Highgate Cemetery at a Crossroads
How to Take the Right Turn? A Contribution Based on the Economic Theory of Clubs

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Highgate Cemetery is running out of space. If that problem is not solved in a satisfactory manner, the Cemetery might have to shut down its operations in the future. Trying to avoid such a scenario, in 2017, the Friends of Highgate Cemetery Trust, the Cemetery's managing body, commissioned Alan Baxter Ltd., a London based consultancy firm, specialists in the design and conservation of urban spaces, to carry out a baseline study formulating the core questions related to that problem. Subsequently, from 22 July to 6 August 2017, the Trust organised an exhibition, which was also accessible online, providing a questionnaire aiming to fathom the visitors' opinions and standpoints regarding those delicate and difficult questions. In this chapter, those questions and the related issues will first be presented and analysed. Some of them, if not properly solved, have the potential to threaten the future existence of the Cemetery in its present form altogether. Furthermore, in its attempt to solve these issues, the Trust is faced with delicate issues in the sense that some of the obvious solutions to the problems related to one particular issue potentially aggravate other existing problems. Finding a satisfactory solution to all of the individual problems threatening the Cemetery's survival can be likened to a difficult balancing act. Second, based on James Buchanan's economic theory of clubs, this chapter aims to show, on the theoretical level, what a satisfactory solution to the various challenges faced by Highgate Cemetery looks like.[1] With the illustration of eight diagrams, it will be shown that the several variables, such as the number of daily visitors, the number of re-used graves, and the degree of vegetation trimming can be brought, pairwise, into an equilibrium, which maximises the Cemetery's stakeholders' benefit.[2] Diagrams are used because Buchanan's theory works with what is known in mathematics as the first derivative of a function, which can also be graphically repre-

1 Buchanan 1965.

2 Stakeholders include future and present grave owners, visitors, mourners, and the bereaved.

sented by the slope of the function's graph. With the help of the first derivatives of the benefit and the cost functions, the point where net benefit is maximised (i.e., total benefit minus total cost), is identified. It will be shown, on the theoretical level, that a satisfactory solution to the Cemetery's problems is possible.

As mentioned above, the main issue the Trust faces is simply that the Cemetery is running out of space. In their draft of the Highgate Cemetery Options Report presented by Alan Baxter Ltd., which takes into account the information generated by the questionnaire-based survey, the authors write:

> Space for new full burials is expected to run out within seven years (there are approx. 34 spaces on Cuttings Path in the West Cemetery and 90 spaces on the Mound in the East Cemetery). The most pressing issue for the Cemetery is how and where to provide new burial space […].[3]

This problem is not specific to Highgate Cemetery. Especially in the London area, cemeteries are rapidly running out of burial space. In 2011, the BBC reported that «[a] recent audit of burial space by the Greater London Authority found eight boroughs were completely full, with no space for new burials. Another 10 boroughs have a ‹critical› problem, and are predicted to exhaust available space in 10 years.»[4] Six years later, a House of Commons briefing paper on the reuse of graves stated that «[i]n some areas there is now a scarcity of land available for burial and some burial grounds have closed because they are full. […] The position is particularly acute in London.»[5] Highgate Cemetery's financial position is highly affected by that problem as «[t]he Cemetery receives no funding from Government and is reliant upon income from visitors and burials to maintain the Cemetery and keep it open.»[6] If the Cemetery were to run out of burial spaces, the trust would be faced with severe financial problems as the sale of a burial space generates considerable revenue. Whilst the cost of a burial in London is, on average, £3,806, George Michael's burial at Highgate Cemetery in 2017 cost £18,325, £16,475 for the plot and £1,850 for the dig-

3 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 2.
4 Jones 2011.
5 Fairbairn 2017, 4.
6 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 1.

ging.[7] The cost for a burial place, however, can even be above £500,000, as one plot was sold for £550,000 in 2016.[8]

Another serious problem is the rampant growth of plants, scrubs and trees. The trust writes: «Tree roots, as well as falling trees and branches, are causing serious damage to monuments. The boundary between pleasing decay and dereliction is increasingly crossed.»[9] Highgate Cemetery was initially conceived as a garden Cemetery with a variety of landscapes offering «magnificent views towards then-distant London».[10]As the financial situation began to notably deteriorate after the 1940s, maintenance was scaled back, and due to the uncontrolled growth of trees, scrubs and ivy, all of the former splendid views have now been lost. Whilst this may have added to the charm and the reputation of the Cemetery as a place not only of benign decay but also of mystery and alleged vampire sightings, possibly attracting visitors, the out-of-control plant growth now seriously threatens to damage the Cemetery's graves and monuments.[11]

