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Taking Care of Companion Animals

Institutional Policies and Practices in Newfoundland and Labrador

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Abstract

Focusing on local government and non-governmental nonhuman animal welfare organizations, this paper reports survey results on institutional policies, interpretive frameworks, and practices regarding companion animals in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. The findings suggested that local governments and animal shelters use different interpretive frameworks of companion animal welfare, with the former taking a human-centric position and the latter focusing on animal well-being. The results showed that most local governments are not well engaged with animal welfare issues. Instead, these issues are more often dealt with by non-governmental organizations that operate on limited budgets and rely heavily on volunteer labor. Whereas federal and provincial governments are responsible for legislating companion animal welfare, practical implementation of animal welfare has been largely the responsibility of non-governmental organizations. Our findings demonstrated that the ways that animal welfare policy is interpreted and enacted at the local level have significant implications for animal well-being more broadly.

Keywords

animal welfare practices – animal welfare perceptions – animal welfare governance – survey research – Canada – Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

Much of nonhuman animals and society literature focuses on the cultural meanings of animals among different social groups and historic periods (Anahita & Mix, 2006; Bargheer, 2006; Dauvergne & Neville, 2011; Goedeke, 2004; Loo, 2006; Neves-Graça, 2004; Russell, 1995; Skogen & Krange, 2003). An analysis of domestic animal welfare policies and practices is integral to understanding the ways in which animals are socially valued and treated. Prior research examined attitudes about nonhuman animal welfare among the general public and the processes involved in animal welfare policy-making (Franklin, 2007; Franklin, Tranter, & White, 2001; Garner, 1995; Kendall, Lobao, & Sharp, 2006; Lusk & Norwood, 2010; O'Sullivan, 2007; Signal & Taylor, 2006; Sorenson, 2003; Yates, Powell, & Beirne, 2001). However, less attention has been paid to the local, everyday sites where animal welfare practices are carried out, such as local governments and shelters (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Irvine, 2003; Stephenson, 2010). Our research contributes to filling this gap by focusing on animal welfare perceptions and practices across local institutions that are responsible for the routine tasks of implementing animal welfare policy.

This study examines perceptions and practices related to animal welfare issues among a sample of 122 institutions directly responsible for implementing animal welfare governance in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Our analysis is guided by three main questions: First, drawing on Irvine's (2003) concept of "institutional thinking," how do municipalities (which are incorporated cities and towns), local service districts (which provide services outside incorporated cities and towns), and animal shelters "think" about animal welfare problems related to dogs and cats? Second, what responses or solutions do municipalities, local service districts, and shelters adopt regarding these animal welfare problems? Third, do flows of communication and resources between government and civil society organizations, such as animal shelters, facilitate animal welfare governance at the local level?

Animal welfare regulations locate responsibility for managing animal welfare with municipalities and local service districts. However, our findings indicate that most local service districts and many municipalities are not well engaged with animal welfare or stray animal issues. Instead, much of this work

is taken on by shelters, as civil society organizations, with limited-to-moderate communication and financial support from local, provincial, or national governments. Our findings also suggest that local governments and animal shelters engage in different types of institutional thinking about domestic animal well-being, which Irvine describes as the ways in which “an organization’s discourse and activities help to reproduce characteristic definitions of and solutions to social problems” (Irvine, 2003, p. 550). Animal shelters are more inclined to identify stray cat and dog problems, and to define these problems as more severe than either municipalities or local service districts. Similarly, where municipalities and local service districts express concerns, they often focus on animals as a nuisance or problem. By contrast, shelters orient their concerns around the well-being of animals.

The differences in how domestic animal issues are perceived by shelters, local service districts, and municipalities reflect the different institutional contexts where animal welfare policy is carried out. Much of the existing research on society and animals focuses on public attitudes or policy-making. By contrast, we examine the practices and policies developed by local governments and animal shelters. Our analysis of the local institutional contexts of animal welfare policy and practice demonstrates that these everyday practices have important implications for domestic animal well-being.

Literature Review

Cultural interpretations of animals have shifted historically, and competing cultural understandings of animals can conflict (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Franklin, 1999; Ingold, 2000; Irvine, 2007; Nadasdy, 2011). Wolves, for example, were long seen as vermin and the rightful targets of sport hunters. Spurred on by pro-environmental literature that re-conceptualized wolves as symbols of wilderness, wolves have been redefined as subjects of environmental protection and re-introduction into landscapes from which they were previously extirpated. Divergent understandings of these animals led to debates and conflicts in rural communities (Anahita & Mix, 2006; Brownlow, 2000; Loo, 2006; Skogen & Krange, 2003). Parallel historical shifts have played out in social relationships with other wildlife species, including seals, manatees, whales, spotted owls, orangutans, and foxes, who have undergone cultural re-valuation and transformation into subjects for environmental protest, or have become desirable objects of eco-tourism (Dauvergne & Neville, 2011; Goedeke, 2004; Neves-Graça, 2004; Proctor, 1998; Russell, 1995; Woods, 2000).

