



Roadside Memorials (pietní místa) in the Czech Republic: Grief, Memory, and Public Space

Çek Cumhuriyeti'nde Yol Kenarı Anıtları (pietní místa): Yas, Bellek ve Kamusal Mekân

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Bu makale, Çek Cumhuriyeti'nde "pietní místa" olarak adlandırılan yol kenarı anıtlarını incelemekte ve bu anıtları gündelik kamusal mekân içinde ortaya çıkan kentsel ve yarı kentsel yas pratikleri olarak ele almaktadır. Bu anıtlar çoğunlukla şehirlere ölümle sonuçlanan trafik kazalarının meydana geldiği noktalarda oluşturulmaktadır. Benzer anıtlar şehir merkezinden uzak herhangi bir yerde kaza sonucu gerçekleşen bir ölümü anmak için de dikilebilmektedir. Bu anıtların olduğu yerlere mumlar, çiçekler, oradaki halkın dini inancına bağlı olarak haçlar, kişisel eşyalar ve kimi zaman hasar görmüş araç parçaları gibi nesnelere konulmaktadır. Yasal olmayan bu anıtların yanına konulan bu nesnelere aracılığıyla kayıp, çok sayıda insanın paylaştığı kamusal alanlarda görünür hâle gelmektedir. Antropolojik ve kültürel karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşım benimseyen bu çalışma, Çekya bağlamında yol kenarı anıtlarının bir yandan köklü dinsel sembolizmden beslendiğini, diğer yandan ise ölümleri anma biçimlerinin güncel dönüşümlerine uyum sağladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, bu alanlara bırakılan nesnelere sembolik anlamlarına ve bu anıtların belleğin zaman içinde sürdürülmesindeki rolüne odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma, başta České Budějovice kenti ve çevresindeki Tábor ve Bechyně olmak üzere farklı mekânlarda çekilen fotoğraflara dayalı nitel bir görsel analiz üzerinden ve yerel halkta var olan inanışların derlenmesiyle yürütülmüştür. Yerel yas pratiklerini anıtlarlaştırma, kamusal mekân ve kolektif bellek tartışmalarıyla ilişkilendiren makale, yol kenarı anıtlarının kentsel peyzaj içinde resmî olmayan ancak anlam yüklü bellek işaretleri olarak işlev gördüğünü savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, toplumların paylaşılan kamusal mekânlar içerisinde ölüm, bellek ve aidiyet duygusuyla nasıl ilişki kurduklarına dair tartışmalara yer vermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antropoloji, din, kamusal alan, kent etnografisi, kolektif bellek.

ABSTRACT

This article examines roadside memorials, known as pietní místa, in the Czech Republic. It focuses on these memorials as urban and semi-urban forms of mourning that appear in everyday public spaces. These memorials are often erected at the sites of fatal traffic accidents in cities. They might be erected at sites where the accidents resulting in death occurred, and this is usually far away from the city. Candles, flowers, crosses, depending on the religion of the local residents, personal belongings, and sometimes damaged vehicle parts are placed at these memorials. Through these objects accompanying these illegal memorials, the deceased becomes visible in public spaces shared by many people. Adopting an anthropological and cross-cultural comparative approach, this study discusses that roadside memorials in the Czech context are both deeply rooted in religious symbols and adapt to contemporary transformations in ways of commemorating the dead. The study focuses particularly on the symbolic meanings of the objects left at these sites and the role of these memorials in maintaining memory over time. The research was conducted through a qualitative visual analysis based on photographs taken in various locations, primarily in and around the city of České Budějovice, including Tábor ve Bechyně. Local narratives and beliefs are also used as supporting data sources. Connecting local mourning practices with discussions of memorialization, public space, and collective memory, the paper argues that roadside memorials serve as informal yet meaningful markers in the urban landscape. In this context, the study offers important insights into how communities relate to death, memory, and a sense of belonging within shared public environments.

