

# Mapping protests against dog culling in post-communist Romania

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*This paper explores the spatial expressions and ethical implications of culling dogs. The harsh treatment of street dogs by the Romanian government's hired companies, following the mauling of a child, generated a divide in the opinions of those in authority, animal rights NGOs and the general public. Beyond the case study stands a wider geographical analysis of the media reporting of the protest events on culling dogs and a public opinion survey about the welfare of dogs in Romania. Basing on the theoretical framework of the literature on more-than-human geographies, this contribution presents a critical review of the public response to governmental measures to rapidly implement a street dog law. Different discourses and counter-discourses are considered, from which a framework for improving the ethics of culling dogs could be built.*

**Key words:** dog culling, more-than-human, protest movements, animal rights non-governmental organisations (ARNGOs), public opinion, Romania

## Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a rise in what is termed 'more-than-human' geographies (Wolch and Emel 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000; Lorimer 2010). The fundamental concept of such geographies is to find complementary ways of 'being with' non-human creatures (Haraway 2003). Today, the materialist returns of environmental and cultural geographies are tightly connected with the propagation of what Bruno Latour calls 'matters of concern', and are associated with the amplification of the boundaries between life, 'informatic' sciences and politics, which lead to a burgeoning interest in 'animal cultures', 'posthumanism' and the geographies of 'affect' (Whatmore 2006, 601–2). Yet, the articulation of animal rights discourses and protests in opposition to the culling of animals remains limited in the more-than-human published literature on post-communism (Lilov 2009).

On 2 September 2013, a four-year-old child died after he was mauled by free-roaming dogs on the edge of Linden Park (Parcul Tei) in Bucharest (BBC News Europe 2013), Romania. Six dogs were subsequently removed from the property of a private company located in the vicinity of the park and euthanised. As a quick response, the Romanian Government announced its intention to

pass a new law on street dogs (Cândul 2013). The Romanian media and protesters entered heated debates about the ethics of culling of hundreds of dogs, and towards identifying alternative solutions to prevent dogs from attacking humans in contemporary Romania.

This paper addresses several questions: (1) what arguments did the Romanian authorities put forward for the culling of dogs in their policy deliberations, (2) why is Romanian public opinion divided on the issue of culling street dogs, (3) are street dogs able to be adopted by people and (4) how does the counter-discourse framing of animal rights non-governmental organisations (ARNGOs) relate to their potential to improve animal equity in Romania? Thus, this paper aims to present a critical review of the public response to governmental measures for implementing a new street dog law. Specifically, different discourses and counter-discourses are considered, from which a framework for improving the ethics of culling dogs could be built.

## Theoretical background

Since 1995, there has been wide-ranging interest in developing the more-than-human theory (Wolch and Emel 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000) and animal ethics studies

(Palmer 2010; Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011). Animal and more-than-human literature focus on how humans think about and live with animals in both ethical and unethical ways (Wolch and Emel 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000), in addition to the political dimensions of people–animal interactions (Srinivasan 2013). Philo (1995) suggested that there has always been a partial inclusion of non-human animals in geographical texts. However, this perception of animals leads to research that only focuses on the context of the utility of animals to humans (termed the ‘human chauvinist’ perception), leading to ignorance about the true value of animals.

More-than-human studies include human perception on ‘companion species’ (Haraway 2003). In an analysis of human–elephant encounters, Lorimer (2010) showed that interspecies companion relationships alternate between harm, care and lack of interest. Another study on feral cats showed how cats relate to humans in a wide web of situations, both inside and outside of urban society (Griffiths *et al.* 2000). However, humans face a paradox in modern cities: specifically, a desire to ‘eliminate’ nature (e.g. animals), while simultaneously recognising that nature is necessary (providing vital ecological services), with its absence representing a great loss that researchers are currently working to quantify in economic terms.

Today, geographers argue that we need to follow ‘ecologising politics’ rather than ‘politicising ecology’, following Latour’s views on the conventional relationship between science and politics. Ecologising politics represents a way to unsettle traditional divisions between science and politics, humans and nature. The result is ‘cosmopolitics’, which is a specific form of politics that is ‘worked out without recourse to old binaries of nature and society’ (Hinchliffe *et al.* 2005, 643). A similar concept is also asserted by legal geographers, who conceptualise legal, spatial and social parameters into a process of mutual transformation, in which legal discourses and power are interconnected (Blomley 1994).

