or imagines their peripheral

and out-of-sight environments to be (Hartig et al., 1997). An extensive environment must be rich and coherent enough to feel like a whole other world, engaging the mind sufficiently to occupy mental space through both its physical scope and its conceptual connections (Kaplan, 1995).

Natural features in environments that evoke a sense of being away offer fascination through inherently interesting stimuli that capture one's attention effortlessly (Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 1997). However, the influence of fascination on restoration is complex. Some forms of fascinations can be so powerful that they distract attention from what a situation requires, and people can even become fascinated by events that might harm their mental and emotional states, such as violence (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Hartig et al., 1997). The term which best describes the most effective form of fascination for enabling restoration is soft fascination: elements such as clouds, sunsets, or leaves rustling in the breeze that gently hold attention while still leaving room for inward reflection (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995). While soft fascination is generally considered most beneficial for restoration, more intense fascinations, or hard fascinations, can also be beneficial if they align with or support the perceptual or cognitive framework necessary for restoration (Hartig et al., 1997).

Finally, compatibility; settings should align with what a person wants to do and what the environment affords and requires, so that activities can unfold smoothly and naturally (Kaplan, 1995). People's need to perform actions that matter, are worthwhile, or adhere to a higher purpose is readily met in natural en-

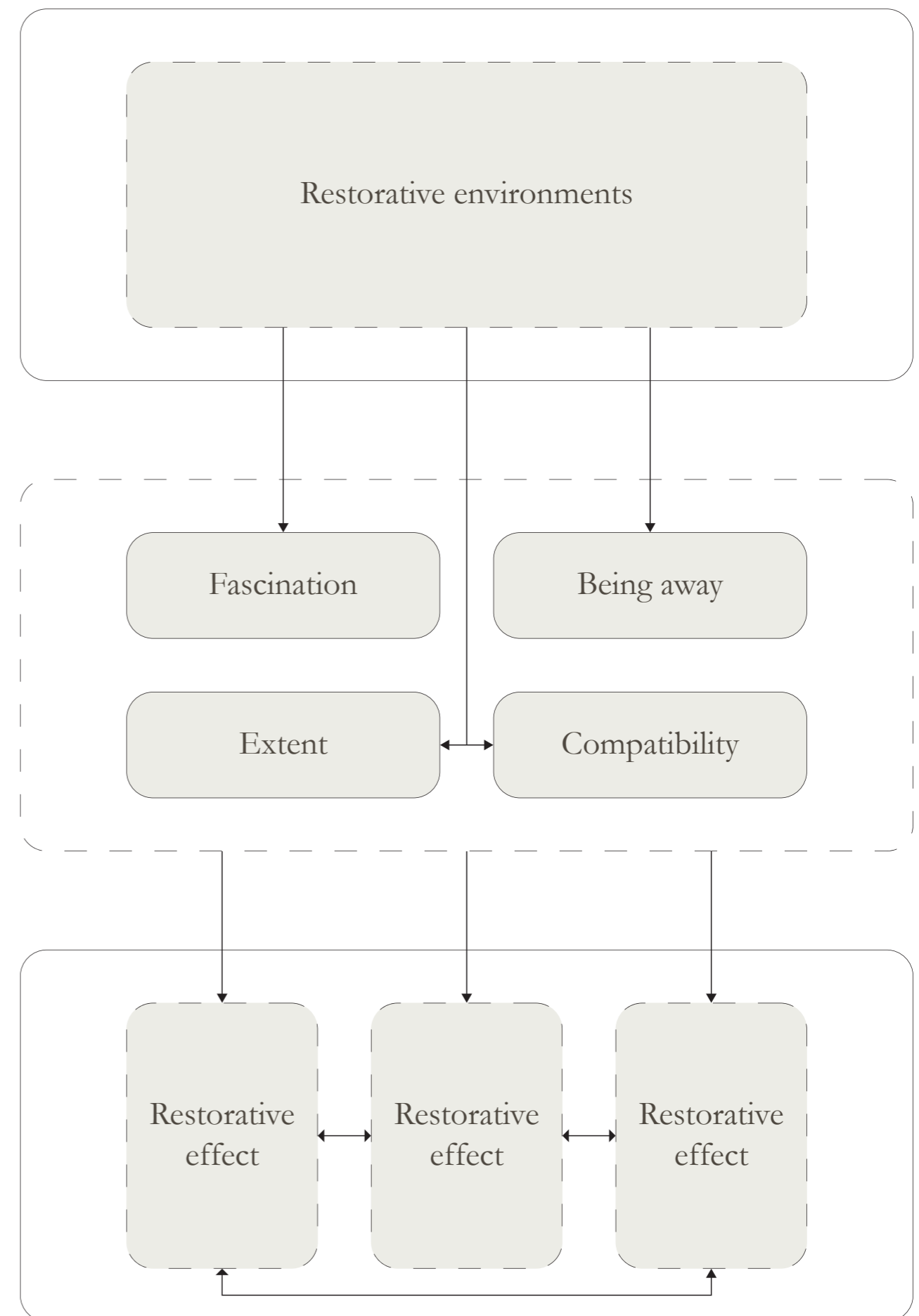


FIG. 10: ATTENTION RESTORATION THEORY

vironments because these environments effectively communicate a sense of reality (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). What makes compatibility particularly important is its double-edged nature. High compatibility enables reflection and can lead to profound and lasting outcomes, whereas a mismatch between people's needs and wants and what the environment affords can increase environmental stress (Hartig et al., 1997), suggesting a reduction in the effectiveness of the environment's restorative qualities. People tend to experience high compatibility with nature and often find that functioning in natural settings is easier than in more civilised settings, suggesting that the natural environment and human inclinations resonate with one another (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989).

3.2.3 Perceived Restorative Scale

PRS, initially developed by Hartig et al. (1997) before the turn of the century and later refined by others (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001; Pasini et al., 2014), offers researchers a standardised method to assess how individuals perceive the restorative qualities of environments. The scale is based on the idea that environmental preference may indicate restorativeness and is grounded in ART (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989), utilising its four primary components (being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility) to create a practical assessment tool (Hartig et al., 1997).

Hartig et al.'s (1997) original scale includes 16 items rated on a seven-point (0–6) Likert scale (Likert, 1932), designed to measure the presence and extent of ART's components in an environment. Validated through multiple

studies with international students, the scale effectively distinguishes between different environments: natural settings consistently scored higher in restorative qualities than built environments, and outdoor areas scored higher than indoor ones. Additionally, Hartig et al. (1997) showed that restorativeness ratings obtained via video or photographic simulations did not differ significantly from on-site assessments, indicating the scale's usefulness for remote evaluations of sites and design proposals.

A study by Purcell, Peron, and Berto (2001) supports Hartig et al.'s (1997) notion of preference reflecting restorativeness and suggests that people unknowingly base their preference judgement of a scene on its restorative value. Using an extended and expanded version of the PRS, with more questions and splitting the extent factor into coherence and scope, the trio tested different scene types ranging from industrial zones to natural lakes and found a strong correlation between preference and restorativeness. In their study, environments with significant topographic variation or water elements and little human presence received the highest preference scores from the participants of their study, while built environments scored the lowest (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001).

Pasini et al. (2014) recognised some practical constraints of Hartig et al.'s (1997) scale, which they attributed to its ill-defined psychometric and factorial properties. This was partly because items varied across studies and partly because most studies aimed to use rather than analyse the scale. They developed the so-called PRS-11, a shortened version of the scale

that consists of 11 items, and much like Purcell, Peron, and Berto's (2001) version, splits the extent factor into coherence and scope, but omits compatibility. The PRS-11 successfully distinguishes between different environmental categories, with hills and lakes receiving the highest scores, followed by housing and city streets, and with industrial zones scoring the lowest. The scale demonstrated little variance across countries and genders, meaning it functions consistently across these demographic variables (Pasini et al., 2014). In addition, Pasini et al. (2014) aimed to understand how laypeople discuss restorative quality and interpret existing item wording, and to clarify the meaning of each of the scale's items when translated into different languages (in their case, Italian). They found that different verb tenses affected the participants' understanding of some items, and that presenting items in their present sense, without double negation, and with positive wording had the most positive impact on clarity.

The PRS and PRS-11 provide designers and planners with concrete tools to assess restorative potential of existing and proposed settings (Hartig et al., 1997; Pasini et al., 2014). For instance, designers can use the scale to evaluate how potential users rate alternative design configurations, enabling evidence-based decisions about spatial arrangements, natural elements, and environmental features. The strong relationship between restorativeness and preference suggests that designing for restoration also addresses aesthetic preferences, with environments perceived as more restorative are also being more preferred (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001).

The consistent findings across studies indicate that incorporating natural elements, topographic variation, water features, coherent spatial organisation, and opportunities for exploration enhances perceived restorativeness (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001; Pasini et al., 2014). The scale's ability to function with photographic simulations also makes it particularly valuable (Hartig et al., 1997), given the approach of this project.

While the PRS and its subsequent iterations have demonstrated consistent validity across environments, cultural contexts, and demographic variables, certain measurement challenges persist, particularly in isolating the extent and coherence components, which tend to overlap with one another and with other restorative components in participants' responses (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001; Pasini et al., 2014; Nordh, 2017).

3.3 Design implications

Each of ART's four components (being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility) carries direct consequences for how a restorative environment should be shaped. The following sections translate these components into concrete design implications, drawing on empirical cemetery research and environmental psychology literature to identify which spatial arrangements, vegetation strategies, and design interventions are most likely to support psychological restoration at Gufuneskirkju-garður. The Preference Matrix's four factors (coherence, complexity, legibility, and mystery) run as a secondary thread throughout,

since they govern how visitors perceive and evaluate the very spaces that ART describes as restorative. Together, these frameworks provide a theoretically grounded basis for the design criteria developed in Chapter 5.

3.3.1 Supporting “being away”

A restorative cemetery must do more than simply be located away from the city: being away requires an environment to offer a psychological distance from everyday demands (Kaplan, 1995). Nordh et al. (2009) established that grass, trees, and bushes are the strongest predictors of perceived being away in urban green spaces, operating through the enclosure they create and creating psychological separation from the demands of everyday life. Cemetery-specific research reinforces this. Nordh (2017) found that the enclosed spatial quality of Gamlebyen cemetery in Oslo, with its hedges, internal rooms, and separation from the city, was central to visitors’ sense of being away. This hedge structure, characteristic of Nordic cemeteries, creates both external boundaries and internal divisions that are not merely aesthetic, but restorative (Nordh, 2017). Design

wise, this suggests that maintaining a physical and psychological separation from everyday life with layered planting structure, such as combining canopy trees with understory vegetation, can serve as an effective instrument for enabling visitors’ sense of being away.

3.3.2 Supporting “fascination”

Two categories of fascination are available in a cemetery: natural and cultural-historical. On the natural side, elements, such as “clouds, sunsets, snow patterns, [and] the motion of the leaves in the breeze” are particularly valuable for their ability to fascinate and to capture attention in an undramatic way that leaves headspace for reflection (Kaplan, 1995, p. 174). Nordh et al. (2009) found water to be the single strongest predictor of fascination among all physical components of urban green spaces, with trees and lower ground vegetation also making significant independent contributions. Purcell, Peron, and Berto (2001) similarly found that environments containing water features and topographic variation received the highest preference and restorativeness scores across different scenes. Water is there-

fore a high-priority design element for its ability to supports fascination directly, along with trees and vegetation.

On the cultural-historical side, Nordh (2017) found that headstones, monuments, and historical features provided a form of fascination that visitors did not find elsewhere in the urban environment. Lai, Scott, and Sun (2019) confirmed this in a Scottish context, finding that graveside adornments encouraged deep reflection and enriched visitors’ sense of fascination. These cultural elements are inherent to any cemetery and need not be introduced by design, but they may be made accessible through design that draws visitors toward significant features and allows them to be encountered at a considered pace. A planting palette supporting seasonal variation, through species with different flowering times, foliage change, and wildlife habitat value, may further extend the soft fascination a cemetery affords across seasons and visitor types.

3.3.3 Supporting “extent”

As established in chapter 3.2.2, extent requires an environment that is coherent and

rich enough to engage the mind as a complete world, based on two conditions: scope, the environment’s physical and psychological scale, and connectedness, how elements relate to each other and to the setting as a whole (Kaplan, 1995; Hartig et al., 1997).

The Preference Matrix is directly relevant here. Mystery, or the suggestion that more lies beyond what is currently visible, is what makes scope feel greater than it physically is: a scene with many layers of trees, plants, and different textures, that overlap and obfuscate a on otherwise direct view, becomes rich in mystery and creates a sense of depth that alters the perceived scope and connectedness of an area (Kaplan, 1995; Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010). Kaplan (1995, p. 174) notes that “trails and paths can be designed so that small areas seem much larger”, identifying path design an effective primary tool for manipulating perceived extent. Nordh et al. (2009) found that a not only a park’s size, but its perceived size, was a strong predictor of its restorative potential, demonstrating that design strategies increasing perceived rather than actual size carry genuine restorative value. Thus, mystery is achievable through path curvature, vegetative



FIG. 11: BOTNSTJÖRN, ÁSBYRGI, ICELAND 2021 (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)



FIG. 12: KERLING, SNÆFELLSJÖKULL NATIONAL PARK, ICELAND 2022 (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)



FIG. 13: LIMHAMN, SIBBARP, SWEDEN 2025 (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

screening of intermediate views, and spatial sequences that disclose the environment gradually. Legibility ensures that mystery does not become disorientation and helps visitors make sense of their surroundings (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010): memorable waypoints and coherent spatial logic should still allow visitors to find their way there and back again.

Nordh (Nordh, 2017) identified the enclosed yet varied character of Gamlebyen cemetery as a key contributor to its perceived extent, with the combination of spatial organisation and vegetation creating a sense of a coherent whole that could be explored. The internal hedge and planted room structure typical of Nordic cemeteries (Nordh, 2017) thus strengthens extent, as it creates the connectedness that allows spaces within cemeteries to feel part of a larger, mysterious, and explorable environment rather than a collection of isolated sections.



