

## **Analysis of the functioning of animal shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka**

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**T**he Act of 2011 amending the Act on the Protection of Animals and the Act on Maintaining Cleanliness and Order in Communes (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, 2011, No. 230, item 1373) defines a shelter as a place for caring for pets which meets the conditions specified in the Act of 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004 on the Protection of Animal Health and Combating Infectious Animal Diseases (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, 2014, item 1539, as amended).

Providing care for homeless animals and catching them is part of communes' own tasks. Commune Councils, by fulfilling this obligation, annually adopt (until 31<sup>st</sup> March) programs for care of homeless animals and prevention of animal homelessness. The program includes providing homeless animals with places in a shelter, and obligatory sterilization or castration of animals in shelters. The commune's tasks may be entrusted to a shelter, including: catching stray animals, obligatory sterilization or castration of animals, searching for owners for stray animals (Act on the Protection of Animals from 1997, Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, 2013, item 856, as amended). Means and devices used to catch homeless animals must not pose a threat to their life and health or cause suffering (Ordinance of the Minister of the Interior and Administration of 26<sup>th</sup> August 1998 on the rules and conditions for catching homeless animals; (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, No. 116, item 753). On the other hand, the Act of 13<sup>th</sup> September 1996 on Maintaining Cleanliness and Order in Communes (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, 1996, No. 132, item 622) clearly states that it belongs to the obligatory own tasks of the commune. There is a provision in the Act stating that communes ensure cleanliness and

order in their area, and create the conditions necessary for their maintenance, e.g. they prevent animal homelessness according to the rules set out in the provisions on their protection. The aforementioned Act stipulates that a permit must be obtained for entrepreneurs to conduct activities in the field of protection against homeless animals or to run shelters for homeless animals. The permit is granted by the commune's head, mayor or city president, competent for the location where the services are provided. The Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2004 on detailed veterinary requirements for running animal shelters (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, No. 158, item 1657) specifies, among other things, that the shelter should be located in a place at a distance of at least 150 m from human residences and public facilities. The area should be paved and fenced. It is necessary to separate rooms for medical treatments, quarantines, for sick and aggressive animals, as well as mothers with young ones. The animals should have enclosures, and constant water access. The entity running the shelter should provide animals with veterinary care, in particular in the areas of: health control, prevention and treatment, combating internal and external parasites, vaccination against rabies, and keeping records of each dog (age, date of admission, adopter's data, date and cause of death). It should always be remembered that the superior function of the shelter is to provide optimal conditions for animals to stay in these establishments (Kaliski, 2013).

According to Kaliski (2012), the first centers established in Poland with a view to animal protection were established in the 19<sup>th</sup>

century. The next ones, founded in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as state units, were called animal shelters. Their name, however, was contrary to what role they actually played. They were intended to catch stray animals and kill them after 14 days (in case of dogs) or 5 days (in case of cats). The law did not protect animals. Introduction of changes in the protection of homeless animals started at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, there are still instances of abuses and improper care of animals in shelters. As the author emphasizes, there are shelters the main purpose of which is to receive money from communes for the service, and not to keep animals alive under decent conditions. There are cases of catching animals in a given commune and leaving them in another one. By doing so, one dog can go to the same shelter several times, and bring profits to entrepreneurs who run shelters every time. Only thorough inspections of shelters conducted by communes can prevent such abuse. As the author points out, it may be a good idea have shelters established and run by communes.

The shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka, based on the contracts, provides services covering a total of 10 communes and cities. The

aim of the study was to analyse the operation of homeless animal shelters in Ostrów Mazowiecka between 2013 and 2015.

### **Material and methods**

The study was based on data from the operation of the animal shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka in 2013–2015. The publication analyses the data on the implementation of tasks resulting from legal provisions, i.e. the Law on the Protection of Animals from 1997, the Act on Maintaining Cleanliness and Order in Communes from 1996, the Regulation of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of 2004 on Detailed Veterinary Requirements For Running Animal Shelters, the Act on the Protection of Animal Health and Combating Infectious Diseases of Animals from 2004. The shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka has been operating for over 20 years. It is located on the outskirts of the city, surrounded by a forest.

