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From 'No dogs here!' to 'Beware of the dog!': Restricting dog signs as a reflection of social norms

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Abstract:	<p>Signs in public space reflect 'normalcy' in a community. We ask what do restricting signs tell about a society? To explore the system and variation in the ways dog signs manifest different norms and control, we compare two different data sets: dog signs in a Northern European town, Jyväskylä in Finland, and two Eastern European villages in Romania. We apply a qualitative methodology based on visual communication, geosemiotics and Linguistic Landscape studies.</p> <p>Our focus lays in the resources of addressing and the visual semiotics of the image. The investigated communities seem to create a complementary distribution of what they regulate displayed through their semiotics as well: the Jyväskylä examples are prohibitions for dogs 'being' while the Romanian cases consist of warnings or threats for people. Both prohibitions and warnings implicate the norms and normalities in the communities, showing where they stand in terms of a continuum between 'dog as a pet' and 'dog as a (co-)worker'. As images, the urban signs in Jyväskylä can be characterized as icons of a small collared pet, placed as a part of top-down communication in 'tight' public spaces. In contrast, the photographs of big dogs in the open and private Romanian village spaces refer to some specific guard dog, through which their owners communicate a benevolent warning or an intimidating threat.</p>

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From 'No dogs here!' to 'Beware of the dog!': Restricting dog signs as a reflection of social norms

Mia Halonen & Petteri Laihonen

Abstract

Signs in public space reflect 'normalcy' in a community. We ask what do restricting signs tell about a society? To explore the system and variation in the ways dog signs manifest different norms and control, we compare two different data sets: dog signs in a Northern European town, Jyväskylä in Finland, and two Eastern European villages in Romania. We apply a qualitative methodology based on visual communication, geosemiotics and Linguistic Landscape studies.

Our focus lays in the resources of addressing and the visual semiotics of the image. The investigated communities seem to create a complementary distribution of what they regulate displayed through their semiotics as well: the Jyväskylä examples are prohibitions for dogs 'being' while the Romanian cases consist of warnings or threats for people. Both prohibitions and warnings implicate the norms and normalities in the communities, showing where they stand in terms of a continuum between 'dog as a pet' and 'dog as a (co-)worker'. As images, the urban signs in Jyväskylä can be characterized as icons of a small collared pet, placed as a part of top-down communication in 'tight' public spaces. In contrast, the photographs of big dogs in the open and private Romanian village spaces refer to some specific guard dog, through which their owners communicate a benevolent warning or an intimidating threat.

1 Introduction

A dog is thus a bundle of fur, teeth, hereditary characteristics, social symbolism and cultural attributes. In essence, a dog is social history that can bark.

(Swart, 2007: 287)

In this paper, we investigate two changing dog-ownership cultures as displayed in the semiotics of dog signs and the visual social interaction taking place through such signs. The dog-human relationship is the first alliance between an originally wild animal and human; wherever humans live, dogs live (see, e.g. Clutton-Brock, 2012: 3–8; Leppänen 2015).