FIG. 14: AUSTURVÖLLUR, REYKJAVÍK, ICELAND 2025 (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

3.3.4 Supporting “compatibility”

Compatibility occurs when an environment’s affordances align with a person’s purposes and wants (Kaplan, 1995), while a mismatch between needs and affordances increases environmental stress and undermines restoration (Hartig et al., 1997). Compatibility is perhaps the most directly challenged by multifunctionality, since people’s needs and expectations of environments differ: a setting that supports one person’s needs and desires well may be incompatible with another whose needs are not aligned with what the environment affords (Kaplan, 1995). In a cemetery shared between mourners and recreational visitors, the risk of such conflicts is possible, and the space must simultaneously support the bereaved and other users (Swensen, Nordh and Brendalmo, 2016; Grabalov, 2018).

Grabalov and Nordh (2022) identified zoning as an effective instrument that Nordic municipalities use to manage this conflict, differentiating areas within cemeteries by function while preserving their overall character throughout. The City of Copenhagen’s strategy frames it underlying principle explicitly: all users should be welcomed as long as the cemetery’s primary function remains visible and respected in every part of the site. Grabalov and Nordh (2022) also noted how cemeteries communicate with the public, and that moving from prohibition-focused signage toward messaging that articulates the cemetery’s character and invites thoughtful use, and that signage which leads with rules suggests incompatibility with everyday use.

3.4 Synthesis

Chapter 3 has established two interlocking bodies of knowledge that together provide the theoretical foundation for the design proposal. The first concerns what cemeteries already are and do: historically rooted places of cultural and spiritual significance that in the Nordic context have evolved into park-like, publicly accessible green spaces with demonstrable restorative qualities. The second provides the conceptual tools needed to understand and operationalise those qualities: the Preference Matrix, ART, and the PRS offer frameworks for identifying which environmental conditions support psychological restoration and how to assess them.

Three conclusions are important for the design work that follows. First, the evidence that cemeteries possess genuine restorative potential demonstrates that the project’s core premise is well-founded: a cemetery can be designed to serve restorative and recreational purposes alongside its primary commemorative function. Second, the compatibility challenge is real, but manageable. The risk that one user group’s needs might undermine another’s is not a reason to avoid multifunctionality, but a reason to address it through thoughtful spatial organisation: zoning, welcoming signage, and a design that keeps the cemetery’s primary character legible throughout. Third, and most directly relevant to the design process, the review reveals a gap: while the theoretical case for restorative cemetery design is strong, empirical research on which specific spatial arrangements and interventions best support restoration in cemetery contexts remains

scarce. The design implications set out in section 3.3 draw on available evidence, but it is preliminary. It is the site analysis and resident survey in Chapter 4 that translate these implications into a specific, contextually grounded understanding of what Gufuneskirkjugarður needs to become multifunctional and restorative.

4 Study

This chapter presents the empirical findings that inform the design proposal. The site analysis applies the theoretical framework established in Chapter 3 to the spatial conditions of Gufuneskirkjugarður, assessing its restorative qualities and shortcomings through the lens of Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and the Preference Matrix. The resident survey then captures how actual and potential users perceive those qualities, using photographed scene pairs rated against PRS-derived items. Together, the two establish the empirical basis for the design criteria developed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Site analysis

The site analysis begins with the place itself. Before the theoretical framework can be applied, it helps to understand what Gufuneskirkjugarður actually is; its history, its layout, and the experiential conditions encountered during the March 2026 visit.

4.1.1 Gufuneskirkjugarður

Gufuneskirkjugarður is a 32,1-hectare cemetery located in the northern suburb of Gráfarvogur in Reykjavík, Iceland. Preparatory works for the construction of the cemetery began around 1978, followed by the development of burial areas, and planting. The first rows of sheltering trees were planted in 1979, and full-scale burials commenced in 1982, when the

burial areas at the nearby Fossvogur cemetery were exhausted. The cemetery has been developed in phases since, with the stated ambition that its finish and facilities be exemplary (Sæmundsen, 2000b). It is enclosed and features a lychgate at its main entrance on Hallsvegur, with a secondary entrance from Borgarvegur at the northern edge (Sæmundsen, 2000c).

The cemetery's 2000 general plan designates a building site at the south edge, adjacent to the main entrance, intended to accommodate a service building, a chapel, a crematorium, and 150 parking spaces (Sæmundsen, 2000a). A later proposal from 2006 expanded on this vision, proposing an event space for wakes (Arkibúllan, Jónsdóttir and Þorsteinsdóttir, 2006). To date, only the service building and some of the parking have been realised. The burial areas themselves are characterised by grass lawns enclosed by hedges, with drivable paths providing access throughout. The general plan anticipated that maturing vegetation would come to define the character of the burial areas over time, and designated rest areas where visitors could enjoy peace and quiet (Sæmundsen, 2000c). Several special sections have been established within the cemetery: a cremation area planned for 3,600 urns; and three sections for congregations outside the national church, comprising an Ásatrú (pagan) section (in 1997, 70 plots), a Muslim section (in 1990, 35 plots), and a Buddhist section (in 1998, 40 plots) (Sæmundsen, 2000c).

Gufuneskirkjugarður occupies a strategically significant position within the urban structure of northern Reykjavík. Reykjavík's master plan (Fig. 16) designates the land surrounding the cemetery predominantly as residential and

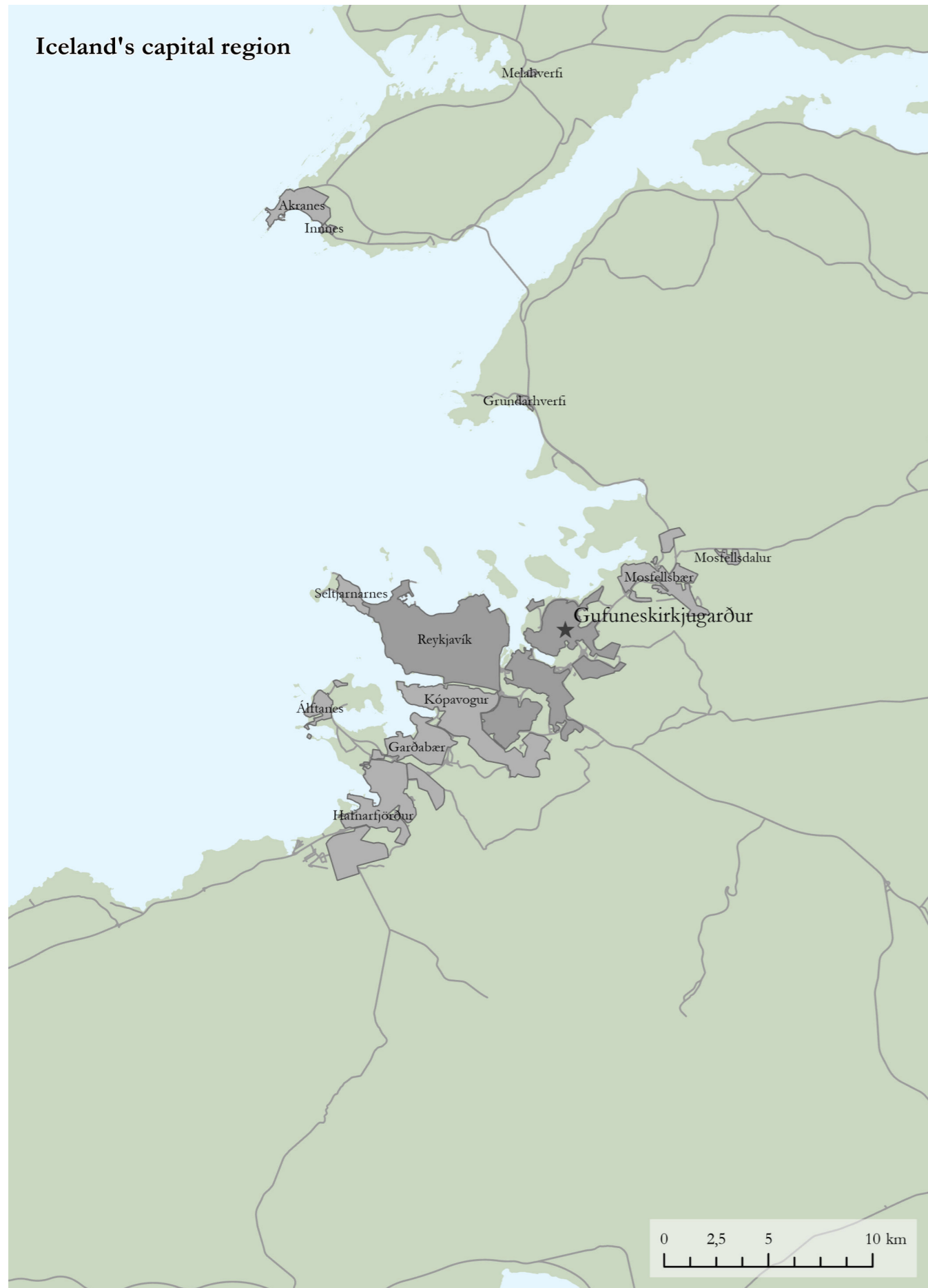


FIG. 15: LOCATION OF GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR (NÁTTÚRUFRAEDISTOFNUN ÍSLANDS, NO DATE)

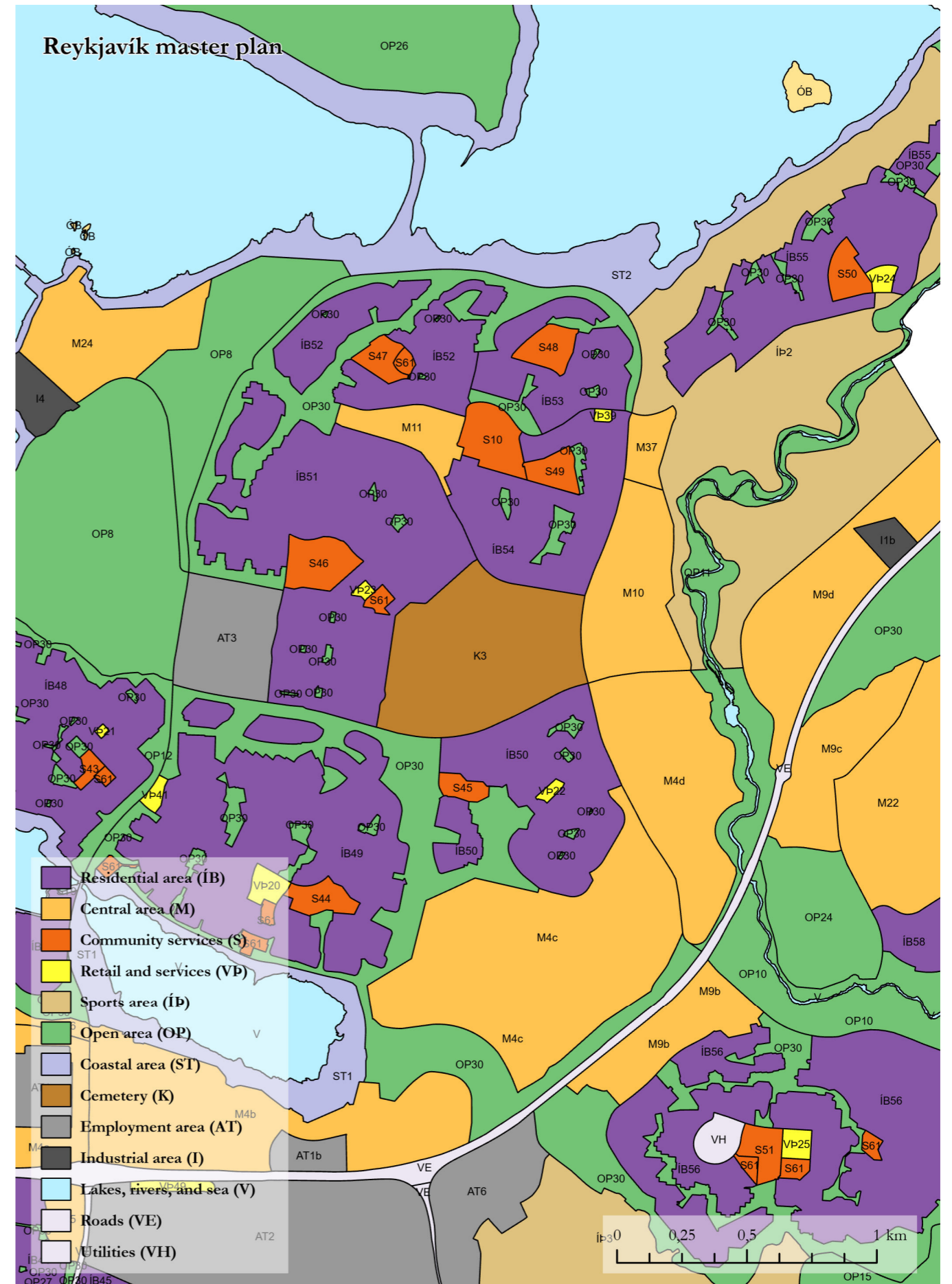


FIG. 16: REYKJAVÍK'S MASTER PLAN (REYKJAVÍKURBORG, NO DATE)

service areas, and a green corridor adjacent to the cemetery's south-western corner connects it to other open green areas and extends to the coast.

The catchment and connectivity map (Fig. 20) documents the pedestrian infrastructure and community amenities within the cemetery's immediate reach. Pedestrian and cycling paths along with underpasses connect the cemetery to the surrounding neighbourhoods of Grafarvogur, while schools, youth centres, sports facilities, and other community service centres within the catchment indicate a diverse potential user base. This concentration of residential areas and community amenities not only positions the cemetery as a potential third place: an informal and accessible place situated between home and the schools, sports grounds, and community facilities, but establishes that Gufuneskirkjugarður is not a peripheral or isolated place and is a centrally positioned resource with a potentially large role in the everyday outdoor life of the community it serves.