To understand the reasons for advocating the culling of aggressive animals, it is first essential to understand animal resistance as an intentional human action against an animal. The published literature on animals shows many acts of resistance against human exploiters, revealing a variety of responses to different types of threats and dangers posed by humans (Lorimer 2010). Not surprisingly, elephants, tigers and dogs attack humans in self-defence when humans encroach on their territory (Hribal 2010).

Under certain conditions of overpopulation, authorities use more simple official discursive practices when considering the necessity to cull animals to ensure human wellbeing (Youatt 2008). However, this action

generates debate about the ethics of killing animals (Animal Studies Group 2006). There is extensive literature on euthanasia, with a primary focus on the ethics of killing animals in dog shelters (Garner 2004). Animal rights movements have a major role in finding alternative perspectives on the ecological risks posed by animals. Consequently, the suffering and death of street dogs due to governmental laws provides a background for strong public resistance.

This paper draws on the published literature about euthanasia (Tasker 2008) and dog shelters (Lulka 2009; Srinivasan 2013), along with the ethics of killing, to assess policies aimed at reducing the size of non-human animal populations and the changing power relationships in a more-than-human world. I link key elements of the published literature to recent cases on the ethics of stringent measures implemented for regulating stray dogs in Romania during September 2013. Specifically, I present details about environmental discourses (Hajer 1997) and environmental movements (Rootes 2003).

## Research design

This paper uses two major approaches: (1) testing the social setting of Romanian public opinion on the issue of street dog welfare and (2) charting both organised protest events and online protests in Romania and the world as a response to the culling of street dogs in Romania. The debates on these approaches are then cross-referenced with the demands of protesters.

Empirical sources include: (1) post-communist governmental laws for the Romanian dog population, (2) primary literature (Mihăilescu 2013; Ristea 2013) and press releases describing the evolution of the street dog law, (3) statistical data about the street dog population from the Animal Surveillance and Protection Authority (ASPA 2013), a Romanian governmental agency, (4) an interview with the main protagonist of the ARNGOs in the protest movements and (5) a survey of Timișoara public opinion with respect to the street dog issue.

The methodology of Fillieule and Jiménez (2003) is followed for the environmental protest event (EPE). I assimilated key slogans and discourses used in the protests organised during September 2013 in Romania. This information was collected from national and international newspapers and electronic platforms (e.g. Facebook) (Table 1), as media coverage is routinely used to identify the main EPE (Rootes 2003). Protest repertoires and discourses for and against the dog law were assembled to create a timeline table (Table 2).

In addition, a mixed-method approach was used to investigate public opinion about dog welfare. The parameters used to test ‘the public voices’ and respondent opinions are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 1 The main features of the selected newspapers (1 September–15 October 2013)

Newspaper and web platforms	Location	Number of articles about street dogs in Romania	Number of selected articles about protests against the new street dog law	Quality/political orientation	Selectivity (interest in animal rights/environment, human/social issues versus political focus)	Territorial bias (in terms of resources across the national territory)
<i>Adevărul</i>	Bucharest (Romania)	12	2	National quality newspaper/ Quasi-autonomous	Socio-economic style	Focus on all Romania's regions
<i>Jurnalul</i>	Bucharest (Romania)	8	2	National quality newspaper/ Quasi-autonomous	Human interest style	Romania's regions
<i>Gândul</i>	Bucharest (Romania)	8	2	National quality newspaper/ Quasi-autonomous	Political focus	Romania's regions
<i>Ziarul Financiar</i>	Bucharest (Romania)	6	2	National quality newspaper/ Centre-right	Financial focus	Romania's regions
<i>BBC News Europe</i>	London (UK)	2	2	World-wide quality newspaper/ Quasi-autonomous	Science-environmental section; socio-economic style	The UK and world-wide
<i>The Huffington Post</i>	Chicago (USA)	2	2	World-wide quality newspaper/Liberal–left	Green section; general socio-economic style	The USA and world-wide
<i>International Business Time</i>	New York (USA)	1	1	World-wide quality newspaper/Liberal–left	Business style	Focus on the world
<i>Deutsche Welle</i>	Berlin (Germany)	2	1	World-wide web quality newspaper/Liberal–left	Environmental section; human/social issues versus political focus	Focus on the world
Facebook 'Red Card for Romania'		255	221			