Keywords: anthropology, religion, urban ethnography, public space, collective memory

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Introduction

Creating roadside memorials, locally known as *pieta místa*, at the sites of traffic accidents is a familiar cultural practice. These memorials usually consist of candles, flowers, crosses, personal belongings, or fragments of vehicles related to the accident. They serve as visible and public expressions of grief and remembrance, making loss present in everyday life. Unlike traditional graves, which are quite away from the city settings, these memorials are placed directly in public spaces. Because of this, they bring private sorrow and public memory together and invite people to reflect collectively on the fragility of life (Doss, 2008; Santino, 2006). In this sense, they not only belong to families but also to the wider community. Roadside memorials are usually understood as memorials placed along roads, often connected to different kinds of traffic accidents. Their location makes them visible to drivers, riders and people who pass around those, and they often function as public reminders of sudden death and risk. However, as it will be discussed further, not all memorials are placed directly beside roads. Some are located in natural environments, such as forests, hills, or mountain paths, where accidents or deaths occur outside traffic settings. These can be described as landscape memorials. Unlike roadside memorials, landscape memorials are often less visible and more closely integrated into the natural surroundings. They do not interrupt movement in the same way but invite quieter and more private forms of remembering. This distinction shows that informal memorial practices are shaped not only by the cause of death but also by the place where the loss occurs. While roadside memorials engage directly with everyday mobility, landscape memorials embed mourning within natural space and environmental context. Roadside memorials are widespread across the Czech landscape, but mostly more common in smaller cities. This points to a strong cultural tradition of commemorating loss and responding to sudden death within ordinary environments. These sites act as constant reminders of the social consequences of traffic fatalities and often encourage people who pass around those to pause, even briefly, and think about mortality and shared vulnerability. These might also serve as a reminder of the dangers posed by roads or the surrounding area. As Doss (2008) suggests, roadside memorials exist at the intersection of personal grief, collective memory, and public ritual. Those turn places of death into shared spaces of remembering (p. 172). This idea helps explain why such memorials remain visible and meaningful over time. This intersection is particularly important in the Czech context, where memorial practices reflect an ongoing negotiation between secular public space and inherited religious symbolism (Walter, 1999; Santino, 2006). It does not fully belong to either.

Although there are studies discussing memorials focusing on the anthropological side of death and dying under different names all around the world such as crash shrines in the US (Bednar, 2011), roadside shrines in British Columbia (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009), spontaneous memorials in America (Doss, 2006) and many more (Henzel, 1991; Petersson, 2009), there is not plethora of studies that analyse memorials in the Czech Republic. The most detailed and comprehensive study was conducted by Nešporová. They have been examined in depth through a series of longitudinal and follow-up studies that highlight their emergence, persistence, and cultural significance. Early research (the first phase, between 2005 and 2008) documented the rapid spread of roadside memorials from the 1990s onwards as a grassroots response to traffic fatalities, particularly among young men, and noted that these memorials operate in a legal grey area. They are unofficial and illegal but informally tolerated by authorities as long as they do not interfere with traffic safety or maintenance (Nešporová, 2008). Characterised by flowers, candles, and frequently the symbol of the cross, these memorials extend private mourning into public space and function both as intimate sites of remembrance for the bereaved and as cautionary markers for passing drivers. Subsequent longitudinal research (between 2011 and 2014) confirms that roadside memorials have become an established and enduring element of Czech mourning culture. Revisiting the same sites after a gap of approximately seven years demonstrates that most memorials remain in place long term and that

new memorials continue to be created, leading to a visible increase across the landscape (Nešporová, 2015). While the cross appears on most memorials, it is most often used as a general symbol of death rather than as an explicit expression of Christian belief. Taken together, this study shows that roadside memorials represent a culturally accepted, evolving, and resilient form of public remembrance that normalises the presence of grief in everyday spaces and embeds mourning practices within the social fabric of mobility and risk. While previous studies like this one approach roadside memorials as a sociological phenomenon characterised by prevalence, temporality, and symbolic content, this study shifts the focus to the experiential and relational dimension of encountering these memorials in everyday mobility, foregrounding affect, ethical discomfort, and involuntary witnessing through an ethnographic lens. So, this study contributes a qualitative and ethnographic perspective that examines how such memorials are experienced, felt, and ethically negotiated by passers-by. This aspect remains underexplored in the literature.

