

# How we want to die tomorrow

**T**he month of November in particular confronts people with their mortality. Due to the changing needs in terms of dealing with the death, end-of-life care and the funeral system,

**Uwe H. Lebok from K&A Brandresearch, Michael Bachmann and Carola Wacker-Meister from Friedwald have analysed motive structures and mourning behaviour continuously and across generations.**

With the buzzwords migration, digitalisation & corona, an important phenomenon has been pushed out of our perception radar that will fundamentally influence our economy and society in the next 20 to 30 years: Demographic ageing. Although it has been creeping up on us since the 1970s, its obvious visibility will increase markedly in the near future due to the baby boomers.

And with more and more older people on the streets and in everyday life, other topics such as health care, age-appropriate living and quality of life in old age, but also self-determined dying and dealing with death will become more important.

The moments surrounding our passing have become more differentiated in the last 10 to 20 years. As in other sectors, personal contact and the most individual care possible have the highest priority. Dealing with death has become more diverse in recent years: Despite increasing demand for services in the last phase of life, classic burials in individual or family graves are declining. A serious change is emerging, which can be attributed to very different, overlapping changes in attitudes towards death and burials.

The average age of the population in industrialised countries has been rising for years. In 1980, the average age of

the population of the Federal Republic of Germany was 36.5 years old, it has now risen to 44.5 years (2019). According to the Federal Statistical Office, the proportion of people who are over 65 years old (and who will certainly die in the next few decades) is currently 21 percent.

## With age comes death

Due to increasing life expectancy, the remaining years of life will increase for those over 65. At the same time, the higher the age experienced, the greater the cognitive dissonance between actual age and self-perception ("how old I actually feel", see Figure 1): the trend that older people will feel younger and younger is likely to continue.

At the same time, religiousness is declining in the younger generations, which has direct consequences for attitudes towards death. Due to the changing needs with regard to dealing with death, death care and burial,



Findings from the "Cemetery Forest Beyond Study 2020" by Uwe H. Lebok, Michael Bachmann, Carola Wacker-Meister

the company FriedWald, as market leader for forest burials, has set itself the goal of analyzing motive structures and mourning behavior continuously and across generations.

Now we could assume that most people only start thinking about death in mid-life. In fact, there is a shift in when people start thinking about their own demise (see Figure 2).

In the Friedwald-, the hereafter "study, 78 percent of all respondents aged 55 and older said they thought about their own death at least occasionally. In the following Generation X (age 40 to 55), however, it is already 70 percent. Talking about death in the social environment is also becoming less and less of a taboo subject. Among people over 70, this is 68 percent due to special contextual life stages - in Generation X (age 40 to 55 years),

but also 52 per cent who talk about death with friends and acquaintances. The reason for this is not so much the Christian faith or an occidental Christian attitude:

Only a minority of Generation X (27 per cent) consider themselves to be religious people or people who live according to Christian rules. Accordingly, not even half of all people over 40 years of age hope that another life awaits them after death. Among people living according to religion, the figure is 60 per cent (among non-religious people 23 per cent). Accordingly, almost 60 per cent of all respondents are convinced that death means the end of their own existence.

Death loses its horror (only eight percent fear hell) and becomes more normal. The end of existence is understood as the course of life and what happens to the body after death becomes less important (40 per cent of less religious people).

## The authors



PHOTO: ANDREAS

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PHOTO: ...

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The surprisingly early preoccupation with one's own demise is strongly related to the context of experiencing death, mourning or life-threatening illnesses with family members, friends and close acquaintances. Particularly in Gen X, there is a lively exchange between children and parents (traditionalists, over 70s), but also about issues of care for the dying.

## As if the light is switched off

Across all generations, the desire for self-determination in dying is central. Long illnesses, life-prolonging measures through device medicine and a painful passing are rejected by more than 80 percent of respondents aged 40+. A death as a nursing case, in dementia or in isolation ("being alone") also triggers discomfort (see Figure 3).