Social relationships with domestic animals, including dogs and cats, but also more exotic varieties of companion animals, have undergone similar

transformations. Prior to environmentalists' concerns with the well-being and rights of wildlife, notions of animal welfare and demands for animal protection policies emerged in Europe as early as the 17th or 18th centuries (Bargheer, 2006; Wiedenmann, 1996). In more recent years, as community bonds have been weakened due to increased geographical mobility, relationships with companion animals have become increasingly salient as an alternative form of community, provoking increased concern with animal well-being (Franklin, 1999).

Public opinion regarding animals varies geographically and, in some cases, demographically. Franklin, Tranter, and White (2001) use the 1993 International Social Science Programme Survey to conduct a cross-national comparison of beliefs about animal rights in six countries in Europe, Asia, and North America. Their research showed that there is a high level of public support for the idea of animal rights across the countries included in the analysis, but that support for animal rights is not clearly explainable in terms of social factors like education, age, or gender. Franklin (2007) also carried out a national survey on Australian perceptions of human relationships with animals. His research concluded that the majority of Australians live with domestic animals, who are often viewed as members of the family.

The Australian general public is also more likely to keep companion animals and donate money to animal-oriented charities than in the past. Similarly, Signal and Taylor's (2006) survey of attitudes towards animals among the Australian public did not show significant correlations between attitudes towards animals and education, age, or gender. However, concern with animal well-being is higher among those with lower income and among those working in health, education, and white collar occupational sectors. By contrast, research conducted with the general public in Ohio indicated that concern with animal well-being is higher among those who grew up in non-rural communities, as well as among women, lower-income groups, younger respondents, and those with lower levels of education (Kendall et al., 2006).

Public policies about animals are often inchoate (Herzog, 2010). In addition to looking at opinions about domestic animal welfare among the general public, researchers have also examined animal-oriented policy-making. O'Sullivan (2007) argued that though many societies have extended legislative protection to animals, the social distinctions made between different types of animals produce inconsistent policy frameworks that protect some animals to a greater degree than others. As work on horse-maiming incidents in rural New England illustrates, defining animals as victims (rather than as sources of food, entertainment, or labor) produces moral outrage at their mistreatment, which gives legitimacy to calls for greater protection (Yates et al., 2001).

Animal rights movements, and their relationships with states, also influence policy-making oriented towards animal well-being. Comparing England and the United States, Garner (1995) observed that legislation in England is more substantial because the system of animal policy development works to engage, coopt, and make concessions to animal rights groups. While this system results in more limited reforms than animal rights groups ideally prefer, this approach has produced more significant policy changes than in the U.S., where relationships between animal rights movements and policy-makers are characterized by confrontation and conflict, rather than engagement. This dynamic has resulted in less movement towards pro-animal welfare policies.

Elsewhere, Sorenson (2003) examined changes to Canadian law that increased penalties for willful animal abuse in non-institutional settings. While this policy change was not made in response to animal rights movements, industries that rely on animals worked to re-frame the legislation as a reply to animal rights “radicals” or “terrorists.” In this case, Sorenson illustrated that just as animal rights movements appear as important policy actors, animal-based industries also intervene to shape animal welfare legislation.

Within the animals and society literature, a good deal of work has been carried out on public opinion and government policy-making related to domestic animal well-being. Less research has been conducted on the local institutional sites where animal policy is interpreted and put into practice. Work in this area also tends to focus on animal shelters, rather than local governments, as sites of animal welfare practice. For example, Irvine (2003) drew on ethnographic and interview research to explore the divergence between the institutional thinking of animal shelters and public interpretations of giving up unwanted companion animals.

Irvine (2003) defined institutional thinking as the ways in which institutions supply “models through which experience is processed” for those who work within them, which in turn help to define social problems and preferred solutions (p. 550). According to Irvine, animal shelter workers are guided by institutional thinking that views adopting domestic animals as a commitment for the life of the animal. By contrast, this cultural framework is often not used by members of the public, who assume that shelters will simply take responsibility if domestic animals become troublesome or too inconvenient.

Signal and Taylor (2006) similarly drew on their Australian survey data to compare attitudes among the animal welfare community to those of the general public. Regardless of whether individuals identify with animal rights or animal welfare philosophical and political standpoints, those who work within the animal welfare community are significantly more pro-animal welfare than the general public. This indicates that those who work in institutional

sites of animal welfare practice have a shared understanding of animal-society relations that is considerably different from that of the general public. At the same time, Stephenson's (2010) analysis of animal killing practices at shelters indicated that decision-making about which animals to put down and which to keep alive are often made through a utilitarian and human-centered lens that privileges animals who show promise as trouble-free companions. Shelter adoption processes work to screen potential caregivers and educate them in appropriate modes of behavior towards animals. Based on this analysis, Stephenson argues that shelters play a primary role in maintaining order in human-companion animal relationships.

Theoretical Approach

Research on human-animal relations devotes attention to historical shifts and cultural conflicts over the meaning and value of animals in society. Public attitudes towards animal welfare and changes to government policy have also been subjects for research. Less attention has been paid to examining social practices and attitudes towards animals within the institutional contexts where animal welfare is managed, and this work has primarily focused on shelters, rather than local government. Our research fills this gap using survey data collected from municipalities, local service districts, and animal shelters in the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We examine the practices and policies of local governments and shelters regarding domestic animal welfare by focusing on three research questions. First, how do local governments and shelters interpret animal welfare problems? Second, what responses or solutions do local governments and shelters adopt regarding these problems? Third, do flows of communication and resources between government and civil society organizations facilitate animal welfare practices?