In České Budějovice, as far as observed over the past three months, staying and listening to locals and Czech friends, roadside memorials are often found along busy streets, at intersections, and on pedestrian routes. Their placement in areas of constant movement has a purpose and is not coincidental. This deliberate placement increases their visibility and strengthens their role as shared sites of remembrance. For someone who has never seen such memorials in a different cultural setting, this type of expression might be interesting to think about because it makes people contemplate alternative places to grieve or show respect for the deceased. Located near crossings, traffic lights, or bicycle paths, these memorials are part of the city's lived environment and connect mourning practices with daily routines and urban rhythms. In this way, remembrance becomes something people encounter in ordinary moments every day rather than in special or isolated spaces like faraway cemeteries. Studies on everyday memorial practices argue that informal commemorative acts can transform ordinary urban spaces into meaningful memory sites (Reershemius, 2024). This argument is useful to understand why such memorials matter even without official recognition. This is because their meaning is produced through repeated everyday encounters rather than formal ceremonies. Those memorials also exist in relation to formal commemorative spaces such as cemeteries, churches, and official monuments. While cemeteries usually represent regulated and institutionalised forms of remembrance, roadside memorials function in a more spontaneous and personal way. This difference highlights how memory practices can move beyond institutional control and become embedded in public space through individual action (Santino, 2006; Margry & Sánchez-Carretero, 2011) and interference. Here, the emphasis shifts from permanence and regulation to immediacy and personal expression. This helps explain the continued presence of these memorials in the urban landscape.

Ethical Aspects of Researching Roadside Memorials and Methodology

Research on roadside memorials required special ethical care and contemplation. This study started out of respect towards the families of the deceased for whom those memorials were created. That is why the matter is taken with great care while discussion. These sites exist in public space, but they are also linked to very personal experiences of loss. Respect for the deceased and their families is therefore central to any research in this area. As Seale (1998) notes, studies of mourning must balance public visibility with private grief and follow clear ethical principles (p. 203). This reminder is important, especially when working with sensitive material that can easily be exposed. In this study, all photographic documentation was collected with attention to respect and sensitivity. Photographs were taken only to document and analyse the material and symbolic elements present at the memorial sites.

This study is based on a qualitative visual analysis of roadside memorials documented through photographs taken during field observations. The photographs were selected according to several criteria. First, the memorials had to be clearly identifiable as commemorative sites associated with traffic fatalities. Second, the photographs needed to show the memorial objects and their spatial context, such as the roadside environment, the surrounding landscape, and the placement of symbolic items. Third, only photographs with sufficient visual clarity were included in the analysis. The analysis was conducted in several stages. In the first stage, the photographs were reviewed and categorized according to visible elements such as crosses, flowers, candles, photographs, and other personal objects. In the second stage, attention was given to the spatial characteristics of the memorials, including their location, visibility, and relationship to the surrounding landscape. In the final stage, these visual patterns were interpreted in relation to themes of mourning, memory, and the cultural transformation of roadside spaces into places of remembrance.

Ethical concerns guided every stage of the research process, from data collection to interpretation. As Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011) emphasise, sensitivity is especially important when researching mourning sites that carry strong emotional meaning for both individuals and communities (p. 34). Keeping this in mind helps reduce the risk of causing unintentional harm or distress. For this reason, the analysis focuses on material culture rather than on the personal identities of those who mourn. This approach allows for a broader anthropological discussion of memorial practices and their social roles, while limiting intrusion into private experiences of grief. By shifting attention away from individual stories, the study highlights collective cultural responses to death and loss instead of personal tragedy (Neimeyer et al., 2011). These sites need to be approached with care because ethical research in this context means recognizing that public accessibility does not remove personal vulnerability.