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3 Consequently, signs regulating this coexistence are a frequent and global phenomenon, which
4 varies as societies vary in their visual cultures – as well as on their ideas of a dog’s place in
5 the society. In this article, we investigate how signs manifesting dog-human relationships are
6 connected to social norms, power and control in two different places and societies in Europe.
7
8 In order to tease out the cultural specificity of dogscares and to explore the system and some
9 variation in the ways dog signs manifest different norms and control in different contexts, we
10 analyse and compare two different data sets: dog sign landscapes in a Northern European
11 town, Jyväskylä in Finland, and two Eastern European villages in Romania.
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19 The investigated signs are all constraining either actions of dogs or humans. By analysing
20 such dog signs, our aim is to contribute to the study of restricting visual communication.
21 Most restricting actions, such as prohibiting, warning or threatening, are face threatening
22 activities endangering the social relationship between the person delivering them and their
23 recipient. In verbal interaction research, restricting actions have been previously investigated
24 in pre-given hierarchical situations (police encounters, see Chong Ho Shon, 2005; and parents
25 disciplining their children, see Hepburn and Potter, 2011). As our analysis will explicate,
26 local hierarchies and sociocultural differences are constructed and often mitigated through
27 semiotic work in private and public dog signs in everyday communicative situations.
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36 While recipients of the dog signs are naturally humans, dogs are the agents in the signs. The
37 dogs’ actions, existence, or being are controlled in restricting signs that claim ‘no dogs
38 allowed here!’ or in warning signs claiming ‘beware of the dog!’ in which dogs are presented
39 as a threat to humans. The investigated signs thus guard the spaces they are bordering either
40 from dogs or unwanted humans.
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46 With the help of a detailed semiotic analysis we will show how constraining communication
47 through dog signs – whether including both text and images or images/text only – convey
48 social meanings. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 19), the two modes of
49 communication, the textual and the visual, follow broadly similar semiotics within a society
50 but, at the same time, the potential meaning of the modes are neither fully conflated nor
51 entirely opposed. Finally, we also analyse how they target recipients and how dog signs can
52 be read or interpreted (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 16-20; see also e.g. Shohamy and
53 Gorter, 2009; Coulmas, 2009).
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2 Theoretical and methodological background

The communicative actions mediated by dog signs are mainly prohibiting, warning or threatening. We argue that these actions mediated by the signs can be compared to negation in verbal interaction or text. Through negation something is presented either as non-existent (in case of declarative negations) or unwanted (in cases of imperative negations, that is, ‘prohibitions’). Negation always activates its opposite, that is, it reveals what is considered as possible, typical or even predictable (Sacks, 1992 [1970]: 453 ff.; Author 1, 2005). Consequently, through studying restricting signs as negation, one can see that what is negated, is what is considered as the normal state of affairs in a society (cf. Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003: 147).

Signs regulating human-dog interaction control various types of spaces (see Author 2, 2016). Most often they prohibit, or at least restrict ‘being’ of dogs or humans in some specific space, indicated by the placement of the sign. Dog signs are similar to ‘no smoking’ signs indexing restrictions on spaces around or beyond them (cf. Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003: 153). In the case of dog signs, there is typically a need to restrict the ‘being’ in a space rather than a specific action like in the case of no smoking signs. Furthermore, by communicating this need through dog signs, it is simultaneously indicated that this ‘being’ is so typical, usual, probable or expectable that there is a need to restrict it. A need to restrict some action, unrelated to whether it is ‘passive’ ‘being’ (‘in the wrong place’) or ‘active’ action (‘doing the wrong thing’, e.g. smoking), always becomes relevant in relation to the typicality of the action in focus. In other words, by applying a constructivist view on human semiotics, it is also possible to construct a state of affairs as typical by negating it.

This study explores everyday forms of interactional order, control, power and social influence on an empirical basis (cf. Hepburn and Potter, 2011). Methodologically, we contribute to the visual turn in investigating everyday interaction – that is, to a turn ‘from the spoken, face-to-face discourses to the representations of that interaction order in images and signs’ (Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003: 82). We apply the methodology of geosemiotics by Scollon and Wong Scollon (2003), and the model of visual communication by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). Further, we refer to some linguistic landscape studies, though we agree with Jaworski and Thurlow (2010: 2), who preferred to name their book *Semiotic Landscapes*. That is, we