A field observation and site analysis was conducted in early March 2026 under calm, overcast skies with soft low-angle winter light. The season limited what could be evaluated: most vegetation was dormant, there was no flowering, and insect activity was absent. These constraints are acknowledged where relevant, and seasonal changes are considered in the analysis. The observation was structured around the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, which includes ART's four components and the four factors of the Preference Matrix.

4.1.2 Overall spatial character

Gufuneskirkjugarður is organised around a strict grid of approximately six-metre-wide driveable paths, which divide the cemetery into lettered zones, each subdivided into numbered sections. Smaller pedestrian paths branch off the main grid between rows of headstones. The spatial character of the cemetery is not uniform: a contrast exists between its older, more mature sections and its newer, less developed ones. Sections in the cemetery's western and central areas, particularly F1-F10, G1-G12, H0-H3, I1-I12, and J1-J2, benefit from decades of vegetation growth and feel enclosed, intimate, and settled. The cemetery's newer eastern sections, particularly R1-R4 and S1-S6, contain fewer planted graves, younger and sparser vegetation, and numerous still-empty plots. The experiential contrast between these two parts of the cemetery is considerable, and as the analysis below shows, has significant implications for its restorative and multifunctional qualities.

4.1.3 Being away

The cemetery's capacity to provide psychological distance from everyday demands varies substantially by zone. In the mature sections, the combination of hedgerows, trees, and planting creates a convincing sense of enclosure and separation. Which is a spatial condition that corresponds closely to what ART identifies as necessary for being away (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). The cemetery sits in a slight hollow, and a vegetated sound berm along the southern edge attenuates traffic noise from



FIG. 17: MAP DEPICTING GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR'S SECTIONS (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE)



FIG. 18: LOOKING OVER SECTION I'S VARYING HEADSTONES (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)



FIG. 19: THE CEMETERY'S EASTERN PERIMETER (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

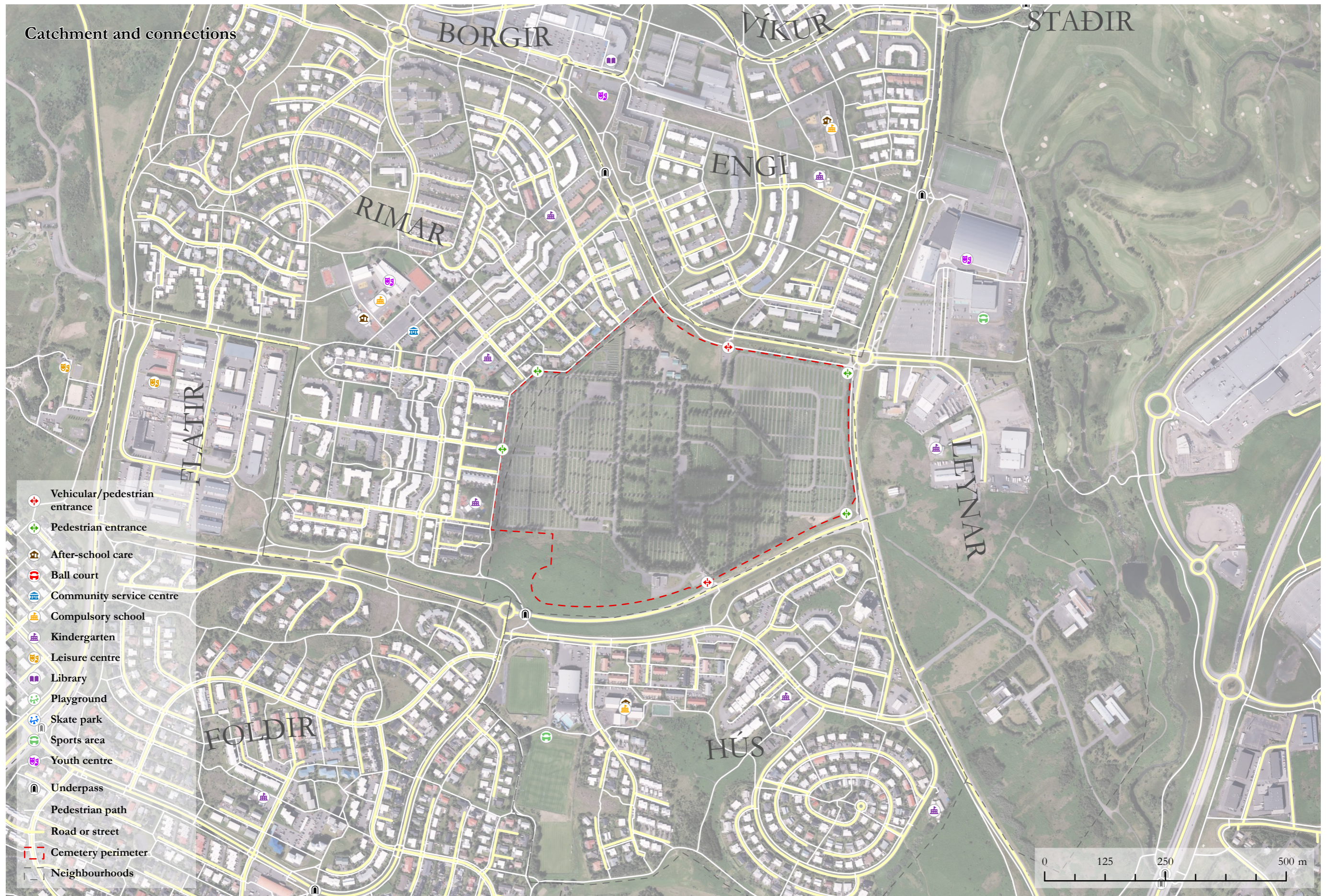


FIG.20: GUFUNESKIRKJUGARDUR'S CATCHMENT AND CONNECTIONS (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE; NÁTTÚRUFRAEDISTOFNUN ÍSLANDS, NO DATE; REYKJAVÍKURBORG, NO DATE)



FIG. 21: GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR'S GENERAL LAYOUT (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE; NÁTTÚRUFREÐISTOFNUN ÍSLANDS, NO DATE)

Hallsvegur. The northern and southern roads are barely visible from the cemetery's interior, though they are audible. The western perimeter fence, while visually unremarkable, effectively separates the cemetery from the residential neighbourhood beyond, which feels adjacent but not intrusive.

The eastern edge is the cemetery's most significant failure in terms of being away. Here, the perimeter vegetation consists of tall cottonwood trees with little understory, leaving vehicle traffic on Víkurvegur both clearly visible and loudly audible from sections R1-R4 and S3-S6. Traffic visibility is the single most immersion-breaking element identified during the visit, and the difference in the restorative quality between the mature western sections and the open, exposed eastern sections is so stark that it almost feels jarring. Addressing this, most plausibly through the introduction of a denser mixed hedge below the existing cottonwood canopy, would produce significant gains in the being away experience for the affected zones.

The main entrance threshold deserves separate attention. The pedestrian approach to the lychgate on Hallsvegur involves crossing a 50 km/h road at an unmarked crosswalk, a situation that does not prepare visitors for the change in pace and atmosphere that the cemetery interior offers. The threshold experience, which might otherwise indicate a significant transition from everyday urban life to a more contemplative mood, is instead marked by the hazards and noise of a suburban arterial road.

4.1.4 Fascination

Given the time of year, the fascination available in the cemetery was limited compared to what warmer seasons might offer. The dominant tree species, black cottonwood, downy birch, and occasional spruce, provided structural interest but little of the soft fascination that moving foliage, flower blossom, and seasonal variation could contribute during spring and summer. Water features, which are associated with high restorativeness and environmental preference (Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001), are absent throughout the site.

The cemetery's most distinctive sources of fascination are cultural and historical. The headstones themselves form a rich visual and contemplative resource: their material variation, the patina of lichen and moss on older stones, and the design trends legible across different eras invite effortless attention. A monument within the cemetery erected for those lost and never found, encircled by evergreen shrubs and anchored by a tree avenue that draws the visitor's gaze toward it, is the cemetery's most successful focal point, combining spatial drama with historical and emotional depth. By contrast, another monument erect-



FIG. 22: MONUMENT FOR THOSE LOST AND NEVER FOUND (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

ed for those who rest far away offers a pleasant view across the surrounding plots, but lacks the spatial framing needed for its significance to register fully. Neither monument bears any interpretive signage, which may limit their capacity to invite the kind of sustained contemplative attention beyond what they inherently offer for those not aware of their message.

Wildlife contributed to the site's fascination: a large population of northern ravens occupied the central sections of the cemetery and produced a remarkably varied range of vocalisations, almost as if they were having a prolonged discussion, while common starlings were audible along the northern perimeter.

4.1.5 Extent

The cemetery's physical scale and its underlying spatial logic support a reasonable degree of extent. Visual axes run the length of the major drivable paths and along tree avenues, offering depth but without the suggestion of more beyond. An elevated ridge in the cemetery's south-west provides a view across the whole site, affording a sense of scope that reinforces the cemetery's character as a coherent spatial whole rather than a collection of unrelated sections. The internal hedge and tree structure of the mature sections creates a series of interconnected rooms that, while distinct in character, feel continuous and related, which is consistent with Hartig et al.'s (1997) concept of connectedness as a prerequisite for extent.

However, the grid layout that organises the entire site works against one of the qualities that extent draws from: the sense that more

remains to be discovered. The paths are predominantly straight, the layout is fully legible from any major junction, and opportunities for spatial surprise or discovery are minimal. The only genuine exceptions is the monument to those lost and never found, which sit slightly apart from the grid and rewards approach. Without path curvature, vegetative screening of intermediate views, or spatial organisation that withholds as well as reveals, the site offers scope without the mystery that would make that scope feel greater.

4.1.6 Compatibility

Gufuneskirkjugarður already functions as an informal public green space to a modest degree: walkers, dog owners, parents with children, and cyclists were observed during the visit, and the wide drivable paths are clearly suited to low-impact exercise, such as walking or jogging. These informal uses align with what Grabalov (2018) observed in Malmö's cemeteries, where recreational use occurred without obvious conflict with commemorative functions, provided users behave respectfully.



FIG. 23: A BENCH IN THE CEMETERY (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)



FIG. 24: MONUMENT (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

The main constraint on compatibility is not social but spatial: the cemetery's resting areas are few, and those that exist are often awkwardly positioned and oriented toward neither significant views nor sheltered conditions. One exception is a bench tucked beneath a spruce near the cemetery's north-western corner, which demonstrated what thoughtful placement can achieve: enclosure, a sense of destination, and a view that rewards sitting. The remaining benches lack this quality. Beyond seating, the pedestrian path network has a structural problem: the only paths reserved exclusively for pedestrians are those between headstones, all of which were uncleared of snow during the visit and several of which are unpaved. Pedestrians are otherwise required to share the drivable paths with vehicles.

A notice at the northern entrance lists prohibitions in the cemetery: no alcohol, no drones, no photography of graves without permission, and notes that the cemetery is monitored by cameras. While these rules are reasonable, their tone does not communicate a warm welcome to the public, and their sole emphasis on prohibition misses the opportunity to frame the cemetery's character and values in terms that might invite thoughtful everyday use.

4.1.7 Preference

Coherence is the site's strongest Preference Matrix quality. The grid layout, uniform path treatment, consistent hedge height (approximately 1–1.5 metres), and repeated planting palette produce a setting that is easy to read and spatially intelligible, supporting the sense of understanding that the Preference Matrix identifies as foundational to preference (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010). Complexity is the weakest quality: outside the variation contributed by the headstones themselves, the planting palette is limited, and there is little visual richness or layering at the two-dimensional level to stimulate interest without effort. Legibility is moderate: the cemetery map posts enable navigation to specific graves, but the site lacks distinctive waypoints that would help visitors orient themselves spatially without a map. Mystery is noticeably missing: the straight paths, open sightlines, and clear grid provide no hints that something is to be discovered beyond a corner, which reduces the invitation to explore that mystery sustains (Kaplan, Kaplan and Ryan, 2010).

4.1.8 Design relevance

The site analysis identifies several conditions that are particularly relevant to the design proposal. The eastern perimeter is the most urgent remedial priority: denser understory planting below the existing cottonwood canopy would substantially improve the sense of being away in the affected zones. The numerous internal parking lots, confirmed by a cemetery worker to be rarely at full capacity, represent the

site's most available design space and could be repurposed for rest areas, informal gathering, or landscape features without disturbing any burial plots. The entrance threshold on Hallsvegur needs to be redesigned to offer a welcoming pedestrian arrival that matches the cemetery's interior character. The two monuments, particularly the memorial for those who rest far away, would benefit from spatial enhancement and interpretive signage. Water elements are absent on site and could meaningfully support fascination and restorativeness, particularly in the vicinity of the latter monument. Finally, the path network requires redesigning to prioritise pedestrian movement and to introduce a degree of mystery and discovery. Importantly, any design implementation put forth must sustain compatibility with both those in mourning and recreational users.

4.2 Survey findings

The survey was distributed via social media over four days in March 2026, targeting adult residents in the vicinity of Gufuneskirkju-garður. Of the 109 individuals who began the survey, 45 completed it in full, yielding a completion rate of 41%. The 64 partial responses are included in the analysis.

4.2.1 Participants

Of the 45 respondents who completed the survey, the majority identified as female (71%), with men (27%) and non-binary (2%) respondents accounting for a smaller share. Respondents were broadly distributed across age groups: 16% were aged 18–29, 31% aged 30–



FIG. 25: SURVEY SCENE LOCATIONS (LOFTMYNDR EHF., NO DATE)

Scene I: Being away

Scenario

After a long week, you decide to visit Gufuneskirkjugarður to find an escape from everyday life.

Unaltered scene

Visually permeable east perimeter hedge of the cemetery. Commercial district in the background.



Altered scene

Eastern perimeter hedge replaced with a dense row of spruces. Eliminates visibility to commercial district.