The Symbolic Significance of Roadside Memorials in Czech Society

Roadside memorials in the Czech Republic carry different layers of meaning. They bring together personal grief, collective remembrance, and forms of spiritual reflection. The fact that objects such as candles, flowers, and crosses appear repeatedly at these sites works as shared visual signs of mourning because many people recognise them, and memory and loss can be expressed openly in public space. Even those who did not know the deceased usually understand what these symbols stand for. In this way, grief becomes visible without the need for explanation or direct involvement. Roadside memorials are not only markers of tragic events. They also act as material stories placed within the everyday landscape. Experiences of loss are fixed in ordinary spaces such as roadsides, paths, and crossings. Their continued presence supports collective memory through repeated visibility and daily encounters (Santino, 2006, pp. 5–9; Reershemius, 2024). Many people pass these memorials every day. They may notice them while walking, driving, or cycling. Over time, the sites become familiar. This familiarity does not reduce their meaning. Instead, it often makes remembrance feel more natural and part of everyday life. They are almost reminders of the death and also the failures of the urban system that might have led to the accident because some memorials were located either on roads that were too narrow for two vehicles to pass, at extremely sharp bends, or at points where multiple roads intersected, as well as on very steep or poorly visible roads. Therefore, some observers question whether the accidents were caused by the road's design or by the overall structure of the city's road network. At the same time, these kinds of material objects raise ethical questions for researchers, especially when photography is involved. Some of the memorials had the real photos of the deceased on them. So, memorial site images might unintentionally expose private grief to a wider audience. This can happen even when no people appear in the photographs. Names, dates, handwritten messages, or photographs of the deceased may still be visible. For this reason, visual material needs to be collected carefully and used only for

clear analytical purposes (Pink, 2013, pp. 77–83). Photographs should not be seen as neutral records. They carry emotional and symbolic weight. In this study, photographs were taken from a distance whenever possible. The framing avoided details that could identify individuals or families, and the photos are blurred whenever they are evidently seen. The focus remained on objects, spatial relations, and material elements rather than personal information. This approach helps limit potential harm. It also treats roadside memorials as places of ongoing mourning, not as finished or closed events. Grief obviously continues long after a memorial is placed, and research methods need to reflect this reality. Ethical reflection, therefore, does not end with data collection. It continues during analysis, interpretation, and publication. The way roadside memorials are described shapes how readers understand grief and loss. Researchers carry responsibility not only toward those directly affected but also toward the wider communities in which these memorials exist. Dramatic or sensational descriptions can easily distort the meaning of mourning practices and should be avoided (Kellehear, 2007, pp. 15–19). This is especially important for roadside memorials, where grief is often quiet and informal. Strong or heavy language risks speaking over the memorials themselves, rather than leaving their meanings open and subtle.

Candles, Flowers and Crosses

The candle flame is generally understood as a symbol of life, hope, and remembering in many cultures. One striking thing was that the candles were always lit in the memorials. This means that people take care of those memorials. They are not something created once and left unattended. In Czech roadside memorials, candles are more than simple sources of light. They work as symbolic links between the living and the dead. Their use reflects Christian traditions, but it also connects to wider folk beliefs about light, transition, and memory. For this reason, the candle carries both religious and cultural meaning, as the locals expressed. Candles also represent continuity. Families often return to memorial sites to replace candles that have gone out, as they do at the cemeteries. Because of this repeated action, these places remain active and cared for. The same candle tradition does for the cemeteries. Especially on special occasions and religious holidays, people visit cemeteries, light candles, and regularly refresh them to keep the graves lit and cared for. So, they do not become fixed or forgotten. As Davies (2002) notes, candles function as tangible expressions of memory and emotional attachment (p. 103). This helps explain why lighting a candle can feel as meaningful as the candle itself. The continuous care through candles supports the symbolic presence of the deceased and strengthens emotional bonds over time (Seale, 1998). Here, remembrance is not a single moment. It requires effort and repetition. Through repeated acts of lighting and maintenance, the candle becomes a *memento mori*. It serves as a reminder to passersby (Clark & Franzmann, 2006).

Candles are not used in the same way across all cultural contexts, though. In many Islamic burial traditions, candles are generally less common in graveyards, either in the form of bouquets or by planting them directly on the grave. Instead of candles, flowers are widely used, and practices such as watering the grave are also observed. While candles are not a standard element of burial sites in these contexts, light and candles still carry symbolic meanings, say in Turkish cultural traditions. In folk belief, lighting a candle is often associated with remembrance, protection, making wishes, or asking for spiritual support, rather than with formal religious doctrine. Candles might be lit at graves and during memorial practices, especially on anniversaries of death. In Turkish cultural contexts, lighting a candle is generally understood as an act of remembrance and respect rather than as a clearly defined belief about the afterlife (Boratav, 1984; Ocak, 1992; Koçak, 2015). In this sense, light functions not only as a ritual act but also as a way of maintaining emotional and moral connection with the dead. In this context, the candle does not stand for grief alone. It also expresses care, respect, and responsibility toward those who have passed away. It shows that remembrance is ongoing, not finished. This places candles within everyday practices, instead of limiting them to

