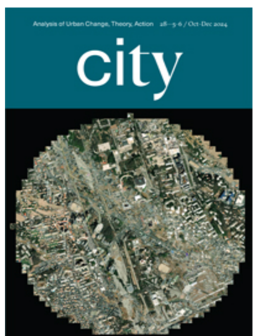

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Adam Eldridge & Maja Jović

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‘They’re not dog friendly because they’re not anyone friendly’: living with dogs in two densifying London neighbourhoods

Adam Eldridge and Maja Jović

Since the late 1990s, policy makers in the UK have promoted building higher density housing. Notably absent from this policy are the companion animals with whom we share our homes and public spaces. Their absence is all the more surprising given that dog companionship is often associated with the same outcomes as championed by the density and compact city agendas—social cohesion, community well-being, and active lifestyles. Based on research conducted in two London neighbourhoods, this paper explores how people experience urban density when with a dog, the challenges and opportunities they encounter, and how they negotiate their way through an often confusing and unspoken web of rules, laws and norms. The research builds on work which examines human-dog relations, arguing that the lack of clarity around where dogs are and are not welcome is reflective of the ways dogs are ambiguously positioned in relation to discourses of density and urban living. The ways urbanism is promoted in the UK is not politically neutral, nor are the ways some dogs are included or excluded from this imagining. We argue that the absence of

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clarity about dogs is constitutive of shifting and often confusing discourses about animals, urbanism, and densification.

Introduction

Since the late 1990s, densification has been a feature of sustainability, regeneration, housing, and planning discourses in the United Kingdom (Urban Task Force 1999; Lees 2003; Colomb 2007; Bunce et al. 2020). Policies and guidance at a local, regional and national level have promoted a range of initiatives including developing medium to high-density housing (ODPM Sustainable Communities Plan, PPG3; DETR 2000; Imrie and Raco 2003; CABE 2004), in-fill developments, soft-densification (Dunning, Hickman, and While 2020), and active travel as part of the ‘compact city’ or ‘return to the city’ agendas. Notably absent from these policies are the companion animals with whom we share our homes and public spaces. The estimated number of dogs living in the United Kingdom varies between 10.2 million (PDSA 2022) and 13.5 million (UK Pet Food 2024a). In London it is estimated that 46% of all households include a dog, making it the region with the highest proportion of dog ownership in the UK (UK Pet Food 2024b). Given this figure, and dog companionship is often understood to result in the same outcomes as championed in the density and compact city policies—social cohesion, community well-being, and active lifestyles (Bauman et al. 2001; Graham and Glover 2014; Tissot 2011; Wood et al. 2007)—their absence from such policies is notable.

There is an established body of work on dogs in public spaces, especially parks (Robins, Sanders, and Cahill 1991; Weston et al. 2014; Grier and Perry 2018; Włodarczyk 2021), but it is the experiences of dogs and their human companions in dense and densifying areas in London with which this paper is concerned. The argument developed below draws in particular on the work of Pearson (2021) and Instone and Sweeney (2014) in exploring how cities and human-dog relations are co-constituted, and the types of urban cultures being activated through human-dog relations. More broadly, while the argument recognises how dogs are privileged within discourses of urban sociability, and that these discourses are patterned around existing forms of inclusion and exclusion, we are primarily focusing on the ways dogs are ambiguously framed within recent drives to increase and represent urban density. Moreover, the paper seeks to consider how we may think about sharing space with dogs in ways that de-centres the tendency to see them as an addition or as something to be accommodated within already existing urban spaces. Motivated by work around multispecies urbanism, we seek to explain how dogs are co-constitutive of the urban and what this means then in specific spaces such as shops, lifts, public transport, and on pavements. The findings challenge the argument that dogs are ‘good’ in and of themselves and instead argues they mean and do different things in different contexts, which can reproduce existing patterns of inequality and struggles over space. In sum, in seeking to depart from policies which seem to simply ‘add dogs and stir’, the argument explores the consequences of ambiguous urban policies and discourses.

The paper begins by explaining the methods and research aims. A review of existing literature on both density and human-dog relations is introduced before turning to findings from the two areas. The discussion explores in particular points of confusion and gaps within current transport, planning, and housing policy and how humans with dogs negotiate this. Rather than suggesting there is a policy vacuum about dogs in urban areas, we argue there is instead a complex and at times opaque web of personal, quasi-legal, and non-spoken regulations, norms, and preferences akin to the concept of 'legal consciousness' operating (Chua and Engel 2019). In conclusion, the paper argues that while policy does need clarification and coherence, this will not address a more fundamental question about the ambiguous ways dogs motivate and are entwined within historic and emerging debates concerning human-animal relations, sociability, and densifying urban spaces. Rather than this being a weakness of policy, we instead suggest the ambiguity the interviewees discussed is indicative of where generative tensions are being played out, and are an inevitable feature of managing complex and diverse spaces.

Research aims and context

This research was in part motivated by the ways discourses of densification and regeneration ignored non-human animals. Both authors also had a personal interest in the subject: one lived in a block of flats where dogs were forbidden and the other overlooked a small green space popular with dog owners which was redeveloped into a block of flats. Based on observation and interviews in Clerkenwell in central London and Tottenham Hale / Seven Sisters to the northeast, we wanted to explore how living with a dog shaped everyday life in these neighbourhoods. More specifically, the research explored how people negotiated and experienced pavements, shops, and local infrastructure such as public transport when with a dog, and, second, what impact if any local, regional and national policy played in this. The research commenced in Clerkenwell, a central London neighbourhood that overlaps the boroughs of Camden and Islington. The ward of Clerkenwell has a population of 10,956 and a density of 11,760 per sq km (ONS 2023b), which is over double the density of Greater London with its 5,596 people per sq km. The area where the interviews were conducted also lies between two areas identified in the London Plan (GLA 2021) for further incremental growth: Holborn to the west and Smithfield / Farringdon to the east. Camden, in which part of Clerkenwell is located, has 64 registered parks but only five of these have dog exercise areas and dogs are restricted from accessing all sports, children's and games areas as well as four specific squares and gardens in the borough (Camden 2005). Islington has 11 main parks that are accessible and a number of squares, some of which remain unlocked at night and are therefore open to dogs, but it also has an extensive list of green spaces where dogs are excluded as part of its Public Space Protection Orders powers (Islington 2023).