**Table 2 Phases of the street dog law, major protest events and discourses for and against culling**

Mauling of a child	The passing of the various phases of the law	Major protest events	Protest repertoires*	Key slogans	Demands	Arguments in favour of the law/euthanasia	Arguments against dog culling
2 September 2013	Ordinance no 155/2001	Bucharest: 15 September 2013	Demonstrative protest**	'Against comfortable euthanasia!' 'The fate of the stray dogs should be yours' 'Don't poison stray dogs!'	Anti-culling by euthanasia Anti-culling by stringent measures Anti-culling by poisoning	Presidential position: 'Humans are above dogs' 'I passed the law without reservation' PM's position: 'the new law must be welcomed by the general public in Romania'	WSPA (2013): 'culling is both inhumane and ineffective' Animal Welfare Intergroup (2013): 'systematic mass killing of stray dogs goes against the values and objectives of . . . the European Union' Occupy for Animals (2013): 'Mass slaughtering of dogs is inhumane'
	Law no 227/2002	Ploiesti: 23 September 2013	Demonstrative protest				
	Law Project no. 771/2007	Timisoara: 11 September 2013	Demonstrative protest	'We say no to euthanasia' 'Sterilisation, not euthanasia'	Anti-culling by euthanasia A better welfare for dogs	Bucharest mayor's position: '80 per cent of street dogs will be removed within one year' ASPAs position: 'We want from 28 dogs caught per day, to reach 150 very soon'	
	Decree no. 778/2013						
	Law no. 258/2013	Facebook: 15 September 2013	Conventional protest***	'Red Card for Romania!'	Loss of ethical regulations in Romania	Facebook supporter of euthanasia: 'packs of stray dogs are a plague of wild animals'	Facebook dog supporter: 'not an act of mercy killing, but a massacre'

\* One EPE can include different types of protests (variables), or a newspaper article might report multiple protests of different types. These events were coded by simply identifying all types of protests mentioned in the article. I have not found repertoires referring to confrontational (blockages), violence and attack on property. 87 per cent of the protest events were demonstrative and 13 per cent were conventional.

\*\* It refers to street marches, demonstrations, rallies.

\*\*\* It includes demands for judicial review, the collection of signatures on petitions and actions such as collective representations to officials, public meetings, leafletting.

### A short history of the street dog population and its governance in Romania

Street dogs have been present for centuries in the current territory of Romania. The first official documents for eliminating street dogs appeared in the Romanian Principalities at the beginning of the 19th century, when households did not have clear boundaries (e.g. fences) and dogs were part of the community (Mihăilescu 2013). Many dogs were killed during the two world wars, but their numbers rose during the subsequent communist rule. With the industrialisation of Romania in the mid-1960s, thousands of people moved from the countryside to the cities, often bringing their pets. The highest level of canine abandonment was recorded during Ceauşescu’s regime (1966–1989), when systematisation and urbanisation plans were at a peak (Kangas 2013). Many houses in urban areas were demolished to create space for new residential apartments. The former ‘courtyard dogs’ dispersed throughout the towns and multiplied rapidly (Mihăilescu 2013). In the 1980s, Romania’s foreign debt was high; thus, most of the planned blocks were not completed until the 1990s. These areas became breeding

places for street dogs, because they were at the border between public and private space, ‘a nobody’s land’ (Mihăilescu 2013).

City authorities currently estimate that there are between 30 000 and 40 000 stray dogs in Bucharest; ASPA representatives give an estimate of 50 000 dogs (ASPA 2013). An indirect result of poor street dog management is that about 5000 people were bitten by dogs in Bucharest during 2013, most of which were street dogs (INMB 2013). During 2013, hundreds of people were also bitten by dogs in the industrialised cities of Galaţi, Constanţa, Craiova, Timișoara, Pitești and Ploiești (Figure 1). Many adults and children are admitted to hospitals for injuries caused by dogs. For instance, Bucharest’s Sector 6 (‘Militari’ quarter) contains high numbers of street dogs (Figure 2), with people being scared to leave their houses because of aggressive dogs (Ristea 2013).