formal religious rituals. The meaning of light is especially clear in Alevi–Bektashi traditions, where “ışık”, which means light in the Turkish language, represents spiritual presence, truth, and ethical awareness. Lighting a candle here marks remembrance and moral responsibility rather than strict religious duty (Melikoff, 1998). Here, light becomes a shared moral symbol. It links remembrance to values such as honesty, responsibility, and communal memory. These practices show that the symbolism of candles is not limited to Christian traditions. Instead, light appears across different belief systems as a common cultural language for expressing memory, loss, and continuity. This helps explain why candles work so well in roadside memorials, where meanings need to remain open and understandable to different people from different cultural backgrounds.

As another object that has been seen by the memorials, flowers are also central symbols. Because of their beauty and short lifespan, they are often linked to such ideas as fragility and loss. In roadside memorials, flowers express respect and affection for the deceased. They also help transform places of tragedy into temporary spaces of care, beauty and remembrance. When flowers are replaced over time, a rhythm of renewal appears, just like candles. This rhythm supports emotional continuity (Francis et al., 2005). In this way, flowers are not only decorative objects. They act as visible signs of care and emotional connection. In Turkish cultural traditions, flowers also play an important role in practices related to death. People often visit graves on religious holidays or on special days after death. During these visits, they pray and place flowers and water on the grave. Or they even plant some small types of trees, flowers and plants on the graves. Many graves include a small hollow or container designed specifically to hold water and flowers. This shows that these offerings are expected and meaningful parts of remembrance (URL-1). This suggests that bringing flowers to graves is understood as a respectful act. It is a way of honouring the people who have passed away and keeping their memory alive. Placing flowers on graves is also linked to broader ideas of care for the dead in Turkish folk culture. Tending the grave, replacing flowers, or looking after plants is part of ongoing remembrance. These repeated actions communicate respect and show that emotional bonds continue after death. Here, flowers become part of a small ritual. Through repetition, memory stays active in everyday life. It does not fade with time.

These meanings closely relate to the role of flowers in roadside memorials. In both settings, flowers point to fragility, affection, and the temporary nature of human life. When people renew them, this allows the relatives’ bond to remain visible while accepting loss as part of daily experience. Research supports this view. A study conducted in Poland shows that roadside memorial symbols, including flowers, are widely seen as socially acceptable signs of remembrance. They also encourage reflection and emotional engagement among passersby (Przybylska & Mazurek, 2025). This shows that flowers can communicate shared meanings in public space, even across different cultural contexts. From a broader sociological perspective, Walter (1999) notes that contemporary European mourning practices increasingly rely on material symbols such as flowers and candles. In many European countries, bringing flowers to graves is a common and socially expected mourning practice. Cemeteries in Western and Central Europe are often described as landscaped spaces where flowers play a central role. As observed during the fieldwork for this study, which included funerals and many cemetery visits, preparing bouquets of flowers just before the visit and tenderly placing them on the grave is done with great care and respect. Also, candles are prepared and kept lit. They come back to the grave to refresh the candles, just like they do for the flowers. During all these times, emotional bonds continue beyond the moment of burial (Davies, 2002), and the deceased is remembered with good memories. As far as the observations, this is a ritual. Family members talk about the deceased person while preparing the necessary things for the cemetery visit. The fact that floral offerings are not treated as optional decorations but as key material elements of cemetery rituals (Francis, Kellaher, & Neophytou, 2005) is supported by the experience from the field. Similar patterns appear

in roadside memorials. In both cemeteries and roadside sites, flowers mark places of death, express affection, and create temporary but meaningful spaces of remembrance. The shared use of flowers across formal and informal memorial sites points to a common cultural logic in European mourning practices.