The second neighbourhood where research was conducted was made up of two wards in Haringey Borough: Tottenham Hale and Seven Sisters. Haringey has a population of 264,200 and a population density of 8,930 per sq km (ONS

2023a). Seven Sisters with its population of 17,744 (ONS 2018) has a higher than average population density at 13,505 residents per sq km (ONS 2023b). Tottenham Hale to the north, has a population of 19,147 residents with a density of 11,823 per sq km (ONS 2023b). Located on the fringe of inner London, Tottenham Hale in particular has recently experienced considerable redevelopment on brownfield sites with further growth tipped to replace big box stores in the near future. Tottenham Hale is also marked as an Opportunity Area for high residential growth and Tottenham and North Tottenham have been identified as two of 30 London's Housing Zones. Haringey council's *People Need Parks* 2022 report estimated there are around 10,000 households in Haringey with one or more dogs, and dog ownership has increased by 16% since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As well as providing an opportunity to compare an historically dense neighbourhood with one undergoing densification and regeneration, Tottenham Hale has access to green space on one side and, further south-west, the active and already developed Seven Sisters. This allowed us to further compare whether the presence of green space alone would influence the experience of living in a densifying urban neighbourhood with a dog or whether other aspects of urban densification such as sharing busy pavements, services, and other infrastructure such as transport were also meaningful and in what ways.

Fourteen in-depth interviews, go-along and online, were conducted in the two neighbourhoods initially in 2018-2019, then, after the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, in 2021. Moran et al. (2022) see go-along interviews as a way to gather rich data while building a rapport with interview subjects. It is a method that helps to overcome some of the power imbalances that happen in traditional interviews, as well as providing an opportunity to experience firsthand how interviewees engage with other people and spaces. By accompanying interviewees on their morning or afternoon walk with their dog, we were able to identify any specific sites they avoided or were drawn to, interactions with others, and to discuss any signs referring to dogs as we went along. Observation was later conducted in the parks and green spaces they went to in order to assess how well they were used by other humans and dogs, and other users. Though some of these green spaces were forbidden to dogs, they were important local dog exercise areas and served as useful sites to conduct further informal discussions with dog walkers.

In total, seven interviews were conducted in Clerkenwell and seven in Tottenham Hale and Seven Sisters. We initially used the snowball method after contacting a local Tenants Advisory Group in Clerkenwell. Once exhausted, we turned to the social media platform 'Nextdoor.com' where further interviewees were recruited. There was no explicit criteria for the interviewees beyond being over 18, living in the designated area, and having at least one dog that lived with them. All bar one of the interviewees lived in a flat and this one interviewee was also the only person who had direct access to a private garden and their own car. Depending on our interviewees level of comfort due to the pandemic, we met in person at a designated spot and joined them on their dog walk, or we met online. The interviews were typically 45–60 min with one lasting almost 90 min. The interviewees below have been identified only by their location and a substitute name.

Density and dogs

Much has been written in recent years exploring human-dog relations at a variety of scales; suburban, urban and rural (Graham and Glover 2014; Instone and Sweeney 2014; Koohsari et al. 2020; Pearson 2021). There is also a body of work on planning and dogs (Carter 2016; Metzger 2015), dogs in gentrifying neighbourhoods (Hubbard and Brooks 2021; Grier and Perry 2018) and dogs and public transport (Kent et al. 2021). There is a further body of work which examines municipal laws and how they shape the lives of dogs and their human companions in urban environments (Mouton and Rock 2021; Valverde 2005). This paper draws on this literature and engages with similar themes about community, conflict, and sociability. Its primary focus, however, is less on suburban or designated green spaces than streets, pavements, public services, retail, leisure, commercial, and public spaces. Secondly, though the legal framework through which dogs are managed is essential for understanding how they become 'legal entities' (Mouton and Rock 2021, 654) the focus here is less on what those laws actually are than the ways they are understood, applied, ignored or even acknowledged. That is, the socio-legal context is important for understanding how dogs become 'legible' (Mouton and Rock 2021). In the contexts discussed below, they are legible in legal terms such as being owned entities, with certain rights, and needing to be managed according to specific laws around safety, but they are also family members, potentially threatening in some contexts, used to promote housing schemes in other contexts, and are representative of the effects and exclusions resulting from gentrification. As Instone (2011) suggests, laws which affect animals are often understood as about welfare or rights but can include a much wider range of powers from housing to planning. Conceiving the socio-legal context as an 'assemblage' (2011, 78), Instone's analysis allows for a consideration of the ways bodies and spaces become constituted in a much less deterministic and much more complex way that pulls across a range of different powers and tiers of governance. Indeed, a finding which to some degree echoes the work of Valverde (2005), other factors such as existing norms around dog companionship, interactions with other people, the design of the local area including its pavements and green spaces, the presence of specific plants and other animals, insurance policies, and the provision or otherwise of accessible spaces are just some of the multiple other 'actors' that constitute the ways local areas are lived and the wider dog ecology. What this paper is specifically concerned with is the experience of that context in dense and densifying areas; sharing limited space with others, not having private gardens, using public transport, and the challenges or opportunities dog owners experienced.