QUESTION	ART FACTOR	ALTERED	N	MEAN	MED.	SD	MIN.	MAX.
This place feels removed from my everyday environment	Being away	No	63,00	3.84	4,00	1.78	0	6
		Yes	61,00	4.11	4,00	1.64	0	6
Being here gives me a sense of escape from daily demands	Being away	No	63,00	3.57	4,00	1.71	0	6
		Yes	61,00	4.34	4,00	1.50	0	6
This environment feels orderly and well put together	Extent (coherence)	No	63,00	3.17	3,00	1.55	0	6
		Yes	61,00	3.89	4,00	1.56	0	6
This place feels spacious enough to wander freely	Extent (scope)	No	63,00	4.14	4,00	1.50	0	6
		Yes	61,00	4.64	5,00	1.44	0	6
There are interesting things to notice here	Fascination	No	63,00	3.11	3,00	1.80	0	6
		Yes	61,00	3.49	3,00	1.74	0	6
I feel comfortable in this environment	Compatibility	No	63,00	3.38	3,00	1.73	0	6
		Yes	61,00	3.92	5,00	1.76	0	6
Overall, how appealing do you find this scene?	Preference	No	63,00	2.90	3,00	1.75	0	6
		Yes	61,00	3.61	4,00	1.68	0	6

FIG. 26: SCENE PAIR DEPICTING “BEING AWAY” (BY AUTHOR) AND SURVEY RESULTS

44, 29% aged 45–59, 18% aged 60–74, and 7% aged 75–89. Forty-two percent of respondents reported living in Grafarvogur; the remainder were distributed across other neighbourhoods in Iceland’s capital area, including Hlíðahverfi, Grafarholt, Árbær, Breiðholt, Kópavogur, Garðabær, and central Reykjavík, with a small number responding from other parts of Iceland or from abroad. The deliberate promotion of the survey through local community groups appears to have drawn a geographically wider audience than anticipated.

Seventy-one percent of respondents confirmed having a friend or a loved one buried in the cemetery, indicating that the sample skews toward bereaved regular visitors rather than the general public. The most commonly cited reasons for visiting was to remember the deceased, followed by walking or exercise, and dog walking, with a smaller proportion visiting for recreation. Several respondents also noted visiting as they passed through on their way elsewhere.

4.2.2 Being away

The Being Away scene pair depicted the cemetery’s eastern perimeter, where sparse cottonwood understory leaves vehicle traffic on Víkurvegur visually and acoustically exposed.

The unaltered image was rated lower in all items, compared to its altered counterpart. The sense of being away through feeling removed from one’s everyday environment averaged 3,84 (SD=1,71) and through feeling an escape from daily demands averaged 3,57 (SD=1,71). The sense of extent through co-

herence averaged 3,17 (SD=1,55) and 4,14 (SD=1,50) through scope, fascination 3,11 (SD=1,80), compatibility 3,38 (SD=1,73), and overall preference was rated the lowest of all, at 2,90 (1,75). The relatively high rating for scope and its lower SD suggests that despite the perimeter’s permeability, participants already perceived the space as sufficiently expansive.

The altered image, in which a dense row of spruces replaced the sparse understory and screened the road entirely, produced consistent gains across all items. The sense of being away through a feeling of escape from daily demands showed the largest individual increase, rising from 3,57 to 4,34 (SD=1,50). Being away through feeling removed from one’s everyday environment improved from 3,84 to 4,11 (SD=1,64), coherence from 3,17 to 3,89 (SD=1,56), scope from 4,14 to 4,64 (SD=1,44), fascination from 3,11 to 3,49 (SD=1,74), and compatibility from 3,38 to 3,92 (SD=1,76). The preference rating rose from 2,90 to 3,61 (SD=1,68), representing the second-largest preference gain across all five of the survey’s scene pairs.

The open responses to the unaltered scene were largely critical of the road’s intrusion. Respondents described the area as “stark and too close to heavy traffic” and noted that “the open space puts cars first”, with one participant writing that “traffic disrupts my purpose in the cemetery.” Participants observed that the low and sparse vegetation made it “easy for things outside the cemetery to capture attention, reminding one of daily stress.”

Scene II: Fascination

Scenario

After a long week, you decide to visit Gufuneskirkjugarður to walk and clear your head.

Unaltered scene

Looking over an empty snow-covered parking lot, with rows of varying headstones in the background.



Altered scene

A pond (water element) and statue (cultural element) introduced to scene.



QUESTION	ART FACTOR	ALTERED	N	MEAN	MED.	SD	MIN.	MAX.
My attention is drawn to many interesting things here	Fascination	No	71,00	3.61	4,00	1.83	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.05	4,00	1.67	0	6
I find myself wanting to look more closely at the surroundings	Fascination	No	71,00	3.48	4,00	1.75	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.82	4,00	1.63	0	6
I want to explore this area further	Fascination	No	71,00	3.39	4,00	1.82	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.90	4,00	1.67	0	6
This place is stimulating and engaging	Fascination	No	71,00	2.96	3,00	1.77	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.56	4,00	1.73	0	6
This place feels different from my everyday surroundings	Being away	No	71,00	4.41	5,00	1.45	1	6
		Yes	62,00	4.55	5,00	1.42	1	6
I feel comfortable spending time here	Compatibility	No	71,00	3.85	4,00	1.79	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.85	4,00	1.60	0	6
Overall, how appealing do you find this scene?	Preference	No	71,00	3.66	4,00	1.76	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.97	4,00	1.56	0	6

FIG. 27: SCENE PAIR DEPICTING "FASCINATION" (BY AUTHOR) AND SURVEY RESULTS

Responses to the altered scene were noticeably warmer. Participants described the screened edge as "much more pleasant, because the cemetery is now separated from Víkurvegur," and several used words associated with enclosure and shelter, including "skjól-gott" (sheltered) and "friðsælt" (peaceful). One response captured the before-after contrast directly and noted the difference to the unaltered scene: "this is much nicer because the garden has been separated from the commercial district and the traffic." Privacy emerged as a further dimension: one participant noted that the open unaltered scene made them feel "as if everyone can see me in my private thoughts", while the screened version was perceived as offering the psychological seclusion needed for restorative experience.

4.2.3 Fascination

The Fascination scene pair depicted a rather open area within the cemetery. The unaltered image was already rated moderately high, 4,41 (SD=1,45), on the being away item, confirming that the setting was perceived as spatially removed from everyday life, even in the absence of any elements designed to achieve that effect. The four fascination items ranged from 2,96 to 3,61, with the "stimulating and engaging" item scoring lowest at 2,96 (SD=1,77) and the "wanting to look more closely at the surroundings" item scoring the highest at 3,48 (SD=1,75). Compatibility averaged 3,85 (SD=1,79) and the scene's overall preference 3,66 (SD=,1,76).

The introduction of a pond, statue, and increased vegetation in the altered image pro-

duced moderate but consistent gains across the fascination items. Attention being drawn to interesting things increased from 3,61 to 4,05 (SD=1,67), the desire to look more closely at the surroundings from 3,48 to 3,82 (SD=1,63), the desire to explore further from 3,39 to 3,90 (SD=1,67), and the stimulating and engaging item from 2,96 to 3,56 (SD=1,73); the last being the largest gain within this scene pair. Being away continued to score high at 4,55 (SD=1,42), while compatibility remained unchanged at 3,85, though with lower deviation (SD=1,60). Overall preference rose modestly from 3,66 to 3,97 (SD=1,56).

Responses to the unaltered scene revealed that the headstones themselves already served as a source of soft fascination for many respondents. One participant wrote: "I walk and look at headstones, interested in how different they can be, reading the dates: was this a long life, a short one, Icelandic, foreign?" Another described pausing to "be in the present and think about what these people were like in life." For some, however, the scene lacked visual richness: "there's not much to look at apart from the names on the headstones." The unaltered pond area was perceived by some as slightly gloomy and under-furnished.

Responses to the altered scene converged strongly around the water and sculptural elements. The pond and statue were repeatedly mentioned as focal points that improved the scene's character, with comments such as "the statue changes the atmosphere of the place, bringing more peace and solemnity" and some discussed "the interplay of water, earth, and the statue." The absence of seating was raised as a notable omission, and one participant's

Scene III: Extent

Scenario

You decide to spend an afternoon leisurely walking through Gufuneskirkjugarður.

Unaltered scene

A clear-cut and straight driveable path vanishes to a point.



Altered scene

Spruces and bushes introduced to scene to screen visibility and hide final destination.



QUESTION	ART FACTOR	ALTERED	N	MEAN	MED.	SD	MIN.	MAX.
This place feels large enough that I could wander w/o feeling confined	Extent (Scope)	No	67,00	4.84	5,00	1.42	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.94	5,00	1.24	0	6
I feel that this environment extends beyond what I can currently see	Extent (Scope)	No	67,00	4.54	5,00	1.39	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.58	5,00	1.36	0	6
The different parts of this place feel like they belong together	Extent (Coherence)	No	67,00	3.91	4,00	1.48	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.05	4,00	1.56	0	6
The environment has a clear and consistent character	Extent (Coherence)	No	67,00	3.79	4,00	1.49	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.02	4,00	1.51	0	6
I am curious about what lies further ahead	Fascination	No	67,00	3.49	4,00	1.62	0	6
		Yes	62,00	3.85	4,00	1.76	0	6
I feel comfortable walking here	Compatibility	No	67,00	4.42	5,00	1.55	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.48	5,00	1.46	0	6
Overall, how appealing do you find this scene?	Preference	No	67,00	3.90	4,00	1.52	0	6
		Yes	62,00	4.32	5,00	1.47	0	6

FIG. 28: SCENE PAIR DEPICTING “EXTENT” (BY AUTHOR) AND SURVEY RESULTS

note on the pond suggested that they felt it was an intrusion, though many other participants found the pond to be a positive addition to the cemetery.

4.2.4 Extent

The Extent scene pair depicted one of the cemetery’s main driveable paths. A straight corridor, legible from end to end, flanked by hedges and trees that offers depth. The unaltered image produced the highest scores of any unaltered scene: scope items rated at 4,84 (SD=1,42) and 4,54 (SD=1,39), and compatibility through the comfort of walking scored 4,42 (SD=1,55). These high baseline scores indicate that the long, straight corridor was already perceived as a spacious and coherent environment. Coherence items rated at 3,91 (SD=1,48) and 3,79 (1,49) respectively, and the fascination item scored 3,49 (SD=1,62), reflecting moderate curiosity and mystery.

The altered image introduced spruces and low shrubs at intermediate points along the path, partially screening the view and implying that something could lay around a visual bend. The two scope items improved only marginally, from 4,84 to 4,94 (SD=1,24) and from 4,54 to 4,58 (SD=1,36), suggesting that scope was already near ceiling in the unaltered scene. The coherence items also improved slightly, from 3,91 to 4,05 (SD=1,56) and from 3,79 to 4,02 (SD=1,51). The most meaningful change was in the fascination item, which rose from 3,49 to 3,85 (SD=1,76), the clearest indicator that the screening introduced a sense of mystery, or something yet to be discovered. Compatibility also remained high, with a slight rise

to 4,48 (SD=1,46). Preference improved from 3,90 to 4,32 (SD=1,47).

Open responses to the unaltered scene were divided. Some found it pleasantly accessible and peaceful for walking; others characterised it as car-dominated, tedious, or devoid of mystery: “the environment puts cars first” and “I know the cemetery personally and find it rather boring.” Practical concerns about sharing the path with vehicles were frequent. One respondent described the path as a “car road, not good for walking.”

The altered scene drew more engaged responses. Several participants expressed curiosity directly: “the tree in the middle is hiding something — I want to see what’s behind it” and “yes, it’s somewhat mysterious.” One English-language response noted: “I can see that there’s some kind of turn further down which makes it interesting to see where it goes.” Another described the screened image as “even more cosy and exciting because it’s broken up, and the green colour provides calm.” The car-sharing concern persisted even in responses to the altered image, with one participant writing that they would “still be thinking about whether a car was coming behind them.” Requests for natural-like paths instead of asphalt surfaced in both conditions.

4.2.5 Compatibility I

The first Compatibility scene pair depicted an existing, unsheltered bench in an exposed position facing an elevated stone planting bed. The unaltered image scored moderately across all compatibility items: compatibility through

Scene IV: Compatibility I

Scenario

After a long week, you visit Gufuneskirkjugarður one afternoon to sit down, rest, and let your mind go quiet. You're looking for a spot where you can settle for a while.

Unaltered scene

An unsheltered bench positioned towards an elevated stone planting bed.



Altered scene

Spruces and bushes of varying sizes introduced to shelter the bench and to give more variety to the bench's view.



QUESTION	ART FACTOR	ALTERED	N	MEAN	MED.	SD	MIN.	MAX.
I can do things I enjoy in this environment	Compatibility	No	61,00	3.44	4,00	1.78	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.72	4,00	1.82	0	6
Being here feels right for what I want to do	Compatibility	No	61,00	3.36	4,00	1.81	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.68	4,00	1.84	0	6
This place feels like it suits my personality	Compatibility	No	61,00	3.26	3,00	1.77	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.49	4,00	1.89	0	6
I can find ways to enjoy myself here	Compatibility	No	61,00	3.44	3,00	1.73	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.77	4,00	1.71	0	6
This spot feels like it belongs in its surroundings	Extent (Coherence)	No	61,00	3.64	4,00	1.70	0	6
		Yes	65,00	4.25	5,00	1.77	0	6
From here, I have a sense of the broader environment around me	Extent (Scope)	No	61,00	3.70	4,00	1.68	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.69	4,00	1.67	0	6
Overall, how appealing do you find this scene?	Preference	No	61,00	3.46	4,00	1.83	0	6
		Yes	65,00	3.78	4,00	1.84	0	6

FIG. 29: SCENE PAIR DEPICTING "COMPATIBILITY I" (BY AUTHOR) AND SURVEY RESULTS

the ability to do things one enjoys rated 3,44 (SD=1,78), through the feeling that the space suits one's needs 3,36 (SD=1,81), through personal fit 3,26 (SD=1,77), and through finding ways to enjoy oneself 3,44 (SD=1,73). The coherence item scored 3,64 (SD=1,70), and the scope item 3,70 (SD=1,68). Overall preference scored 3,46 (SD=1,83).