Finally, another object encountered by the memorials, though not all, was a cross. In Christian traditions, the cross might usually be linked to sacrifice, suffering, and salvation. In Czech roadside memorials, however, crosses often work as public signs of remembering rather than clear statements of religious belief. Even in a largely secular society such as the Czech Republic, crosses continue to appear at accident sites. This points to the lasting presence of Christian symbolism in public mourning practices. For us, this suggests that the cross still functions as a shared cultural symbol, even when personal faith is weak or not clearly expressed. Roadside memorials are at the meeting point of religious and secular meaning. They express loss and a hope for something beyond death. Because of this, the cross can speak to different people in different ways. It does not require belief. Instead, it offers a familiar language through which death can be acknowledged in public. When families place crosses at accident sites, private grief becomes visible to others. In this way, loss moves into shared space and becomes open to communal response. Such symbols might support social interaction and help strengthen social bonds through remembrance (Hockey et al., 2010). We see this as a way of turning individual loss into a moment of connection, even between strangers who briefly share the same space.

Roadside Memorials as Communal Spaces and Changing Forms of Memorials

Roadside memorials in the Czech Republic are not only personal expressions of grief but also serve as communal spaces. They interrupt everyday movement and invite (self)reflection. In this sense, places designed for speed and transit are briefly turned into moments of pause and awareness (Doss, 2008). This interruption feels important because it brings thoughts of death into spaces where they are usually unexpected. In semi-urban and peripheral areas around České Budějovice, memorials often appear along highways and regional roads. Unlike memorials placed in forests or open fields, these sites stand out clearly against their surroundings. Their strong visibility increases their symbolic force and reinforces their role as silent warnings to travellers. Here, the landscape itself becomes part of the message. It makes loss difficult to ignore. Before discussing personal belongings as memorial objects, it is important to note that, in addition to urban spaces, memorial practices have expanded through digital technologies. Online memorial pages, social media posts, and virtual candles now exist alongside physical roadside markers. Logan and Reeves (2009) note that digital memorials allow remembrance to move across physical and virtual spaces, adapting to contemporary forms of communication (p. 257). This suggests that mourning is no longer confined to a single physical place. Instead, it follows and is shaped by the rhythms of modern life and everyday media use.

Along with traditional elements such as flowers, candles, and crosses, roadside memorials have changed as views on death, memory, and public expression have shifted. Many newer memorials include photographs, handwritten messages, and personal objects. These items add a more personal layer to the site. They allow the deceased to be remembered not only through symbols of death, but also through signs of everyday life and personality. This reflects an effort to keep the person visible, not only at the moment of death. Research on spontaneous and informal memorials supports this view, as Reershemius (2024) notes that personal objects (such as a person's helmet, clothing, or sunglasses as seen during the fieldwork) help transform memorial sites into places where individual identity and collective memory meet. This helps explain why roadside memorials often feel both private and public at the same time, even though they are located in open and shared spaces.

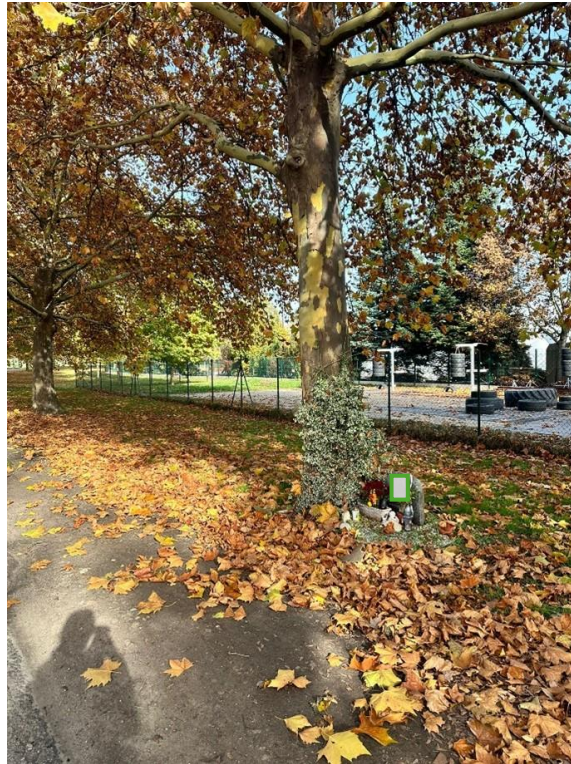


Photo 1: České Budějovice, 03.11.2024



Photo 2: České Budějovice, 03.11.2024

This roadside memorial (Photos 1 and 2) is placed at the base of a tree and slightly away from the road. It is seen while biking or walking. It obviously looked like a tombstone, and it was placed by a very busy road. For people from other cultures, it might take some time to understand the mentality behind it. The memorial, as can be seen, is partly protected by plants and vegetation around it. It