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3 focus on the ‘semiotic construction of space’ (Stroud and Mpendukana 2009: 365) in our
4 analysis, taking into account all modalities and not only the textual element as some earlier
5 linguistic landscape studies have done.
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10 According to Rose (2016: 25), there are four sites of meaning creation that can be analysed
11 through visual methodologies: 1) production of the sign, 2) the image itself, 3) its circulation,
12 and 4) its addressee’s interpretation. Our analysis will be systematic and detailed only in
13 studying the image itself. To be able to analyse images as interaction, we are applying the
14 concept of turn-design and sequentiality from conversation analysis. From the turn-design
15 point of view, signs can be seen and analysed as first pair parts in an interaction sequence
16 such as an adjacency pair (e.g. question — answer). Here, we are able to analyse the first
17 (pair) part, whereas the second part, the addressee’s reaction is not available in general in
18 linguistic landscape research and it can be examined only through indirect and retrospective
19 methods at best. Nevertheless, through examining the design and placement of dog signs, we
20 can analyse the activity type of a first pair part the signs form. Furthermore, the design of a
21 turn also shows who the anticipated recipients of the sign are and what the anticipated action
22 in next turn in interaction will be. In other words, the first turn is designed to get the recipient
23 to act in some expected way. Furthermore, the turn and its design also display an analysis of
24 previous interaction. In our case of dog restriction signs, the interactional analysis of the turns
25 displayed in visual communication of dog signs can be interpreted as representations of the
26 function of dogs in a given society as well as the typical actions which are to be restricted in
27 relation to dogs. (E.g. Heritage 1984; Sacks 1987.)
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43 Our analytical focus lays in the semiotic resources of addressing (e.g. the breed, the posture
44 and position of the dogs and the texts used) as well as in the varying cultural frames of
45 interpretation (Coupland, 2012). In the interactional analysis, we focus on actions which have
46 a restricting effect on their addressee’s. We follow conversation analytical research on
47 restricting and controlling activities in talk-in interaction (Chong Ho Shon, 2005; Hepburn
48 and Potter, 2011). Such previous research has termed the investigated activities as
49 prohibitions, warnings and threats.
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57 Our study demonstrates how reading a single type of sign, insignificant at first glance, can be
58 closely connected to larger scale societal issues (see Author 2, 2016; Pandey, 2017). We
59 consider the dog signs as our window to societal norms, since they are available in different
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3 contexts (e.g. towns and villages), and since they mediate restricting activities (e.g. warnings
4 and prohibitions), which are less common in talk-in-interaction due to their face threatening
5 and hierarchical nature (see Chong Ho Shon, 2005; Hepburn and Potter, 2011). Our
6 investigation delivers an exercise on detailed analysis of visual semiotics of dog signs in
7 order to illuminate the fine-grained semiotic construction and mitigation of constraining
8 activities, as well as how social norms are made visible through such activities. By providing
9 a fine-grained semiotic analysis of images, we have also aimed to be analytically transparent
10 in our investigation. Following the conversation analytical tradition (see Heritage 1984), the
11 reader is provided enough details to carry out the analysis herself.
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20 The dog signs reside in the under-researched intersection of private and public signage, that is
21 they are private signs in public space (Author 2, 2016; Pandey 2017) or as we are going to
22 show, public signs controlling pet keeping and thus restricting private people in their freetime
23 activities. Representations of dogs have already been studied as indicators of control
24 (hygiene), hierarchies (class) and social history in general (e.g. Kete, 1995; Swart, 2007).
25 However, despite their general nature, little attention has been paid to dog signs or forms of
26 communication of restrictions and social norms through them (but see Author 2, 2016).
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34 In our analysis, we focus on how signs in public space reflect ‘normalcy’ in a community.
35 That is, a restricting sign often implies potentially undesired activity in that place and points
36 to the need of maintaining the endangered order. Through the study of such restricting signs,
37 we can explore the communication of social order in a given society. Most importantly, we
38 study the social relationship as displayed through the image in the interaction between the
39 sign producer (e.g. a dog owner, an institution or a property owner) and the addressees
40 (audience). Our main research questions are the following: What do typical dog signs do and
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51 **3 Research sites and data**

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54 To explore variation and tease out details that can be different in the ways dog signs manifest
55 different norms and control, we analyse two different data sets: dog signs in a Northern
56 European town Jyväskylä (Finland) and two Eastern European villages, namely ethnic
57 Hungarian villages in Transylvania (Romania).
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6 Figure 1. Jyväskylä, Finland (By Original artist: Ningyou. SVG-map created by Care - SVG
7 map of Finland is created by user Care. Original bitmap map is created by User: Ningyou,
8 Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4312488>).
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13 insert Figure 2

