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How the Camping cum Cane project benefits dog owners

Thomas Smith once said: "One man's freedom ends with the freedom of another man".

Some dog owners often expect too much understanding from their surroundings. The welfare of their dog is more important than the welfare of their loved ones. The consequences of such conviction are far reaching. Here are a few examples of certain cases which have happened in camp Slatina on the island of Cres during the year 2006. – in only a period of two weeks!

One owner never kept her hunting dog on a leash. After a few days the dog ran into sheep which were out to pasture and drove them into the sea. Some of the sheep were hurt on sharp rocks while running down in a panic. Put yourself in the shepherd's place. He has almost nothing except those sheep. And then, as he sees it, the rich guests of the camp come and damage the little that he has. – Attempts to explain to the dog owner that the accident could have been avoided by keeping the dog on a leash were without success. Two days later the dog was once again freely running around the camp, "visiting" other dogs, whether they liked it or not.

An old lady had trouble walking down a steep road to the beach. Suddenly, from one of the plots a mongrel dog came and started jumping on her. The owners, who were sitting next to the barbeque, shouted to the old woman: "Don't be afraid, he just wants to play!". However, the woman fell and was injured. We do not even want to mention how scared the old woman was. Another family let their rotweiler roam at night without a leash. The dog was passing other dogs which were in their boxes and were barking of course. When we warned the owner about this the next day, he said: "Yes, at night he is too hot and I cannot leave him in the tent". He immediately refused our suggestion to keep his dog on a leash. Another owner walking his German shepherd, who displayed attacking and aggressive behaviour towards other people was walking through the bush. The owner was not in a state to hold the dog which was dragging him forward strongly. The dog was literally pulling the owner after him. The owner whenever coming across anybody else had to find a post around which he had to tie the leash around a number of times. When warned about this, he answered: "This is why I always go out when there is nearly no one else around".

However, it is not only big dogs that cause problems. Many dog owners of small races of dogs give their dogs all kinds of privileges assuming because they are weaker dogs they

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cannot cause too much harm and that others must put up with constant barking. Shouts of “Come on Floki, will you finally calm down!” are only an alibi, empty phrases with no effect. These owners forget that certain rules apply among dogs. Growling, certain body stances, as well as barking – similarly with people too – “are considered a provocation” which some individuals will not tolerate. The fault for the reaction of a larger dog is not only his fault, rather the dog who provoking him and who has broken certain rules. A stance or fixed look may cause flight or offensive behaviour in another animal. As the owner of a dog you must recognise certain signals.

Following on from this, it is often that dogs both like and dislike each other. And they insist on their right, among other things, to be left at peace. Of course it is possible that a dog that is not on a leash approaches a dog on a leash with friendly intentions and maybe just to play with the other dog. If a fight ensues, the owner of the dog who was not on a leash will often shift the blame to the owner of the dog on a leash with the reasoning that their dog approached with friendly intentions.

He has, however, overlooked the fact that the other dog did not desire the contact and that he showed this with corresponding signals. However, today many dogs are not capable of interpreting signals being sent by other members of their species or acting accordingly. This is one of the fatal consequences wrongly understood by the training of puppies, personification of games for puppies and generally the unnatural way of keeping dogs. If in the early training phase and later phases dogs do not have an opportunity to learn to respect “critical distance”, later this will always cause problems. People who have dogs who run without control to unknown people and dogs, even with friendly intentions, should be tied up so as to avoid such conflicting situations.

It is important to promote natural behaviour wherever it is in the service of domestication, social integration, but also the safety of others. On the other hand one should take advantage of the capability of the adaptability of dogs to avoid dangerous and disturbing behaviour. Dogs can without a doubt, without losing out on quality of life, learn how not to attack people and other dogs; and hunting dogs do not have to pee on the tyres of other automobiles or on the neighbours tent.

Modern training of dogs offers an appropriate manner of know-how. However, where there is no understanding, often change cannot be expected. The majority of dog owners live in the belief that their dog is well behaved, not problematic and in no way dangerous. We are all familiar with the line: “My dog won’t harm anyone”. However, the reality is somewhat different. Danger cannot be excluded when dealing with dogs. Starting from the fact that the question of rules and obligations must be addressed. Therefore it is necessary to undertake

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all possible measures to avoid accidents. Primarily in the camp where people live one next another and where certain plots are not fenced in.

From a legal, but also moral standpoint, it is not right that dog owners give their dogs inappropriate freedoms and consciously enter into the risk that their dog will disturb, endanger or injure someone. In the end run the risks are great and may extend to lifelong disability and death. In this context, one needs not only point out the rights of man not to have damage incurred to him, but also the right not to be scared.

