



Dog Walking and Young People's Sense of Place

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Abstract

Dogs have long been recognised as one of humanity's closest animal companions, with a history spanning thousands of years. Historically, human-dog relationships were primarily instrumental, shaped by human needs and priorities. In recent decades, however, everyday practices and scholarly perspectives have increasingly acknowledged dogs as sentient and agentic beings. Within the more-than-human paradigm, such relationships are understood as co-constitutive, with non-human actors actively contributing to human spatial practices, everyday life, and sense of place. This reconceptualization invites closer examination of how human-animal interactions influence the formation of place attachments and sense of place.

This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of young people, who, during adolescence, intensively engage with urban and neighbourhood spaces as they explore and express their identities, while simultaneously developing foundational place attachments and agency. Daily practices such as dog walking may play a key role in these processes, offering opportunities for interaction, negotiation of autonomy, and shared experiences of place.

This presentation reports on a scoping review conducted in line with PRISMA guidelines. The review identified 17 eligible publications, mapping 1,164 studies, that focused on youth-dog relations. Findings reveal four recurrent relational patterns: dogs as companions, motivators of mobility, catalysts of social interaction, and sources of safety. Across these themes, the analysis demonstrates that everyday practices with dogs shape young people's micro-geographies, increase autonomous mobility, and strengthen affective place attachment. The review also highlights a notable absence of explicitly place-focused theoretical framing in existing studies, pointing to a substantial conceptual and methodological gap.

Keywords: sense of place, more-than-human, dogs, young people, relationship