

Making room for dogs in public open space - are we planning for dogs or for people with dogs?

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ABSTRACT

Dogs are a perennial problem facing open space planners and animal management officers, leading some people to question if dogs have a place in public open space. In 1995, the author published 'Public Open Space and Dogs : A Design and Management guide for Open Space Professionals and Local Government'. It was the first study in the world to consider these issues. It presented the case for accommodating dogs in public open space along with guidelines for selecting free running areas and using design to passively encourage responsible behaviour.

The study has been well received around the world with Australian local authorities, in particular, using it to plan variable leash laws and dog exclusion zones. However, providing good free running opportunities continues to be resisted by open space planners and AMOs. Their resistance seems to be based on the notion that we are planning for dogs, when in fact we are planning for people with dogs. The distinction is important, it relates to the central and critical role that dogs play in some people's leisure and recreation. Apart from the inducement to exercise, which is already established, there is the notion that people don't just take a dog out because they have to. They take their dog out because they too get something out of it ó from interaction with their dog, to interaction with others, to the idea that when their dog experiences joy, they too experience some of that joy. For the 42% of Australian households that own dogs, this issue is very important.

Virginia will outline preliminary findings from her research on the relationship between dogs and leisure.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Virginia is an urban policy analyst and town planner with specialist expertise in domestic animals management. Virginia advises government, industry and community groups on legislation and policy and is the only town planner in the world to have looked at the future of domestic pets in cities in a detailed and comprehensive way. Her most recent publication, released in June, is called Companion Animals in the City : Defining a New Agenda for Local Government. It is a compilation and extension of all her work in this area to date.