Even if a dog kept on a short leash only has conditional rights to the basic rights. Even when kept on a leash, a large amount of risk remains. In regard to that remaining risk, society is quite generous towards dog owners, even with the general obligation of keeping a dog on a leash. We should not forget this! If dog owners burden their surrounding with more than the remaining risk, they should not be surprised when the surroundings react in a touchy manner. Therefore it would not only be appropriate, but also wise to act in accordance with the right to the greatest possible safety (according to human judgement). And the greatest possible safety is offered only by a dog on a leash.

The belief that in certain situation dogs on a leash have a sad and miserable life, is nothing more than a fairy tale. Such arguments are often based only on one's own inability to train their dog and keep it in the desired manner. According to one set of research, it is primarily a case of such people who spend very little if any time with their dog in an interactive manner who categorically refuse to use a leash and this most often shown in the manner that they don't carry a leash with them. It is often the dogs of such owners who are often not satisfied and therefore look for that social deficit in other dogs and people.

And it is precisely here that we come upon another problem. Many dog owners force their dog upon other people and owners. Without prior consent from the other party, allowing their dog to freely rush at other dogs. This may end happily, but it may not. However this is not important. What is important is that no one has the right to impose themselves contrary to the will of another in any form of behaviour of their dog. No one has the right to force danger upon other people and dogs. Let us think about everything that can happen when we let our dog run freely among others. This dog may be old, sick or convalescing. Even sudden stopping as a reaction to a running, friendly dog can after an operation cause paralysis or egzitus. If it is a case of a timid dog, the imposed meeting may cause a recurrence and wipe out the results of many months of desensitisation. Often dogs without a leash often bother or attack female dogs on heat. This of course results in unwanted copulation which are especially problematic in pure bred dogs and which are partially connected with large financial losses.

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Here one should consider the principle of fault. It is indisputable that everyone is responsible for their own dog! He who releases their dog to run freely in places where there are other people and dogs, is irresponsibly ignoring the rights of others. What can be done in such situations? Someone who comes across a passers-by, jogger, bicyclist or other dog owner, should behave in the following manner:

Even from a distance the dog who is not tied should be held close, standing with it at the edge of the path, tie it up briefly and wait until the other dog passes by him. A person should hold off untying their dog until the other person we have come across has moved a sufficient distance. All this should be done even if we have with us the world obedience or sport champion as the other dog may not know that and may already have some bad experiences. Regardless of whether the jogger has the right or not to be scared of the dog. Therefore we must be understanding. You will see that the other party will often breathe a sign of relief and thank you. Often you will also receive praises like "My how your dog listens to you". This simple way of behaving may greatly contribute to the acceptance of dog owners in society. And your dog in a few weeks will learn that in the event of someone passing by to come to you and sit.

As far as meetings between dogs are concerned, the advice is as follows: when coming across another dog owner, you should ask, before the meeting of the dogs occurs, if they share you desire for the dogs to meet and do they expect any problems. To be sure, both dogs will remain in a leash during the initial meeting. Certain signals in their behaviour will show whether the meeting, most probably (!), go off without any problems or not (if your dog on a leash becomes violent, this is not an excuse, rather you should correct this type of behaviours as quickly as possible).

Let us summarise once again: from all standpoints, moral and legal, and even ethological standpoint, it is irresponsible to assume the right of allowing your dog walk around all the time without a leash and impose themselves on other people and dogs. Respecting the rights of others, as well as the decision to hold the dog in a manner in which it does not pose a danger to others, supports the idea of occasional tying a dog on a leash. Therefore we are not speaking of "forced tying of a dog on a leash", rather about the "obligation of tying your dog" which is based on the basic rights and which should in itself be understandable and voluntary.

Dogs should therefore in all places occasionally be tied. The exception is official, fenced off fields for dogs where dogs can run freely – A pessimistic outlook for dogs and their owners? Of course not! On the other hand there are always new opportunities for dogs to be set free to run on a suitable terrain, however under the conditions that the owner is ready to call his

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dog over and tie it up upon meeting others. Aside from this there are also retractable leashes giving freedom of movement of up to 5 to 8 metres. There is also the possibility of riding a bike with a dog (an extension for running alongside a bike), to go jogging with him on a not too tight leash, to ride cart or sleigh for dogs (Sacco) and that, last but not least, on sport terrains for dogs a sufficient amount of running and moving is enabled.

The temporary keeping of a dog on a short leash (up to 1.5 m) and retractable leash (maximum 8 to 10 m) is something that not only can be required from a dog, rather there exists great social benefit, under the conditions that the owner has trained his dog to happily and with motivation follow him! Therefore, three things are important:

- Train your dog properly, beginning in the period of when it is a puppy
- Work with your dog in an appropriate manner and in an appropriate measure
- Respect the basic rights of other people and dogs.

The main reason why dog owners keep repeatedly provoking interest conflicts is arrogant audacity which imposes danger and uncomfortable situations for other people and dogs. A prerequisite for acceptable coexistence with society, requires that dog owners adapt their behaviour towards society in an acceptable way.

Prof. Ekard Lind, Graz, March 2007

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