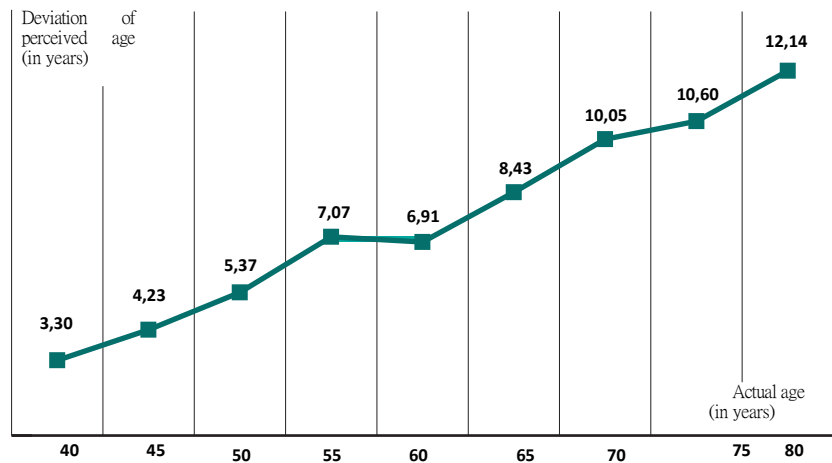
## About the Cemetery Forest Beyond Study 2020

With the "Afterlife Hour 2020", K&A BrandResearch/respondi conducted a representative zero measurement with n=3000 respondents from the generations of Traditionalists (born 1949 and older), Baby Boomers (born 1950-1964) and Gen X (born 1965-1979). In addition to attitudes towards religion, cemeteries and funerals, the survey also investigated individual death care and personal mechanisms for dealing with grief and death. The survey was largely based on insights from previous psychological research on coping with grief using K&A psychodramas.

Accordingly, with advancing age, death is also perceived as redemption, when body and mind are only able to function to a very limited extent.

Today, most over-40s are concerned that relatives and friends regain a zest for life as quickly as possible after their own death. It is important to around 50 percent of those surveyed that their relatives do not forget them after their death or that they have succeeded in leaving their mark on the world.

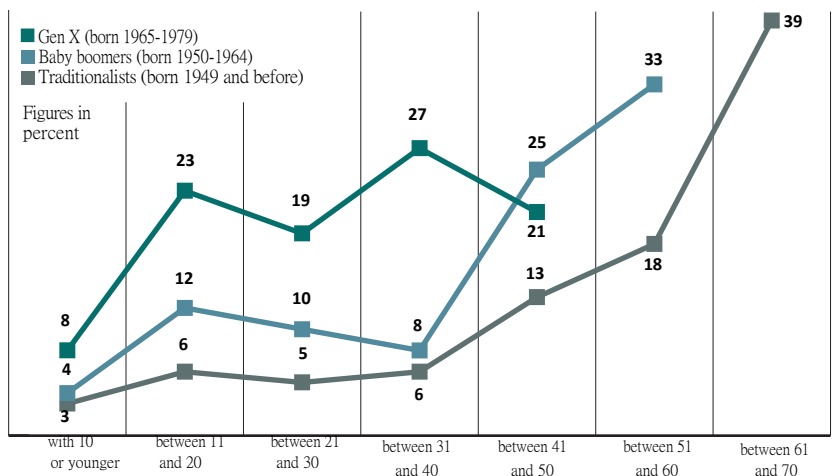
### Difference between actual and perceived ages of life



Source: K&A BrandResearch

planning& analysis 2020

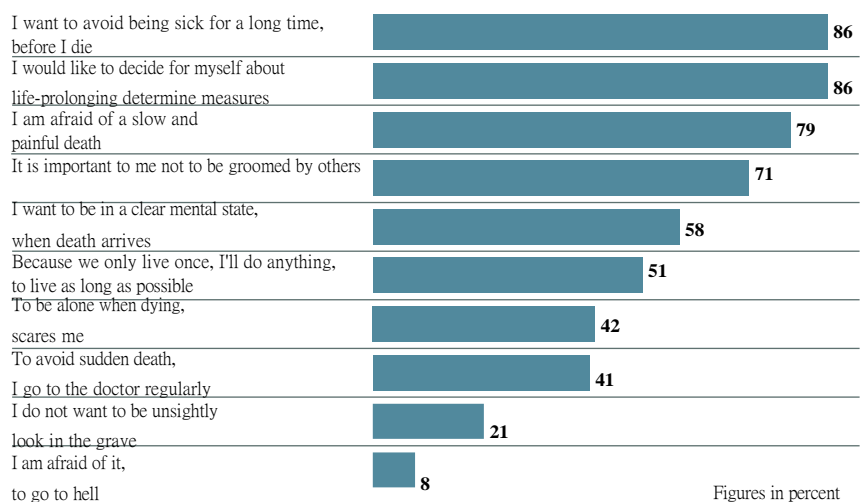
### Remembered age for the first thoughts about one's own demise



Source: K&A BrandResearch

planning& analysis 2020

### Dying needs



Figures in percent

Source: K&A BrandResearch

planning& analysis 2020

Much more important, it is that one's own death does not cause any financial or long-term emotional burden (64 percent) for the surviving dependents.

