

Can I bring my pet? The space for companion animals in hospitality and tourism

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ABSTRACT: Companion animals play an important role in our lives as pets, as emotional support animals, as guide dogs, or through different forms of pet therapy. The sociological, emotional and physical space that companion animals have been gaining in our lives and houses has steadily grown for more than a century. Such a trend reflects a societal change with regard to the human-animal relationship as well as an increasing attention towards such a relationship, questioning and scrutinising its ambiguities and hypocrisies. In the hospitality and tourism sector, the sociological and physical space for companion animals seems overlooked and under-researched. Therefore, this research note aims at filling this gap by calling for further studies and research in this field.

KEYWORDS: animal space, pets, posthumanism, social theory, sociology of space

Introduction

The European Pet Food Federation (FEDIAF, 2022) estimates that in the European Union 90 million households own at least one pet. This number represents 46% of all European Union households, (ibid.). Similarly, according to the 2021/2022 National Pet Owners survey of the American Pet Products Association (APPA, n.d.), 70% of United States' households own a pet. Even if there is not agreement on the calculation of these numbers, it is broadly acknowledged that the number of companion animals — commonly referred to as "pets" — has grown in the last few decades and the pandemic years, as well as the numbers of the pet industry market (Brulliard & Clement, 2019). Such a trend is arguably a societal change stressing the importance of companion animals in our daily lives and prompting a critical reflection on the ethical, sociological and ontological implications of our relationship with them (Franklin, 1999; Sandøe et al., 2015; Overall, 2017).

This societal change has implications for the hospitality and tourism sector since a growing number of travellers desire to travel with their companion animals. Hence, the creation of a sociological and physical space for companion animals in this sector is urged by academic researchers (Carr & Cohen, 2009; Dotson et al., 2010; Ying et al., 2021). In *Travel Weekly*, Lapan (2021, p. 1) highlights that "the COVID-19 pandemic boosted an already growing trend of dog owners traveling with their pooches, and hotels are stepping up with lenient policies and extra amenities to entice guests who don't want to part with their canines". Similarly, in *Skift*, Thornell (2022, p. 1) states that "as the number of pet owners across the country [United States] spiked during the pandemic, the hotel of the future

needs to be fit for man *and* man's [sic] best friend like never before".

To which extent such societal change is embraced and supported by the hospitality and tourism sector is the focus of this research note. Drawing on the literature on companion animals, human-animal relationships and the space for companion animals in the human environment, this research note aims to prompt a critical reflection on the (lack of) hospitableness towards companion animals in the hospitality and tourism spaces, calling for further research in this field.

Companion animals

Companion animals are largely understood and defined as domestic animals and pets. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA, n.d.) defines companion animals as "domesticated or domestic-bred animals whose physical, emotional, behavioural and social needs can be readily met as companions in the home, or in close daily relationship with humans". The more traditional term "pet" is increasingly seen as more controversial for the "negative connotations of plaything and entertaining value" (Franklin, 1999, p. 49). Even if the term "pet" seems failing to respect animals' own dignity or integrity, it remains the most broadly used term since it conveys to people a practical understanding of its meaning (Sandøe et al., 2015). Nevertheless, this research note — for scientific and theoretical consistency and rigour — uses the term "companion animals".

A sociology of human-animal relations is discussed by Franklin (1999) who adopts a historical perspective and a thematic approach. With regard to companion animals, Franklin (1999,

p. 49) highlights how from the 1960s onwards — in parallel to other societal changes — companion animals have been drawn closer into human society, moving “from being regarded as mere companions and friends to becoming quasi or pseudo family”. Franklin (1999, p. 36) elaborates on the cultural centrality of animals in postmodernity, linking such centrality to the loss of ontological security experienced by humans that have become “less bound to one other by the moral ties of family, neighbourhood, community and class”. He does so by discussing the ontological insecurity of the post-Fordist, neoliberal economy characterised by “new flexibilities and freedoms in the creation and dissolution of domestic relations” (ibid., p. 5). Franklin (1999) stresses how companion animals seem to have substituted several domestic and community relationships, and how such ontological insecurity can be explained through the social isolation of modern individuals in Western societies facing the decline of local communities as well as the stretching of social networks over great distances. “Pet keeping can be understood as the extension of familiar relations to non-humans” (ibid., p. 57). This means that humans and their companion animals — to some extent — can be conceived as a cultural unity.