Introducing spruces and varied shrubs to shelter the bench and diversify the immediate view produced improvements across all items, though the gains were modest. Compatibility items rose to 3,72 (SD=1,82), 3,68 (SD=1,84), 3,49 (SD=1,89), and 3,77 (SD=1,71) respectively. The most striking gain was on the coherence item, which rose from 3,64 to 4,25 (SD=1,77). Overall preference improved from 3,46 to 3,78 (SD=1,84).

Open responses to the unaltered scene consistently identified exposure and openness as the key problem. Participants described the setting as "too open" and "cold," noting that cars were visible in all directions and that the lack of enclosure behind the bench created discomfort: "there's no shelter behind the bench and so it would not feel safe." One participant described the unaltered bench as producing a feeling of being on display. The desire for additional trees, shrubs, and sculptures was recurrent, and the seasonal timing of the survey was noted by several respondents, who anticipated that the scene would feel more inviting in summer.

Responses to the altered scene were more positive but continued to push for greater enclosure and privacy. Participants appreciated the shelter from the spruces, but commonly

requested even taller or denser planting. Privacy was a particular concern: "more tree vegetation would make the experience more private." One participant requested a sculpture to add further visual interest. A seasonal note recurred: "the experience would be better in summer when the vegetation in the planter is out." The general pattern suggests that while the alteration moved the scene in the right direction, a seating area's restorative quality depends on a density of enclosure that a few added spruces alone do not fully achieve.

4.2.6 Compatibility II

The entrance scene pair produced the lowest scores of all five pairs. The unaltered image, depicting the unmarked pedestrian crossing on Hallsvegur and the approach to the lychgate, scored particularly low on compatibility through the feeling of belonging, at 2,39 (SD=1,75), the lowest score recorded for any single item across the entire survey; compatibility through the feeling of being at ease approaching and entering this space averaged 2,54 (SD=1,72). Compatibility through the feeling of being welcome scored 3,03 (SD=1,93), being away 3,32 (SD=1,85), coherence 3,07 (SD=1,87), and overall preference 2,69 (SD=1,75), the lowest preference score of any unaltered scene.

The altered image introduced flanking vegetation along the approach and a marked pedestrian crossing. All items improved: compatibility items rose to from 3,03 to 3,41 (SD=1,85), from 2,39 to 2,79, from 2,76 to 3,20 (SD=1,92), and 3,07 to 3,61 (SD=1,79). Being away rose to 3,61 (SD=1,79), and coherence

Scene V: Compatibility II

Scenario

After a long week you decide to visit Gu-funeskirkjugarður. You are approaching the main entrance from the street, hoping that simply stepping inside will help you leave the week behind.

Unaltered scene

The entrance to the cemetery lacks any transition effect and is only accessible via an unmarked crosswalk.



Altered scene

Vegetation intended to ease transition into the new environment is introduced along with a crosswalk.



QUESTION	ART FACTOR	ALTERED	N	MEAN	MED.	SD	MIN.	MAX.
This environment feels welcoming to someone like me	Compatibility	No	59,00	3.03	3,00	1.93	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.41	3,00	1.85	0	6
I feel that I belong here	Compatibility	No	59,00	2.39	2,00	1.75	0	6
		Yes	56,00	2.79	3,00	1.86	0	6
Being here feels right for what I need right now	Compatibility	No	59,00	2.76	3,00	1.85	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.20	3,00	1.92	0	6
This place feels separate from the demands of everyday life	Being away	No	59,00	3.32	4,00	1.85	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.45	4,00	1.89	0	6
This environment has a clear and inviting character	Extent (Coherence)	No	59,00	2.54	2,00	1.72	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.02	3,00	1.77	0	6
I feel at ease approaching and entering this place	Compatibility	No	59,00	3.07	3,00	1.87	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.61	3,50	1.79	0	6
Overall, how appealing do you find this scene?	Preference	No	59,00	2.69	2,00	1.75	0	6
		Yes	56,00	3.29	3,00	1.91	0	6

FIG. 30: SCENE PAIR DEPICTING “COMPATIBILITY II” (BY AUTHOR) AND SURVEY RESULTS

to 3,29 (SD=1,91). Preference increased from 2,69 to 3,45 (SD=1,89), the largest preference gain across all five scene pairs. However, all items in the altered scene remained below 4,0, marking the entrance as the scene where the proposed design intervention left the greatest residual deficit.

Open responses to the unaltered entrance were among the most critical in the survey. Pedestrian access was described as “ridiculously difficult for walkers and public transport users” and outright “dangerous, especially for children and elderly.” Multiple respondents characterised the cemetery as a “car cemetery”, and one wrote that the entrance “feels as if it’s not intended for me to approach from this side.” The absence of a welcoming signal was a recurring theme: “there’s no clearer path here that invites people in.” Some respondents reflected personally on the entrance: one noted that due to a family member being buried there, they “never feel particularly well arriving at the cemetery”, a reminder that the entrance experience for mourners is not merely spatial but emotionally charged. The juxtaposition of grief and peace was captured in one of the most evocative responses: “there is grief in this place but also peace — and the noise of the surroundings disappears [once inside].”

Responses to the altered entrance were more receptive, with the crosswalk consistently noted as a meaningful improvement: “the crosswalk helps.” However, participants still found the entrance fundamentally car-oriented and desired a more defined pedestrian gate, with one respondent suggesting “an arched and wide gate.” The observation that “the vegetation makes the approach more pleasant, but

the entrance is otherwise understated and doesn’t communicate what lies inside” captures the altered scene’s central limitation: the vegetation improves the threshold’s sensory quality, but the legibility and invitation of the arrival experience remain insufficient.

4.2.7 Cross-cutting themes

Several themes surfaced consistently across multiple scene pairs and conditions. The most pervasive was the conflict between pedestrian and vehicle movement. The cemetery’s network of driveable paths was noted across Scenes I, III, IV, and V as a source of discomfort that undermined both safety and restorative quality. Participants expressed a desire for dedicated pedestrian paths on natural surfaces, and many described the car-dominated character of the site as incompatible with a contemplative visit. This finding reinforces the site analysis’s assessment that the pedestrian path network requires restructuring.

A second recurring theme was the desire for greater enclosure, shelter, and vegetation density. Across all five scenes, participants described feeling exposed, cold, or observed in the unaltered conditions, and consistently identified added trees, tall shrubs, and windbreaks as the most desired improvements. The importance of enclosure as a prerequisite for psychological comfort was expressed not only in the Being Away scene, where it is theoretically central, but equally in the seating and entrance scenes.

Seating emerged as a third consistent need. Multiple participants across several scene pairs

noted the absence of benches or requested additional seating, and the altered seating scene's still-limited ratings suggest that the quantity and placement of seats across the cemetery remains inadequate for the restorative purposes residents seek. Linked to this was the desire for sculptural and artistic elements: statues, water features, and artworks were mentioned spontaneously across Scenes II, IV, and V, indicating a community appetite for cultural enrichment that the cemetery currently does not address.

Finally, several respondents reflected on seasonal variation, noting that the winter timing of both the site photographs and the survey visit limited what could be assessed. The cemetery's restorative qualities were expected to be considerably stronger in spring and summer, and multiple participants expressed that they would rate certain scenes differently in warmer conditions. This seasonality effect, while unquantified, should be taken into account when interpreting the survey results and communicating findings.

4.3 Synthesis

The site analysis and resident survey produce a convergent picture of Gufuneskirkjugarður's restorative shortcomings. The eastern perimeter, where sparse perimeter vegetation leaves vehicle traffic fully exposed, was identified as the most urgent remedial priority by both inquiries, while the entrance on Hallsvegur produced the lowest preference and compatibility scores of any scene in the survey, including the single lowest item score of the entire study.

Together, these two conditions represent the cemetery's most significant barriers to functioning as a restorative public space.

Across the survey more broadly, enclosure and shelter emerged as the most universally desired quality, confirming that the presence of vegetation alone is not sufficient to foster restoration, and that vegetation density and strategic placement is required. The vehicle-pedestrian conflict was the most pervasive cross-cutting concern, seating was a persistent unmet need, and the introduction of water and sculptural elements produced the clearest gains in fascination ratings. These findings align closely with the design implications established in Chapter 3 and translate them into a specific, site-grounded set of priorities that inform this project's design proposal.

Five spatial priorities emerge from this convergence. The eastern perimeter's understory deficit is the most urgent remedial intervention: both the site analysis and the survey's being away scene pair independently identify it as a great restorative deficit and it can be addressed without disturbing any burial areas. The secondary entrances distributed around the perimeter represent a being away failure of a different kind: as nondescript metal gates in a wire fence, they perform no transitional function and offer no signal that the visitor is crossing into a different kind of space. Redesigning them as genuine thresholds is a prerequisite for the cemetery to function restoratively beyond its main gate. The main entrance on Hallsvegur requires redesign as a welcoming pedestrian threshold, as it produced the lowest preference and compatibility scores of any condition in the study, and the interven-

tion tested in the survey confirmed that the deficit there extends beyond what planting alone can resolve. Restructuring the path network to give pedestrians priority addresses the a cross-cutting concern identified in the survey and underpins the compatibility of the cemetery for both mourners and recreational visitors. Finally, the introduction of water and cultural elements addresses the fascination deficit found in underutilised open areas, where the survey demonstrated the clearest gains in restorativeness from targeted interventions. Together, these five priorities constitute the design criteria developed in Chapter 5.



FIG. 31: GUFUNESKIRKJUGARDUR'S SERVICE BUILDING OVERLOOKING HEADSTONES (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

5 Design

The theoretical framework established in Chapter 3, the site analysis of Gufuneskirkjugarður, and the resident survey have each produced distinct but complementary bodies of knowledge. This chapter brings them together in a design response. Section 5.1 restates the project's main objective and articulates the design criteria that govern the work that follows. Section 5.2 identifies additional design objectives that extend beyond what the criteria strictly require. Section 5.3 presents the design strategy, organised around three spatial frameworks: a priority intervention map, a functional character map, and a path network and planting strategy.

5.1 Objective and criteria

The main objective of this project, as stated in Chapter 1, is to produce a scientifically informed design for adapting Gufuneskirkjugarður to be multifunctional and to cater to the needs of the deceased, mourners, and recreational users. The design strategy is governed by a set of criteria derived from the convergence of the theoretical framework and the empirical findings of the site analysis and resident survey. These criteria are organised around Attention Restoration Theory's (ART) four components, each of which identified specific spatial conditions at Gufuneskirkjugarður requiring a design response.

Being away: the design must strengthen the cemetery's capacity to provide psychological distance from everyday demands. The eastern perimeter, where sparse understory vegetation leaves vehicle traffic on Víkurvegur both visible and audible, was identified as the most urgent remedial priority by both the site analysis and the survey, which recorded the largest preference gain of any scene pair when the exposed edge was screened. Dense understory planting below the existing cottonwood canopy along the eastern, northeastern, and southeastern perimeters is the primary instrument for addressing this deficit.

Fascination: the design must enhance the cemetery's capacity to hold attention effortlessly and invite contemplative engagement. The introduction of water features was identified as the single highest-impact fascination intervention across the survey, while art installations, storytelling elements, and improved seasonal planting could extend the range of soft fascination available to visitors throughout the year. The cultural-historical fascination offered by the cemetery's monuments is currently unrealised: both would benefit from stronger spatial framing and interpretive elements that allow their significance to register for visitors who arrive without prior knowledge of their meaning.

Extent: the design must increase the cemetery's perceived scope and sense of discovery. The cemetery's strict grid, straight paths, and fully legible sightlines produce coherence but eliminate mystery. Path design is the primary instrument for addressing this: strengthening existing curvature, and introducing vegetative screening of intermediate views would make

the cemetery feel more expansive and explor-able than its physical dimensions suggest. The approach paths to the monuments should be spatially strengthened so that they communicate that something significant lies ahead.

Compatibility: the design must ensure that the cemetery's spatial organisation supports both mourners and recreational visitors without one group's needs undermining the other's. The vehicle-pedestrian conflict identified in the survey is the most direct barrier to compatibility, and restructuring the path network to give pedestrians priority across the majority of the cemetery is perhaps the most effective single intervention available. The entrance on Hallsvegur, which produced the lowest scores of any scene in the survey, requires redesign as a welcoming pedestrian threshold. Seating in the cemetery requires improvement, with attention to enclosure and orientation rather than quantity alone. Signage at the cemetery's entrances should lead with the cemetery's character and values rather than with prohibitions.

An overarching constraint applies to all these criteria: every intervention must sustain the cemetery's commemorative character and role as a place of mourning and remembrance.

5.2 Additional objectives

Two further objectives took shape during the analysis that, while not derivable from the criteria above, surfaced as natural implications of what the site and its context revealed.

The first concerns the cemetery's position

within Reykjavík's wider green infrastructure. As established in section 4.1.1, a green corridor adjacent to the cemetery's south-western corner connects it to a chain of open green spaces extending toward the coast. The design strategy seeks to reinforce this connection, treating the south-western corner as a point of arrival from the green network and strengthening the cemetery's role as a node within its surroundings, rather than as an isolated island.

The second concerns the cemetery's potential role in the everyday life of its surrounding communities. The catchment analysis demonstrates that Gufuneskirkjugarður sits within reach of a dense residential fabric and a concentration of schools, sports facilities, and community amenities, yet currently lacks the qualities that would make it a natural part of people's daily movement between these places. The design strategy aims to support the cemetery's emergence as an accessible, welcoming landscape between home and the other spaces that populate its catchment. One that different users can visit at different times for different purposes, bound together by a shared respect for the space's primary character.

5.3 Design strategy

The design strategy is presented in three spatial frameworks that develop sequentially: from an analysis of where the cemetery's restorative shortcomings are concentrated, to a framework for how its space should be functionally differentiated, to a proposal for how its path network and vegetation should be re-structured to realise that framework.

5.3.1 Priority intervention areas

The priority intervention map translates the ART-based analysis of Chapters 3 and 4 into a spatially explicit account of where the cemetery's restorative deficits are concentrated and which component each area fails to support.

