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## The City as Multispecies Space: Dog Walking in Downtown Belgrade during the COVID-19 Lockdown\*

This paper represents an autoethnographic account of dog walking in a residential area of downtown Belgrade during the COVID-19 lockdown of early 2020. It is also an attempt at, or rather, the result, of the largely experimental practice of canine-assisted ethnography, as my dogs Dita and Ripley were instrumental during fieldwork. The lockdown, with its ill-thought-out and constantly changing rules about dog walking underlined three basic issues: 1) in a city with a huge dog owning population, public policy with regard to this issue is virtually non-existent; 2) the city lacks public green spaces, and 3) the movement patterns of dog walkers tend to converge due to the fact that the needs of the canines (both biological and social) are embedded into the architecture and planning of local neighborhoods. In this sense, the city emerges as a multispecies space, and the social patterns and walking routes of its residents who keep dogs are influenced, if not completely determined by the human-animal bond at play. This became especially visible during lockdown at times when dog walkers were the only people allowed outside. Thus, this paper analyzes how interspecies (in this case human-dog) relationships shape the functions of urban space in Belgrade.

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## Град као мултиспецијски простор: шетање паса у центру Београда током затварања услед ковида 19

Овај рад представља аутоетнографско сведочанство о шетању паса у стамбеном крају центра Београда током затварања грађана услед пандемије ковида 19 почетком 2020. године. Он је такође и покушај, или пре резултат за сада махом експерименталне праксе обављања етнографије уз помоћ паса, будући да су моји пси Дита и Рипли били кључни за обављање теренског истраживања. Затварање, које је било окарактерисано лошим планирањем и правилима у вези са шетањем љубимаца а која су се стално мењала, скренуло је пажњу на три основна проблема: 1) у граду у којем велики део популације чува псе јавне политике у вези са овим готово уопште не постоје; 2) у граду фали јавних зелених површина, и 3) обрасци кретања шетача паса имају тенденцију да конвергирају услед потреба (како биолошких тако и друштвених) паса и ушанчени су у архитектуру и планирање града на локалном нивоу. Због тога, град се помаља као мултиспецијски простор, а друштвени обрасци и руте кретања његових становника који имају псе бивају обликовани, ако не и потпуно одређени, везом између људи и животиња о којој је реч. Ово је постало посебно видљиво током затварања у време када су шетачи паса били једини људи којима је било дозвољено да буду на улици. Стога, у овом раду се анализира како интерспецијски односи (у овом случају између људи и паса) обликују функције урбаног простора у Београду.

*Кључне речи:* људско-животињски односи, пси љубимци, Београд, аутоетнографија, етнографија уз помоћ паса, ковид 19, затварање

### INTRODUCTION

On March 15<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Republic of Serbia declared a state of emergency due to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup>. The declaration was accompanied by strict lockdown procedures and counter-epidemic measures that saw most of the population (aside from essential workers)

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<sup>1</sup> "Službeni glasnik RS", number 29, published March 15th 2020.

working remotely and confined to their homes for most of the day. A police curfew lasting from 8pm to 5am was instituted on March 18<sup>th</sup>, followed by the decision to allow pet owners to walk their dogs between 8pm and 9pm, for no longer than 20 minutes and no further than 200m from their place of residence. This caused problems, as I will explain later on. On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, a 12 hour curfew was instituted, lasting from 5pm to 5am, and on March 28<sup>th</sup>, at the behest of Serbia's president Aleksandar Vučić, the decision to allow pet owners to walk their dogs from 8pm to 9 pm was revoked, as dog owners were accused of "congregating" in public spaces. This caused outrage among dog owners living in large cities in Serbia. After a major public outcry<sup>2</sup> including the opinions of veterinarians published in both Serbian and foreign media, on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the decision was made to allow citizens to walk their pets between 11pm and 1am, for no longer than 20 minutes and no further than 200m from their place of residence. Along with these measures, the state of emergency was lifted on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2020.

In this paper I aim to provide an autoethnographic account of dog walking in Belgrade during the COVID-19 lockdown. As an anthropologist who keeps two companion dogs I was in the position to conduct participant-observation fieldwork over the course of the lockdown. I believe that the issues faced by people and their companion animals, as well as the wider political and planning issues raised – or rather – made evident during this time, merit further thought and examination.