The analysed data included: mean number of dogs in a box, the number of accepted animals, the number of adopted animals, the number of euthanized animals, the number of animals sterilized and vaccinated against rabies.



## Results and discussion

Data on the functioning of the animal shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka in 2013–2015 show that over the analyzed period, there were 1046 dogs accepted from 10 communes and cities, which constituted an average of 104 dogs from each locality over three years, and an average of 34 dogs per year. Most dogs were accepted in 2014–397 dogs (Tab. 1). Fiszdon & Boruta (2014) report that in contrast to Western European countries, in Poland the dogs in the shelters mostly include those caught by municipal guards or workers of establishments who have concluded appropriate contracts with communes. In Poland,

dogs placed by their owners are rare in shelters.

In Western Europe, on the other hand, animals usually go to shelters because of their behavioral or adaptive problems, or life problems of their owners (illness, migration, departure). The main reason for the increasing number of stray dogs is the behavior of owners – throwing out or letting unsterilized females go on their own which leads to population growth.

The analysis of the number of adoptions shows that in terms of the adopted animal number, most dogs were adopted in 2013 – 82% (Figure 1). In 2014, there was a decrease – down to 69%, while in 2015 – the rate was 73%.

Table 1. Year-by-year data set

Item	Year			Total
	2013	2014	2015	
Number of boxes	155	160	160	–
Average number of animals per box	1–5	1–5	1–5	–
Maximum number of animals for which the shelter was designed	370	370	370	
Number of animals accepted	267	397	382	1046
Number of animals at the end of the year	282	294	290	866
Number of animals adopted	217	273	278	768
Number of animals euthanized	21	39	43	103
Number of dead animals	54	85	63	202
Number of animals that have escaped	2	1	2	5
Number of sterilized animals	48	135	236	419
Number of animals which have been vaccinated against rabies	364	504	546	1414

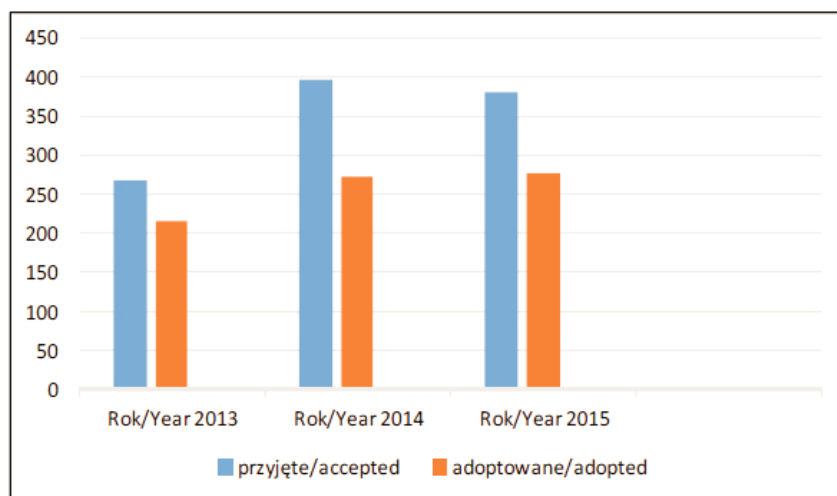


Figure 1. The number of adopted dogs in relation to the number accepted in years

Conversations conducted with the owner of the shelter suggest that puppies and young dogs as well as purebreed dogs and those resembling a breed are adopted most quickly. This is the focus of the interest for those willing to adopt. Old dogs do not attract attention, and are adopted the least often. The information on the results of the inspection carried out by the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) in 2016, covering the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 to 28<sup>th</sup> April 2016, shows that at the end of 2014 there were 184 animal shelters in Poland, i.e. 34 more than in 2011. In relation to 2011, there was an increase in the number of both dogs staying in shelters (up to 105.7 thousand, i.e. 5.4%) and cats (up to 24.1 thousand, i.e. by 17.8%). The number and the percentage of adopted animals increased just slightly: in 2014, 59.3 thousand (56%) of dogs staying in shelters were adopted. For comparison, in 2011, 54.7 thousand (55%) dogs out of 100.3 thousand staying in shelters were adopted. On the other hand, the percentage of dog (4.9%) and cat (12.5%) deaths decreased. For comparison, in 2011 6.8% of dogs and 13.7% of cats died (NIK, 2016). The greater number of dogs entering shelters is a phenomenon that affects the entire country. The percentage of adoptions in the Ostrów Mazowiecka shelter is higher than that shown in the NIK inspection. The NIK carried