The deficit in being away is concentrated along the eastern perimeter, where the sparse understory of the existing cottonwood belt the cemetery's eastern zones exposed to the traffic on Víkurvegur. The northeastern and south-eastern corners share this condition. These are the zones where the cemetery's capacity to provide visitors with a sense of being away is most severely compromised, and where targeted planting would produce large restorative gains.

The inadequate extent is concentrated along the cemetery's two main north-south driveable paths. These paths offer depth and scope but no mystery: their straight geometry and open sightlines make the layout fully legible from any junction, providing a sense of destination without discovery. Vegetative screening and changes to path character along these routes are the primary means of introducing the sense of something yet to be found that extent requires.

The lack of compatibility is distributed across the shared driveable path network as a whole, reflecting the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles identified in the survey. Path and other areas where seating is absent or inadequately positioned must also be addressed.



FIG. 32: AREAS REQUIRING DESIGN INTERVENTIONS (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE)

The shortfall in fascination is concentrated around the cemetery's two monuments and the special Muslim and Buddhist sections, whose cultural and spiritual significance is not currently communicated through design or interpretive elements. These are the areas with great untapped potential for the culturally grounded fascination that distinguishes cemeteries from other urban green spaces.

5.3.2 Functional character

The functional character map establishes how different parts of the cemetery should be spatially organised in terms of use, atmosphere, and design. Five character zones are defined.

The contemplative/mourning zone covers the majority of the cemetery and preserves its primary commemorative function. Design interventions within this zone prioritise mourners, tranquillity, and the quality of seating and rest areas, and its character must remain legible throughout the site.

The cultural zone overlays the mature central and western sections, where decades of vegetation growth, varied headstones, and a settled spatial quality create conditions for a kind of unhurried, culturally engaged presence that these sections already informally afford. The zone does not replace the contemplative/mourning character, but enriches it: the headstones, mature trees, and historical depth of these sections are treated as a resource to be made more accessible through improved seating, seasonal planting, and, where appropriate and possible, water features and small landscape installations.

The active/recreational zone follows the main north-south path that starts at the southern lychgate and extends to the open area at the northern end of the cemetery. This is the zone where respectful, passive forms of recreational use, such as walking, pausing, encountering art installations and storytelling elements, are introduced to the cemetery. The active character here is not intensive, and the aim is to accommodate everyday recreational movement in a way that is consonant with the cemetery's overall contemplative atmosphere.

The commemorative zones surround the both of the cemetery's monuments. These are emotionally charged spaces, and the design strategy treats them as destinations: spatially distinct, clearly signalled along their approach, and enriched with interpretive elements that allow their significance to be encountered whether or not a visitor arrives already knowing their story.

The transitional zones mark the north and south entrances. Their function is to prepare visitors for the change in pace and atmosphere that the cemetery interior offers, and to do so through spatial and material means: a change in material from the surroundings, transitional planting, a clearly marked pedestrian crossing, legible wayfinding, and signage that leads with the cemetery's character rather than through restriction.

5.3.3 Path and planting strategy

The path and planting strategy proposes a restructuring of how movement is organised through the cemetery and how targeted intro-

duction of new vegetation enhances the cemetery's restorative qualities.

The main north-south path from the lychgate is redesignated as a living street that open to pedestrians and cyclists at all times, and closed to private vehicles except during the heaviest winter months, major holidays, and funeral events. This allows the path to function as a promenade along which visitors can walk, pause, and encounter art and storytelling installations without being displaced by traffic, while retaining car access at the times when it is needed most. The living street is extended northward through a currently unorganised area at the cemetery's northern end, connecting it directly to the northern entrance and completing the route as a continuous promenade through the cemetery. Two driveable paths branching west from the main route,

toward the Buddhist and Muslim sections and toward the Ásatrú section, are similarly redesignated as living streets, strengthening access to the special sections while reducing through traffic in the cemetery's interior.

The cemetery's central parking lot is decommissioned and redesigned as a people-oriented open space along the main living street, providing the cemetery with a centre, which it currently lacks, and offers a setting for both formal and informal gatherings. Two parking lots in the western sections are redesignated as seasonal lots, open to vehicles during winter and special events, but available for temporary landscape installations during the summer months. The remaining driveable paths are divided between those that remain accessible year-round and those restricted to maintenance vehicles, with the latter opened to all



FIG. 33: NEW FUNCTIONAL CHARACTER OF GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR (LOFTMYNDR EHF., NO DATE)

users during winter, holidays, and funerals to ensure that accessibility is maintained when it is needed. Taken together, this arrangement eliminates the possibility of driving through the cemetery: a visitor arriving by car must leave by the same route as they came, making walking more convenient than driving for those who live within reach, without removing car access altogether.

The planting intervention introduces dense understory vegetation, primarily beneath the existing cottonwood canopy, along the eastern perimeter and in the northeastern and southeastern corners, directly addressing the being away deficit identified in the priority intervention map and providing the enclosure that the survey established as the most universally desired improvement for the cemetery.

5.4 Design proposal

The design proposal is presented as a general overview plan (Fig. 35) at a scale of 1:3.000, a scale necessitated by the cemetery's considerable extent of 32,1 hectares and the constraints of an A3 layout. At this scale the plan reads as a whole: the cemetery's relationship to its surroundings, the logic of its new path network, and the broad distribution of vegetation interventions are all legible in a single view. The plan is followed by a series of detail views, which zoom into specific locations to describe, at a closer scale, the spatial quality that the overview plan proposes.



FIG. 34: PATH AND VEGETATION STRATEGY (LOFTMYNDIR EHF., NO DATE)



FIG. 35: PLAN VIEW OF CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROPOSAL (NÁTTÚRUFRÆÐISTOFNUN ÍSLANDS, NO DATE; REYKJAVÍKURBORG; NO DATE)

5.4.1 Overview plan

The overview plan acts on each of the design criteria established in section 5.1 and pursues the additional objectives set out in section 5.2. It is organised around the four ART components and the two spatial frameworks that precede it: the functional character map and the path and planting strategy.

Perimeter and vegetation

The plan shows both existing and new vegetation. Along the eastern perimeter, the existing cottonwood belt is reinforced with a dense layer of understory vegetation, directly addressing the being away deficit identified as the most urgent priority in both the site analysis and the survey. The same treatment extends to the northeastern and southeastern corners, where the perimeter was found to be equally exposed. The southern edge receives additional vegetation and hedgerow planting to screen road visibility from Hallsvegur and strengthen the perimeter's sense of enclosure. A short green corridor is introduced at the northern edge, connecting the cemetery's northern entrance to the open green area immediately north of it, extending the cemetery's reach into the wider landscape.

Path network and pedestrian priority

The plan introduces a new hierarchy of path functions. The main north-south axis is redesignated as a living street, open to pedestrians and cyclists at all times and closed to private vehicles except during winter months, major public holidays, and funeral events. Two branch paths connecting the living street to

the Buddhist and Muslim sections are similarly redesignated. The central parking lot is decommissioned; two western lots are reclassified as seasonal lots available for temporary landscape use in summer. Pedestrian crossing zones are introduced at both the northern and southern entrances, replacing the unmarked crosswalk on Hallsvegur that the survey identified as the single weakest point in the cemetery's compatibility. A new pedestrian entrance is created at the southwestern corner, connecting the cemetery directly to the green corridor and open green network beyond.

Axis and programme

An axis is established along existing paths running east-west through the cemetery's interior, connecting the two monuments and the Buddhist and Muslim sections to the main living street. This axis, along with the north-south route, accommodate a sequence of destinations as the experiential spine of the proposal: the lychgate, the green propylon, the decommissioned central parking lot redesigned as a green square, the cemetery's monuments, and the cultural zone of the heart of the cemetery, give the site a legible narrative from north to south and east to west.

Focal interventions

Lush groves are introduced to strengthen fascination in the areas where the site can accommodate them: one in the space freed by the decommissioned central parking lot, one in the currently unorganised and unused open area at the northern end of the cemetery, and one at the cemetery's southern edge by the Ásatrú

section. Understory vegetation is introduced beneath the row of cottonwood trees along the eastern perimeter. Portal planting marks all secondary entrances, signalling a transition in character and preparing visitors for the atmosphere within. At the northern entrance, a welcoming bosque, a loose grove of trees forming an outdoor room, creates a place of arrival with sufficient enclosure and spatial depth to begin the transition from the street. The southern approach is given a transitional green propylon preceding the lychgate: a planted gateway that initiates the shift in atmosphere before the threshold is crossed, so that the change in pace and character has already begun by the time the visitor steps through the gate.

5.4.2 Detail views

I The southern bosque and lychgate

This view shows the proposed transformation of the pedestrian approach on Hallsvegur. A vegetation installment is introduced on the southern side of the road, whose planting enters into a dialogue with both new and current vegetation that surrounds the lychgate on the other side, and forms a loose and informal bosque. In this space, it is not the lychgate alone that facilitates the transition from one space to another. The bosque, which now spans the entire crossing, signals that a transition is already underway, and visitors who enter via the



FIG. 36: ILLUSTRATION OF THE SOUTHERN BOSQUE AND LYCHGATE

crossing do so within a space that has already begun to feel different from the environment they came from.

The crossing zone itself reinforces this signal through material means. Rather than an unmarked stretch of asphalt, which the survey respondents described as making the cemetery feel inaccessible, car-oriented, and unwelcoming, the surface around the crossing is changed to a contrasting paving material, communicating to drivers that they are entering a different kind of space and that pedestrians have priority here. This material intervention works in concert with improved signage and a proposed reduction of the speed limit from 50 to 40 km/h, together forming a layered hierarchy of traffic-calming measures that prioritise the pedestrian arrival experience without requiring major road changes.

II Northern entrance and propylon

The northern entrance currently presents itself as an asphalt parking lot bounded by a utilitarian metal gate; a threshold that doesn't prepare visitor for what lies beyond. Yet immediately past the gate, the cemetery reveals one of its most distinctive spatial features: a straight path flanked by rows of mature cottonwood trees whose canopies meet overhead, forming a green propylon of considerable presence. This sequence of a carpark, gate, and propylon, is experienced as a series of mismatched moments rather than a coherent arrival, and the design proposal sets out to resolve this discontinuity.

The design proposal here follows a similar logic to the southern entrance proposal: vegetation is introduced along the cemetery's

northern periphery and on both sides of the parking lot, screening the cemetery's interior from view in all directions except one: straight ahead, down the axis of the green propylon. Rather than revealing the cemetery to approaching visitors all at once, the new planting frames a single, deliberate view and makes it the focal point of the arrival. The visitor's eye is drawn through the gate and into the avenue before they have even crossed the threshold. The surface material of the parking lot is changed to paving stones, consistent with the pedestrian crossing zones at the northern and southern entrances. Taken together, these interventions transform an incidental and unwelcoming forecourt into an intentional antechamber: a space that gathers the visitor, orients them, and leads them to the space they are about to enter.

III The secondary entrances' portal planting

The cemetery's secondary entrances have until now read as gaps: openings in a metal wire fence whose utilitarian gates communicate nothing of the space beyond. Passing by, nothing signals that this is a threshold worth crossing, and the entrances exert no pull on the incidental pedestrian. The portal planting proposal addresses this directly by flanking each gate with deciduous trees and spruces, arranged informally on both sides of the opening, with a layer of shrubbery at their base, and continues in each direction as a part of the perimeter hedge. The gap between the trees is left deliberately clear, so that the planting frames the gate. The effect is that of a natural aperture: the eye is drawn to the gap, and the rhythm of the surrounding hedge is interrupted in a way that entices exploration.

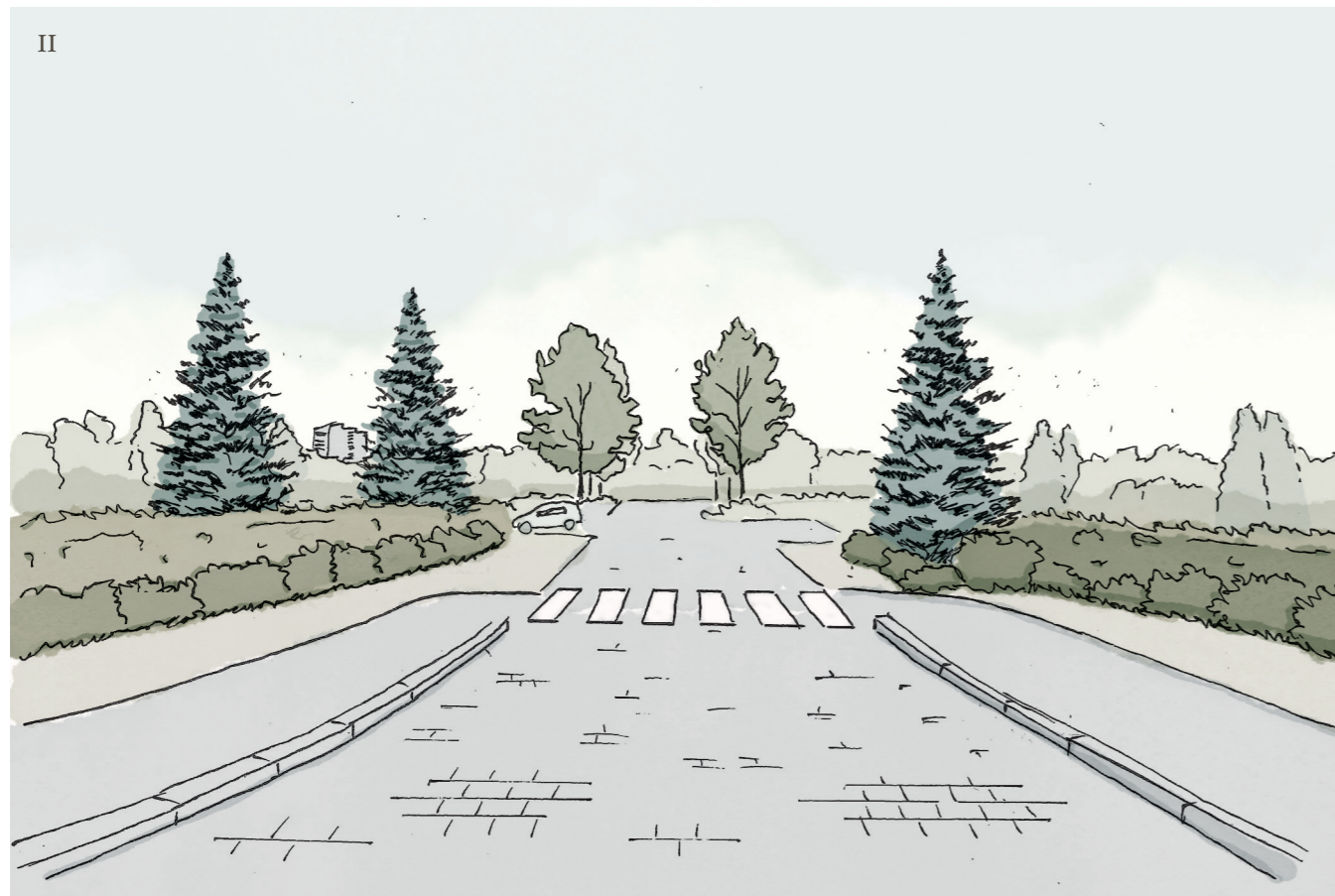


FIG. 37: ILLUSTRATION OF THE NORTHERN ENTRANCE AND PROPYLON



FIG. 38: ILLUSTRATION OF A SECONDARY ENTRANCE'S PORTAL PLANTING

Like the proposed bosque at the southern entrance and the planted forecourt at the northern one, the portal planting performs a transitional function, thought not to full effect. The shift from street to cemetery does not begin at the latch of the gate but in the layered vegetation on either side of it, whose canopy and mass begin to signal a change in atmosphere before visitors enter. Passing through a gate framed by trees and shrubs is a more deliberate and spatial experience than passing through a nondescript gate in a fence, and this small elevation of the threshold turns what was previously a non-event into something closer to a considered arrival.