The notion of institutional thinking is useful for interpreting our survey results. By asking questions about an organization's policies and practices, we are able to get a sense of how institutions "think" about animal welfare as a social problem (Irvine, 2003). While Irvine (2003) demonstrated how "institutional thinking produces versions of problems (and solutions) that are at odds with the lived experiences of people outside the organizational setting that ostensibly deals with those problems," we use the conceptual tool as a way of making sense of what the organizations in our study say and do regarding animal welfare (p. 561). According to Irvine, institutional thinking refers to "the interpretative practices that become apparent in organizational discourse" (p. 550). In other words, we can infer how institutions "think" based on what they say about a social problem and what they say they do about it.

We interpret our survey results as telling us something about how local governments and animal shelters understand animal welfare as a social problem.

Context of the Research

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador is located on the east coast of Canada. Its population is relatively small (514,536) and much of the province is rural. The provincial capital, St. John's, is home to 38% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2012). In Canada, jurisdiction over animal welfare policy is shared by federal, provincial, and local governments, though provincial governments play a particularly important role in policy-making related to domestic animals. Policy is carried out and translated into animal management by municipalities and, in more rural areas, by local service districts. By contrast with federal or provincial governments, municipalities and local service districts operate with relatively few resources, and address animal welfare as one among many competing demands.

Civil society organizations, particularly animal welfare organizations like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), also play a key role in managing domestic animal welfare at the local level. While St. John's is home to more animal shelters than the rest of the province, suggesting an urban-rural divide in the capacity for managing domestic animal welfare, there are eight SPCA branches located in cities and towns throughout the province.

According to the 2011 Canadian Animal Protection Laws Rankings produced by the Animal Legal Defense Fund (Otto, 2011), Newfoundland is ranked 9/13 for Canadian animal protection laws, placing the province in the "middle tier" of provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The "existing strengths" of the province's animal protection legislation include the extension of basic protections to most animal species, the possibility of fines or incarceration for animal abuse, escalating punishments for repeat offenders, and allowances for emergency seizure and protection of companion animals. By contrast, the "areas for improvement" include clearer definitions of standards of basic care, mandatory seizure of abused animals, a broader range of legal protections for animals and of penalties for those convicted of animal abuse, and restrictions on companion animal guardianship for those convicted of abuse (Otto, 2011, p. 12).

Materials and Methods

The Newfoundland and Labrador Animal Welfare Survey (NLAWS) was a project conducted by a team of researchers in the Department of Sociology

at Memorial University working in conjunction with the office of the Chief Veterinary Officer of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Impetus for the research resulted from discussions regarding the lack of systematic information available on policies and practices of provincial municipalities, local service districts, and non-governmental support organizations, such as animal shelters, with regard to domestic animal populations, including the challenges of dealing with stray domestic animals.

The principal objective of the survey was to establish a baseline of current practices, policies, and perceptions on these issues, particularly as they relate to cats and dogs. Filling such information gaps would assist the Provincial government as it prepared to update animal care legislation. In addition to ascertaining the level of knowledge and practices already in place, results were also intended to provide guidance for important areas of education to ensure compliance with such legislation. Given the lack of research on this topic in the province, it could also encourage and help frame further research.

Following an orientation process, student research assistants hired by the NLAWS team undertook a telephone survey of all municipalities, local service districts, animal shelters, and veterinary offices in the province. Table 1 provides population parameters for each group.

TABLE 1 *Population and Sample Size (n)*

	Population	Sample	Response rate
Incorporated Municipalities	280	74	26.4%
Local Service Districts (LSDs)	178	37	20.8%
Veterinary Clinics	36	1	2.8%
NGO Animal Care Organizations	19	10	52.6%
TOTAL	513	122	23.8%

Rather than draw random samples from each group, an attempt was made to interview designated representatives from all listed organizations. Since interviewing resources were sufficient, a saturation strategy was selected in which all organizations were contacted in random order to ensure a fairly high degree of representativeness whatever the final number of interviews completed.

Using organizational phone numbers, individuals listed as official contact persons were called and informed of the purpose of the study through an

introductory script. Each contact was informed that information was being requested about their organization's policies and behaviors in the survey and not their own personal views. They were informed that of particular importance was information about the policies, perceptions, and practices deemed legitimate by their organizations. When personal opinions were offered in responses, separate codes were developed to ensure they were understood to be personal views rather than official positions.

Organizational representatives were asked to respond to 27 questions addressing issues organized into the three general themes: animal welfare problems, institutional responses to those problems, and flows of resources and communication between governments and non-governmental organizations. In addition, numerous unstructured comments were collected through probing or at the initiative of the respondent. Overall response, despite three attempts at follow up, was fairly low at 24% (122/513). The distribution of organization types in the response sample is shown in Table 1. Numerous explanations are possible for this success rate including outdated information lists, minimal formal office hours (particularly for less organized local service districts), hectic work schedules at the respective organizations, an unwillingness to speak on behalf of an organization, or a perception that the topic was not particularly relevant to their organization. Follow-up research would be useful to better understand these and other possible explanations.