### The dog law and the arguments of political leaders on culling dogs

Street dogs are ‘a legal category of animal being’. Therefore, humans regulate animal welfare by laws, and even

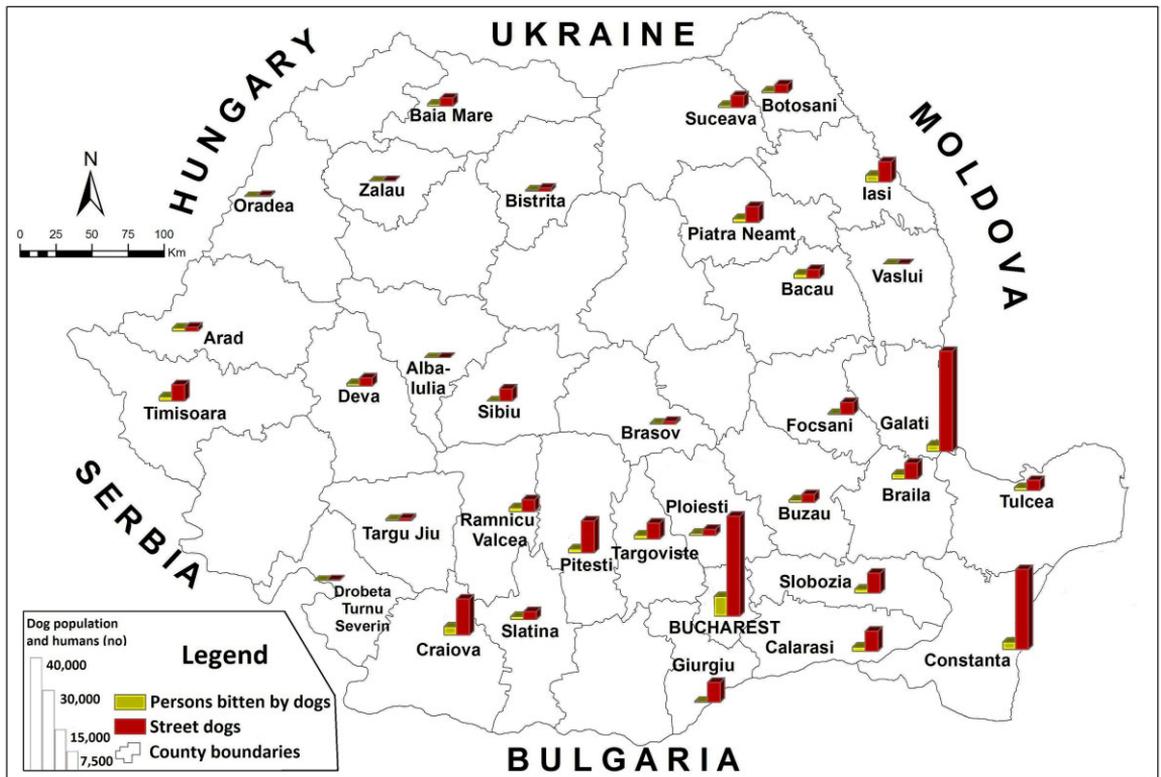


Figure 1 Major Romanian cities with street dogs, including the number of people bitten by dogs

Sources: ASPA (2013) and INMB (2013)