The city is a multispecies space, inhabited by humans and various other animals some of whom we keep as pets, but other animals – both feral and wild – and plants (even fungi and other organisms!) play a large and important part in cityscapes (on multispecies ethnography see e.g. Tsing 2012, 2014, 2015). However, their role is often missed by researchers in the social sciences and humanities, at least in part because *cities are so loud*. The sounds, sights and smells of cities are dominated by human action. Cars and other vehicles are often the core around which urban neighborhoods are built – and as the main danger for city dwellers (and especially their pets), tend to be the focus of attention when walking in urban landscapes. This urban bustle tends to mute and minimize the other, non-human, processes and lives taking place in cities. What the COVID-19 lockdown in Belgrade provided was, first and foremost, a respite

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<sup>2</sup> Organized mostly in the form of a social media campaign titled „Šetnja u 8“ (walk at 8), that saw owners taking photos of their dogs and posting them online with the hashtag #Setnjau8.

from the background noise (and smell) of human activity. This imposed absence of people was much lauded and talked about online during the global lockdown: “nature replenishing itself” was an oft cited benefit of the lack of human activity, often illustrated by the re-emergence of wild animals in cities. However romanticized these accounts were, the fact remains that, at least in the neighborhood where my study was conducted, the lockdown did allow for a changed context, one which was especially evident (and I would argue, pertinent) when traversing the cityscape with creatures who rely on smell and hearing much more than on sight to get around.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As stated before, this paper is an autoethnographic account of dog walking in Dorćol, a residential area of downtown Belgrade, during the COVID-19 lockdown. The methods used in acquiring data were participant observation and informal interviews – some conducted online, others in person. The interviews conducted online dealt with the situation in other residential areas in downtown Belgrade, and mostly served to confirm my findings in Dorćol<sup>3</sup>. From March 15<sup>th</sup> until May 6<sup>th</sup> 2020, *other dog owners* were almost the only people I spoke to face to face.

The theoretical framework for the paper is interspecies ethnography. Interspecies ethnographies are ethnographies focusing on, in Dona Haraway’s words *how we live with other species* (Haraway 2003). In this paper I rely on theoretical approaches constituted within the field of human-animal relations, first and foremost the idea that relations between people and other animals – in this case dogs – are meaningful social relations (Mullin 1999, 2002; Knight 2005; Kohn 2007, 2013; Noske 1993; Nadasdy 2007; Milton 2005; Žakula 2010, 2017, 2021; Žakula & Živaljević 2018, 2019). In the context of the study, I extend this idea further: human-dog pairs (or in my case – triads) interact with other human-canine pairings to constitute an interspecies web of interactions dependent on the habits, personalities, and even moods of both the canine and human actors. Another theoretical aspect I aim to explore further in the paper is how humans walking with dogs interact with cityscapes. In this I rely on Tim Ingold (2011) and his work on walking in the landscape as a way of experiencing the world through the feet – in my case – feet and paws

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the dog owners living in Novi Beograd, the part of Belgrade built under socialism, had a less severe experience of the lockdown, as socialist public planning envisioned ample public green spaces for its residents.

of humans and their companion animals. I will argue that traversing cityscapes with companion dogs entails a specific way of moving and an awareness of one's surroundings that is usually absent when walking without canines.

This paper is also an attempt at, or rather, a result, of the largely experimental practice of canine-assisted ethnography, as my dogs Dita and Ripley were instrumental during fieldwork. In this research, specifically, my canine assistants played a two-fold role. For one, they enabled me to move about during curfew in a very strict sense – I would not have been allowed outside, and would have been subject to legal action and a fine on part of the state if they weren't with me. Thus, they were my "ticket" to the conducted fieldwork in a very literal sense. In a broader sense, canine-assisted ethnography relies on the idea of dogs as a "social lubricant" (as attested in Robins et al. 1991) – canine companions tend to bridge the gap between strangers and allow humans to strike up conversations, and sometimes, even lasting social bonds by *just being there*. They provide a neutral ground and a topic for introductory conversation, which can serve as an "ice breaker" in any kind of ethnographic interview – thus, canine assisted ethnography is not necessarily bound to research on human-animal relations. However, in the context of this research, it was a great help as dog owners in local areas tend to form *communities*. Being part of such a community is contingent on socializing within the framework of dog-walking. In that sense, my dogs had made me part of one such local community long before COVID-19 and allowed me access to the specific kinds of local, situational and *social* knowledge necessary for participant observation.