14 Figure 2. The region of ethnic Hungarian villages in Romania © Author 2.
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20 Data gathering resulted to c. 60 photos of dog signs taken by the authors in both sites. Both
21 authors are situated in Jyväskylä, Author 2 carried out fieldwork in Romania.
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23 We documented a selection of typical cases, presenting a part of the range of dog signs in
24 Jyväskylä and photographed all dog signs occurring in two Hungarian villages in Romania
25 (in July 2012).
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30 Our starting point for choosing a comparative approach was to investigate our initial
31 observation of a kind of a ‘complementary distribution’ that we had discovered when starting
32 to analyse the two cases together. Originally we had gathered dog signs independently
33 without knowing of each others’ data, and had analysed them separately (see Author 2,
34 2016). Joining forces, we noticed that in the urban environments (a collection of photographs
35 of dog signs in Jyväskylä, Finland by Author 1), the gathered signs often restrict dogs from
36 different spaces and places (see Figure 3 below), whereas in the Eastern European rural cases,
37 dog signs mostly appear to restrict humans (see Figure 4 below). Another general difference
38 seems to lay in the producers or owners of the dog signs; the signs in the urban context
39 appeared to be top-down signs, whereas the signs in the villages were posted by private
40 people, representing bottom-up forms of social interaction through signs (cf. Pandey 2017).
41 What is more, there appeared to be some recurring differences (and similarities) in their
42 semiotic properties, such as the breed of the dog displayed in the signs. Encouraged by such
43 seemingly clear differences in our data sets, we started to study the semiotics of the signs and
44 the social interaction through the signs in a more systematic and comparative manner.
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58 We chose to focus on two specific spaces (Jyväskylä and ethnic Hungarian villages in
59 Transylvania) as representatives of different types of data, and, consequently different types
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3 of communities, urban and rural, Eastern and Northern European, especially in relation to the
4 changing practices and norms of dog ownership. We investigate these differences through
5 their constructions in the semiotic landscapes of dog signs. We also aim to explore the
6 complexity of these shifting economic contexts as displayed in the signage being
7 investigated. Among others, we will point to the different forms of control (human and dog)
8 and their consequences for the dog imagery.
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15 We did not expand our data to include other contexts for two reasons. First, even though we
16 do not have vast amount of pictures needed to claim global significance (cf. Leppänen 2015)
17 we have deep enough membership ethnographic knowledge of both sites, so that we could
18 judge, for example, the typicality (in qualitative means) of the types of signs in both
19 landscapes. Second, we can safely argue that the differences of these sites are significant and
20 sufficient when it comes to dichotomies like urban ‘tight’ spaces, controlled by top-down
21 norms, and rural ‘open’ spaces, controlled by bottom-up norms.
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29 Insert Figure 3

30 Figure 3. Post office door in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.
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35 This is our first example from a ‘tight’, urban space. In Figure 3, the dog sign can be said to
36 restrict dogs from the post office. The sign in Figure 3 was placed on the outside surface of
37 the post office door, indicating prohibition from that transitory point from outdoor to indoor
38 space. In other words, it tells the dog owner that it is prohibited to let the dog in to the post
39 office. From the point of view of normalcy, the sign in Figure 3 indicates that it is potentially
40 typical activity (i.e. normal) to take dogs to offices. The dog in the image is a small dog, a
41 terrier, depicted through a drawn silhouette. The pet character of the dog is further indicated
42 by its collar. In urban dog signs, the dog usually has a collar and sometimes a leash (e.g. see
43 Figure 6). A collar symbolically indicates a domesticated and disciplined dog with a home
44 and an owner responsible for the dog, not a wild or a stray dog. Small dogs on a leash are
45 iconic in urban environments, and they are controllable and dependent on humans (cf. Kete
46 1995).
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57 insert Figure 4