Haraway (2003, p. 8) highlights the human entanglement with companion species by questioning the sterile polarisation between “nature” and “culture”, and proposing instead “relations of significant otherness”. By emphasising connectedness and a relational approach, Haraway (2016, p. 4) advocates “making kin” with the otherness of beings different from us to “staying with the trouble”, that is “making odd kin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become — with each other or not at all” (ibid.). In alignment with this perspective, Braidotti (2013) offers a posthuman ontology made of a rhizomatic subjectivity and entanglement with others and challenges the anthropocentric approach to a diminished non-human otherness. The Nobel Literature Prize winner, J. M. Coetzee, in his metafictional novel *The Lives of Animals* (Coetzee, 1999), advocates for an ethics of sympathy in our treatment of animals. Through his fictional alter-ego, Elizabeth Costello, he states that

“Cogito ergo Sum” he [Descartes] famously said. It is a formula I have always been uncomfortable with. It implies that a living being that does not do what we call thinking is somehow second class. To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being” (Coetzee, 1999, p.131).

The photo-reporter Jo-Anne McArthur — through her works *We Animals* (McArthur, 2017a), *Captive* (McArthur, 2017b) and *Hidden: animals in the anthropocene* (McArthur & Wilson, 2021) — investigates animals in the human environment. In doing so, she questions the unbalanced power-relations between humans and animals as well as the (lack of) emotional, sociological and physical space for animals in the Anthropocene (a term identifying a geological epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on Earth’s geology, ecosystems and climate).

The space for companion animals in hospitality and tourism

The notion of space is here used in relational terms, drawing on Massey’s (2005) spatial theory. Massey (2005) claims that space is relational, made of a multiplicity of connections, relationships and networks, is never static and is always

under construction. Using such a notion of space as a point of departure, this research note questions the space for companion animals in hospitality and tourism. It does so by acknowledging the increasing interest in animal-based tourism experiences (e. g. Airbnb animal experiences) as well as a growing number of studies on animal-based tourism (Kline, 2022), largely focusing on human-animal encounters and the ethics of such encounters (Bertella, 2014; 2021; Bertella et al., 2019; Hoarau-Heemstra & Kline, 2022). Conversely, there is scant literature on companion animals in hospitality and tourism. The existing studies investigate the desire of dog owners to travel with their pets (Carr & Cohen, 2009), the constraints of travelling with pets (Yin et al., 2021), the emergent sector of travelling with dogs (Dotson et al., 2010) and the relationship between domestic animals and leisure (Carr, 2015). Hence, it emerges that there is a gap in the literature with regard to the sociological — and physical — space for companion animals both in tourism and — even more — in hospitality. How and to what extent the notion of “hospitalableness” (Lashley, 2015) embraces companion animals has remained largely under-investigated and under-theorised.

Studies on companion animals largely revolve around the co-creation of domestic spaces through the human-animal co-living (Cudworth, 2021; Schuurman & Syrjämaa, 2021) as well as the co-production of space in specific cultural contexts (Fox, 2018). Such studies do not yet address the sociological and physical spaces of both tourism and hospitality, the latter with its establishments and services. Here, the companion animals’ presence is still rare, untraced and occasional. Moreover, it seems mainly visible in luxury hotels offering services such as a “pet concierge” and having the hotel staff willing to take guests’ dogs for walks as well as to organise pet-friendly cultural nights (Soteriou, 2016). Hence, the hospitality and tourism sectors appear as still predominantly a human domain where companion animals can be tolerated or even accepted for customer satisfaction, so long as they are small, silent and tidy. This means that the hospitality and tourism sectors are overlooking the opportunities connected to a proper welcoming and hosting of companion animals that, for instance, would allow the co-creation of a compelling and “more-than-human” spatiality as well as a richer guest experience. So far, such an oversight has been translating into a lack of physical places — and services — for companion animals in hospitality facilities and tourism-related services. The companion animals’ presence seems to still largely be confined to predefined “bestly places” (e. g. grooming salons, veterinary clinics, off-leash areas). Hence, this approach overlooks the opportunities of a “more-than-human” spatiality as discussed by Philo and Wilbert (2000) in their *Animal space, bestly places* where they advocate for the creation of a “more than human” geography and social spatiality embracing both human and non-human animals.

Conclusion

By providing an overview of the current debate, trends, academic knowledge and (lack of) studies on the space for companion animals in tourism and hospitality, this research note aims at casting light on a literature gap, while contributing to filling this gap and calling for further research on such a theme. The growing number of companion animals in our households as well as our increasing desire for travelling with our companion animals depict an interesting societal change

that should soon be acknowledged and embraced by tourism and hospitality academia and the industry for the construction of novel spaces, theoretical reflections and practices. Therefore, this research note advocates for further study and research on the space for companion animals in the hospitality and tourism by looking at different geographical areas and different types of companion animals as well as at different typologies of facilities and services (e. g. hotels, restaurants, airports, flights, camping sites). Finally, though this research note, I wish to invite other scholars, researchers and practitioners to work together on a future special issue on this topic to build further knowledge and develop novel lines of investigation.

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