includes a small gravestone with a photograph of a young woman, potted plants, flowers, lit candles, and several personal decorative objects. Fallen autumn leaves cover the ground and blend the memorial into the seasonal landscape. The site does not clearly separate itself from its surroundings. The location and arrangement suggest an effort to create a quiet and cared-for place rather than a visible warning for drivers. The framed photograph makes the memorial strongly personal. The deceased is shown as a person with an identity and a life, not only as someone who died in an accident. During the fieldwork, it was observed that the flowers were refreshed and the candles were kept lit. This suggests that people return to the site over time and points to continuity, care, and ongoing remembrance rather than a single act. Although the memorial is clearly located in public space, it remains modest and unobtrusive. It invites quiet recognition rather than demanding attention.



Photo 3



Photo 4

This landscape memorial (Photos 3 and 4) shows that roadside memorials are not always placed next to roads. In some cases, the memorial marks the exact place where the accident happened. Here, the site is located in a rocky and wooded area in Bechyne. This suggests that the accident did not take place on the road itself, but within the natural landscape. It reminds us that these memorials are not limited to traffic accidents. They can also mark deaths that occur in places such as forests, hills, or mountain paths. The memorial is placed directly into the rock, not on the edge of a road. Small flowers and candles are set into cracks in the stone. Because of this, the site is easy to miss. It was difficult to point it out, so it was shown to us by one of the locals while hiking. It blends into the surrounding environment perfectly, and it does not stand out. Only a few objects are present. The simplicity of the site suggests restraint rather than public display. Although the memorial is located in public space, its quiet placement protects the privacy of grief. Remembrance here is subtle. It exists without interruption and without strong visibility. This example shows that memorial practices adapt to the place of death and are shaped by the environment in which loss occurs. When it was shown to us by one of the locals, the person added that local people believe the deaths of those people are so abrupt and sudden that the souls of those people are still there, stuck in time and place, in such cases.



Photo 5

This memorial (Photo 5) is completely opposite to the previous one in many aspects. This is located at a bus stop, directly within everyday urban infrastructure. It is placed under a large advertisement panel, next to public transport information and adjacent to a clothing store. Small flowers are arranged close to the ground, which makes the memorial easy to miss at first. Unlike landscape memorials, this one is closely linked to daily movement and routine. People waiting for the bus or walking past definitely notice it while continuing their normal activities. The contrast between the memorial and its surroundings is strong. The flowers sit below an image connected to work, strength, and everyday urban life, which is associated with speed and worldly things. This creates a quiet tension between routine and sudden death. The memorial does not stop movement. Instead, it exists within it. Its small size suggests restraint rather than public display. Although the space is highly public, the memorial remains emotionally contained. This example shows how roadside memorials can exist even in commercial and transit spaces, where mourning must share space with routine, visibility, and everyday life.



Photo 6

Photo 6 shows a small stone plaque fixed to a rock in a natural setting. The Czech text reads “Zde tragicky zahynul ...”, meaning “Here ... died tragically”, followed by a date and age. The wording is simple and factual. It does not use religious language. The plaque marks the exact place of death rather than a general location. Candles and flowers placed nearby show that the site continues to be visited and cared for.



Photo 7



Photo 8

These images show different forms of informal memorialization and how objects, text, and place work together. The memorial in Photo 8 is placed next to a rural road and faces open fields. A stone marker shows two names and dates, which suggests that more than one person died in the same event. Small figurines are placed around the stone. Because the memorial is open and clearly visible from the road, remembrance is closely linked to everyday movement through the landscape. Photo 7 shows a car wheel rim attached to a tree. This object is directly connected to the accident itself. It functions as a fragment of the event rather than as a symbolic or religious marker. Handwritten dates

on the metal surface refer to the moment of death and the act of remembrance. The use of an accident-related object shifts attention away from religious symbols and toward material traces of what happened. For us, this suggests a very direct form of memory, where the object itself carries the weight of loss.