Survey data were entered in Excel spreadsheets with open-ended responses inputted as comments. The data were then transferred to Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 19 for statistical analysis. Responses to open-ended questions were examined with the assistance of NVIVO software for qualitative analysis. Rather than imposing a predefined coding scheme, an inductive approach was used to identify salient themes within the qualitative data.

The project was conducted with ethical approval from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research. No funding for the project was received from sources outside of Memorial University.

Our presentation of the research findings is grouped around three questions:

1. How do municipalities, local service districts, and shelters perceive animal welfare problems related to dogs and cats?
2. What responses or solutions do municipalities, local service districts, and shelters adopt regarding these animal welfare problems?
3. Do flows of communication and resources between government and civil society organizations, such as animal shelters, facilitate animal welfare governance at the local level?

Our results are presented through a series of figures that summarize participant responses to our questions about animal welfare problems, solutions, and governance.

Results

Question 1: Perceptions of Problems

Figure 1 suggests the majority of participants from municipalities and local service districts do not perceive stray dogs as a problem in their communities. Most municipal districts and nearly all local service districts indicated no problems with stray dogs in their governing areas. By contrast, a minority of workers at shelters perceived stray dogs to be a problem.¹

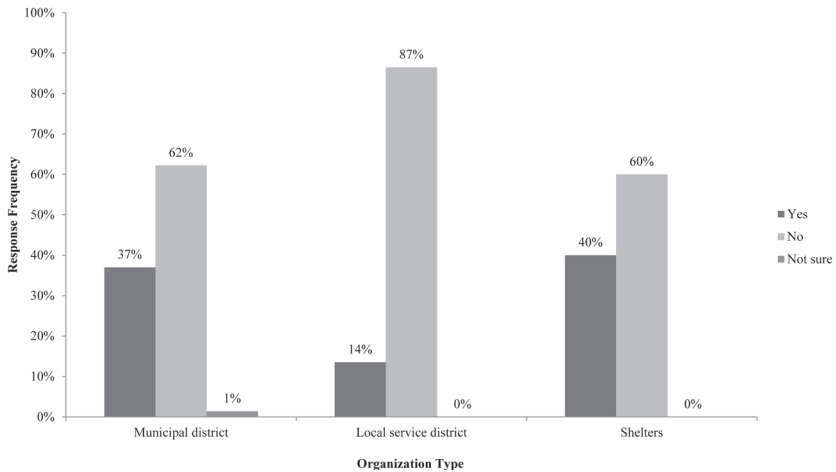


FIGURE 1 *Is there a perceived problem with stray dogs in your area? Chi-square test invalid because of low cell counts. Fisher's Exact Test: $p < .05$.*

1 Due to low cell counts, a Pearson Chi-Square test was inappropriate; however, a Fisher's Exact test revealed the differences between categories is significant at a value of $p < 0.05$. We calculated Chi-Square test statistics for each cross-tabulation represented in Figures 1-7, and in each case (with the exception of Figure 5), we found the differences between groups were statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level or below. Chi-Square statistics and p -values are reported at the bottom of each figure. In the case of Figures 5 and 6, the Chi-Square test was inappropriate because half of the table cells had very low cell counts. As such, we collapsed the frequently and occasionally categories in each figure, dropped the don't know category in Figure 6, and re-calculated Chi-Square tests on the collapsed categories. In the modified categories, there were no significant differences in Figure 5, but the Chi-Square statistic in Figure 6 was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

When they were asked about stray cats, respondents from municipalities and local service districts most often reported no problems in their communities (see Figure 2).² In addition, the number of those who asserted that there is a stray cat problem was higher than those reporting problems with stray dogs. A similar trend was seen among participants from shelters, almost all of whom reported stray cat problems in their communities. In general, the severity of stray cat problems was perceived to be somewhat higher than the severity of stray dog problems. This was particularly the case among participants from shelters, almost all of whom viewed stray cat problems in their communities as moderate or severe.

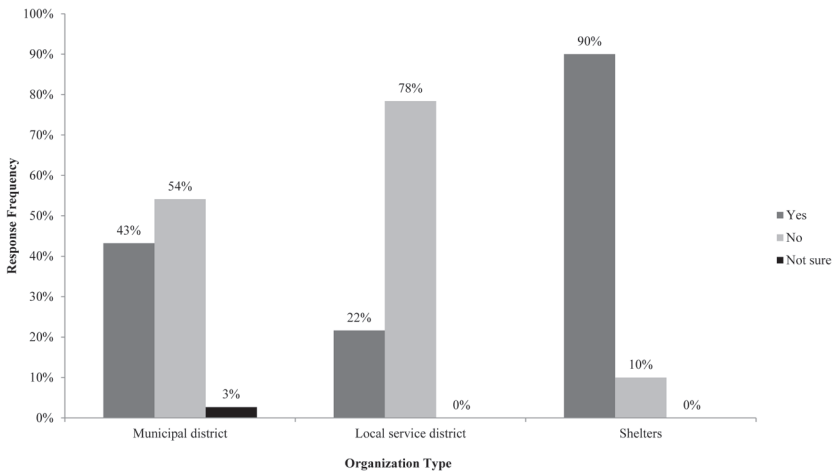


FIGURE 2 *Is there a perceived problem with stray cats in your area? Chi-Square. (df = 4) = 17.55; p < .01.*

We also asked about stray cat populations associated with community landfills. Among participants from local service districts and municipalities, where the question was applicable, the common responses were “no” and “don’t know.” By contrast, the majority of participants working in shelters indicated that there were stray cat populations associated with local landfills.