Another problem faced by the trust is to find the right balance between paying visitors and the preservation of the Cemetery's «unique atmosphere of romantic melancholy».[12] Both the famous people laid to rest at the Cemetery as well as its natural beauty, and the historic importance of the monuments within it, mirrored by the Cemetery's listing «at Grade I in Historic England's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens», led to a steady increase in the number of visitors.[13] The trust writes:

> Although Highgate Cemetery does not advertise, visitor numbers are increasing year by year. In 2016, 60,000 people visited the East Cemetery and 25,000 took a guided tour of the West Cemetery. […] Visitors and tours accounted for a vital 35% of the Cemetery's income.[14]

From a financial point of view, a continued increase in the number of visitors is desirable. However, the Cemetery's atmosphere, which is, in the words of the trust, «one of the finest and most atmospheric in the world», is likely to be negatively affected.[15] Moreover, especially if the number of

7 Jones 2017.
8 Bartlett 2017.
9 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.
10 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.
11 Patient 2016.
12 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 6.
13 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.
14 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 8.
15 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 6.

visitors exceeds a certain limit, the privacy of those who are visiting graves, mourners and the bereaved, is infringed upon. This is a concern as the trust aims to keep Highgate Cemetery «a ‹living› cemetery relevant to local people».[16] The attainment of that delicate balance between the preservation of the Cemetery's atmosphere and an increase in revenue generated by more visitors represents one of several issues the trust is faced with.

As mentioned above, following the exhibition addressing the pressing issues facing Highgate Cemetery and taking into consideration the results of the survey, Alan Baxter Ltd. presented a draft of possible actions that the trust might take to secure the Cemetery's future.[17] Regarding the imminent shortage of burial spaces, the draft's authors suggest the re-use of graves. The term «re-use» of graves is used according to the definition presented by the Cemeteries, Crematoria and Burials Provision (CCBP) Sub-Group of the London Environment Directors Network (LEDNET): «Re-use involves burial in graves previously used for burials (but at least 75 years previously), at depths where it may be necessary to disturb human remains».[18] Whilst the authors state that «[…][the re-use of graves] has been found to be acceptable in other cemeteries», they contend that «[a]t Highgate […][the re-use is] made more complicated by the need to preserve the high significance of the site».[19] Here, the authors address two conflicting objectives in connection to a possible solution to the Cemetery's most pressing problem, the lack of burial space. If the re-use of graves is organised and carried-out with the sole objective to maximise the number of spaces available in the future, the Cemetery might have to give up its unique atmosphere, which constitutes, by itself, a financial asset as it appears to be obvious that the exceptionally high prices that are paid for a burial space at Highgate Cemetery are, in part at least, owed to the Cemetery's character of melancholic abandonment.

A field with perhaps less conflicting objectives is the Cemetery's encroaching vegetation. Uncontrolled growth of low-quality trees has begun to take its toll. The trust writes: «The balance has shifted from the romantic to the destructive, as self-seeded ash and sycamore have hidden the original landscape, destroying graves and monuments and obliterating long vistas.»[20] Furthermore, «[t]he landscape is slowly evolving into a succession

16 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 4.
17 Evans/Hradsky 2017.
18 LEDNET 2013, 1.
19 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 2.
20 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.

woodland habitat».[21] It appears obvious that some action must be taken to preserve the Cemetery's character where the ensemble of nature and the deceased's resting place form that unique ensemble. «The juxtaposition of trees, ivy and graves gives the cemetery its unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy, which is treasured by grave owners and visitors.»[22] Obviously, that atmosphere would be lost if the Cemetery were to be restored to its original character as a «garden with clumps of trees and shrubs framing distant views of London».[23] In that sense, the trimming of the vegetation as an objective does, if not done in moderation and with great care, conflict with the preservation of the Cemetery's unique atmosphere.

That scenario with its delicate balance between differing objectives is now addressed through an approach based on the economic theory of clubs. When Buchanan presented his theory in 1965, he exemplified the theory's tenets with the example of a public swimming pool. In this chapter now, his theory is applied to Highgate Cemetery. With that theory it can be shown that there exist indeed stable partial equilibriae, that is, combinations of the variables in question, which maximise the Cemetery's stakeholders' (i.e., all involved parties, such as grave owner, visitors, and the bereaved) benefit. In the following, the current situation faced by the Cemetery's trust is scrutinised according to the tenets of that theory, and it will be shown that the attainment of multiple partial equilibriae, maximising stakeholders' benefit, is indeed possible. The attainment of a general equilibrium, however, will not be addressed, as that would lie beyond this chapter's scope. Prior to that, however, it is needed to introduce the term «club good» and how it relates to Highgate cemetery.