What is in part driving some of the themes explored here are policies which are seeking to increase density in British cities. The urban renaissance, as a term at least, has fallen out of favour but the principles underpinning it such as urban regeneration, higher densities, mixed-uses, building on 'left-over' and brownfield sites, and better access to public transport and leisure spaces continue to inform urban policy (Dempsey, Brown, and Bramley 2012; Colomb 2007; GLA 2021). Since the agenda setting The Urban Task Force's (1999) first report encouraging an urban renaissance, there has been a notable increase in medium-high density housing across the UK (Smith 2013). In London, the highest population density

as of the 2021 Census was in Tower Hamlets at 16,200 people per square km. This is higher than the central London average of 10,963 per square km (Trust for London 2022), but similar trends of population growth and densification can be seen across much of the capital. At the time of writing, Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, called to increase density in London (Frank-Keyes 2023) while the Prime Minister promised to build more housing in cities rather than building on the countryside (Allegretti 2023).

Density remains a broad and much-debated term (Chen et al. 2020; Dembski et al. 2020) and is articulated with all sorts of aesthetic, environmental, and urban aspirations (McFarlane 2020). Recognising this, the question underpinning this research is not so much about identifying a tipping point, or an exact measurement of what constitutes density, but rather to consider to what extent it poses challenges and opportunities that differ to the suburban or open green spaces on which much of the human-dog literature is based. Secondly, the paper asks how density, as a process and experience rather than something that can be precisely measured, is lived and understood when with a dog. Following Bunce et al. (2020) and their use of Churchman (1999), density can be understood both quantitatively and qualitatively, as well as contextually, culturally, and according to different circumstances. As they argue,

> … similar approaches to densification have emerged in urban planning in more recent times, and in a market-led system, where planning processes are discretionary, such as those applied in London, the contextual understandings of density, coupled with myriad understandings of how the concept is understood, can be variegated across interpretations of density in the city’s 32 boroughs … (Bunce et al. 2020, 177).

It is not therefore a question of what exactly constitutes density (Ellis 2004) that motivates this discussion but how ‘densification’ is experienced when with a dog, how human-dog relations are experienced in spaces such as lifts, narrow pavements, limited green and other public spaces, and how humans when with dogs generally ‘rub along’ with other people (Watson 2016).

Pearson serves as a guide here for thinking about dogs, urbanism, modernity, and urban change. In the late 19th century there was considerable growth in the number of domesticated dogs in London, Paris and New York and these three metropolises were instrumental in developing and sharing policies that were designed to manage them—and their owners. As Pearson suggests, dogs were central to the ‘emerging urban modernity’ (2021, 9) of the time and its anxieties and aspirations around new patterns of consumerism, debates about cosmopolitanism, ordering the clean from the chaotic, and public health projects. The fears and aspirations around dogs in the 19th century continue to inform dog-human relations in London today. Debates about dogs and public fouling or barking remain, for example, as do shifting ideas around nuisance (Valverde 2011), but dogs are also now swept up into contemporary debates and tensions about gentrification and the middle-classification of central London. Similar themes to the 1900s about health and safety remain, but how might recent discourses about dogs and the lives they lead generate and reflect emerging ideas about urbanism, consumerism, and densification? The regeneration and densification discourse is important for answering this question but ambiguous.

Figure 1: Billboard covering a new London development construction site, showcasing contemporary city living that includes dogs. Authors' own, 2024.

This ambiguity is illustrated in the ways contemporary urban regeneration policies and promotional literature often draws on an imagined urban / rural idyll (Hoskins and Tallon 2004) whereby nature, urbanism, sociability, density and aspirational developments are articulated. Evidence of this is demonstrated in the ways dogs are used to promote a naturalised and friendly image of the city and increasingly feature in marketing for new housing schemes and architectural place-making renderings. Billboards which cover developments under construction commonly feature images of strolling couples, icons of Britishness such as Minis, young people on scooters and bikes, outdoor cafes, and often a Jack Russel or similar such breed (see Figure 1). 'Pet friendly' signs displayed outside leisure spaces [see Figure 2], or recent rental schemes that

Figure 2: An ambiguous 'pet friendly' sign outside a hospitality venue in London. Authors' own, 2023.

promote themselves as being pet-friendly are further evidence of this context where dogs are associated with a naturalised, aspirational and welcoming representation of urban life.

What we see here is similar to the conditions described by Pearson (2021), whereby dogs are instrumental to urban imaginings, fears, and modernity, but in light of more recent guidance and policies promoting urban densification, they have also become associated with belonging and the natural, sociable, and aspirational city that is also dense and urban rather than the typical suburban home with a back garden. This is not a neutral rendering of the village or 'urban as a village', but one that is situated within broader debates and aspirations around densification, gentrification, and aesthetics of high social capital (Colomb 2007). This is not simply about dogs in cities, in other words, but a very particular city where urbanity, density, belonging, and sociability in cafes, flats, and public spaces are articulated with dog companionship.

Returning to the point from which this paper emerges, however, other than in some marketing contexts, dogs are almost entirely absent from the actual policies concerned with urban development, densification or regeneration. The original *Towards An Urban Renaissance* (1999) did not mention companion animals at all, nor have any of the earlier London Plans (GLA 2017; GLA 2016), or the updated *National Planning Policy Framework* (HCLG 2021). The current London Plan refers to animals only in terms of biodiversity and green corridors (GLA 2021, 498, 506) and while there is extensive reference to green spaces, including pocket and small open spaces, these do not include any reference to companion animals; dogs or otherwise. Local policies, where they do mention dogs, are almost entirely about management and control. There are currently around 20 pieces of legislation that affect dogs in Britain and additional local authority policies that regulate the day-to-day lives of dogs and their companions. *Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, sections 106 and 107* amends the *Dangerous Dog Act 1991* and regulates dogs 'dangerously out of control'. The *Environmental Protection Act 1990* classes dog barking as a 'statutory nuisance', while the *Environmental Protection Act (1990), Litter (Animal Droppings) Order 1991; Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, and The Countryside Code* all refer to dog fouling. In lieu of a blanket law regarding dogs on a lead, there are a series of orders, including the *Highway Code*; *Road Traffic Act 1988, section 27*, and local authorities' Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO) in certain public spaces. Particularly illustrative of the main problem we are focusing on in this paper is the fact there is no law or any health and safety regulation that bans dogs from premises where food and drink are served or sold., Dogs should not enter areas where food is prepared, handled and stored only in the same terms as the general public, who might also lack proper training or clothing (*Food Hygiene Regulations 2013, under EU Regulation (EC) 852/2004, Annex II*). Beyond this, it is up to the owner or the manager of the establishment to decide whether or not they will allow dogs on the premises, which our findings will show is most often where the confusion and misunderstandings on both sides happens—both for the users and the providers of services. A final point to make about the legal context is that dog licencing was scrapped in 1987. Microchipping has been law since 2022, and largely so owners and / or keepers can be traced if a dog causes damage or is lost. However, though an owner / keeper can be fined