out inspections at 11 offices of communes (cities) and two inter-commune associations, in 13 shelters, an asylum, two entities dealing with the capture of animals pursuant to contracts concluded with communes, and 10 district veterinary inspectorates from Lubelskie, Łódzkie, Mazowieckie, Podlaskie, Świętokrzyskie, Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Wielkopolskie and Zachodniopomorskie voivodeships. According to Boruta et al. (2014), the basic way of ensuring appropriate living conditions for animals from shelters should be the striving to hand them over to new owners, namely adoption. Even the best care in a shelter will not provide the dog with what individual care at home does. Rode (2015) reports that the dogs on the first day after entering the shelter demonstrated three times higher levels of cortisol, which decreased over time. The human interaction with the dog in the shelter (even 15 minutes) reduced the level of this hormone. This indicates the huge stress experienced by the dog when going to the shelter.

Over the three analyzed years, the mortality rate of dogs was 20% in 2013, 21% in 2014, 16.5% in 2015 – in comparison to animals adopted (Figure 2). Euthanasia was used in 2013 – in 7.9%, in 2014 – in 9.8%, and in 2015 – in 11.2% of dogs in relation to adopted animals. For

comparison, the NIK inspection (2016) showed that in the visited shelters the percentage of dog and cat deaths (including ones resulting from euthanasia) decreased from 14% in 2014 to 12% in 2015. As noted by the Supreme Audit Office, the results of the inspections carried out in

shelters with the highest dog mortality rates did not show any irregularities in terms of providing living conditions, which could be considered the cause of high mortality.

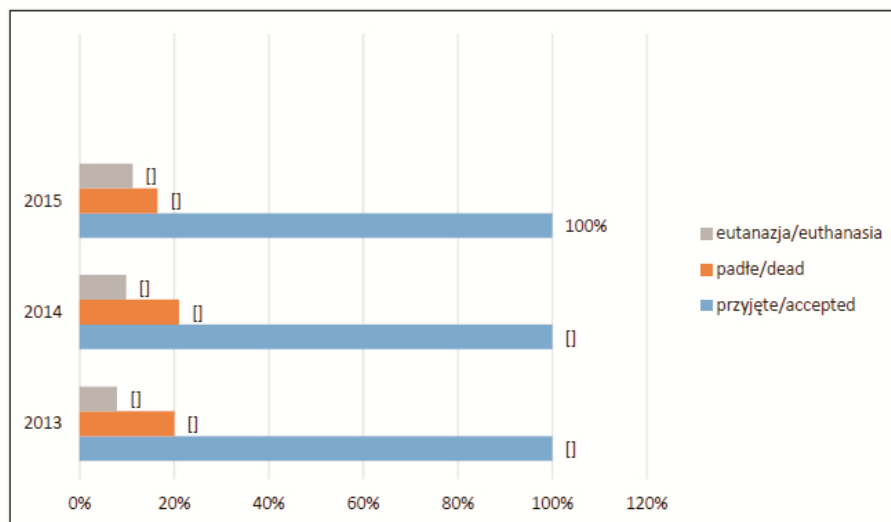


Fig. 2. Percentage of dead and euthanized dogs

All dogs in the shelter were sterilized, some of which were subjected to the procedure before coming to the shelter. The number of sterilization increased significantly each year. For comparison, the NIK inspection (2016) demonstrated that 77% of inspected shelters introduced mandatory castration or sterilization in case of less than 30% of animals. Sterilization/castration is one of the best methods to combat animal homelessness. Karpiński et al. (2012) indicate that these procedures are safe and can be performed as early as on animals in the age of several months. Return to normal activity occurs after a few days after the procedure. The mean number of dogs in the box in the studied shelter did not exceed 5. All dogs were vaccinated against rabies each year. The number of vaccinations has increased each year. In accordance to the Act on the Protection of Animal Health and Combating Infectious Diseases of Animals, 2004 (Dz. U. – Journal of Laws, 2014, item 1539, as amended), in the