58 Figure 4. ‘Beware, the dog bites’. (In Hungarian.) On a house gate in Romania. © Author 2.
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7 In Figure 4, the dog sign communicates a warning for humans not to enter the gate without
8 permission from the dog's master. The sign in Figure 4 includes an image of a dog and a text
9 'BEWARE! THE DOG BITES!' stressing the threatening side of the dog: it might bite. The text
10 is in all capital letters, displaying the semiotics of bigness (Pandey 2017: 36-37). Also the
11 dog in the image is a big shepherd dog. The image of the dog is a photograph, which appears
12 more naturalistic than its urban counterpart in Figure 3. The placement of this sign is similar
13 to the sign in Figure 3; the difference is that this time it prohibits humans to enter the space
14 behind the sign, not the dog. In Figure 4, it indicates that the space is restricted, but that
15 people might still attempt to enter it without permission. Unlike urban pet dogs, shepherd
16 dogs displayed in village signs seldom have collars not to mention leashes, however, they are
17 clearly not wild or stray dogs either. The explanation for the lack of a collar can lay on the
18 function of these signs in not expressing the need to control dogs, but humans.
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29 Next we will analyse different dog signs and their relationship to the society in question in
30 more detail. The different data sets show that, what is taken for granted, considered normal or
31 typical in one society, might well be different in another context. Thus, we will enhance our
32 discussion of dog signs and society by comparing and contrasting the two data sets. We will
33 start with the Jyväskylä cases and move forward to the Romanian villages.
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41 **4 City of Jyväskylä, a 'West' European pet culture**

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45 Our 'Western' and urban case is represented by the Finnish town Jyväskylä in Northern
46 Europe. In this culturally 'Western' and urban 'tight' space, the main type of dog signs
47 consists of restrictions for dogs rather than humans. The dominance of dog restrictions
48 reflects the normalcy of pet dogs living and being on the move everywhere with humans,
49 including places and spaces where their presence is considered unwanted. In these dog signs,
50 either the 'being' of a dog or a particular action in some specified area are restricted. In
51 Jyväskylä, like elsewhere in Finnish cities and perhaps in 'Western' cultures in more general,
52 there are also warning (beware of dog) signs, but they seem to form a minority among
53 various restrictive signs in our urban data. Dog restriction signs are mostly found in public
54 spaces and constitute institutional, mass produced signs placed by authorities or businesses,
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3 thus representing examples of top-down policy, that is, authorities regulating the actions of
4 private people (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006:10).
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8 In the empirical analysis, three main categories arose in the Jyväskylä case. First, the ones
9 where the ‘being’ or ‘existence’ of dogs in some specific urban place is restricted. Another
10 category is the signs restricting dogs in urban nature (parks). We have classified such signs as
11 a category in its own right because of their paradoxical character; dogs are part of nature, part
12 of ‘fauna’, but they can still be prohibited from ‘urban nature’ by signs. The third category
13 consists of signs, where the impurity of the dog is highlighted. We have named the three
14 categories as (1) ‘Being restricted’, (2) ‘Dogs are not part of nature’ and (3) ‘Dogs as
15 potentially impure’. Next we will discuss the urban empirical categories of dog signs through
16 examples in more detail.
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27 **4.1. ‘Being’ of dogs restricted**

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30 In this empirical category, the placement of the sign (cf. Scollon and Wong Scollon, 2003)
31 and consequently the space that the sign is interpreted to restrict, was even more relevant than
32 in the other categories. In such cases, the ‘tightness’ of urban spaces becomes especially
33 relevant. The most typical place for this type of restrictive signs were borders, typically
34 doors, both outdoors and indoors (see Figure 3 above). In Figure 5, the sign is on the door of
35 a mall accompanied by other restrictions:
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43 insert Figure 5