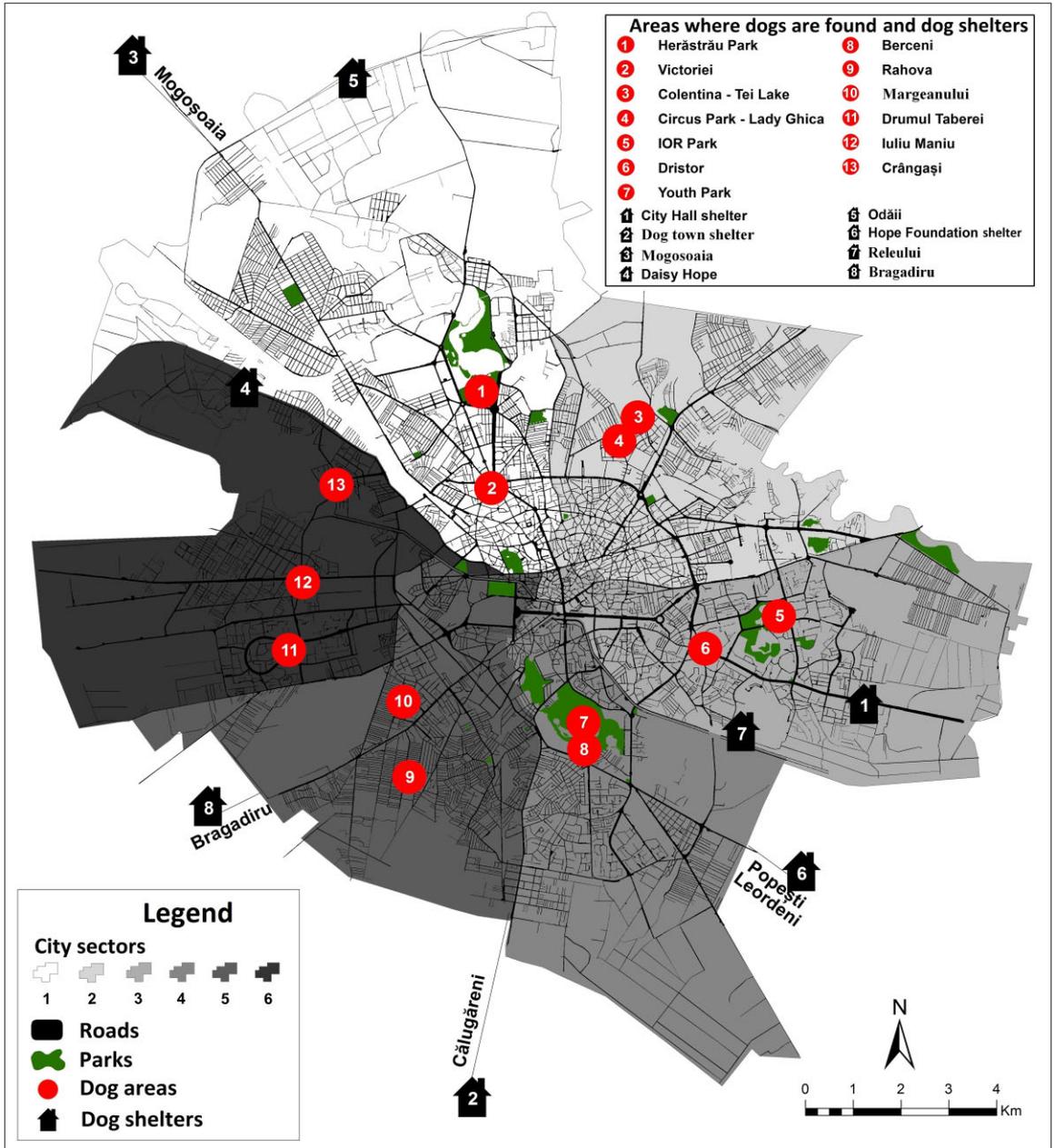


Figure 2 Street dog shelters and areas where street dogs are found in Bucharest

Sources: ASPA (2013) and Ristea (2013)

street dogs have legal status. Furthermore, legal discourse on animal life and the ‘socio-spatial context’ are co-constitutive (Blomley 1994). Ordinance no. 155/2001 was the first regulation implemented for the management of dogs in post-communist Romania. The ordinance stated

that all (healthy and unhealthy) street dogs could be euthanised, and that this procedure was the responsibility of local authorities. The Romanian Government revised the law in 2007, stating that healthy animals should not be euthanised, but left to the care of outdoor shelters.

Subsequently, hundreds of dogs in shelters were left to become malnourished and sick, before being euthanised (Kangas 2013).

In late September 2013, the Romanian Government adopted a new law for dogs (Law no. 258/2013), which permitted the euthanasia of all dogs in shelters not claimed or adopted within 14 days. The law stipulates that every dog must be sterilised at the age of 6 months. Furthermore, those who wish to adopt more than one dog from town hall shelters were expected to pay.

The official position on the rapid implementation of the law is important in revealing the government's discourses on culling dogs. Romanian President Traian Băsescu called on the government to pass the law on euthanasia for street dogs quickly, stating that 'humans are above dogs'. In addition, Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta announced that the new law must be welcomed by the general public in Romania (*BBC News Europe* 2013). Consequently, in September 2013, Bucharest's mayor, Sorin Opreșcu, promised that 80 per cent of street dogs would be eliminated from the streets within one year. Yet, Răzvan Băncescu from ASPA stressed that City Hall captured 28 dogs per day, and numbers would reach 150 very quickly (Mediafax 2013).

Although the law permitted euthanasia, the stringent measures against dogs involved actions taken outside of the law, but in support of its rapid implementation. Such measures were used by hired companies, and not directly by local authorities. Thus, the debate on street dogs opens opportunities for resistance and institutional power.

### Investigating the opinions of Romanian people on the welfare of street dogs

To avoid 'centrality of media research', I investigated the opinions of local people on dog welfare by employing a mixed-method approach with two sources of data (Creswell 2009). The first approach used participant observation. In September 2013, I participated in two of the major protests: in Bucharest and Timișoara. Having a prior interest in protest movements, I was knowledgeable in the way I designed the questionnaire. Then, I surveyed passers-by in the central square of Timișoara to obtain their opinions about street dog welfare. Systematic sampling was used, whereby every tenth adult that walked past the interviewer was asked to participate ( $N = 192$ ) (Table 3). Besides obtaining demographic details about the interviewees, the questionnaire contained 12 open-ended questions. The sample includes a balanced representation of gender and age groups. I identified an inventory of responses that occurred most frequently and selected dominant discourses (Table 4).