entire country, dogs over the age of 3 months are subject to mandatory protective vaccination against rabies, and then the vaccination should be repeated at least every 12 months. In developed countries, the main infectious diseases of dogs and cats are extremely rare. Nevertheless, there are still geographical niches in which the germs persist, sporadically causing epidemics, and the location of dogs and cats which are homeless and stay in shelters differs extremely from the situation of animals who have owners (Frymus, 2014). The owner of the shelter keeps a register with the record of accepted, adopted, dead, killed, escaped, euthanized animals, and the documentation of animal treatment.

### Recapitulation and conclusion

The analysis of data on the operation of the Ostrów Mazowiecka shelter in 2013–2015 shows that:

1. The least number of dogs was accepted in 2013 – 267 dogs, the most were



accepted in 2014–397 dogs, and in 2015 – there were 382 dogs accepted. In 2014, there was a significant increase in the number of accepted animals which may involve the construction of additional boxes.

2. Based on the statement at the end of the year, the shelter was not overcrowded, but there could have been months when there was an excessive number of animals, e.g. in Summer or Spring.

3. The highest number of dogs was adopted in 2013 – 81.27% when compared to the number accepted, in 2014 it was 68.76%, and in 2015 – 72.77%. In 2014, the number of adoptions decreased, after which in 2015 there was a slight increase in relation to the number of accepted dogs. Promotional activities should be intensified for more adoptions.

4. Relatively high mortality rate for dogs (20% in 2013, 21% in 2014, 16.5% in 2015) in the shelter may be related to the health condition of animals accepted there, as well as their age.

5. The percentage of euthanasia in relation to the number of adopted dogs increased slightly in the analyzed years.

6. Within three years, there has been a significant increase in the number of performed sterilizations, but in order to significantly reduce the number of homeless dogs in the Ostrów Mazowiecka shelter, the communes covered by the shelter should introduce free dog sterili-

zation/castration program for their residents. The general obligation to sterilize/castrate dogs in Poland, with the exception of registered breeding entities, could significantly contribute to the decline in the number of homeless animals in the entire country.

7. The shelter meets the requirements of the law (including separate quarantine rooms, rooms for aggressive dogs and mothers with puppies, proper site protection), and veterinary checks did not show any irregularities.

8. Regular disinfestation and deratisation as well as thorough cleaning are carried out in the shelter. Maintaining cleanliness prevents diseases and is one of the elements for ensuring animal well-being.

9. The shelter conducts various types of campaigns promoting adoption through delivery of the adopted dog to the place of residence of new owners, and various types of advertising campaigns. The increase of public awareness and sensitivity to the fate of dogs staying in shelters may result in greater number of adoptions.

10. There is no volunteering in the shelter. There are shelters in Poland where volunteers regularly bring dogs out, socialize with them, and help in adoptions (e.g. shelter for homeless animals in Celestynów). Studies have shown that contact between dogs and humans reduces stress levels in animals.

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## ANALYSIS OF THE FUNCTIONING OF ANIMAL SHELTER IN OSTRÓW MAZOWIECKA

### Summary

The aim of the study was to analyse the functioning of animal shelter in Ostrów Mazowiecka in the years 2013–2015. Analysed data included average number of dogs in the box, number of animals accepted, number of animals adopted, number of animals euthanized, number of animals sterilized, and number of animals vaccinated against rabies. The results indicate an upward trend in the number of dogs that go to the shelter. The shelter was not overfilled. Every year, the number of euthanasia increased, which was done to reduce the suffering of animals. The shelter meets the requirements of the law and the veterinary checks do not show any faults. The shelter provides separate quarantine facilities for the aggressive dogs and mothers with puppies.

**Key words:** animal shelter, homeless dogs



Phot. M. Bednarczyk