

AN INTERCULTURAL PHENOMENON: PET DOGS IN GERMANY AND THE BENEFITS OF THIS HOBBY

Elena VELESCU¹

e-mail: elena.velescu@uaiasi.ro

Abstract

Over 10 million Germans have a dog as a pet. Sometimes it represents the best friend and it often may be an alternative for children or a partner. In the last few years, there has been a tendency to consider animals close to man, a good reason for specialised companies to take advantage of this hobby and significantly increase their sales in this field. The historian Wolfgang Wippermann, in his book *Die Deutschen und ihre Hunde (The Germans and their dogs)* noticed the incarnation of the dogs into human beings having the needs and the characteristics close to their owners. There are persons who turn their dog into an object of veneration. For over a decade there have been magazines and special shops for dog owners as well as websites, like facebook for dogs where more than 15 000 quadrupeds are signed in (www.stadthunde.com). Cosmetics for dogs, such as toothpaste which tastes like chicken or shampoo for the fur, cost the German pet owners an average, about 3, 7 billion, according to the statistics made by the Central Organization of the Zoo Stores (Zoologischer Zentralverband Fachbetriebe). The food for big dogs costs 90 Euros per month in Germany, plus a canine psychologist and massage sessions. In Germany, there are over 5 million dogs, half of a quarter million are from the German Shepherd breed, famous for its loyalty, intelligence and cooperativeness. This dog had an active role in the German history; the Nazis rose it to an icon status within their ideology as a means of propaganda and terror in the concentration camps. After the Second World War, the dogs belonging to this breed had different characteristics in the two halves of Germany. After the unification, a compromise had been reached to so that the current breed possesses the best characteristics of the two types. Today, the German Shepherd is recognized both in the role of Austrian Commissioner Rex, and worldwide there are registered around 10 million copies, according to the World Union of Associations of German shepherd dogs.

Key words: pedagogy, language, authentic documents, agronomic profile

The relationship between human beings and dogs encountered many changes over the last period of time. Both of them became very close to each other. The dog is often seen as a family member. Sometimes, it is the replacement for a partner or a child. The sociologists talk about the humanisation of, perhaps, one of the oldest pet dog of the world. Some of them consider this metamorphosis very disturbing. The historian Wolfgang Wippermann, in his book, “The Germans and Their Dogs” says that the dog is no longer a dog since we are working assiduously at its human incarnation (Wippermann, Wolfgang, 1999). The experts consider that the social development is one of the reasons which led to such a statement as the number of single dog owners is increasing in Germany.

A lot of dog owners transfer their life and consumption habits on their pets. The dogs become a symbol of status and a life-style object (for example, there are dogs living in a designed doghouse). Because of this trend, The Dogs life-

style magazine has been active on the market for over 10 years. Since 2007 there is also a portal, stadthunde.com, a kind of Facebook for dogs, where almost 15.000 dogs are registered.

Over five and a half million of dogs are living in Germany. A quarter of them are German shepherd dogs. They are considered one of the most popular dogs and one of the most loyal, cooperative and diligent. They are also a reflection of the German history. The Nazis made them a symbol for their ideology. They were part of their propaganda and an instrument of terror, in the concentration camps.

It is important to notice that nineteenth-century German sheepdogs were descendants of the original domesticated wild dogs. There was no standardization across regional lines; sheepdogs in Bavaria, for example, could vary widely in: range, fur-colour, size, or shape from the sheepdogs with equivalent purposes in Hamburg. Dogs living in warmer regions, for example, would evolve

¹ University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Iasi

without the thick, warm fur coats that came to characterize sheepdogs working in colder regions.

By the nineteenth century, however, the social landscape had changed in a way that would profoundly had an impact over the origin of the German Shepherd breed. Increasingly, rural, agriculture-based economies were giving way to urbanization and the rise of the prosperous, business-oriented middle classes – a process that was especially dominant in Germany.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the last couple of years, there has been a tendency to consider animals close to man. This hobby was perfect for specialized companies which have significantly increased their sales in this field. The expenses are generally \$110 a month, as it follows:

- Food: \$912/year (\$76/month)
- Medication (heart-worm and flea preventative): \$176/year (\$15/month)
- Toys and treats: \$100/year (\$8/month)
- Vet bills: \$120/year (\$10/month)

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the average annual cost for a large dog is around \$900.

The economy understood it very well, that there are customers who are willing to pay for dog shampoo and toothpaste products. 3,7 billions Euros paid the German people for such products last year (according to the Zentralverband Zoologischer Fachbetriebe). Despite of food costs there are also: a dog license fee, the insurance or the medical treatments or visits to the vet. For the dog owners who have a lot of money to invest in the health care of their companions, there are also: animal psychological counseling and dogs massage.

Besides the tooth and grooming cosmetics, the food habits can be also very expensive(bio or vitamin products and mash for the new born dogs). There are owners who feed their dogs with vegetarian meals, with spelt, zucchini or rice with soya and carrots. More than all others companies, the feeding bowl is earning with its sale products for animals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Another benefit for the pet owner is the fact that dogs can improve your health. It only takes a few minutes spent with a dog or a cat or watching fish swim to feel less anxious and less stressed. The body goes through physical changes during that period of time, changing your mood. The level of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress, is lowered and the production of serotonin, a chemical associated with well-being, is increased. We must take care of our weight and do exercises, but having a pet can help us manage the blood pressure. In a study applied to 240 married couples, pet owners had lower blood pressure and

lower heart rates during rest than the people who did not own a pet. The results were true whether they were at rest or undergoing stress tests. Another study showed that children with hypertension lowered their blood pressure while petting their dog.