£500 for failing to chip their dog, vets are not required to report a dog that is not chipped.

The point we want to emphasise in this paper is that this legal context needs to be understood in light of increasing densification of British cities. If laws are not clear, as suggested here, what happens when those laws, policies, or assumed guidance come up against increasing density and a tightening of expectations and 'entitlements' around public space due to gentrification and 'regeneration'? From the United States, Urbanik and Morgan suggest that 'planners have begun to incorporate nonhumans into land use decisions—especially with regards to canines' (2013, 294). Jackson (1995, 2010) has developed guidelines for Australian planners and architects that proposes ways pets can be accommodated at the private, local and public level, focusing specifically on the needs of pet owners living in medium to higher densities. *Pets in the City* (PCIAS 2010), prepared by the Australian Petcare Information and Advisory Service, is similarly focused on those crossover benefits of dogs and densification such as encouraging exercise and tackling social isolation. The considerable economic influence of pet owners, and the extent to which dogs and their human companions are entwined within new urban experiences and environments in Australia has also been recognised (Instone and Sweeney 2014). The breadth of work on pet stores, dog runs (Tissot 2011), pet grooming salons and dog friendly cafes, the conflicts that may ensue in urban areas, and more recent work around companion species and COVID-19 (King 2022a), or dogs and gentrification, all point towards a rich and broad understanding of the ways dogs and human relations constitute and are constituted through the urban environment. Increasingly, literature frames leisure—whether in urban or non-urban environments—as a multispecies activity and highlights the importance of acknowledging the shared physical, as well as cultural, social and political spaces between humans and non-humans (Danby, Dashper, and Finkel 2019; Houston et al. 2018). Dog walking is seen as a sensory or meditative activity that encourages paying attention to the world (Žakula 2023), which subsequently makes humans more sensitive to non-companion species. Willis (2024) argues that the empathy and responsibility of dog companions is extended from dogs to other, non-canine creatures encountered during walks and coexistence with others. This is particularly pertinent for the focus of our paper where we interrogate practices of sharing space in urban areas that are densifying in terms of people and the built environment, but also in the context of the rise of dog ownership (particularly during COVID-19) and greater pressure on urban space and infrastructure. Dogs are in effect 'there' within the literature and the aspirational lifestyles promoted via the densification and urbanisation imagery, but they are just not accounted for in actual UK policy about housing, densification, or sustainability. In summary, over recent decades we have witnessed urban centres in the UK being promoted through such terms as sociability, sustainability and an 'intuitive' and 'expressive' (Franklin and Tait 2002, 256) sense of the urban village. Policies which promote higher densities similarly draw upon a re-imagining of regenerated urban centres which articulate social and environmental sustainability and social cohesion with density and more compact cities. The overlaps between the discourses of densification, sociability, and more recently 'wellbeing' are evident in similar work about dogs as social lubricants that aid conviviality, neighbourliness and

community and these two discourses often overlap in promoting new high density developments. Actual animals, even domesticated ones such as dogs, are nonetheless an absent-presence in housing and planning policy. It is this absence to which the research discussed below responds.

Findings

The first point to note is that the absence of clear guidance for dogs and their human companions in the two areas did not mean an absence of any guidance at all, or indeed other norms, regulations, spoken and unspoken rules, or individual or relational forms of governance. The point we emphasise throughout is that for the respondents, the guidance was instead understood more as a patchwork of shifting and context-specific 'influences' shaping their access and experience. Comparable to the notion of legal consciousness, what policies and guidance did exist were found to sometimes be misunderstood and individuals were typically left to negotiate their own understanding of what spaces or services were dog friendly. As characterised by Chua and Engel,

> 'the relevance or irrelevance of law to a person's experience connects to the process by which that person's identity—or sense of self—takes shape, making legal norms and institutions appear naturally suited in some instances and inappropriate in others' (2019, np).

For example, 'No Dogs' signs were commonly seen on housing estates and in windows of shops and other facilities but who put them there, under whose authority, and whether they were observed or even believed to be actual laws was unclear and negotiated individually. Occupying and accessing public and semi-public spaces (such as shops, cafes and bars) were equally found to be as much dependent on the confidence of the owner in declaring their 'rights', whether these were actual rights or not, as to who happened to be working that day in a local shop or cafe. We will show that using public space in Clerkenwell and Tottenham Hale and Seven Sisters was negotiated within a vague and at times confusing context that was in some ways patterned around class but was also too unpredictable to conceive only in terms of identity. The findings presented below start with this before introducing other key points to have emerged from the interviews and observation.

Lack of guidance and regulation

Public space was the primary area of interest but housing was remarked upon several times by people living in property managed by local councils, in rented flats, and in shared ownership. The Pet Advisory Committee, which comprises various animal welfare charities including the RSPCA and veterinary groups, have lobbied housing authorities to allow pets in social housing but to what effect is unknown. Their 'Guidelines on Pet Management for Housing Providers' (2007) is based on a 2004 survey of 1,100 housing directors and officers from local authorities and housing associations across the UK. The guidance includes a small section regarding dogs in flats, however, it only covers issues such as

developing sanitary areas on housing estates and discouraging dogs who have trouble with stairs from living on higher floors. In terms of housing more generally, guidance differs according to tenure, the local authority, housing management, and whether a flat is owned or rented. Local Authority policies for both Haringey and Camden in relation to social housing are brief and limited to saying that one dog per household is allowed in Haringey and two in Camden before an additional permit needs to be sought.