Economic theory differentiates between «private goods» and «public goods». The distinction rests on the two concepts of «rivalry of consumption» and «excludability». Rivalry of consumption means that consumption of a particular good, or service, by one consumer precludes consumption of that very good, or service, by another consumer. For example, if the re-use of graves were to be considered entirely inappropriate, then, a burial plot, once used, could not be used for another burial in the distant future. If the re-use, however, is considered acceptable after, say, fifty or one hundred years, one may speak of partial rivalry.[24] Of course, as long as there is sufficient space available, the problem of rivalry does not materialise and

21 Evans/Hradsky 2017, 5.
22 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.
23 Highgate Cemetery 2017, 2.
24 Hindriks/Myles 2004 (2000), 172.

present itself; the burial of one person does not preclude the burial of another-one. However, if space is running out, rivalry of consumption becomes an issue and can only be avoided through the re-use of graves. Excludability then means, that a person can be excluded from the consumption of a certain good. For example, if a person A is unwilling to spend money on an admission ticket to visit Highgate Cemetery, that person will be excluded from visiting the site. A so-called private good is characterised by both, rivalry of consumption and excludability. A bottle of mineral water, which is sold to person A who intends to drink it all by him- or herself, cannot be consumed by person B. Moreover, the seller of mineral water bottles can exclude everyone who is not willing to pay the asking price from consumption.

A so-called public good, on the other hand, is characterised by the absence of both, rivalry of consumption and excludability. A good example of a public good is traffic regulation by government authorities. A pedestrian, waiting at a zebra crossing, who crosses the road when the light jumps to green, is not in rivalry with other pedestrians seeing the same green light, nor can anyone be excluded from crossing the street. A club good then is characterised by excludability and the absence of rivalry of consumption. For instance, a person who is not willing to pay the asking price for a burial space is excluded from the cemetery. And, if person A is buried in the cemetery, person B can still be buried in the same cemetery, provided there is sufficient space available. Similarly, whilst a person can be excluded from visiting the Cemetery if he or she is not willing to pay the entrance fee, there is no rivalry between person A's and person B's visit to the cemetery, they can both visit the cemetery simultaneously. In the following analysis then, the goods, and services offered by the Cemetery will be treated as club goods. With the help of the economic theory of clubs it will be shown that a) there exist, on the theoretical level, partial equilibriae between the number of re-used graves, the numbers of visitors admitted to the Cemetery, the number and quality of the facilities provided for visitors and mourners, as well as the degree to which the Cemetery's vegetation is trimmed and altered that optimises the benefit to grave-owners, visitors, and the bereaved, and that b) the attainment of such partial equilibriae is likely to safeguard the Cemetery's future. For the purpose of the analysis, a few assumptions are made. For example, it is assumed that the Cemetery's cost of maintenance has to be carried by visitors, new grave owners, or both. Donations and other sources of income are neglected. Furthermore, it is assumed that individual visitors, or new grave owners profit to an equal amount from a reduction in the cost. Furthermore, it is assumed that all individual visitors have an identical benefit curve. The same is assumed

regarding all of the individual new grave owners. Finally, existing grave owners are not included in that analysis as it is assumed that, having fully paid the price for their burial space, they cannot be made to contribute again to the Cemetery's maintenance cost.

To avoid formal mathematical notation, the theory's tenets are illustrated with the help of eight diagrams (fig. 1 to fig. 8). In figures 1 and 2, the behaviour of the total cost and the total benefit to the individual visitor is plotted as a function of the number of visitors to the Cemetery (fig. 1), and as a function of the number of re-used graves (fig. 2). In each diagram, the behaviour of cost and benefit is plotted for two given scenarios. For instance, in figure 1, in function of the number of paying visitors to the Cemetery, the two pairs (a dotted curve with a corresponding straight line as well as a solid curve with a corresponding straight line) illustrate the total benefit and total cost to the individual visitor for two scenarios: a) a scenario with the re-use of graves (dotted curve and dotted straight line) and b) a scenario with no re-use of graves (solid curve and solid straight line). Figure 3 then, drawing on the insights illustrated by figures 1 and 2, represents a partial equilibrium which, in light of the implied best combination of the two variables (number of visitors and number of re-used graves) maximises the individual visitor's net benefit. Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the analogous case from the perspective of the individual new grave owner. Finally, figures 6 to 8 illustrate the attainment of a partial equilibrium through a balance between the degree of vegetation trimming and the number of visitors to the Cemetery.