To manage cholesterol, doctors still recommend you to follow guidelines regarding diet, exercise, and medication. But owning a pet has the power to decrease the dangers of cholesterol. Researchers have noted lower levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in people who own pets compared to people who don't. However, this could be attributed to the lifestyle factors of pet owners.

Research has shown that the long-term benefits of owning a cat include your heart protection. Over the 20 years of one study, people who had never owned a cat were 40% more likely to die of a heart attack than those who had. Another study showed that dog owners had a significantly better survival rate one year after a heart attack. Overall, pet owners have a lower risk of dying from any cardiac disease, including heart failure.

Therapists are prescribing pets as a way of dealing with and recovering from depression. No one loves more unconditionally a man than a pet. And pets will listen to your talk for as long as the person has something to say. Petting a cat or dog has a calming effect. Taking care of a pet - walking with it, grooming it, playing with it - takes us out of ourselves and helps us feel better about the way we spend our time.

People who own dogs tend to be more physically active and less overweight than people who don't. Taking your dog for a daily 30-minute walk will keep us moving and such an activity is perfect for our health. Two 15-minute walks, one in the morning and one in the evening, will do the same thing. And after that, just playing fetch in the back yard with the dog will earn healthful dividends.

If we exercise with our pet, both will have great benefits: shine a flashlight on the wall or wave a string while we do a step aerobics routine. Nationwide, there are yoga classes for people and their dogs, called doga. One of the keys to a healthy mind is staying connected to one another. Pet owners have the tendency to want to talk with other pet owners. A dog is a conversation waiting to happen. People, especially dog owners, stop and talk to us when they see us walking our pet. Visiting a dog park is a way to socialize with other owners while our dog socializes with their dogs.

Researchers have found out that children raised in a home where there is a dog or a cat are

less likely to develop allergies. The same is true for kids who live on a farm with large animals. In addition, higher levels of certain immune system chemicals show a stronger immune system which will help keep them healthy as they get older.

For people with diabetes, a sudden drop in the level of blood glucose can be very serious. Some dogs can alert their owner about a dangerous drop before it actually happens. They may be responding to chemical changes in the owner's body that give off a scent. The alarm gives the owner time to eat a snack to avoid the emergency. About one in three dogs living with people with diabetes have this ability. "Dogs for Diabetics" is training more dogs to help more people.

Some mental health therapists use a dog in therapy. A dog in the office may help someone feel more comfortable. But that's not all. A remark to or about a dog may show what's really on someone's mind. One therapist tells about a couple who came to his office and started arguing. The dog, which usually just slept during the session, got up and wanted out. He used that to help the couple see how their fighting affected others, especially their children.

Kids with ADHD can benefit from working with and keeping a pet. Taking charge of the jobs on a pet care schedule helps a child learn to plan and be responsible. Pets need to play, and playing with a pet is a great way to release excess energy. That means falling asleep faster at night. Because the bond between a pet and a child is unconditional love, pets help children with ADHD learn about self-esteem.

Sensory issues are common among children with autism. Sensory integration activities are designed to help them get used to the way something feels against their skin or how they react to certain smells or sounds. Both dogs and horses sometimes have been used in these activities. Children usually find it calming to work with animals. And animals easily hold the attention of children with autism.

Strong bones are your best defense against osteoporosis and painful fractures. Walking your dog helps. It's a weight-bearing exercise that strengthens your bones and the muscles around them. It also lets you spend time in the sun, which provides vitamin D. If you have osteoporosis, be sure you guard against falls. Use a short leash that won't get tangled.

A "seizure dog" is one that has been specially trained to live and work with people who have epilepsy. Some are trained to bark and alert the parents when a child is having a seizure outside or in another room. Some lie next to a person having a seizure to prevent injury (as seen in this

demonstration). And some work has been done training dogs to warn before a seizure occurs. This gives the person time to lie down or move away from a dangerous place such as a hot stove.

Specially trained dogs can perform tasks that let people with Parkinson disease maintain their independence. They can pick up dropped items or fetch requested ones. They can provide balance support, open and close doors, and turn lights on with their paws. They can also sense when someone with Parkinson is "freezing" and touch the foot to let the person keep walking. Groups like "Pet Partners" can help you find a good service dog.

Visits from therapy dogs help patients recovering from devastating illness or an event such as a stroke. Some dogs are trained to understand a range of commands which let them help people with aphasia (a language disorder common in older adults, particularly those who have had a stroke) feel good when they see the dog understands them. And, petting or scratching a dog can help a patient rebuild strength while recovering from a stroke or other illness. It also creates a feeling of calm.



Figure 1 **German Shepherd**
(http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/10/German_Shepherd_Dog_with_disc.jpg)

People with AIDS are less likely to be depressed if they own a pet, especially if they're strongly attached. And with an animal in the home, people with Alzheimer have fewer anxious outbursts. The animal also helps the caregivers feel less burdened. Cats seem to be particularly helpful since they require less care than dogs.

Some studies are being done on bringing specially trained animals into clinical settings, which is happening in more and more hospitals and nursing homes. One of the biggest advantages of letting patients interact with animals in such places appears to be the improved mood and the dropping level of anxiety.

CONCLUSIONS

The dog ownership tend to see dogs as pets and hobbies rather than as necessary helpers on the farm or in the field. Ironically, this migration of dogs from helpers to family pets eventually paved the way for the German Shepherd to become one of the most well-known and accepted breeds around the world today.

The benefits of bringing a dog to work are so increasingly obvious that more companies are catching on. Studies show that people who interact with a pet while working have lower stress levels throughout the day, while people who do not bring up a pet see their stress levels increase over time. Dogs in the office also lead to people taking more breaks, to play with or walk the dog, which makes them more energized when they return to work. This, in turn, has led to much greater job satisfaction and productivity.

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