IV *The eastern perimeter's understory fill*

This cross-section cuts through the eastern perimeter. The existing cottonwood belt, tall with even-canopy height, currently offers little at eye level, and the vehicle traffic on Víkurvegur remains visible and audible through the sparse lower growth. This gap between canopy and ground is the site's most acute restorative deficit, and the section is drawn to show how it is closed.

Beneath the cottonwoods, a layered understory is introduced: birches provide a middle stratum whose irregular branching contrast with the upright cottonwoods above, while a variety of shrubs and seasonal ground-level vegetation fill the lower layer. A hedge defines the perimeter's inner edge, establishing a clear and legible boundary that gives the cemetery's

eastern zones both visual and acoustic shelter from the road. Together, these layers produce a perimeter that no longer reads as a thin and visually permeable screen, but as a strong boundary with its own spatial character and changing seasonal presence.

V *The living street's green square*

This wide view looks out across the redesigned space that occupies the former parking lot at the cemetery's very centre: a site where the north-south living street and the east-west axis converge, and a place that gives the cemetery a centre of gravity that it has, until now, lacked. The square is designed to uphold the cemetery's character: offering the stillness the bereaved require and the gentle stimulation that draws other visitors in.

The surrounding planting holds the square together and gives it the quality of an outdoor room. Plant installations bring close-up interest and seasonal variation to the space, so that the square rewards both a passing glance and a longer stay, and a water element anchors the composition, drawing the eye and settling the pace of anyone who enters the square. Benches are oriented toward the square's focal points and sheltered enough to feel like a safe and comforting place.

The overall impression is of a space that has been thought about and cared for, and that it is quietly alive. For visitors moving along the living street, the square offers a reason to stop. For those who come to sit, it offers a setting that holds them without demanding anything in return.



FIG. 39: ILLUSTRATION OF THE EASTERN PERIMETER'S UNDERSTORY FILL

5.5 Synthesis

The priority intervention map established that the cemetery's restorative deficits are concentrated in particular places and are weighted differently by severity, and this proposal addresses this appropriately: some components are addressed through a single, spatially concentrated intervention, such as the introduction of understory vegetation to the eastern perimeter's hedge, while others are distributed across the proposal more broadly, such as ART's extent factor. What follows reads the detail views back through the framework to show how each of the criteria established in section 5.1 is met.

Being away

The eastern perimeter's understory fill is the proposal's most direct response to a single, clearly located deficit. Closing the visual gap between the existing cottonwood canopy and the ground removes the most immediate obstacle to psychological distance from the street. With the traffic on Víkurvegur screened, the cemetery's eastern zones are no longer rooms with one wall missing. A perimeter with depth and seasonal presence also establishes a sense of extent and evokes fascination. The living street's green square also achieves this: its surrounding planting and its position away from the perimeter place it at a physical and psychological distance from everyday life that more exposed zones do not offer to the same extent.

Fascination

The green square is the proposal's principal site of intentional, designed fascination. The water element is its most direct instrument, holding attention effortlessly through surface, sound, and reflected light, and the plant installations around it sustain close-up interest across seasons, so that the square does not exhaust itself on a single visit. Both are forms of soft fascination in ART's sense: gently holding one's attention and leaving room for inward reflection. Fascination appears more incidentally elsewhere in the proposal: the layered understory along the eastern perimeter and the portal planting at the secondary entrances introduce seasonal variation, along with bird habitats, and textural variety that accumulate as background richness.

Extent

Extent is addressed more loosely than the other three components, and more through the path and planting strategy as a whole than through any detail design. The redesignated path network, the vegetative screening introduced along the main north-south axis, and the east-west axis connecting the monuments and special sections together produce a cemetery that rewards the feeling that there is more to discover ahead, which is among the factors that extent requires. The northern entrance proposal contributes to this at the threshold: directing the visitor's eye down the axis of the cottonwood propylon before they have crossed the gate, it offers a foretaste of depth and scope that prepares the visitor for the space they are entering.



FIG. 40: ILLUSTRATION OF THE LIVING STREET'S GREEN SQUARE

Compatibility

Compatibility receives the broadest treatment in the proposal, reflecting the survey's finding that it was the most widely and consistently felt deficiency. Both entrance proposals address it at the point where it is at risk: the approach and threshold. An unwelcoming arrival may compromise the restorative experience before it has begun, and both the southern and northern bosques reframe the arrival as a welcoming transition event. The portal planting at the secondary entrances apply the same logic, increasing the number of points at which the cemetery can be entered with a sense of occasion and welcome. The green square addresses compatibility with sheltered seating in a space that supports visitors' capacity to do what they came to do, whether that is to grieve, to rest, or simply to be somewhere else for a while.

6 Reflections

Does the design proposal succeed in what it set out to do, balancing multifunctionality with the cemetery's commemorative character, and where does it remain unresolved? How well did the Attention Restoration Theory (ART) and the Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS) actually serve the design process, and what did they fail to capture? What did the methodological choices, such as the winter site visit, the socially distributed survey, and the photographic simulation method, cost the project in terms of the conclusions that can be drawn from it? What does the project leave open and how may it might be expanded upon in the future?

6.1 Outcome

The project's main objective was to produce a scientifically informed design for adapting Gufuneskirkjugarður to be multifunctional and to serve the needs of the deceased, mourners, and recreational users without one group's use of the space undermining another's needs. The design strategy addresses this objective through a zoned functional character map, restructured path network, targeted perimeter and vegetation interventions, and experiential spaces. Together, these moves respond to both the conditions identified in the site analysis and resident survey and the design criteria.

The proposal's clearest success is its treatment of the eastern perimeter. Both the site

analysis and the Being Away scene pair in the survey independently identified the hedge's visual permeability as the most acute restorative deficit on site. The proposed dense understory planting below the existing cottonwood canopy closes the visual gap between the cemetery's interior and the traffic beyond, and does so without altering any burial areas or disrupting the cemetery's primary function. It is a simple, high-impact, low-conflict intervention, and the survey's evidence provides reasonable grounds for confidence in the design response.

The path network restructuring is possibly the design strategy's most extensive move. Redesignating the main north-south axis as a living street, open to pedestrians and cyclists at all times and closed to private vehicles except for certain times of year, directly addresses the vehicle-pedestrian conflict that the survey identified as a prominent cross-cutting concern, while retaining reasonable car accessibility for older or mobility-limited visitors.

The logic of the arrangement is sound: it makes walking more convenient than driving for those within reach without removing car access when it is most needed. What remains speculative is how this restructuring would function during different user groups' simultaneous use. The proposal does not resolve, for instance, what happens when recreational users and large funeral gatherings coincide at the southern entrance, or along one of the cemetery's driveable paths.

The green square occupying the decommissioned central parking lot is where most of the site's designed fascination is concentrated.

The survey's Fascination scene pair provided clear support for the water element's impact on perceived restorativeness and fascination ratings, and multiple open responses named the pond and statue as the most significant improvements to the scene. The square is presented at a schematic and conceptual level: it establishes a spatial logic and identifies design elements without prescribing a final outcome. What the proposal addresses is the need for a focal, fascination-rich space within the cemetery, and leaves the square's design open for an informed detail design, which would naturally follow if the design process were to be advanced further.

The entrance redesigns collectively address an emotionally charged compatibility deficit. The entrance on Hallsvegur produced the lowest compatibility and preference scores of any scene in the survey, including the single lowest item score of the entire questionnaire. The proposed intervention improved scores across all items, but all remained below 4.0, confirming that the vegetation and marked crosswalk alone do not resolve what is perhaps a road design and planning problem, though this is speculative. The proposal calls for a reduction of the speed limit from 50 to 40 km/h and a change in surface material at the crossing zone, but both of these measures fall outside the cemetery management's direct authority and would require engagement with Reykjavík's municipal planning office.

This is a limitation of the proposal's scope, as the most urgently felt barrier to compatibility on site is one that cannot be resolved by cemetery design alone.

6.2 ART and PRS

The project's secondary objective was to explore the feasibility of using ART and the PRS as analytical frameworks during the design process.

ART was selected as the primary analytical framework because of prior familiarity with its vocabulary and empirical literature, and because it had already demonstrated particular fitness for cemetery research in the work of Nordh (2017), whose study formed a direct precedent for this project. Ulrich et al.'s (1991) Stress Reduction Theory (SRT), which emphasises affective and physiological responses to nature as the primary mechanism of restoration, is a credible alternative and may well have been equally productive. Nordh (2017) observed that some visitor descriptions of Gamlebyen cemetery sat more naturally within SRT's framework than within ART's, centred on aesthetic pleasure and emotional calm rather than cognitive relief. The question of whether SRT would yield different or complementary design implications for a site like Gufuneskirkjugarður remains open, and the choice of ART was pragmatic rather than principled. This project does not claim that it is the uniquely correct framework for cemetery design research. A comparative study applying both theories to the same site would be a meaningful contribution to the field and is discussed further in section 6.4.

ART genuinely served the design process, rather than functioning as a tool for post-hoc justification. Its four components provided a structured vocabulary for the site analysis that prevented the field observation from becoming

merely descriptive, and the theoretical framework established in the literature review informed both the specific spatial questions for the site analysis and the design criteria. The survey's paired scene structure, which tested targeted interventions against each of ART's four components and the participants' preferences, then allowed the design criteria, strategy, and proposal to be grounded in empirical evidence rather than theory alone. The theory successfully accommodated the discussion of historical, cultural, and natural elements within the same analytical vocabulary, which was essential for working with a site as contextually rich as Gufuneskirkjugarður. A framework oriented exclusively toward natural elements would have missed the cultural and historical dimensions that make up the cemetery's atmosphere and character, and would have made

it considerably harder to convert a subjective field experience into testable hypotheses.

The PRS worked well as a survey instrument. The scale's established validity for photographic simulations made it a natural fit for the method, and the scale's Icelandic translation produced items that respondents appeared to engage with fluently, based on the quality of their open-ended responses.

The one recurring difficulty was occasional overlap between some of the PRS's items, which moved together in the data in ways that made it harder to know whether a design response should prioritise one of ART's components or another: whether, for instance, a low-scoring area calls for stronger enclosure to support being away, or for a spatial intervention that increases perceived scope.



FIG. 41: A BENCH IN GUFUNESKIRKJUGARÐUR NESTED IN SHELTERING VEGETATION (PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR)

There is, however, one experiential dimension that ART and the PRS have no language for: grief. The cemetery is, before anything else, a place where people go to be with their dead. One of the survey's respondents wrote that they "never feel particularly well arriving at the cemetery" due to a family member buried there, and another described "grief in this place but also peace." These are not descriptions of cognitive fatigue or any one of ART's four factors. They are descriptions of an emotional process that the cemetery can both demand and facilitate, and ART explains what the cemetery can offer those who are mentally fatigued, but relatively little about what it offers those who are actively mourning.

Of ART's four components, compatibility comes closest to acknowledging grief. Compatibility asks whether the environment aligns with what the visitor wants and needs to do; for a mourner, that need is precisely to grieve, and a cemetery is a place that culturally sanctions grief as a legitimate activity. The survey's compatibility items produced some of the lowest scores for the existing conditions and some of the sharpest improvements under the proposed alterations, which suggests that the barrier between the cemetery and the grieving visitor is often a practical one, an unwelcoming entrance or exposed path, rather than an inherent incompatibility. In this narrow sense, designing for compatibility is already, to some degree, designing for grief.

Being away and fascination offer a more speculative connection. The survey participant's account of "grief in this place but also peace" suggests that the cemetery can hold grief and restoration simultaneously: the distance from

everyday life that being away affords may offer a space in which grief can be experienced rather than suppressed. Soft fascination, the effortless pull of rustling leaves, a water surface, the texture of stone, may allow the grieving mind to rest without demanding that it let go of its grief. This is not the cognitive fatigue that ART was built to explain, but the mechanisms may nonetheless overlap.

Whether grief warrants its own measurable dimension within a restorative environment framework is a more open question. One possibility is to measure the degree to which an environment permits and supports the active processing of loss, perhaps as a sub-dimension of compatibility that is distinct from ART's definition, but legible within the same theoretical language. Another possibility is that grief requires its own framework altogether, one grounded in bereavement research and the psychology of mourning rather than in the cognitive science of attention. How such a framework could be operationalised into spatial or design criteria is a question this project cannot answer, but it is one that future research combining environmental psychology and bereavement studies might productively pursue.