44 Figure 5. Mall door in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.
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49 Similar signs to Figure 5 can be found often in Jyväskylä, not only on doors leading to public
50 indoor spaces such as malls, post offices, libraries etc., but also on gates to restricted outdoor
51 spaces like public parks, cemeteries or beaches. The typicality of such dog signs implies a
52 normalcy of dogs potentially accompanying their owners to these places, that is, almost
53 everywhere. Physically restricted ‘tight’ spaces, indicated by doors and gates or fences, are
54 easy to conceive, and the signs gain their meanings by their placement (see Scollon and
55 Wong Scollon, 2003) on the ‘border(s)’; the ‘being’ of dogs in the demarcated spaces is
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3 prohibited. However, in the case of urban spaces that are more open, such as parks or
4 beaches, it is often more difficult to define where it begins and thus which space restricts
5 dogs.
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10 It is also important to notice that other similar restrictions are routinely interpreted to concern
11 only specific actions carried out with visualized objects. Their plain ‘being’ is not prohibited:
12 e.g. you are allowed to bring skateboards and roller skates (but not use them) as well as
13 cigarettes (but not smoking ones) to the mall, but this is not the case with dogs.
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19 Along the analytic units used by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 88), the silhouette drawing
20 captures and mediates what is widely recognisable as a dog. The sketch of a generic breed
21 draws on its sharedness and familiarity both from the present ‘dogscape’, that is, breeds that
22 are most often seen, and the historical trajectories of the dog sign scapes, that is, the type of
23 signs that people living in the society in question are used to seeing and reading. These
24 characteristics are typical for an icon of a generic dog (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003: 25-
25 26), that is, it represents any dog. The red stripe is also an icon, meaning that the icon (of a
26 dog) beneath it is ‘prohibited’ from that space.
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34 Positioning the dog in the form of a silhouette profile – for example, like dogs are presented
35 in dog shows – of a well-known breed and a well-known type of a sign functions to iconicize
36 the dog instead of indicating some specific breed or specific individual dog. (Cf. Kress and
37 van Leeuwen, 2006: 158-159.) This is significant for the Jyväskylä data, because the
38 restrictions of the signs apply to all dogs, in contrast to the Romanian cases, where the
39 specifics of the breed itself is important, because of the function and pragmatics of the signs
40 (see next section). In this manner, the meaning and function of the sign motivates the type of
41 dog displayed in them. In comparison to the rural examples we will analyse later, the image
42 of the dog in Figure 5 represents a smaller dog, and semiotics of smallness are typical for the
43 construction of being a pet.
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53 The (Fox) terrier might work as the imaginary prototype of a dog in Finland, however terriers
54 are not among the 30 most popular breeds in Finland in the records of 2017 (Breed
55 registering information, The Finnish Kennel Club). We have not been able to find out why
56 the terrier has been chosen for so many images, but we can propose an explanation based on
57 relatively sound arguments. To begin with, during the great urbanization wave in Finland in
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3 the 1960s and the 1970s the (wire) fox terrier was a fairly common breed. The first restriction
4 signs were produced and placed during 1970s (Suomen Kettuterrierit ry; ‘Finnish Fox
5 Terriers’). In this way, part of the common understanding of the semantics of the signs is also
6 formed by the familiarity and frequency of the sign type. In addition, the dog restriction signs
7 in public spaces in Finland are almost identical, mass produced signs. They vary a bit in their
8 size, colour and layout, but the profile of a ‘breed’, some type of a (Fox) terrier, has remained
9 the same since the 1970s. The terrier image has thus gained a kind of a dog prototype status
10 for public signage (see Kress and van Leeuwen on production, 2006: 217). Finally, on a more
11 global scale, the (Fox) terrier gaining a dog prototype image status would not be at all
12 peculiar, since the terrier is one of the oldest scientific dog breed described already by Caius
13 in 1570. The relatively small size of the terrier makes it a suitable icon for the Western pet
14 dog as well.