In figure 1 below, as mentioned above, the pair consisting of the solid curve and the solid straight line represents the scenario with no new burials, that is, without the re-use of graves, and the pair consisting of the dotted curve and the dotted straight line represents the scenario with continued new burials, that is, with the constant re-use of graves. The solid cost line is situated above the dotted cost line because in case of no new future burials due to a lack of space, that source of income will close, and the Cemetery is likely to have to charge very high admission prices to visitors. The solid benefit curve is situated below the dotted benefit curve because in the absence of new burials, especially of famous people, the benefit to the individual visitor is likely to be considerably lower as a visit of the grave of a recently passed-on celebrity is likely to add to the individual visitor's benefit.

The arrow then shows, for the scenario with continued new burials, that is, in the case of a re-use of graves, the number of visitors which, regarding the individual visitor, generates the biggest net benefit, that is, the individual's total benefit minus total cost. The arrow is located where the slope of

the cost and the benefit curves are identical. To the left of that point, total benefit increases, or it decreases at a lower rate than total cost, and to the right of that point, total benefit decreases faster, that is, at a higher rate than total cost. Therefore, the arrow's position corresponds to the highest net benefit to the individual visitor. In the case of no new burials, the optimal number of visitors is zero simply because the price of an admission ticket exceeds, for all numbers of visitors, the benefit of a visit to the Cemetery.

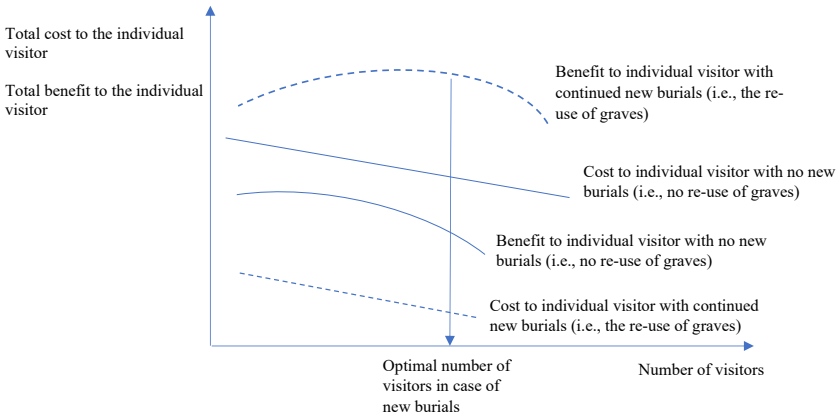

Fig. 1.

Figure 2 below illustrates the individual visitor's cost and benefit in function of the number of re-used graves. Two scenarios are shown: the solid benefit curve is above the dotted benefit curve simply because a large crowd of visitors might possibly compromise the individual's experience of the Cemetery's unique atmosphere of sublime melancholy. The two straight lines represent the cost to the individual visitor. Regarding the cost, the following assumptions are made. The solid straight line is positioned above the dotted straight line because with very few visitors only, that part of the cost of the Cemetery's maintenance, which is not paid for by new burials is shared by only a few visitors, and hence the cost to the individual visitor is substantial. It also has a steeper slope because in the case of a few visitors only, a reduction in the cost burdened on visitors, due to income generated by the re-use of graves, leads to a comparatively higher decrease in the cost per visitor than in the case of many visitors. However, due to the very small number of visitors, the cost to the individual

visitor is, for all numbers of re-used graves, above the benefit curve. Analogous to the scenario shown in figure 1, in the case of very few visitors only, the optimal number of re-used graves is therefore zero.