In order to help gauge whether unwanted animals are being handled in an appropriate manner, we asked about the drowning of unwanted animals (see Figure 3). While a small number of representatives from municipalities

2 The notion of “community” may be interpreted differently by representatives from local service districts, municipalities, and shelters. Respondents may adopt a range of definitions, from more geographically specific to more diffuse, of who constitutes the community they serve.

and local service districts reported that this practice takes place in their communities, most reported that it does not, or that they do not know about it. By contrast, almost all respondents working with shelters reported that the drowning of unwanted animals occurs in their communities.

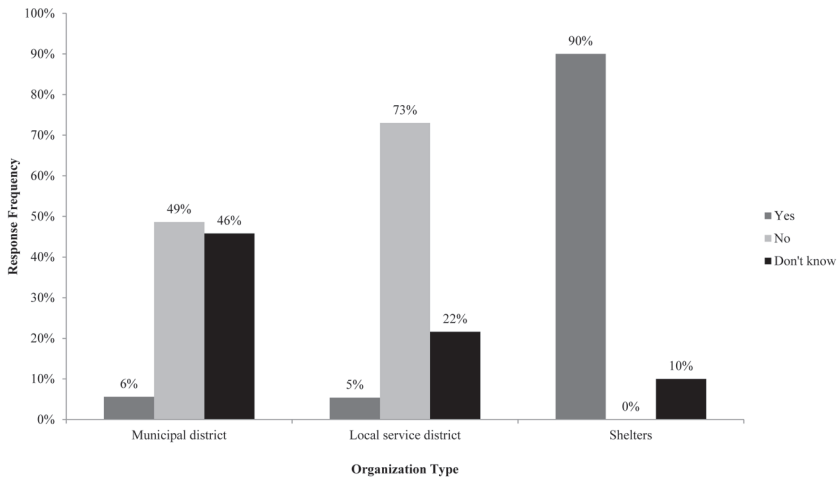


FIGURE 3 Does the drowning of unwanted animals occur in your community? Chi-Square ($df = 4$) = 66.39; $p < .001$.

The survey also asked several open-ended questions in order to allow participants to identify issues of concern regarding animal welfare in their communities. When asked about concerns regarding how dogs are restrained, several participants from municipalities and local service districts indicated that the main problem is simply that dogs are often not properly restrained. By contrast, participants working with shelters more often raised concerns about the well-being of dogs. The most common concerns were that dogs are left on leashes that are too short, dogs are left tied outside all day, and dogs are kept in substandard pens and enclosures.

The second open-ended question asked participants whether they have concerns regarding stray dogs or cats that were not addressed elsewhere in the survey. No single issue was raised by a substantial number of respondents. Participants from municipalities and local service districts identified such concerns as stray and feral cats, convincing caregivers to keep animals on their own property, and mass euthanasia of cats, while shelter workers stressed problems with backyard breeding as well as neglected and abused animals.

In a third open-ended question, participants were asked a broader question about animal welfare issues, not limited to stray dogs and cats. A wide range

of issues were identified, and no particular issue stood out as a concern for a substantial number of respondents. However, animal shelter workers were much more likely than respondents from local service districts or municipalities to raise animal welfare issues in response to this question. Issues identified included living conditions of domestic companion animals, concern with coyotes, quality of care for agricultural animals, problems with stray cats, and the need for laws mandating tagging and tethering for dogs.

Question 2: Institutional Responses

The questions on institutional responses to the problems identified above focused on issues of programming and local bylaws addressing animal welfare. We asked respondents about the existence of dog and cat control programs, collection of stray animals, tagging and tethering bylaws, and tethering practices in the local community.

As our data indicate, very few Local Service Districts and less than a quarter of municipalities have a dog control program (see Figure 4). A similar response was reported for cats. In contrast, the majority of participants working with shelters noted that there are both cat and dog control programs in place in their areas. This discrepancy between local governmental and shelter reporting of dog and cat control programs likely arises from the fact that most of the shelters are situated in larger municipalities where control programs are present.