The theoretical ideas outlined above came to be especially pertinent during lockdown at times when dog owners were the only people allowed outside. In this, almost experimental scenario, it became obvious that, when walking with dogs, the cityscape is not only composed of sights and sounds – which humans tend to focus on, but also smells and the activity of other animals in the vicinity, such as other dogs, stray cats and birds that inhabit the city. The heightened anxiety of lockdown affected both humans and their pets, and a kind of nervous energy permeated the air. Everyone was on edge and dogs fought and barked more often. As there was little to no traffic and all other scents and sounds were minimized, dogs became hyperaware of one another, and due to the time constraints during curfew, often crossed paths with other dogs they generally didn't like. Most dog owners have a fair idea about who their dogs get along with and who they dislike, owners sometimes even being in contact over

the phone to schedule walks so as not to run into each other<sup>4</sup>. All this was upended during lockdown and altercations happened more often.

Thus, in this paper I will provide an autoethnographic account of this strange time, and attempt to show how interspecies relationships shape the functions of urban space in Belgrade.

## SITUATING THE RESEARCH

Dorćol is a residential area of downtown Belgrade, encompassing a large part of the old city center<sup>5</sup>. The area where the research was conducted is called Donji Dorćol (Lower Dorćol, also sometimes called “Šipka” by the locals). Specifically, the fieldwork was conducted in the neighborhood located between Cara Dušana street on the upper end, Dunavska street on the lower end, Dubrovačka street on the one side and Pjarona de Mondezira street on the other. While this part of Dorćol is close to Kalemegdan park and the Danube quay, public parks were off-limits during lockdown, with police turning citizens away as they tried to enter. During curfew, citizens walking their dogs were confined to areas 200m from their place of residence.

As the old heart of the city, with rampant new development and gentrification taking hold, Dorćol lacks public green spaces, and in certain areas you would be hard pressed to find a patch of greenery 200 meters from your home. This was primarily a problem for people keeping dogs who are, like my Dita, “picky” about where they do their business. Furthermore, as dogs and their humans usually have set routes for short and long walks, being unable to follow said routes due to time and space restrictions caused stress, confusion and agitation among the canines as well as the already stressed out *Homo sapiens* accompanying them.

While this may seem a trivial issue, it is by no means that. While there is no official data on the number of pets being kept in households in Belgrade (nor in Serbia, for that matter), here is a random sample: the apartment building I reside in is an old pre-World War II building, with one extra floor added on in the 90's. The building contains 27 apartments. There are 13 dogs living in my building alone, across 11 apartments. There are only two small green spaces within a 200m radius from my building.

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<sup>4</sup> The opposite is also true: dog owners will often schedule walks with other owners, especially if their dogs get along well.

<sup>5</sup> Local knowledge holds that Dorćol is the area situated between Knez Mihailova street (the main pedestrian zone in the city center) on the upper end, the Danube on the lower end, Pjarona de Mondezira street on one side, and Dvadesetdevetog Novembra street on the other.

On the other hand, there are four veterinary practices and five<sup>6</sup> pet supply stores (including a store that sells exclusively *luxury dog clothing*<sup>7</sup>) within a 1km radius from my apartment. While there have, as of yet, been no studies conducted in Serbia, studies done in the US show that pet ownership, on the whole, intersects in meaningful ways with categories of age, race and economic status, or class<sup>8</sup> (Weaver 2013; Marx et al. 2015; Applebaum, Peek & Szembik 2020).

## KEEPING COMPANION DOGS IN BELGRADE

Aside from love and companionship, dogs provide an “excuse” for people to *just walk around*. More importantly, dog walking is a leisure activity that *costs nothing*. Even under capitalism, humans can just wander around with their canine companions without having to spend money, and without being productive in any way measurable under capitalism. This, and especially within the context of the increasing commercialization of public space in Belgrade (as attested by Radović 2021), is a big deal.