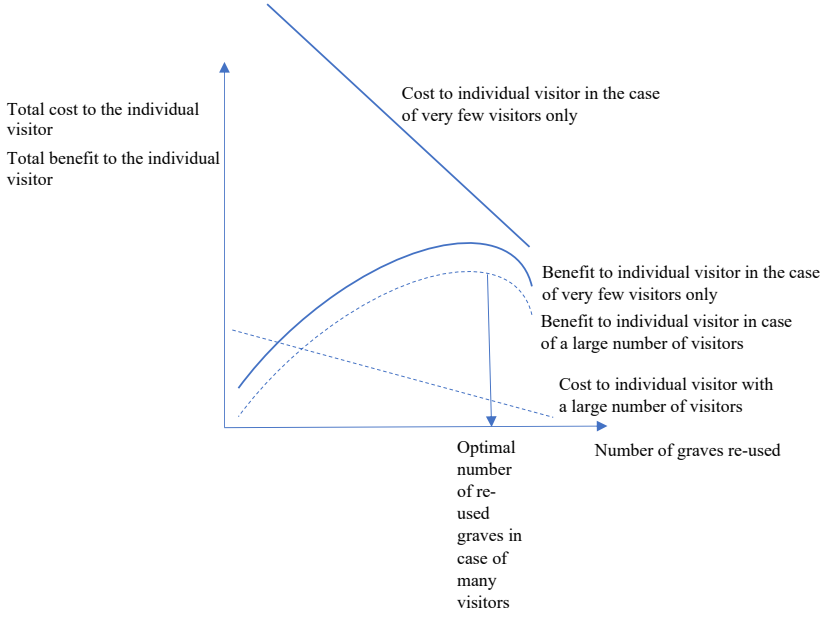

Fig. 2.

The circumstances and results of the two figures 1 and 2 can be merged and are represented in figure 3 (fig. 3). The straight line labelled «optimal number of visitors N_{opt}» determines the number of re-used graves that results in a visitor's highest net benefit, and the straight line labelled «optimal number of graves re-used R_{opt}» determines the number of total visitors to the Cemetery that results in the individual visitor's highest net benefit. Those two straight lines can be seen as reaction functions that lead to the achievement of a point of equilibrium. The logic underlying those two straight lines is derived from the two figures 1 and 2. In those two figures, it has been established that an increase in the number of visitors goes along with an increase in the number of re-used graves (and vice versa), if the individual visitor's net benefit is to be maximised. Figure 3 then is read as follows: if, for example, the initial number of visitors corresponds to the amount indicated by point 1 on the abscissa, then the corresponding number of re-used graves is point 2 on the ordinate. That in turn leads to point

3, representing the corresponding number of visitors, leading to the highest net benefit of the individual visitor. In that way, equilibrium in point E is reached.

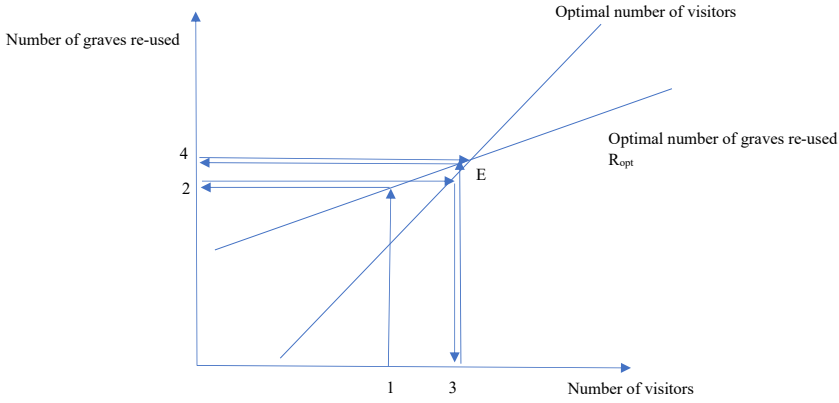

Fig. 3.

A point of equilibrium can also be achieved regarding the highest net benefit of the individual new grave owner. As illustrated in figure 4 below, a pairing of a solid curve and a solid straight line as well as a pairing of a dotted curve and a dotted straight line are shown (fig. 4). They represent, for the two scenarios indicated in the diagram, the total benefit and total cost to the individual new grave owner in function of the number of paying visitors to the Cemetery. The solid cost curve is situated above the dotted cost curve because in case of no new future burials due to a lack of space, that source of income will close, and the Cemetery is likely to have to sell the remaining burial spaces at a much higher price. Furthermore, in both scenarios, with and without new burials, an increase in the number of visitors leads to a decrease in the cost to the individual new grave owner simply because an increase in the number of visitors to the Cemetery and the corresponding generation of additional funds reduces the financial burden that has to be carried by new grave owners.