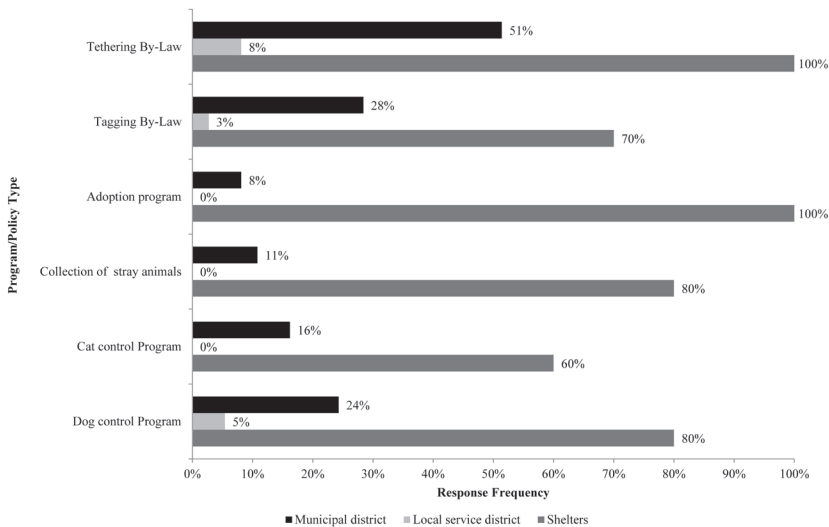


FIGURE 4 Does your organization/area have the following programs or policies? Chi-Square statistic for each response significant at $p < .001$.

We also asked participants whether their organizations are involved in collecting stray animals. Very few municipalities (11%) reported collecting stray animals, while no local service districts reported doing so. By contrast, eight of ten (80%) shelters collect stray animals. Given the mandate of animal shelters, this result is unsurprising. Of those organizations that collect stray animals, most have holding facilities. The facilities run by animal shelters are most often staffed by a combination of paid employees and volunteers, though a few are staffed entirely by volunteers.³ Most of the organizations that collect stray animals keep them for three to five days before they are euthanized. The most common method is through a contract with a veterinary clinic. Other techniques identified include carbon monoxide cylinders (5 responses), euthanasia drugs outside the veterinary clinic setting (2 responses), and shooting with a firearm (1 response).

Alternative strategies for addressing stray animals were limited. Only a few municipalities reported adoption programs, while no local service districts did so. By contrast, all participants working with shelters reported having adoption programs in place for stray animals. Similarly, while all shelters are engaged in promoting animal adoption programs to the public, only a few municipalities and no local service districts are actively involved in promoting animal adoption.

Finally, we asked whether bylaws were in place regarding tagging and tethering animals. As Figure 4 illustrates, the majority of municipalities and local service districts do not have a bylaw requiring that animals are tagged. A substantial minority of participating municipalities require animal tagging, but only one local service district has such a bylaw in place.

By contrast, more than two-thirds of participants working with shelters reported that their areas have bylaws requiring animal tagging. Among municipalities and local service districts that require animal tagging, the bylaws apply either to both cats and dogs (11 municipalities) or only to dogs (10). As with the control programs described above, the discrepancy between local government and shelter reporting on bylaws most likely arises from the location of many shelters in larger municipalities where bylaws are present. Moreover, just over half of municipalities have bylaws in place requiring that dogs be tethered, while only a few local service districts require it. As with the previous question, participants from shelters all noted that their communities have tethering bylaws in place.

Following our question about tethering bylaws, we asked how outdoor dogs are restrained. This was an open-ended question, allowing participants flexibility in their answers. The most common method for restraining outdoor dogs is using a leash, or otherwise tying dogs. Other common methods

3 It is also common for many local service districts and municipalities in the province to operate with a mix of paid and volunteer labor.

include the use of enclosures (fences or pens), or keeping dogs in the backyard. Several participants noted that most dogs in the community are kept indoors. Several other participants noted that dogs in the community are not usually tied up or otherwise restrained.

Question 3: Governance

In order to better understand how local governments and animal shelters manage animal welfare, we asked several questions that focus on flows of communication and resources between local organizations and provincial and federal governments. When asked if there are taxpayer-funded programs to help reduce stray animal populations, no local governments and only two shelter workers reported any taxpayer-funded programs in their areas to help with stray animal populations. These two programs were discounted spaying and neutering, and/or euthanasia and disposal services provided by veterinary clinics.

When representatives of municipalities and local service districts were asked about their financial or in-kind contributions, a majority (see Figure 5) reported that they never contribute to local animal shelters. Only one municipality reported that it makes frequent contributions, while a small group of municipalities and local service districts reported making occasional contributions to animal shelters. When asked to provide further details about contributions to animal shelters, the most frequent response was that the community made financial donations to shelters. Other responses included supporting ticket sales for shelter fundraisers and hosting fundraising events for shelters.