This is not to say that keeping dogs doesn't cost money, it certainly does, but in the context of Serbia – with its lack of anything resembling a consistent, well-enforced legal framework<sup>9</sup> for dog ownership – keeping dogs can be (sadly) as easy as just feeding them – as is attested by the huge numbers of dogs kept on chains all over the country. In an urban setting, the financial corners of keeping dogs can be cut in various ways: a number of people have told me they don't vaccinate their dogs against rabies. Even though the vaccination is mandatory and they face a fine, they are of the opinion that rabies has been eradicated in Serbia, and even if it wasn't, their dogs – living in the city – are in no danger of catching the disease, and as the vaccine is costly, they opt out (most, however do vaccinate against other diseases). The market for dog food is very big, and hence there is a lot of variety: even the tiniest mom and pop pet stores carry a wide variety of brands of kibble, with prices ranging from about

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<sup>6</sup> While this article was in the process of being reviewed, *another* big, franchise pet supply store opened within the same radius, bringing the total up to six.

<sup>7</sup> They don't even sell leashes or collars, or any other dog-related paraphernalia (i.e. dog food, pet beds, treats...), they sell *exclusively luxury dog clothing*. How many tutus does a Chihuahua need? Apparently, enough for the store to be in business for over five years.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, gender doesn't seem to be an important factor.

<sup>9</sup> While the „Zakon o dobrobiti životinja“ – the Animal Welfare Law became law in 2009, little is actually done to enforce it, and while the penal code envisions fines and even prison sentences for the abandonment or maltreatment of animals, in practice, these rules are scarcely – if ever – enforced.

2€ to more than 20€ per kilogram. Many dog owners also choose to cook for their pets (along with feeding them kibble and other commercially produced dog food) and most butchers' shops still keep certain leftover meat and bones specifically to sell to dog owners at low prices. Couple that with feeding dogs leftovers from the family lunch, feeding dogs isn't all that expensive. Veterinary care is costly, and sadly, pets are sometimes left untreated, are abandoned or put down due to financial issues regarding treatment. However, small veterinary practices in local neighborhoods often offer credit for treatment to people and animals they know, and just having your pet checked out by a vet, with no treatment administered, is usually free of charge.<sup>10</sup>

## SO, WHY ARE THERE SO MANY PET DOGS IN DONJI DORĆOL?

In this particular instance, I believe there is a peculiar confluence of factors leading to Donji Dorćol being home to so many pet dogs, and I believe economic status to be the determining factor in, at least, two ways.

While Šipka used to be the poor part of Dorćol, the economic transformation (gentrification) taking place over the last 15 or so years, has brought in new residents, both families with children (usually residing in newly built housing complexes) and young professionals (moving into quaint, small apartments in old buildings – myself included) with the means to support (more) pets, and specifically pet dogs. There is another tendency visible: families tend to buy small purebred dogs from puppy mills, while young professionals living alone or in pairs, tend to adopt mixbreeds.<sup>11</sup>

However, nothing is ever as it seems in a post-socialist context and this particular part of Dorćol, with its proximity to the Danube quay and Kalemegdan park, has always been prime real estate for keeping dogs, and the emergent class divide of the neighborhood still hasn't forced out all the old residents. Especially since, between the fancy old pre-World War II buildings riddled with young professionals and the tiny old houses being torn down to make room for new residential complexes and rich

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<sup>10</sup> Once I even brought an injured squirrel to our vet, and even though he got treatment and bit the vet, it was free of charge. The squirrel recuperated at my place for a couple of weeks (to Dita's great interest), and was safely returned to the wild.

<sup>11</sup> This is by no means a rule, but it is a visible tendency. The reasons behind it are sadly beyond the scope of this paper, but are an issue of class, an issue of *distinction* (*sensu* Bourdieu), and an issue of human-animal relations in the strictest sense.



families, there is a large legacy of buildings and apartment complexes built during the socialist period – some built immediately after WWII in place of buildings destroyed during the war, and others, built in the 60's and 70's, that are still home to older residents and their families and/or descendants. The fact of the matter being that it is expensive to *rent* apartments in the neighborhood, and most apartments have a no pet policy, but if you own the apartment you live in – as most dog owners I interact with on a daily basis do – barring individual time constraints, it is easy and enjoyable to keep a dog. At least when you're allowed to go on walks with them.