In order to keep this as low as possible, precautions would have to be taken. However, 65 percent of Gen X say they have not yet made any provisions (compared to only 28 percent of those over 70). On the one hand, this seems to be a reflection of the "distancing of the age of death" due to the continuing increase in life expectancy and the associated lower perceived need for advance directives, powers of attorney, wills or funeral provisions.

At the same time, the inner images of one's own death are quite concrete. As part of a diary survey, the „Friedwald-Jenseits“ study also openly asked about moods and images that would come to mind if the respondents imagined lying on their deathbed. For 44 percent, feelings such as melancholy, gratitude, relief, confidence, but also fear and anxiety (15 percent) come to mind, followed by thoughts about one's own life as a retrospective, as a balance sheet like one's own film (32 percent), wishes for a death that is as painless and easy as possible (twelve percent), the most important thing for the relatives (ten percent), and the most important thing for the family (ten percent)

and practical considerations (nine percent). Religious people also have stronger thoughts about life after death (15 percent). Overall, most statements focus on one's own life, the most important people during one's lifetime as well as a mindful feeling of one's own feelings in the (projected) moment of dying (see Figure 4).

The funeral itself is given little space in the last thoughts, even if the tendency to think about one's own funeral and corresponding arrangements increases with age. As in the case of thoughts about one's own demise, the desire to no longer focus on mourning predominates (61 percent). Rather, the focus should be on beautiful moments - also of one's own life - during funerals (59 percent). 47 per cent of respondents also no longer attach importance to funeral ceremonies after their death.

### What remains of us


Cemeteries are seen as places of quiet reflection, part of our life and culture by the over-40s across the generations, although compared to the over-70s in Gen X, more and more people dislike cemeteries (17 per cent),

respectively they find cemeteries creepy (nine per cent). Nevertheless, more than two thirds see cemeteries as the established standard for commemorating the dead.

However, burial in an individual or family grave as a desired image for one's own funeral continues to lose importance: less than 25 percent consider burial in a coffin. In the future, cremations in the cemetery or in nature (such as FriedWald) will therefore increase. Already today, almost 80 percent would prefer a cremation or urn burial for themselves. The cemeteries will therefore become less crowded ...

It is therefore all the more important that people's needs with regard to their own demise are taken into account at an early stage. In this context, moods of hope, relief and lightness provide an easier emotional access than difficult traditions of mourning and ritualised funeral ceremonies. As is the case for other industries, the needs and contexts of service providers in the context of the very last stage of life are changing. Not to internalise a change, to only want to be moderately involved in shaping a change, leads to dead-end roads. Or to abandoned graves, empty cemeteries and emptied churches... ■

### Selected quotes about moods in the projective context of one's own demise.



I am glad to have had such a great life with my partner and with my children. We have experienced so many wonderful things together, that I would have nice thoughts for a whole life to come...

A contented recollection of my life, painlessly across, in the inviolable dignity of man.

I will never again be able to experience all the beautiful things, to participate with people. That was it then for all time, unimaginable.

I would like to have everything settled, to be to at peace with all people, to be able to say I've seen a lot and lived as I imagined.

..that I would thank the people who have entered my life (..) and I feel a sense of longing and tranquility despite the soon ending days. The light has represented me for years and soon it will be extinguished.

the time becomes less and less and then it is irretrievably over. What a pity that it is already so far.

Let images from childhood and life situations pass by.

Slight sadness would arise. I would remember the many beautiful moments. But I have lived my life.

I will remember the many beautiful moments of my life (with the people important to me), wonderful vacations, the infinitely precious moments we spent in nature, in the forest and in our garden. I will leave with dignity and gratitude and hope for a reunion.

Thoughts of not having noticed everything, thoughts of having missed many things, to let life pass by.