The dotted benefit curve then is situated above the solid benefit curve because, from the point of view of the grave owner, the certitude of being laid to rest in the vicinity of famous contemporary artists, business people and, or politicians is likely to be considered a benefit, otherwise, they are unlikely to have chosen Highgate Cemetery as their final resting place. Beyond a certain number of visitors, both benefit curves slope downward due

to overcrowding of the Cemetery. The arrow then shows the number of visitors which, regarding the individual new grave owner, generates the biggest net benefit, that is, the individual's total benefit minus total cost. In case of no new burials taking place, that number is zero as the cost to the individual new grave owner is, for all numbers of visitors, above the benefit.

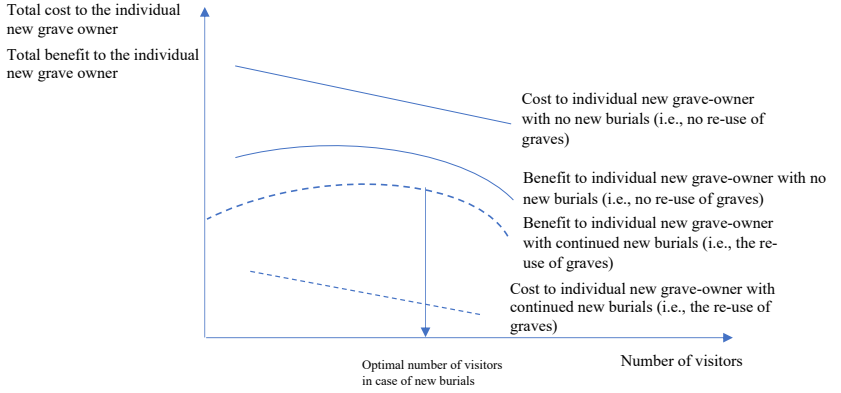

Fig. 4.

In figure 5 below, the individual new grave owner's net benefit in function of the number of re-used graves is shown (fig. 5). The diagram illustrates two scenarios, one with few visitors only, the other one with many visitors. The cost to the individual new grave owner is clearly smaller in the case of many visitors, as the revenue generated by the sale of entry tickets carries a lot of the financial burden. And, analogous to figure 1 above, in the scenario with many visitors, new burial plots can be sold at a smaller price, and an increase in the number of re-used graves will therefore lead to only a comparatively small reduction in the cost to the individual new grave owner (compared to the scenario with few visitors only). As in all diagrams, for reasons of simplicity, the cost to the individual new grave owner is represented as a linear straight line. The benefit curve for the scenario of a large number of visitors is above the benefit curve of the scenario with few visitors only because it is assumed that a grave owner choosing Highgate Cemetery as his or her final resting place has, in part at least, made his or her decision based on the Cemetery's celebrity status which is commensurate to a large number of visitors. Both benefit curves turn downwards as

the number of re-used graves increases beyond a certain point as that would imply a loss of the Cemetery's character.

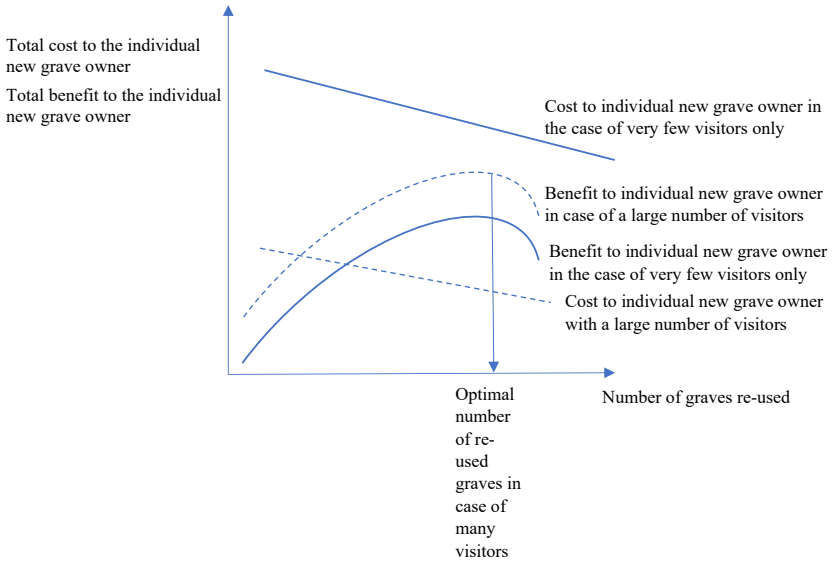

Fig. 5.

As shown in figure 5, the optimal number of re-used graves, which maximised the individual grave owner's benefit, in the case of only very few visitors, is zero. In the case of a large number of visitors, however, the cost to the individual visitor is substantially reduced, resulting in the identification of an optimal number of re-used graves (>0). Therefore, analogous to the equilibrium shown in figure 3, a point of equilibrium in terms of a combination of the number of visitors and the number of re-used graves maximising the individual grave owner's benefit can be established, an equilibrium that maximises the individual grave owner's net benefit.