Gordon, a resident of Clerkenwell, had been recently subject to an ASBO after allowing his dog into the lift without a collar. Gordon was particularly critical of management corporations who had taken over managing housing estates:

> Councils are supposed to be managed by the people who live there but they have their own ideas about things. I know of at least 3 estates in the area that bar dogs (Gordon, Clerkenwell).

For Perry, the difficulties he faced in the private sector were largely financial but they were indicative of how private renting, council tenancy, and private ownership might also be understood to differ:

> With a lot of new builds they say you're not allowed to have dogs because of noise and all that but … if you spend minimum £300,000 on a place in London, no one is going to stop you from doing that because you have bought (Perry, Seven Sisters).

Finally, Shelly, from Clerkenwell, had previously been declined by a rescue shelter from adopting a dog as she was living above the third floor. This was later overturned, and at the time of the interview, she was looking after a small rescue dog. Her daughter, however, was in temporary housing and unable to secure any stable tenancy at all due to having a dog.

The recent *Renters Reform White Paper* (DLUHC 2022) goes some way to addressing the restriction on pets in the private sector but does so by proposing pet insurance is taken out, and legislating only 'to ensure landlords do not unreasonably withhold consent when a tenant requests to have a pet in their home' (2022, 57). What 'unreasonably' might mean, or indeed what it means for Shelly or Gordon who are housed in the public sector is not clear, however. Their tenure is dependent on different management structures as well as regulations which, already, they did not believe to be fair, consistent, or transparent.

Equally, a lack of clarity between leasehold and freehold—and what this meant for dog owners—was missing and affecting those who owned their property:

> I think actually one of the biggest problems is the leasehold. You're essentially allowed to do anything, but they do have very pernickety wording, so we had to double, triple check (Mara, Tottenham Hale)

The lack of coordinated regulations can in part be explained by the argument that dogs in the UK are managed through a whole range of different tiers of government, as well as different groups operating in the public and private

sector. Equally, local councils and government do take an active interest in dogs, but this is almost entirely understood in terms of controlling, regulating, and prohibiting (see Gov.uk, n/d).

It is worth pausing on this to recite Valverde’s (2005; 2011) and Mouton and Rock’s (2021) review of municipal laws and the management of dogs. The policy context, laws, and regulations are part of a legal framework in which humans and dogs become legal subjects. However, the focus of our paper is not their specific powers and how they operate, but the ways they were interpreted and understood to be absent, vague, or applied haphazardly. As importantly, these laws operate alongside other norms, spoken and silent regulation and interpretations of that law or ‘guidance’. The first point to raise here is to justify why we therefore refer to legal consciousness rather than a specific socio-legal context. Legal consciousness considers the ordinary, the undercurrent of daily lives, and an ‘invisible life of law in society’ (Halliday and Morgan 2013). As legal consciousness focuses on the taken-for-granted, the concept is helpful in understanding what happens when the regulations around living with dogs in dense urban areas are unclear and left to be deciphered by different stakeholders, such as hospitality staff, transport workers, shop owners or dog walkers. Chua and Engel (2019) explain legal consciousness is not framed exclusively by legal awareness or the level of knowledge or ignorance of the law, but the individual negotiation of the law’s relevancy.

The second point to this, needless to say, is that individuals’ sense of their legal rights or those of others does not happen within a vacuum. There are patterns. However, these norms, existing tensions, and ideas of good citizenship are all ambiguous. We could argue that this is partly the point—ambiguity can be exploited and enable those with an already existing sense of their and their dogs rights to assert further control over space, other people, and the uses of public space. This ambiguity is therefore part of the ‘struggle’ in the sense it opens up conflict to occur, but it is not reducible only to socio-economic status or indeed identity. As Valverde argues ‘we cannot assume that techniques of governance are hard-wired to particular political rationalities’ (2011, 309). Identity and existing forms of power are important, in other words, but are not always predictable, and they do not always coincide in ways that could be predetermined. For example, all the respondents, if prompted, did comment on other dog owners and had a sense of ‘good citizenship’. They were especially critical of faeces being left on pavements and all bar one interviewee were strongly in favour of using leashes. However, this was the main ecological conflict identified in interviews. Where much of the tension occurred was instead in relation to ‘rules’ being unclear or applied haphazardly, particularly in specific spaces such as shops and services.

Public spaces and services

Public transport was singled out by the interviewees as a site for conflict and in need of clearer guidance. While there is clear guidance for assistance dogs on transport services managed by Transport for London (TFL), the interviewees in both areas had a range of experiences accessing these services. This was especially noted in Clerkenwell where, after a charitable veterinary service ceased operating in a nearby local park, residents had to catch a bus to Victoria

(approximately 30 min away) for their dog to be seen by a veterinarian. Gordon, in Clerkenwell, had been refused entry to buses on many occasions while Shelly had been told not long before our interview she could only board a bus with her dog if she went upstairs, despite being on crutches at the time. Buses were often difficult due to the common belief that access with a dog was dependent on the driver's discretion, despite the *Conditions of Carriage* (TFL 2022) stating:

> You can also take any other dog or inoffensive animal on these services, unless there is a good reason for us to refuse it (such as if the animal seems dangerous or not properly controlled). You must keep it under control on a lead or in a suitable container and must not allow it on a seat (TFL 2022)

Interviewees reported opposing experiences, negotiating whether they needed to move upstairs or downstairs, and some believing their gender affected the driver's decision. Some also reported conflict on the bus with other passengers based on presumed religious beliefs. Equally, catching the underground, where dogs are allowed as long as they can be carried (TFL 2022; M@ 2021), provided other challenges. Several interviewees spoke of the lack of lifts at their station and being unable to physically carry their dog up or down steps. This was also important for the dogs themselves, some of whom also had mobility constraints. The problems discussed here were by no means universal, however. Other interviewees spoke of their dogs being very welcome on public transport to the point where, in one case, an interviewee was alarmed when a stranger picked up and cuddled her dog while riding the tube.