Keeping in mind that people in the neighborhood have always kept dogs – an interlocutor regaled me with stories about how her family fed their dogs during the crisis of the 90's<sup>12</sup> – as well as the fact that obtaining a dog in Serbia is as easy as walking around and just picking one up and taking it home, as there is a huge population of stray dogs in the country, Dorćolites *love* their pets and keep a lot of them<sup>13</sup>.

Now imagine having one hour in the evening for everyone to go on walks, and only one accessible public green space where you can reasonably let your dog go off leash<sup>14</sup>. Factor in the feral cat population that exploded during lockdown, and it's a recipe for disaster.

## DOG-WALKING IN BELGRADE DURING CURFEW

It's late March and still cold. I disinfect my shoes after every outing and leave my jacket on a chair next to an open window in the kitchen (if I had a balcony, I'd hang it there) every time I come home. I recite the "Rings" poem from Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" every time I wash my hands, as that amounts to about 20 seconds – the recommended duration for hand washing I picked up online. I disinfect all my groceries, and I worry. I don't

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<sup>12</sup> Stories like that are part of my own family folklore as well.

<sup>13</sup> Aside from the 13 dogs, there are at least three cats living in my apartment building. I also keep a 26-year-old turtle, and there are parrots in the building as well – dogs are just the easiest to count.

<sup>14</sup> The culture of keeping companion dogs in Serbia is specific in a number of ways, one of which is the „leash issue“. While, legally, it is prohibited to walk dogs off leash in the city, and in most public green spaces outside of designated dog parks, the regulations are viewed as more of a strong suggestion by owners. Dogs will be walked on a leash down the street, but will be let off in green spaces. This is also underscored by the fact that teaching your dog to walk off leash – meaning that it will be obedient enough not to chase after cats, fight other dogs or run into traffic – is, in a sense, considered to be the pinnacle of dog ownership-as-a-skill, both on part of the owners and the dogs themselves.

leave the house without a mask – in the early days I was lucky to have one – I'd ordered some reusable masks online because of the pollution problem in Belgrade, they came just before the pandemic. Around 8pm we all get antsy, my partner and I debate whether to wait a little or go out right away. As we had two dogs, we could both go out, or one of us could take them. My dogs usually walk off-leash, but we leash them when going out, because of the other dogs in the building some of whom they don't get along with, and because, even if there is no danger of traffic outside, everyone else is anxious. It's eerily quiet as there are no cars and no people, and even I can hear everything. The rustling of wind in the branches, the meowing of the feral cats that have gotten bold and taken over the street around the dumpster in front of my building, and the distant barking of dogs. Sometimes, the barking is so clear that my own dogs and others in the vicinity take up the chorus. And other times you can even hear the wolves howling from the zoo nearby. The dominant smells are also different: the neighborhood smells of the river, and the linden and acacia trees, instead of the usual smog and pollution. The whole experience is surreal. Dita and Ripley are usually tense when we go out, especially as they aren't used to walking in their own neighborhood on leashes. We walk down the street to the first patch of greenery, and encounter other dog-walkers. However, this patch is fenced off by a hedge and complicated to get to, and would entail getting muddy and letting them off leash in the dark, so we head to the next patch that is bigger, has a paved walkway, and more light. We round the corner, and *everyone is there*. On most nights there would be at least 10 people there, awkwardly trying to keep their distance *and* engage in small talk. Sometimes, the dogs would be barking and playing, other times there would be conflict. Depending on the dogs present, we would either stay for a while or move further down the street so Dita and Ripley could do their business. Afterwards, we'd walk home at a brisk pace, hoping we don't get caught more than 200m from our place of residence. The whole experience was always stressful for all of us. This occurred every night between March 18<sup>th</sup> and March 28<sup>th</sup>.