It is quite possible to enlarge this analysis by the inclusion of yet another variable, for example the degree to which the Cemetery's vegetation should be trimmed. A point of equilibrium, for example, between the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming, which maximises the individual visitor's benefit can be established.

The diagram below (fig. 6) illustrates the individual visitor's net benefit in function of the degree of vegetation trimming. Two scenarios are shown: the dotted benefit curve and the dotted straight cost line illustrate a

scenario with a large number of visitors, the solid curve and the solid straight line illustrate the scenario with few visitors only. Obviously, some vegetation trimming increases the individual visitor's benefit as he or she will now be able to enjoy some of the original spectacular vistas. Too much vegetation trimming, however, reduces the individual visitor's benefit as the Cemetery is bound to lose its character of melancholy decay. The solid benefit curve, illustrating the scenario with few visitors only, is above the dotted benefit curve simply because a large number of visitors is likely to spoil, to some degree at least, the individual visitor's experience of the Cemetery. The cost lines both have a positive slope as vegetation trimming will lead to higher prices of entry tickets; naturally, the fewer visitors, the bigger the price increase for the individual visitor. Therefore, the solid cost line has a steeper slope than the dotted-one.

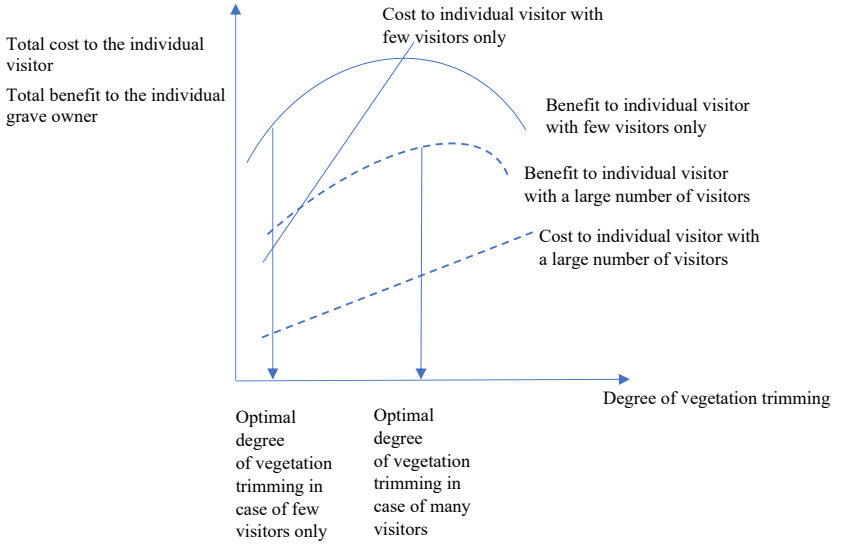

Fig. 6.

As in the two equilibria presented above, the relationship between the optimal degree of vegetation trimming and the number of visitors is of a complementary nature. The larger the number of visitors, the higher the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's net benefit.

Figure 7 below illustrates the individual visitor's net benefit in function of the number of visitors in the case of a high and of a low degree of vegetation trimming. The benefit in the case of a high degree of vegetation trimming is above the benefit related to a low degree of vegetation trimming simply because the re-establishment of some of the initial spectacular vistas is likely to contribute positively to the individual visitor's benefit (fig. 7). The slope of the cost line, in case of a low degree of vegetation trimming, is negative as an increase in the number of visitors leads to a lower cost for the individual visitor, however, it is not as steep as the slope of the cost line for a high degree of vegetation trimming. The reason is straightforward. As in the case of a low degree of vegetation trimming, the absolute cost to the individual visitor is comparatively small, any reduction thereof due to an increase in the number of visitors is of course comparatively small also, resulting in only comparatively small reductions in cost due to additional visitors.