Negotiation and, again, this sense of legal consciousness, was central to successfully accessing transport services. One interviewee had printed out the guidance for bus drivers and would read it out to them if access was denied. Private taxi services also came with similar challenges where 'the rules' had to at times be argued. Though recent initiatives have sought to better manage this (King 2022b), it was evident that accessing both public and private transport was not guaranteed and the only interviewee not to comment on transport difficulties had their own car. For everyone else, whether they had the means to use private hire services or were more reliant on public transport, moving around London was often dependent on who was working and their understanding of their own 'right' to use transport services.

More than parks

Parks were a significant source of discussion and though one interviewee had her own garden like everyone she also used local parks. Concerns were raised about locking gated squares at night which meant they were inaccessible for an evening walk, the presence of poisonous plants, and losing small 'brownfield' sites to in-fill developments. It was these in-between spaces, not specific parks, which came up repeatedly as essential spaces, especially for going to the toilet or a short walk. As noted earlier, much of the existing literature on dogs and cities focuses on open designated green spaces, but a finding which echoes Gaunet, Pari-Perrin, and Bernardi (2014) is that accessible streets, pavements and roads in-between are as integral to the lives and experiences of dogs and their human companions as purpose built green spaces (see also Koohsari et al. 2020). Using

small leftover spaces, or green areas on estates, and moving between these spaces were all integral to the ease of living, working, and socialising in the two areas when with a dog. More parks were certainly welcome, but it was the lost in-fill or leftover spaces (Wu and Bachmann 2021), alongside using other areas of socialisation such as cafes, pubs, bars, and supermarkets that were the most important in shaping how the interviewees in Clerkenwell and Tottenham Hale and Seven Sisters experienced their local environment. The lack of dog friendly cafes and pubs, for example, was widely commented upon as these sites were as much of a common activity when accompanying a dog as going to a designated park. Once again, individual managers or staff who happened to be working on the day determined what social spaces could be used. More middle class pubs and cafes were seen as much more accommodating, as were LGBTQ + venues, but affordability was central to whether such spaces were used at all. A cafe in Clerkenwell was praised by some interviewees as being dog friendly, but avoided by others due to the cost. Identity is therefore very important here and, as alluded to above, the visuals on marketing for new housing developments typically draw upon symbols of middle-class aspiration such as cafes and scooters. 'Cute' or 'toy' dogs afforded much greater access to all spaces than Staffies, for example, which are typically coded as working class. Finally, we heard multiple stories about inconsistent guidance, access thoroughly shaped by class, sexuality, and ethnicity, and a common theme about some 'cultures' being more dog- friendly than others: but the point we heard most often was that this was not guaranteed. As with transport and housing, shops and services were experienced in ways that suggested there were no uniform regulations or understanding of where dogs were welcome or tolerated. Lifts in residential buildings posed additional challenges, especially when they were used alongside people who were not as amenable to sharing small spaces with animals. A further recurrent theme was that when taking a dog out for a walk it was sometimes convenient to visit a local supermarket, or that everyday habits need to be changed and alternative arrangements sought for the dogs to be looked after at home while their humans shopped. Entering these spaces with a dog was dependent on who happened to be working on the day. A local supermarket in Clerkenwell had once allowed pets to wait by the tills, but a new manager had banned the practice. At the time the interviews were conducted in 2021, dog theft, especially breeds such as Staffies and French Bulldogs, was a cause of considerable alarm (Gov.uk 2021) and only one interviewee was prepared to tie her dog up outside when visiting a nearby supermarket. This was dependent on her personally knowing and trusting the security guard to keep watch of her pet.

These spaces, lifts, shops, public transport, parks, supermarkets, pubs, and bars, are bound up with wider representation of urbanism, conviviality and sociability, but they were subject to considerable informal regulations and interactions on the day.

The point we want to return to here is that rather than this disparity of experience being a result of absent policy, there was an almost unanimous sense that Britain's definition of what it means to be dog friendly was ambiguous. The common sight of dogs tied up in the wet and cold outside supermarkets while their human companions shopped inside was singled out as evidence of the widespread lack of dog-friendly spaces—even though they were welcome

in some spaces—and Britain's incoherent attitudes towards dogs. To be 'dog friendly', even in the spaces that welcomed dogs, did not preclude some dogs, or even the same dog, being subject to various unspoken rules or even excluded in the same spaces on a different day depending on who was working.

Discussion

What we arrive at here is not only about the need for clarity, or that access and to whom it is afforded needs to be more transparent; it is that the 'urban context' is subject to competing struggles and discourses. Most importantly, that ambiguity, which at times seemed to be purposefully designed to make some lives harder, was also at times unpredictable. As Valverde argues, there are a whole host of rules and regulations that are not applied and 'legal nonconforming uses are everywhere' (2011, 290). What this means for more vulnerable people is the misapplication of guidance and laws that then depend on individuals to negotiate. To draw this together, we want to first discuss one of the most revealing questions to which we received answers. The interviewees were asked if they would like designated dog areas, either like the purpose-built exercise runs found in some mainland European cities, or those which have been built in some parks in London (see Figure 3). The unanimous response was no. Objections to this were largely on the grounds that cities, all of its public and private areas, its infrastructure, services and leisure opportunities, should be accessible to dogs. That some people feared dogs was noted. It was also agreed that some owners were not 'responsible' in cleaning up after their dogs (see Westgarth et al. 2019). Nonetheless, distinguishing between 'dog' and 'human' spaces was rejected and in some cases seen as antithetical to the very idea of social inclusion. Notably, this question also touched on a more emotive discussion about dogs as more than just animals. Shifts in family structures (Power 2008; Franklin 2006) that result in dogs being understood as 'family' impacts not just on the management of the private home and domestic lives, therefore, but how the urban is also understood and lived. It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the domestic and how it relates to the public in sufficient depth, but, as noted, only one participant had access to a private garden. For all the others, their only engagement with the outdoors was in public spaces like cafes, parks, and on pavements. With increasing density occurring across both sites, and with existing tensions already playing out as alluded to above in public parks, it remains to be seen how public space will be further contested, and by whom.