6.3 Methodology

One deliberate effort to reduce the influence of participants' varying backgrounds on their responses was the use of brief framing scenarios at the opening of each survey section. Because participants differed in their familiarity with and relationship to Gufuneskirkjugarður,

there was a risk that each participant would evaluate the photographed scenes from a fundamentally different perspective. A mourner who visits regularly and a recreational jogger who has never entered a cemetery bring different needs, expectations, and emotional registers to the same image. By introducing each scene pair with a brief scenario, the survey attempted to hold the evaluative baseline constant: all participants were asked, in effect, to imagine themselves in a comparable state of mind and with a comparable purpose before rating the scene. This does not neutralise the effect of personal history, and it is unlikely that any textual framing entirely overrides a participant's lived relationship with a place, but it orients all respondents toward a common evaluative lens and reduces the degree to which individual background alone affects the rating. The goal is to measure how restorative a given environment appears to be, not how restorative it has proven to be over a lifetime of visits.

A notable limitation is the winter timing. The site visit, photographs, and the digitally altered scenes were all produced in March 2026 under snow cover, with dormant vegetation and soft light, which likely affected the results of the survey and the design proposal. It focuses both the site analysis and the survey on the spatial and structural qualities of the cemetery, such as enclosure, path geometry, and vegetation shape and density, and away from the ephemeral, seasonal, and sensory qualities that summer conditions would have made available, such as flowering vegetation, canopy movement, birdsong, and insect activity. Several survey respondents noted this ex-

PLICITLY, anticipating that their ratings would have differed with warmer conditions. The design's emphasis on understory planting, hedge structure, and path curvature over flowering species and wildlife habitat design reflects, at least partially, what was observable and assessable in March. A summer site visit and survey would not necessarily have produced a different design, but it might have generated richer evidence for some of the softer fascination elements, such as seasonally varied planting and bird-attracting vegetation, that the proposal includes but justifies primarily from the theoretical literature and educated speculation rather than the survey's data.

The survey sample's skew toward the bereaved is the second notable cost. 71% of participants confirmed they had a friend or a loved one buried at Gufuneskirkjugarður, which means the survey captured the perspectives of regular, grief-connected visitors rather than recreational users, passers-by, or newcomers. This was an anticipated consequence of distributing the survey through local community groups, whose membership is concentrated among those with some connection to the cemetery. The design criteria that emerged from the survey are therefore weighted toward what regular, bereaved visitors find restorative and lacking, but the recreational user's perspective, which might have emphasised different priorities, is underrepresented. Given that recreational users are among the user groups the proposal explicitly sets out to serve, this is a gap in the evidence base that the design addresses more through the theoretical literature and speculation than through direct empirical grounding.

The photographic simulation method carries its own costs, as acknowledged in Chapter 2. The randomised scene order was a deliberate methodological choice designed to prevent demand characteristics: the risk that participants, recognising the altered scene as the intended improvement, would rate it more favourably as a consequence. Though this likely succeeded in preventing direct comparison between paired scenes, it also means there was no common reference point for the ratings. A score of 3.5 on a 0–6 scale is difficult to interpret in absolute terms, and the project’s conclusions therefore rest on the relative gains produced by each alteration.

Taken together, the methodological choices made here were considered attempts to bring the study as close as possible to the evidence it required. Hartig et al.’s (1997) validation of the PRS for photographic simulations provided justification for the method, and Pasini et al.’s (2014) recommendations on item wording, present tense, positive framing, and no double negations, were followed during the Icelandic translation to minimise linguistic ambiguity. The open-ended question appended to each scene pair served as a corrective to the Likert scale’s bluntness, allowing participants to articulate nuances and experiential qualities that a seven-point scale cannot accommodate, and proving to be where the richest and most contextually specific evidence emerged. None of these measures fully resolves the limitations they address, but the pragmatic RTD approach served the project’s ambitions well overall.

The research pipeline of literature review to site analysis to resident survey to design criteria to design proposal produced a process that

is documentable, transparent, open to critique at each stage, and accumulates technical, experiential, and contextual understanding rather than producing isolated partial knowledge.

6.4 Future directions

The survey established that the proposal’s interventions aid restorativeness, but those assessments were based on static photographs. A logical next step is therefore a post-hoc evaluation that follows the implementation of the proposal’s interventions through monitoring on-site use over time. A seasonal pair of visits, one in winter and one in summer, using a method comparable to the one applied here, would also allow for a direct comparison with the project’s baseline data.

A complementary study with a more deliberately balanced sample, including recreational users, cyclists, and people without personal connections to the cemetery, would address the most significant gap in the survey’s data. Such a study might find that recreational users’ priorities differ from those of bereaved visitors in ways the current evidence does not fully reveal, and that certain design choices require adjustment accordingly.

The most fundamental question this project leaves open is whether a single theoretical framework is sufficient. This study used ART and the PRS as its analytical and evaluative instruments and confirmed that they work well in this context, but the choice was, as noted in section 6.2, pragmatic rather than exhaustive. A natural extension of this project would be

to replicate its RTD pipeline using SRT (Ulrich et al., 1991) as the analytical lens and some complementary instrument as its evaluative counterpart. SRT’s emphasis on the emotional and physiological dimensions of environmental response may be particularly well suited to capturing what a cemetery offers visitors who are not cognitively fatigued but emotionally raw: the bereaved visitor whose experience resists reduction to ART’s four components. Whether SRT produces systematically different design criteria, or simply reinforces ART’s conclusions through a different vocabulary, is a question worth testing.

The PRS could also be complemented by physiological measures, such as heart rate or cortisol, to test whether the restorativeness gains measured from participants’ self-reports correspond to measurable stress reduction, bringing the study closer to the experimental tradition of Ulrich et al. (1991).

The RTD pipeline applied here is also transferable. A comparative multi-site study applying the same ART-structured site analysis and PRS-based visual preference survey to several Nordic or Icelandic cemeteries would allow the design criteria developed here to be tested for generalisability and refined against a broader evidence base. Icelandic cemeteries, in particular, have received almost no empirical design attention, and the evidence base developed here represents a starting point that studies on urban and rural cemeteries in Iceland could build on. The methodology is not exclusive to cemeteries, either: the combination of theoretical site analysis and paired photographic preference survey could be applied to other contextually rich environments where

cultural, historical, and natural elements combine in ways that resist purely naturalistic analysis, much as Ouellette, Kaplan, and Kaplan (2005) demonstrated in their study of a Benedictine monastery.

6.5 When all is said and done

Gufuneskirkjugarður is a place where people go to be with their dead, and what it could become is a place where they also go to breathe. What this project has tried to show is that, with care and a certain sensitivity, these two purposes do not conflict, and that a cemetery can be made more welcoming, more restorative, and more alive to the people passing through, without compromising what it owes to those who rest in it.

The cemetery should accommodate both grief and recovery. A cemetery that only serves one does not yet know what it is capable of.

Of all places, it is the cemetery that most honestly reminds us we are still here:

*“The human race comes from nothing and goes to nothing.
Beyond this, there is nothing.”*

Peter Wessel Zapffe, 1941
Translated by Showler (2024, p. 102)

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Appendices

I Glossary

The following terms appear in the thesis and may be unfamiliar to the general readers. The definitions below clarify their meaning as used in this thesis.

Ásatrú

The modern revival of Old Norse paganism. In Iceland, a legally recognised religion with its own congregation (Ásatrúarfélagið). Gufuneskirkjugarður contains a dedicated Ásatrú burial section established in 1997.

Bosque

An informal grove of trees arranged loosely to define an outdoor room or enclosed space. Used in the design proposal to describe the planted arrival spaces at the cemetery's northern and southern entrances.

Kristintaka

Literally “the taking of Christianity.” Refers to the event of Iceland's conversion to Christianity in the year 1000, which marked a shift from pagan burial customs to Christian churchyard burial.

Kuml

A low earthen burial mound used during the Norse pagan period in Iceland (c. 870–1000). Kums were typically sited close to farmsteads and represent Iceland's oldest known burial tradition.

Living street

A shared street or path where pedestrians and cyclists have priority over private vehicles, and where design measures, such as surface materials, planting, and restricted access periods, discourage through-traffic.

Lychgate

A roofed gateway at the entrance to a churchyard or cemetery, traditionally used as a resting place for a coffin prior to burial. The main entrance to Gufuneskirkjugarður on Hallsvegur features a lychgate.

Propylon

An entrance gateway that precedes a main structure or space. In this thesis, the term is used to describe the tree-lined avenue of mature cottonwood trees at the cemetery's northern entrance, which frames the approach and draws the visitor's eye inward before the threshold is crossed.

Understory

The layer of vegetation growing beneath the main tree canopy, typically comprising smaller trees, shrubs, and ground-level plants.

II The survey

The survey was structured around five scene pairs, each grounded in one of ART's four components (being away, fascination, extent, and compatibility) with compatibility assessed twice to capture two different conditions at Gufuneskirkjugarður. Each section presented respondents with a brief scenario to establish a frame of mind, followed by a set of closed-ended Likert-scale items and one open-ended question. The items were adapted from the Perceived Restorativeness Scale and its revisions (Hartig et al., 1997; Purcell, Peron and Berto, 2001; Pasini et al., 2014), guided by Pasini et al.'s (2014) recommendations to use present-tense, positively worded items without double negations.

Each section contains a primary cluster of items targeting the focal ART component, supplemented by one or two cross-cutting items from other components. This design choice was deliberate: it allowed the survey to collect broadly comparable data across all five scene pairs without requiring respondents to complete a full multi-factor scale for every scene, while still enabling cross-component comparisons where relevant. A preference item was included in every section, following Purcell, Peron and Berto's (2001) finding that preference and perceived restorativeness are strongly correlated and that people implicitly use restorative value as a frame of reference when making preference judgements. The open-ended question in each section invited qualitative elaboration, inspired by Nordh's (2017) semi-structured interviews with visitors of Gamlebyen cemetery.

Section I: Being Away

The eastern perimeter was chosen as the site's weakest point for being away, where sparse vegetation leaves traffic on Víkurvegur both visible and audible.

Scenario

After a long week, you decide to visit Gufuneskirkjugarður to find an escape from everyday life.

Likert-scale questions

1. This place feels removed from my everyday environment. (being away)
2. Being here gives me a sense of escape from daily demands. (being away)
3. This environment feels orderly and well put together. (coherence)
4. This place feels spacious enough to wander freely. (scope)
5. There are interesting things to notice here. (fascination)
6. I feel comfortable in this environment. (compatibility)
7. Overall, how appealing do you find this scene? (preference)

Open-ended question

Describe how this part of the cemetery makes you feel, and whether anything about the surroundings contributes to, or works against, your sense of being away.

Section II: Fascination

This open area was chosen to test whether introducing natural and cultural elements could meaningfully strengthen fascination.

Scenario

After a long week, you decide to visit Gufuneskirkjugarður to walk and clear your head.

Likert-scale questions

1. My attention is drawn to many interesting things here. (fascination)
2. I find myself wanting to look more closely at the surroundings. (fascination)
3. I want to explore this area further. (fascination)
4. This place is stimulating and engaging. (fascination)
5. This place feels distinct from my everyday surroundings. (being away)
6. I feel comfortable spending time here. (compatibility)
7. Overall, how appealing do you find this scene? (preference)

Open-ended question

What, if anything, catches your eye in this scene? Is there anything that makes you want to linger, or that draws your attention effortlessly?

Section III: Extent

This straight corridor was chosen because its depth and enclosure support coherence and scope, while its full legibility leaves little mystery.

Scenario

You decide to spend an afternoon leisurely walking through Gufuneskirkjugarður.

Likert-scale questions

1. This place feels large enough that I could wander without feeling confined. (scope)
2. I feel that this environment extends beyond what I can currently see. (scope)
3. The different parts of this place feel like they belong together. (coherence)
4. This environment has a clear and consistent character. (coherence)
5. I am curious about what lies further ahead. (fascination)
6. I feel comfortable walking here. (compatibility)
7. Overall, how appealing do you find this scene? (preference)

Open-ended question

Does this path make you want to keep walking? Describe what, if anything, gives you a sense of there being more to discover, or what makes the space feel limited. (open question)

Section IV: Compatibility I

This resting spot was chosen to test whether the cemetery affords the stillness and shelter that compatibility requires for a visitor seeking quiet.

Scenario

After a long week, you visit Gufuneskirkjugarður one afternoon specifically to sit down, rest, and let your mind go quiet. You're looking for a spot where you can settle for a while.

Likert-scale questions

1. I can do things I enjoy in this environment. (compatibility)
2. Being here feels right for what I want to do. (compatibility)
3. This place feels like it suits my personality. (compatibility)
4. I can find ways to enjoy myself here. (compatibility)
5. This spot feels like it belongs in its surroundings. (coherence)
6. From here, I have a sense of the broader environment around me. (scope)
7. Overall, how appealing do you find this scene? (preference)

Open-ended question

Imagine sitting here for fifteen minutes. What would that feel like? What would make the experience better, or worse? (open question)

Section V: Compatibility II

The main entrance was chosen because ART's compatibility begins at that threshold: if the approach feels unwelcoming, restoration is undermined before it starts.

Scenario

After a long week you decide to visit Gufuneskirkjugarður. You're approaching the main entrance from the street, hoping that simply stepping inside will help you leave the week behind.

Likert-scale questions

1. This environment feels welcoming to someone like me. (compatibility)
2. I feel that I belong here. (compatibility)
3. Being here feels right for what I need right now. (compatibility)
4. This place feels separate from the demands of everyday life. (being away)
5. This environment has a clear and inviting character. (coherence)
6. I feel at ease approaching and entering this place. (compatibility)
7. Overall, how appealing do you find this scene? (preference)

Open-ended question

How does approaching this entrance make you feel? Does it prepare you for the kind of visit you're hoping to have, or does it get in the way of that?

Vitalising a Cemetery

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