Just over half of respondents (56 per cent) view the culling of dogs as an abhorrent practice. The age of

**Table 3** Participant demographic characteristics

Age	Male (n = 93)	Female (n = 99)	Total (n = 192)	%
18–20	5	6	11	5.7
21–30	20	19	39	20.3
31–40	14	18	32	16.7
41–50	16	20	36	18.8
51–60	15	16	31	16.1
61–70	14	11	25	13.0
70+	9	9	18	9.4

**Table 4** Respondents' opinions about the dog welfare issue

Opinion	Total	%
Culling is inhumane/unethical	108	56.25
Culling is necessary for aggressive dogs	64	33.33
Culling is necessary for all street dogs	5	2.61
Don't know	15	7.81
Dogs must be euthanised, there are too many	15	7.81
Only unhealthy dogs must be euthanised	72	37.50
It is not ethical to euthanise dogs	97	50.52
Don't know	8	4.17
Sterilisation is the best solution for street dogs	146	76.04
Sterilisation is useless for street dogs	33	17.19
Don't know	13	6.77
Dog shelters are a long-term solution for street dogs	78	40.62
Dog shelters are a short-term solution for street dogs	102	53.12
Don't know	12	6.25
I want to adopt/I am interested in adopting a street dog	22	11.46
I don't want to adopt/I am not interested in adopting a street dogs at all	154	80.21
Don't know	16	8.33

respondents appeared to influence the view on the stringent measures used on dogs, with younger people being more in favour of culling dogs that are 'aggressive'. This indicates that the generation born after 1989 has adopted a more radical view on the dog issue. Older people were more likely to blame authorities. For instance, one elderly person stated: 'It is about authorities and hired companies' lack of coordination which lead to brutal acts against dogs.'

The next stage of the analysis explores how people perceive euthanasia. Most of respondents disapproved of euthanasia. More women (65 per cent) than men (35 per cent) opposed euthanasia, which supports the general view that women are more sensitive to killing animals than men (Animal Studies Group 2006). Only 7 per cent of the

respondents stated that there are too many street dogs carrying certain diseases, with euthanasia providing a good solution.

Different respondents also had different views on neutering. For instance, 76 per cent of respondents consider neutering as the only viable solution for street dogs. The majority believed that shelters should be a temporary solution for dogs. Interestingly, due to the high number of dogs, the respondents did not consider adoption as a realistic long-time solution. Only 11 per cent of respondents were interested in adopting a street dog (generally, elderly women).

The last level of inquiry is the anti-culling protests versus the content of the new dog law. Most of the respondents agree that it is the best law on street dogs since the 1990s. Only 6 per cent of the respondents participated in the protest in Timișoara; yet, 55 per cent of all respondents agreed with the demands of the protesters regarding the ethics of culling dogs.

## The Romanian animal rights movement

ARNGOs, journalists and local people have rallied against government decisions to euthanise dogs under the various laws implemented in recent years in Romania. During September 2013, the ARNGOs established an emerging social movement. Several open letters were drafted. International and national activists, including the actress Brigitte Bardot and Marcela Felt from the Association Cuțu-Cuțu (Doggy-Doggy), focused on this group of animals by organising press conferences to help raise the consciousness of the general public.

The Fier Pfofen (Four Paws) Foundation was the most active opposition group. The organisation was founded in Germany in 1988 and is involved in international animal rights programmes. The reports compiled by this organisation present arguments and counter-arguments on the dog culling issue in Romania, describing basic legal, political and environmental aspects in connection to the euthanasia stance of the local authorities towards dogs.

To enhance our understanding of the activity of the main ARNGO protagonist in the September 2013 protests in Romania, an open-ended, face-to-face interview was employed with one of the leaders of Fier Pfofen Foundation in Romania. The interview lasted one hour and was tape recorded, and the responses (to the 13 questions) were then analysed for their content. In general, animal rights organisations do not explicitly mention belonging to environmental movements on their web pages. Interestingly, in response to the question 'Does your NGO self-identify as an environmental movement or as an animal rights movement?' the respondent answered in favour of the latter. In a comprehensive national survey in

the UK, Rootes and Miller (2000) also identified a weakness in the connection between environmental and animal rights organisations.

As Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011) suggest, the categorisation of animals is very important in animal rights studies. In Romania, street dogs are categorised in different ways ('câini maidanezi'/stray dogs, 'câini fără stapân'/homeless dogs etc.), but I observed that the respondent preferred using the term 'câini de rasă comună' (common race dogs).

Furthermore, I noticed that the respondent considered euthanasia as 'a medical act for lowering the suffering of sick animals . . . killing is equal to euthanasia and vets must be aware that killing a healthy dog is not ethical'. The interviewee measured 'neutering as the best solution in the long term for dogs', while 'living in a shelter is not the best solution for dogs but it is better than killing them'. I was interested to be informed that 'the stringent measures of the private firms of dog-catchers are related to their primitive ways of capturing, transporting and accommodation . . . sporadic cases of harsh actions on cats were registered'.

Finally, I enquired whether participating in protest movements brought any practical results for the respondent and, indeed: 'Fier Pfofen's implications in the September 2013 protests put pressure on the political leaders to respect EU (European Union) legislation on street dogs'.

The rules for enforcing the dog law were published in December 2013. Fier Pfofen condemned the absence of a legal framework for catching dogs and euthanasia. Consequently, in June 2014, the Bucharest Court of Justice suspended the rules for enforcing this law. Thus, euthanasia is now temporarily banned in Romania.

## Protest events against dog culling

It is essential to chart the petitions of protests to understand the ground on which discourses, counter-discourses and social movements develop (Hajer 1997; Rootes 2003). In Romania, the largest national protest against the culling of dogs occurred on 15 September 2013 in front of the Constitutional Court in Bucharest, and involved about 1000 people. As a participant at one of the Bucharest protest meetings, I noticed many voices shouting 'Criminal Court' and 'The fate of the stray dogs should be yours'. A major slogan was 'Against comfortable euthanasia!' Through this slogan, the activists aimed to convey that they are against the simplest, easiest way the official authorities wanted to apply to address the street dog issue – euthanasia – rather than considering ethical solutions. All protesters had red cards with four paws in their hands, and many pets accompanied the protesters.

Press releases (Table 1) showed that additional demonstrative protests (Table 2) occurred in front of the town

halls of other Romanian cities (Timișoara, Ploiești, Iași, Constanța), as well as outside the Romanian embassies of several European capital cities (e.g. Prague).

While the new law received much support in Romania, protests occurred worldwide, with critics condemning the impending 'massacre' (*BBC News Europe* 2013). Of note, the major protest in Bucharest was organised by a group of NGOs on Facebook. Social networks were filled with thousands of messages describing the distress of people at the cruel actions of the dog-catchers hired by the authorities. In protest, people changed their Facebook profile page to show the bright red dog paw on a white background carrying the slogan 'Red card for Romania!' (Facebook 2013), a rallying-call disseminated by ARNGOs in protest against the neglect of animal rights in Romania and the political involvement in controlling dog culling.

The group 'Occupy for Animals' launched a petition calling for the Romanian Government to end the culls, stating that the new law provides a 'free ticket' for the slaughtering of animals that were 'being bludgeoned, shot and poisoned in villages and towns all over Romania' (Occupy for Animals 2013). In addition, the European Parliament's Intergroup on the Welfare and Conservation of Animals (Animal Welfare Intergroup 2013) did not support dog culling in Romania, stating in an official letter to the Romanian Government that 'calls for a systematic mass killing of strays' goes against the will of the democratically elected Romanian members of the European Parliament, as well as the values and objectives of the treaties concerning animal rights.

## Discussing the dog culling issue

### *Calls for stopping dog culling through stringent measures*

Like the general public, the protesters and the mass media were divided on the dog culling issue. Some Romanian media provided regular reports on dog culling, while other media drew wide attention by focusing on the mauling of humans by dogs.

The culling of animals is against EU legislation on animal welfare. The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 ensured 'protection and respect for the welfare of animals as sentient beings', while the Treaty of Lisbon (article 13) and the Written Declaration 0026/2011 of the European Parliament on the management of dogs in the EU, state that euthanasia and culling are not effective solutions for managing street dogs.

The question raised in a more-than-human geography context is the moral issues involved in culling: do humans have the right to cull animals? Animals are sentient beings – they feel pain and have the ability to suffer (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Palmer 2010). By testing public

opinion, this paper shows that the act of culling animals is neither humane nor ethical.