In the interviews as well as wider literature it is evident that dogs are ambiguously positioned in relation to the myth of cities as nature or 'not nature', and this ambiguity is historically and culturally contingent. Hubbard and Brooks argue that a common myth is that cities are 'cultured spaces' from which nature has been 'expunged' (2021, 3). As seen above in terms of housing, transport infrastructure, and retail facilities, dogs were indeed only ever afforded guest status on the basis of them being well behaved in otherwise 'human' spaces. It would be easier if we could argue this was entirely about their breed or the person accompanying them but there was no clear sense in the research of

Figure 3: Small designated pet section in a densifying urban residential area's park. Authors' own, 2024.

dogs being entirely expunged or included. Dogs are 'animaled' and included and excluded in a range of ways. Valverde's understanding of nuisance is illustrated here: 'The content of nuisance is by definition indeterminate, since nuisances emerge only in relation to certain contexts and remain specific both to a certain kind of place and to a certain social community' (2011, 296). With dogs more generally, their position shifted in and out of different spheres including but not limited to the natural, marketable, urbanised, needing to be controlled, or generating new configurations of being in the city. We might for example point to how dogs act as conduits to nature such as going to parks—which is seen as sociable, healthy, and broadly part of the urban idyll discourse, or as conduits to wider appreciation of multispecies justice in urban environments—while also being symbols of nature, such as their faeces and barking. Equally, as discussed earlier, in Tottenham Hale dogs have become very much part of the marketing of new housing developments which feature other symbols of friendly urban villages such as market stalls and outdoor cafes, further muddying the ways the terms 'nature' and 'the urban' are understood through this visual language of densification, urbanism, gentrification, and urban 'renewal'. Equally, as we have outlined, some individual establishments promote themselves as being dog friendly and target a human-dog citizen that activates 'new urban cultures'

and 'new ways of being in public' (Instone and Sweeney 2014, 1) which are heavily coded in middle class terms. Multiple 'urbans' and multiple human-dog relations circulate, therefore, in ways that are patterned around class, but also, and in part due to their opacity and looseness, become reconfigured, struggled over, and in some cases fought for in ways that trouble an always fixed human-nature divide or fixed identity. When dogs become articulated in this way with friendly urbanity, belonging and density on the one hand, but excluded and non-human in other contexts, the outcome is perhaps not surprisingly this confusing sense of whose and what dog is included or excluded, how they are integrated or otherwise, and which patterns of exclusion such as around class remain stubborn or more flexible.

It remains the case that the urban privileges human agency over non-human animals but this has long been a tension in Western metropolises, as have tensions between municipal laws and their management and control of uses or people (Valverde 2005). It is out of this tension that the very idea of the city, who belongs, and how it shapes urban-human-animal relations is being played out. Returning to Pearson (2021), dogs are not a new addition to urban living and simply adding a new dog park ignores that they have long represented white middle-class 'struggles', imaginings and sensibilities of what urban life meant from the 19th century onwards. Our findings very much accord with Pearson's, especially the question some interviewees reflected on as to whether cities are even ideal spaces for dogs. But, motivating Pearson and our own research is not so much a question of how or where dogs should fit, or whether new policies are needed, or a new park specifically for dogs being opened here or there. Urban life in densifying areas is at a stage where planning discourses—that might not include dogs but use them as symbols of a new urbanity anyway—are being re-negotiated in quite powerful ways and the fuzziness enables existing tensions to thrive.

We argue this is particularly problematic when dogs' legal status is dependent on 'muddled' evidence. Haringey council's Parks and Green Spaces Policy Pack (2022) is particularly illustrative of this. The policy objective of section PGSS4, which concerns dogs, is stated to be encouraging 'responsible' dog ownership that allows owners and their dogs to enjoy parks and green spaces without infringing on the enjoyment and safety of others. In the preamble, the policy acknowledges dogs play a positive role in society and provide health benefits for their owners and families and add to the general sense of safety within parks. However, despite claiming the document does not 'seek to demonise dogs or dog ownership' (2022, 17), it goes on to claim some dogs represent actual or *perceived* risk, that a number of children and adults are uncomfortable in the presence of dogs of any size, and, as a multicultural and diverse borough, they recognise that some cultures find dogs as pets, and their very presence, unnerving or frightening. The policy is within the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) power given to local authorities under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Police Act (2014), and to control the behaviour of those in charge of dogs in public spaces is not unreasonable. As Mouton and Rock (2021) note, dogs reflect as well as contribute to existing tensions and Harringay is juggling different expectations of what and who public space is for here. Nearby housing developments are promoted using images of dogs, and local venues promote

themselves as 'dog friendly', but this sits in a complex relationship to public parks where there is a more overt attempt to control and manage dog access and where multiple needs are to be met. There are two points to be made here. Firstly, bringing this back to our own point, there is once again an ambiguity and a loosening and tightening of space and who it is for. 'Perceived risk' is a very ambiguous term and could be interpreted through 'security', which is typically made legible in classed and racialised terms (Jaffe 2024). Risk, security, and nuisance are terms that run throughout legislation concerned with dogs but these are not neutral terms and nor are the spaces being governed. It would also be naive to think that the local parks of Haringey were any less subject to controls and forms of governance with or without dogs.