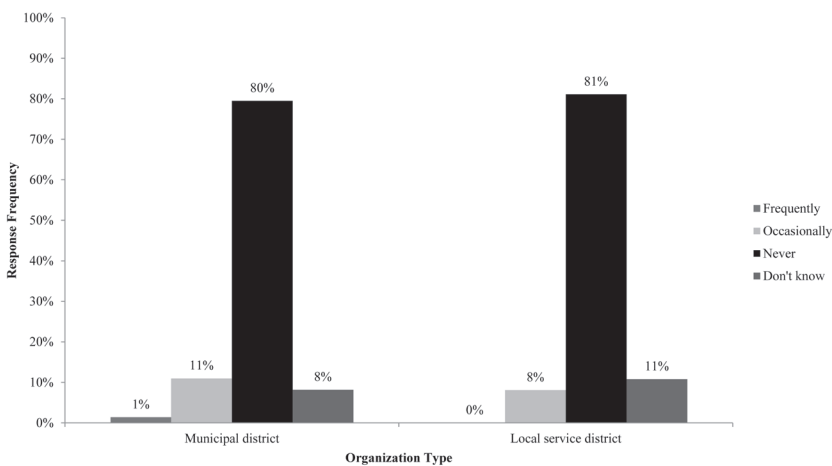


FIGURE 5 *Does your community contribute financially or in-kind to local animal shelters?*
Chi-Square (df = 2) = 0.59; n.s.

In addition to asking local government representatives about financial contributions, we asked shelters about their receipt of financial or in-kind support from local, provincial, and federal governments. Due to the significantly different numbers and scales of operation of shelters and local governments, it is unfair to make direct comparisons between the provision of resources by local government and the receipt of resources by shelters. However, the results from both lines of inquiry tell a similar story of low-to-moderate flows of resources from governments to animal shelters. Four animal shelter participants reported occasional support from local government, while an additional two participants reported frequent support from local government. When prompted for details on contributions from local government, respondents described grant programs, in-kind services and support, and money allocated from local government specifically for shelter maintenance.

Fewer shelter representatives noted support from the provincial government. Three out of eight reported occasional support, while one reported frequent support. When these respondents were asked to provide details on contributions from provincial government, they described annual grant programs ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 per year. Only one shelter representative reported receiving any financial support from the federal government, and this was described as occasional support. Aid from the federal government included a one-time start-up grant, student employment programs, and wage subsidies.

Communication across organizations is possibly another means of creating high-quality animal welfare governance. As our data indicate, most local service districts responded that they never communicate with local animal shelters regarding animal welfare policies and practices (see Figure 6).

Very few local service districts communicate occasionally, and none communicate frequently with animal shelters. Municipalities are somewhat more engaged with animal shelters, with nearly a quarter reporting that they occasionally communicate with shelters and a very small group reporting that they frequently communicate with shelters.

We also asked participants working with shelters about their communication with various levels of government. Animal shelters reported higher levels of communication with local government than local government reported with the shelters. Just over half of shelter workers reported frequent communication with local government and several others reported occasional communication. Communication with the provincial government was reported by just under half of animal shelter respondents, with slightly less than a quarter reporting frequent communication. Animal shelters are even less engaged in communication with the federal government, with a third of participants describing occasional communication and the rest never communicating.

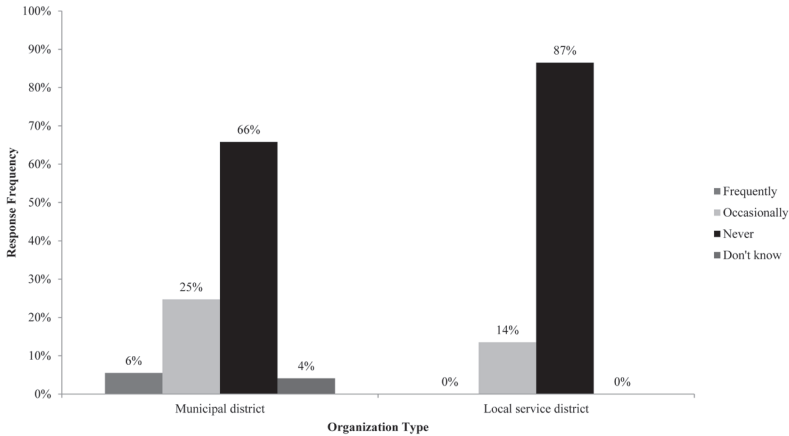


FIGURE 6 *Do you communicate with representatives from local animal shelters regarding animal welfare/control policies and practices? Chi-Square (df = 1) = 4.12; $p < .05$.*

In general, communication between government and civil organizations related to animal welfare appears more frequent than the provision of financial and other material resources from government to civil society organizations.

Animal welfare governance also involves communication with the general public. As indicated earlier, most promotion of animal adoption programs to the public is carried out by animal shelters, while only a few municipalities and no local service districts engage in this work. Young people comprise an important component of the general public. Therefore, we asked respondents whether their organization was active in local schools as a means of communicating about animal welfare (see Figure 7). Almost all shelters are engaged with local schools on animal welfare issues. By contrast, only a handful of municipalities and local service districts engage with schools on the issues.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on survey data from 122 local government and animal shelter organizations, we examined how animal welfare problems are understood and institutional responses to these problems, as well as flows of resources and communication among institutions that are responsible for translating animal welfare policies into practice. Much previous research on domestic animal well-being has focused on historic shifts in the cultural meanings ascribed to animals, on public attitudes towards animal welfare, and on animal