During this time there were rumors circulating of dog owners "congregating", and there was unease in the community. I even heard accusations of "organizing get-togethers" leveled against certain dog owners from the neighborhood by others from the community. Citizens were being policed by helicopters, drones and police cars, and there were theories that the government was spying on people using cell phones, so messages were spread on social media to "leave your phone at home when you take your dog for a walk". The lack of green spaces resulted in

absurd accusations of “public assembly” against dog walkers who were caught “congregating” in groups. The truth was, actually, a lot more benign – there are simply not enough public green spaces, and people always go where their dogs feel comfortable. The ill-thought-out time and space restrictions caused a bottleneck, so dogs and their humans were just in the same place at the same time. During the early days of the pandemic this was frightening for everyone – no one wanted to be exposed to the virus and the spontaneous forming of crowds of dog owners in public greens just raised the tension. Enough so that the residents of an apartment building adjacent to the only safe green space for dog owners in our neighborhood ended up fencing off most of it, leaving even less space for non-residents and their dogs.

Dog walking was conceived of as a privilege which could be revoked at any time. Eventually, this did happen, and on March 28th, the president himself banned the “walk at 8” by decree, leaving pets and their owners confined to their residences for 12 hours every day. The 12 hours itself wasn’t the problem – most dogs can easily go 12 hours without a walk during the night, the problem was that the curfew started at 5pm, and most dogs are used to an evening or late night walk before bedtime. The presidential pouting lasted for a week, to great public outcry both from Serbia and from abroad, and on April 3rd, The Ministry of Internal Affairs decreed that pet owners could walk their dogs from 11pm to 1am, for no longer than 20 minutes and no further than 200m from their place of residence. After that, “miraculously”, the crowds dissipated, and underlined the fundamental problem of city planning in downtown Belgrade: *there are not enough green spaces in the city*, and with rampant development, there are more and more people and more and more cars (also, more and more dogs), while the number of public greens remains the same or even declines.

Coupled with the fact that most people were confined to their residences (especially people over 65 years of age), the dog-walking controversy took different forms. An interlocutor told me about a man walking around outside with a goldfish in a bowl claiming to have to “walk it”, to spite the authorities. His actions were seen as dangerous and unfair by the dog walkers who actually needed to walk their pets. Another interlocutor owns two cats, one of whom regularly goes on walks outside on a leash. When she was seen by some dog walkers they approached her and derided her for walking a pet who doesn’t really need walks outside, and accused her of jeopardizing the whole cause with her actions. I have also heard of people being arrested and fined for walking their pets during curfew.

A video showing a man walking his dog in Knez Mihailova street during curfew and being severely beaten by police made the rounds online during the early days of lockdown. If people are willing to risk being beaten and arrested by police for their pets, and there is next to no public policy surrounding this issue, this is a huge problem, and animal lovers – both dog owners and others who stood in solidarity with them, are a political force to be reckoned with.

In a city (I would also argue, a country) with a huge dog owning population, public policy with regard to this issue is virtually non-existent. It boils down to a kind of “hope for the best” scenario, which was especially evident during lockdown. The fact that there had to be a public outcry and the social media campaign #setnjau8 for the authorities to even consider the wellbeing and health of pets is mind-boggling. The fact that the authorities actually listened is a testament to the sheer number of people who took part – a number that is still not officially investigated nor confirmed.

## WALKING WITH DOGS – A MUTUAL BECOMING

The movement patterns of dog walkers tend to converge due to the fact that the needs of the canines (both biological and social) are embedded into the architecture and planning of local neighborhoods. The dogs’ need to feel grass beneath their paws, as well as their need to socialize with conspecifics, recognized by owners, is the primary driving force behind this. However, there is more to dog-walking: it is not just a goal-oriented activity. The way humans walk in cities when accompanied by dogs is specific in many ways. For instance, I had only “gained a neighborhood” when I got my first dog, Dita. Before her, I had walked set routes – to the bus or tram station, or to work and back, and had little to no knowledge of the neighborhood and its residents. As Robins et al. (1991, 23) argue, “Dogs facilitate contact, confidence, conversation and confederation among previously unacquainted persons who might otherwise remain that way”.