Secondly, Harrigay's policy is trying to promote good citizenship by recognising the culturally specific needs of others. It is an aspiration and very much indicative of the ways dogs are made legible in sometimes competing and ambiguous ways—as symbols of community and belonging on the marketing billboards, but also as potential conduits of cultural tension. They are indicative of the 'struggle' that is constituted by competing claims, policies, and aspirations for space. The problem trying to be resolved here is that a 'perceived risk' challenges someone's right to feel comfortable, included, and to enjoy public space. This is not only about determining which spaces are suitable for which species but considering how dog-human relations and the tensions that emerge come to constitute the city in response to and in formation with this current policy backdrop that is already steeped in forms of exclusion. The extent to which recent dog-friendly developments are marketed in accordance with who is seen as desirable leads us to the question of how dogs 'belonging' is being negotiated without any clear outcome. In agreement with Shingne (2020), the animal turn has seen a re-evaluation of the binaries through which humans and non-humans are categorised and labelled. As also argued, many of these debates take place in cities where there are multiple human and non-human claims and uses of space. Though we have not specifically engaged with this or the more-than-human literature, the findings presented here do point towards similar questions about how non-human animals are categorised, the constitution of cities through human- and non-human animal entanglements, and the ways these are, in our case, being constituted through marketing, planning, and at times opaque and ambiguous laws which shape human-animal relations and mobilities.

A final question to reflect on is the somewhat chicken and egg one of whether dense and densifying areas are now attractive to potential residents because they allow provisions for dogs and are promoting themselves via this 'urbanism as dog friendly' way, or are areas forced to become dog friendly once there is enough critical mass to demand change, be it through strategic, conscious effort or through being—presumably but certainly not always—lucrative spenders. When it is the latter, it is worth reflecting what type of development this would bring in terms of symmetry and provision of services for humans and dogs alike. Similarly, when it comes to navigating the daily life in a city with 'fuzzy' and grey regulations, activities become guided by legal consciousness—people regulate themselves and others by how they think things should be done. Therefore, they rely on the presence of other people and dogs to create informal 'rules' and

interpret existing ones. This has two possible outcomes: on a positive note, this self-regulation can make a dense living environment more liveable and easier for co-existing. On the other hand, individual interpretations are easily marred with structural bias, influenced by a series of social, economic, and cultural factors and tensions leading to conflicts where resolutions are impossible and quality of life diminished. Already, as noted above, the density and urban idyll imaginary is not neutral but instead already pegged to considerable social and economic capital.

We arrive here at an argument about dogs and density that is pulling in different directions; clarify where they can or cannot go; recognise they have long been constitutive of urban environments; consider how recent policies around densification figures dogs, the urban, nature (and all three together) in new ways; the importance of recognising which dogs and with whom relates to existing patterns of identity and inclusion; and finally examine what is being generated out of all these tensions. In practical terms, much could and should be done to enable more dog-friendly environments. While it is essential that dogs are seen 'as worthy of needing, sharing, and utilizing public spaces' (Urbanik and Morgan 2013, 293) it is not simply a matter of adding dog runs or more green spaces, however. A walk to nearby green spaces is important, but as identified by our interviewees, it is often dictated by the provision of a range of things such as bins for waste (or lack thereof), perception of safety (street light), word-of-mouth recommendations where other walkers have spotted glass, etc. To this, we need to add more intangible implications ranging from not being able to plan a leisurely activity such as dropping into a cafe or taking a bus, as access is not guaranteed and is down to the dog, human or manager, to not being able to retain community links and remain in a neighbourhood due to access to dog-friendly housing. These are all important and desired, but to think that dogs can be better accommodated by simply adding more green spaces or clearer policies ignores the wider issues of how the urban in itself is being reimagined in ways that follow traditional patterns of exclusion around class, while also articulating dogs with the very urbanity and sociability through which they remain so ambiguously positioned. To suggest that the challenges the interviewees faced could be resolved by installing more green spaces obscures the more important point about the range of attitudes towards dogs living in dense urban environments, how those attitudes change, and how their absent-presence in current density and regeneration discourses leads to new and often confusing relations between humans and dogs and humans with dogs. As Mouton and Rock (2021) have identified, cities barely regulate humans, what do we make of them regulating animals? For them, digital technologies provide an insight into how legal-technological-bodies are regulated and come into being, but for us it is those layers of norms, sometimes spoken but often not, policies and hunches which are constituting a muddled sense of what it means to be a dog-friendly urban citizen.

The point to end on is that the interviewees did not want to make dogs subject to new laws, regulations or policies if it meant creating new rules that stipulated how and where they could go. Being subject to more administrative intervention might not be ideal if it renders all dogs and their human companions in ways that erases the lived experience of class in gentrifying

spaces, or assumes dogs are somehow a new addition to urban experiences and public life. Equally, when considering the discourses and binaries through which dogs and the urban are understood, it is important to consider how these discourses are also subject to change in response to new policies, experiences, and imaginaries of urban life. As the GLA in London and national government across the UK continue to pursue a policy of urban densification, recognition is needed as to the lived experiences of dogs and their human companions in response to such agendas. In densely built up areas where public space is already limited or eroded through punitive measures and where dogs do not have ready access to back gardens or balconies, dogs are being subject to competing and evolving discourses between different cultural and spatial makers which are themselves constitutive of both human-animal relations and what that means in relation to changing discourses of urbanism. An absence of guidance and the pretence that over 13.5 million dogs simply do not exist, is not meeting the goals of densification such as sociability and urban idylls, but is instead promoting conflict, confusion and resistance.

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ORCID

Adam Eldridge http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9262-8983

Maja Jović http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7217-4638

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Adam Eldridge is at the School of Social Sciences, University of Westminster. Email: a.eldridge@westminster.ac.uk

Maja Jović is at the School of Architecture and Cities, University of Westminster. Email: m.jovic2@westminster.ac.uk