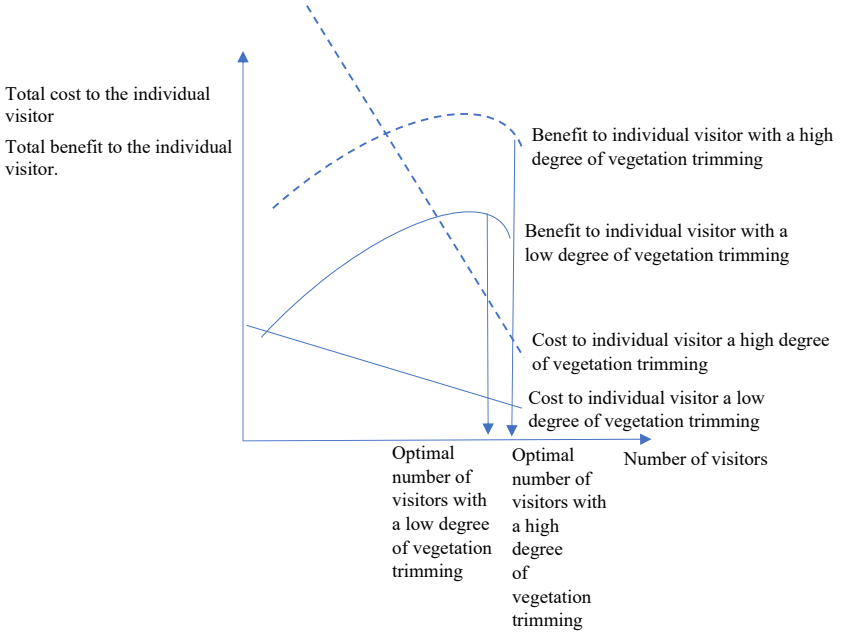

Fig. 7.

As in figure 6, the relationship between the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's benefit

is of a complementary nature. Analogous to figure 3, figure 8 below illustrates the attainment of equilibrium, that is a combination of the degree of vegetation trimming and the optimal number of visitors, which maximises the individual visitor's benefit.

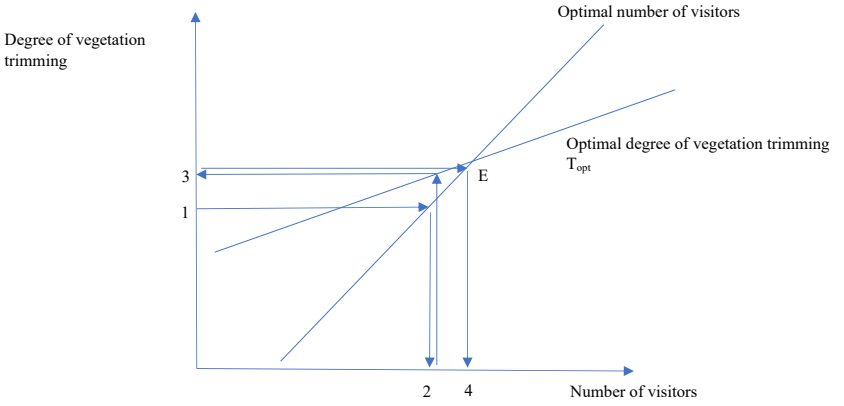

Fig. 8.

In the above diagram (fig. 8), representing the adjustment path leading to the combination of the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming that maximises the individual visitor's net benefit, the starting point is indicated by the point on the ordinate labelled «1». This then means that the corresponding best number of visitors is represented by the point on the abscissa labelled «2». However, if the number of visitors corresponds to point «2», then the best degree of vegetation trimming is represented by point «3». In that way, equilibrium is reached in point E.

Given the various variables addressed in the diagrams above, point E in diagram 8, as well as point E in diagram 3, only represent so-called partial equilibria. As mentioned above, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the attainment of an overall general equilibrium[25] including all relevant variables. The aim was to show, with the help of Buchanan's theory of economic clubs, that there exist indeed many partial equilibria, each identifying a specific combination of the two variables in question (for example, the number of visitors and the degree of vegetation trimming in fig. 8), which maximises the Cemetery's individual stakeholder's (i.e. visi-

25 For a discussion of the general equilibrium see Cournot 2012 (1838); Daal/Jolink 2006 (1993); Marshall 2012 (1890).

tors, existing and future grave owners, as well as mourners) benefit. Those equilibria imply that all variables in question will have to be addressed by the Cemetery's Trust, such that at no time and nowhere should there be a solution imposed that favours one variable over all others. The middle ground, the balance between the many variables concerned must be found. If the Cemetery's Trust manages to find and maintain that delicate balancing point between the conservation of nature, the re-use of graves, and the number of visitors, the continued generation of a net benefit for its many stakeholders is highly likely to secure the Cemetery a well sustained future, as it is due to the generation of a high net benefit for its stakeholders that the Cemetery will be able to generate the funds needed to continue to operate.

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