*Lethal injection versus the right for animals to live*  
Language-use in lethal injection debates has become a key point of contention. Opponents state that most street dogs are healthy animals and that this is not an act of mercy killing, but a 'massacre' (Facebook 2013). The euthanasia of healthy dogs is not ethical (Garner 2004, 91). If we consider using euthanasia, how is life protected (Palmer 2010)? The euthanasia of healthy animals raises ethical problems, mainly for the agent doing it (Srinivasan 2013). However, even when discussing agencies, the category of agency is abstract and insubstantial, unless extended to include the many ways that animals resist human oppression and the value of animal life (Hribal 2010).

A major debate on more-than-human geographies focuses on the discourses about dog wellbeing, which are proposed by authorities. Such discourses suggest that dogs should only exist under human care. The voice of the Romanian authorities supports culls as a necessity to avoid overcrowding in shelters. Tasker (2008) showed that such discourses are a normal practice worldwide.

### *Demands for neutering, a better life in shelters and adoption*

Critics of the law petitioned that, aside from triggering the culling of dogs, the law does not provide a long-term solution to the problem. For instance, a fair sterilisation programme for street dogs, instead of a cull, would be the best solution. Yet, the canine population issue has both societal and economic costs. Thus, programmes focusing on the sterilisation and release of dogs back onto the streets require long-term investment and time (Kangas 2013); however, available funds in Romania tend not to be spent astutely.

There is consensus on both sides that more investment in dog shelters and adoption is needed. Yet, life in dog shelters is not very humane (Srinivasan 2013), with humans regulating mating techniques (Lulka 2009). Moreover, examples such as the recent fire at a dog shelter in Manchester (UK), in which about 50 dogs died, demonstrate that life in shelters is not secure.

In Romania, overcrowding represents a major issue for the ARNGOs and authorities, particularly after the dog law was introduced, with more shelters being needed. However, the public opinion enquiry presented in this paper clearly shows that the alternative to dog shelters (i.e. adoption) does not work; most of the dogs could not be adopted by people. Many people in Romania love dogs, but they do not have the concept of animal ownership.

## Conclusions

Animals are both admired and detested by humans, occupying a dichotomous place in urban space: they often resist the order imposed by humans at the local level (Griffiths *et al.* 2000). As Philo (1995) argues, we need an alternative perspective, in which animals are regarded as a marginal 'social' group that is influenced by human communities. Consequently, dogs form a group that is subjected to a variety of sociospatial inclusions and exclusions. Urban spaces and people–animal relationships are not simply dichotomous: there are overlaps in the relationship between humans and animals, with many levels of acceptance and non-acceptance, and with people setting limits that extend beyond exclusion/inclusion oppositions. Yet, official discursive practices often tend to be simplified on this issue (Youatt 2008).

Through analysing the major social concerns towards dog culling in Romania, this paper demonstrates that pressure to adopt the law quickly has had a major toll, generating socio-political disagreements about the ethics of implementing this policy. Examination of the political factors that determined the stringent culling of dogs, in parallel to assessing the recent policies and discourses on dogs, led to the conclusion that this measure arose as a unique socio-political fabric for the radical change of dog space. Such phenomena emphasised the tension between 'prevalent human ethico-political supremacy' and the rising 'concern for animal wellbeing' (Srinivasan 2013).

This paper contributes to the knowledge gap of published literature on post-communism regarding animal rights discourses and protests in opposition to the culling of dogs. Through examining the demands produced by participating ARNGOs, I identified three main levels of contention around the culling of dogs: calls for ethical human actions towards dogs by stopping culling, demands against lethal injection (euthanasia) and better welfare for street dogs. I showed that protest repertoires on dog culling in Romania are demonstrative and conventional, with protesters petitioning under two key slogans 'Red card for Romania!' and 'Against comfortable euthanasia!' The slogans succinctly convey the opinions of protestors about the culling issue, highlighting the loss of animal rights in Romania. Romanian ARNGOs have been important in raising public awareness about the culling of dogs and euthanasia, placing pressure on authorities to respect EU animal legislation.

By investigating public opinion about street dog welfare, this contribution shows that even if Romanians are divided on the presence of dogs on the streets, over 50 per cent view culling as abhorrent and are against euthanasia. In cases where dogs cannot be adopted, life in shelters is better than culling. However, overcrowding, dog reproduction control and security in dog shelters

represent long-term issues that must be adequately resolved by the authorities and the ARNGOs.

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