This is one part of it. But, through walking together with my dogs, I too am changed, as are they. Donna Haraway (2008) speaks of *becoming with* other creatures. As Weaver (2013, 690) puts it: Haraway’s “becoming with” is “a dance of relating”, in which “all the dancers are redone through the patterns they enact”, processes of human/nonhuman animal encountering in which each becomes “jointly available” and through which each emerges changed. As both my dogs are very friendly towards people and most other canines, our daytime walks in the neighborhood tend to look like the “Bon jour” scene from Disney’s “Beauty and the Beast”: saying hello to neighbors and local shop attendants, as well as kids from the

neighborhood has become par for the course. As an anxious introvert, I have found the camaraderie and ease of contact with other humans that dogs afford to be very soothing and, in a way, therapeutic<sup>15</sup>.

When you walk with dogs in a city, you walk differently. You tend to be wary of corners, and you get to know, and avoid, the places where there might be something unsavory for them to eat. If you're lucky (and I am) you also become friendly with the feral cats of your neighborhood and watch them interact with your dogs in a delight of interspecies coexistence. You choose routes where there's more greenery, and in the summer, you choose routes with more shade so their paws don't suffer from the hot concrete. One of my favorite things about keeping companion dogs is in the winter, when it's snowing and late at night, when I take my dogs for a walk, the only visible footprints in the virgin snow are human ones, accompanied by little paw prints. Keeping companion dogs also lets us experience the city at different times of day and, as a woman, walking outside at night, I am calmer and safer<sup>16</sup> when I am accompanied by my dogs. *Sensu* Haraway, we, in a very literal sense, become something *else*, something other than a lone woman, a dog, or even a pair of dogs, we aren't even "a woman with a dog" anymore, we *become pack*. At night, in the quiet and poorly lit streets, we are potentially *dangerous* in a way none of us would be without each other<sup>17</sup>.

I would also argue, following Ingold to an extent, that there is a special kind of "dog-stride" humans adopt when walking with dogs. It's a leisurely pace of walking that leaves space for dogs to walk abreast with us, but that also leaves them ample time to sniff around – and, when walking off leash – run, play and mark their territory. It is, I would argue, a meditative way of walking, and one that allows us to take in our surroundings much better than the hasty way humans usually move through cities, getting from point A to point B. Dogs allow us to walk for the joy of walking, without having to get to a certain place, and they allow us to enjoy public spaces in cities without having to spend money.

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<sup>15</sup> This is also true about non-friendly encounters. Be it with other dog owners, or people who dislike dogs, even unfriendly encounters have helped me become more assertive and influenced my perspective on the ways in which I – and my dogs – *take up space* in the city.

<sup>16</sup> Before I got Ripley, my second dog, I had a frightening experience with a strange man while walking Dita late one night. However, thanks to Dita, I feel that the experience ended up being much more frightening for him.

<sup>17</sup> I have seen this phenomenon referred to as "scary dog privilege" by women on social media.

## CONCLUSION

Whether we acknowledge it or not, the city is a multispecies space, inhabited by all sorts of other living beings, some of whom we choose to live by our side. If we expand the theoretical frameworks of urban anthropology (see for example Marjanić 2021) to include interspecies ethnographies, radical new insights about the way all of us inhabit cities may emerge. In an ideal case, this may open doors for new and better public policies regarding all animals in the city, not just the ones humans pick as companions – something which is long overdue, not just in Serbia but all over the world, especially with regard to manmade ecological collapse that plagues urban ecosystems as much as others<sup>18</sup>. Thus, in this study, the city emerges as a truly multispecies space, as the social patterns and walking routes of its residents who keep dogs are influenced if not completely determined by the human-animal social bond at play. The way dog walkers use and inhabit public space in cities is influenced by what Donna Haraway termed “becoming with”: through interacting with each other, both humans and their canine companions are changed, and a facet of this is visible (if not measurable) through the ways they inhabit public space in cities. The COVID-19 lockdown of 2020 served to highlight this.

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<sup>18</sup> For more on these issues see, for example: Marjetka Golež Kaučič, 2020 <https://vsakdanjik.zrc-sazu.si/o-zivalih-pa-niti-besede/>; Marjanić 2022; Đurđević i Marjanić 2022; Zaradija Kiš 2022.

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