Taken all together, these examples show that Czech roadside and landscape memorials use different ways to remember the dead. Some rely on names and dates. Others use personal objects or fragments from the accident. When text appears, it is usually short and direct. These memorials do not explain events in detail. Instead, they mark presence, loss, and place. This variety shows that informal memorial practices adapt to where death occurs and to the needs of those who remember. Sometimes, although blurred here, photographs of the deceased are also included. This adds a strong sense of personal presence at the site. Photographs connect anonymous public space to a specific individual's life and can deepen emotional engagement for both mourners and passersby.



Photo 9

This photograph shows a small memorial placed in a natural, green landscape. At the centre, there is a stone monument with a black-and-white portrait of a young person engraved on it. In front of the stone, flowers and a red memorial candle have been carefully placed, showing remembrance and respect. To the right, several large stones are stacked in a balanced, symbolic arrangement. The memorial is surrounded by grass and evergreen trees, while a cloudy sky above creates a calm and reflective atmosphere. What distinguishes this memorial from others is that it is not located within the flow of everyday urban life, but rather in a completely natural setting of mountains, hills, and rugged terrain. It is situated in a tourist area, away from daily routines and human congestion. In

fact, it is located very close to a UNESCO World Heritage area. This adds an additional layer of cultural and symbolic significance to the site.

Conclusion

Roadside memorials in the Czech Republic show how personal grief, cultural memory, and social views on death come together in everyday space. Through simple elements, these memorials express respect for the dead. They create small spaces for reflection. Loss becomes visible without a formal ceremony, and remembrance becomes part of public life. The examples discussed in this study also show that informal memorials appear in different spatial forms. Some are placed directly along roads and crossings. These roadside memorials are closely linked to movement, traffic, and risk. Their visibility connects memory to mobility, reminding people of sudden death during everyday travel. Other memorials can be described as landscape memorials. These are located in forests, rocky areas, or open land. They often mark the exact place where death occurred. Such memorials blend into the natural environment and allow for quieter and more private forms of mourning. A third group includes urban memorials. These appear in highly functional spaces such as bus stops, where remembrance exists alongside routine activities, advertisements, and public transport.

These findings can also be situated within broader cultural understandings of mourning practices. This study also demonstrates how an ordinary roadside environment can gradually be transformed into a culturally meaningful place of remembrance. This perspective resonates with the observations of Sedat Veyis Örnek in his study of death in Anatolian folklore. In it, mourning is understood not merely as an internal emotional state but as a set of culturally mediated practices expressed through rituals, material objects, and spatial markers. In this sense, roadside memorials can also be interpreted as contemporary manifestations of making grief visible within the landscape. What initially appears as a neutral and functional landscape associated with movement and infrastructure acquires symbolic significance through the practices of mourning performed by the bereaved. Flowers, candles, photographs, and other personal objects left at the site contribute to a process of place-making in which memory becomes materially embedded in the landscape. Through these repeated acts of visitation and care, the roadside ceases to function solely as a space of transit and instead becomes a site where personal loss enters the public sphere. In this sense, roadside memorials illustrate how mourning practices participate in the cultural production of memory by turning an ordinary location into a recognisable place of remembrance within the broader memorial landscape. When we consider all these together in one frame, they show that informal memorial practices are strongly shaped by place. Roadside, landscape, and urban memorials differ in visibility, intensity, and in how they interact with everyday life. At the same time, they share a common purpose. All of them make losses present in shared environments. They connect memory to movement, space, and routine. As Czech society continues to move between secular and religious approaches to mourning, these memorials show the persistence of cultural traditions within changing conditions. More broadly, they point to a shared human need to remember the dead and to link past and present within the spaces of everyday life.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study complies with ethical standards.

1. Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest with themselves or with any potential third parties before or after the publication of this study. If a conflict of interest exists, details of the situation and how it will be managed must be clearly stated and submitted together with a wet-signed Conflict of Interest Declaration Form. This form must be signed separately by each author and uploaded to the system as an additional file.

2. Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study. The wet-signed informed consent form related to this statement has been submitted as part of the manuscript process files.

3. Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) Usage Statement

Generative artificial intelligence was used in all sections to improve the language of the manuscript.

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