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On the drawing board: the great pyramid of...Germany

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German entrepreneurs are planning to outstrip the ancient Egyptians by building the world's largest pyramid on a derelict site in eastern Germany – which they claim will eventually contain the remains of millions of people in concrete burial blocks.

Many have dismissed the idea as a harebrained and improbable but the scheme has already received a £89,000 (£60,000) state grant to assess its feasibility. It envisages a pyramid some 60ft taller than the 432-ft high Great Pyramid at Giza in Egypt on a site near the city of Dessau.

The project's initiators include the writer Ingo Niemann and Jens Thiel an economist who have joined other entrepreneurs to form a " Friends of the Pyramid" association. They argue that their scheme will be one up on the Pharaohs who only interred a few in the Egyptian pyramids.

"In future the chance to be buried in a pyramid will be open to all," they say on their website, "Our great pyramid will be the first internationally advertised burial and remembrance site to link the peoples, religions and cultures of the world," they add.

The organisers are proposing to charge from between £200 and £700 for a burial slot in the millions of one cubic metre sized concrete blocks that they hope will make up the pyramid by the time it is complete. Each block will house an urn containing ashes and will carry an inscription in memory of the deceased.

They say that they expect the pyramid to grow gradually over a period of up to 30 years as concrete blocks are added to the structure. They claim to have already received inquiries from people wanting to reserve future burial slots.

The project's website states baldly that the planned pyramid will be the largest building ever constructed by man and talks about an overall height of some 1,600ft but the proposal has already been dramatically scaled down. The revised plans are for a pyramid of some 492ft.

However, the pyramid idea has not been universally welcomed by residents in the next door village of Streetz. "We don't want to live next to the world's biggest graveyard," one inhabitant was quoted as saying last week.

Germany's Federal Culture Foundation which advanced the initial capital for the feasibility study hopes that much of the scheme will eventually be funded through private investment.

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