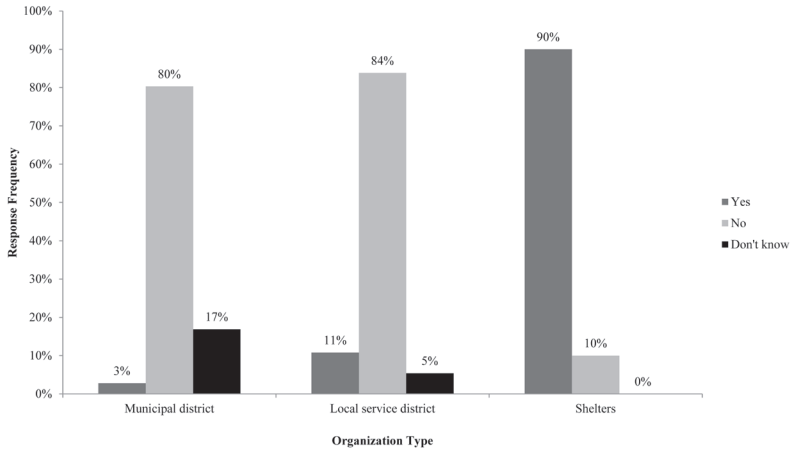


FIGURE 7 *Is your organization active in your schools with regards to animal welfare?*
Chi-Square (df = 4) = 62.87; p < .001.

welfare policy formation. While it is important to understand public perceptions and policy-making processes, this research does not account for the everyday work of managing animal welfare that is done by local governments and civil society organizations. Our results help fill this research gap and demonstrate that the ways that animal welfare is interpreted and enacted at the local level have significant implications for animal well-being.

Our findings demonstrated that local government and civil society organizations engage in different forms of institutional thinking regarding animal welfare problems (Irvine, 2003). Workers with animal shelters are more likely to note problems with stray cats and dogs, and to view these problems as more severe than representatives from local governments. Similarly, animal shelter workers were more likely to identify stray cat populations related to community landfills, and to note that the drowning of unwanted animals goes on in their communities.

Furthermore, our open-ended questions about animal welfare concerns suggested that municipality and local service district workers view domestic animal issues primarily in terms of problem animals (e.g., stray cats, unrestrained dogs), while shelter workers more often view animal issues primarily in terms of quality of care. Prior research by Irvine (2003) and Signal and Taylor (2006) documented a gap in pro-animal attitudes between animal welfare workers and the general public. Our research similarly documented divergent interpretations of animal welfare between shelter workers and representatives of local governments who are responsible for implementing animal welfare policy.

It is important to situate the different forms of institutional thinking demonstrated by local government and animal shelters in the context of different institutional roles and responsibilities in responding to animal welfare issues. Municipal districts and local service districts appear to be largely disengaged from responding to animal welfare problems. For local governments, managing animal well-being is one priority among many that compete for limited attention, time, and resources. Many local governments do not have cat or dog control programs in place, do not attempt to control stray cat populations related to landfills, and do not collect stray animals. Most of this work is carried out by animal shelters, which are civil society organizations that are often staffed by a combination of paid staff and volunteers, or purely by volunteers. Animal shelters are much less numerous than local governments and are not present throughout the province. This has significant implications for animal well-being in regions where shelters do not exist or have inadequate resources to serve their surrounding regions. Analyses of policy-making are valuable, but our results showed that understanding local-level institutional dynamics is also vital to improving animal well-being.

At the local level, animal shelters are central to animal welfare practice in Newfoundland and Labrador. However, these civil society organizations appear to carry out this work with limited financial resources from the government. Few communities have taxpayer-funded programs in place to help reduce stray animal populations, and few municipalities or local service districts report making financial contributions to animal shelters. Similarly, research participants working with shelters reported occasional financial support, rather than frequent support, from local and provincial governments.

Communication among organizations is another way in which animal welfare governance can be facilitated. The majority of municipalities and local service districts reported that they never communicate with local shelters, while a minority communicates with shelters on an occasional basis. Animal shelter workers, by contrast, reported higher levels of communication with local government, though they engage less often in communication with the provincial government, and even less often with the federal government. Limited flows of communication and resources between governments and animal shelters impact the ability of organizations to effectively implement and improve animal well-being at the local level.

Government policy-making on animal welfare has been a focus of previous research on animals and society. However, less attention has been paid to the everyday work that is done to improve animal well-being at the local level, which is largely carried out by civil society organizations. While changes to animal policy are undoubtedly worthwhile, animal well-being will also

be improved by enhancing flows of financial resources and communication among the local-level government and non-governmental institutions that translate policy into practice. One intervention that could improve animal well-being would be to shift the responsibility for animal welfare policy implementation from civil society organizations to provincial and local governments, which would require increasing the capacity for these institutions to become better engaged with animal welfare problems and responses.

An alternate direction for change would be to acknowledge the vital role of civil society organizations in animal welfare practice. This would mean increasing their capacities to do this work more effectively by augmenting their access to financial and non-financial resources. This would also involve improving the quality of communication between the government and animal shelters in order to give animal shelters a greater voice in shaping the policies they will ultimately be responsible for implementing, thereby reducing the distance in the ways in which shelters and governments conceptualize animal welfare. Such a shift would increase the capacity of civil society organizations to carry out the work they are already doing on behalf of governments, the general public, and domestic animals.

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