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26 Approaching the choice of the presented breed from its function as a generic or iconic
27 restriction for all dog types, we can examine its meaning in social interaction. In other words,
28 the contradiction between the (in)frequency of (Fox) terriers and frequency of terrier images
29 in signage are part of ‘face work’ (Goffman, 1967) between the sign producers and the
30 recipients of the dog signs. That is, as the dog image rarely refers to the specific dog of the
31 recipients of the signs, the image can be read as referring generally to any dog, not face
32 threatening to somebody’s specific dog.

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In these type of signs, there is actually no explicit, traditional text indicating restriction, nor
an image or symbol explicitly communicating a negative imperative that could be expressed
as ‘dogs are not allowed to enter’ or ‘don’t take your dog in here’. The red line crossing the
profile picture of a dog could just as well refer to (only) a declarative and descriptive type of
reading ‘there are no dogs here’. As members of the society and culture, we are however able
to link and associate (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 232-233) this type of ‘red line cross
a sign’ icon (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2003: 26) to its imperative, in this context restrictive
character.

4.2 ‘Dog is not part of nature’

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3 Almost all city owned and controlled ‘nature spaces’, such as public beaches, parks, sports
4 areas of various kinds, etc., have a sign concerning the status of dogs in that specific but
5 relatively open space. In the cases analysed above, the dogs’ being was restricted in indoor
6 spaces at the centre of the town. In this section we show a couple of typical cases where dogs
7 are forbidden to enter an unfenced space in urban nature. In Figure 6 we see a sign on stairs
8 leading to a nature reserve area.
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15 insert Figure 6

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17 Figure 6. Nature reserve area in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.
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21 It is obvious that a domestic animal is no longer ‘part of nature’ in the sense that it would
22 belong to an area preserved for conserving nature. In addition, if unleashed, dogs can be
23 perceived as potentially violent animals who could endanger other species (see Kete, 1995).
24 It is thus remarkable also that in this sign the sketched dog is leashed and in that way
25 referring to a pet dog walking with its owner. Similar restrictive signs can be found at various
26 kinds of unfenced outdoor spaces in Jyväskylä, such as parks, school yards and beaches.
27 Figure 7 (dog sign on the right upper left corner) was placed on a bulletin board of a public
28 beach.
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37 insert Figure 7

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39 Figure 7. Köhniö beach in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.
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43 In Figure 7, the dog sign has been placed among other information, and seems equal to other
44 announcements due to its size and placement. The yellow and red attention evoking colouring
45 however marks it as a restrictive sign, indicated clearly by the red X icon meaning ‘Do not’
46 (Scollon and Wong Scollon 2003: 26). Once again, the iconic dog silhouette can be
47 recognised as some terrier breed or similar, smallish urban dog breed, perhaps a miniature
48 Schnauzer. What differs this sign from most of the urban signs in our data (see the previous
49 examples), is that the silhouette image does not have a collar or a leash. This detail makes the
50 sign deviate from the iconic pet dog type, perhaps unintentionally breaching the norm of ‘all
51 dogs must be kept on a leash’ in public urban space.
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3 Exploring the landscape of dog signs in Jyväskylä, at the city centre and in the city controlled
4 'urban nature' thus shows that the space left for dogs seems to be quite narrow, indicating
5 that urban outdoor space is a tight space. Dogs are also treated somewhat ambiguously. On
6 the one hand, dogs are perceived as part of nature not allowed to enter urban indoor spaces;
7 on the other hand, they are not 'nature enough' to enter unenclosed outdoor spaces either.
8 This 'fluidity' in the perceptions of the nature of dogs becomes more comprehensible through
9 our third category which consists of signs treating dogs as potential threats to hygiene and
10 safety.
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20 **4.3 'Dirt is matter out of place': Potentially impure pet and specified restrictions**

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24 The duality of the perceptions of dogs as pets or family members and wild, potentially dirty
25 and violent animals has existed as long as the history of the domestic dog. Even though the
26 dog has been part of the family, a pet or a co-worker and companion, the question of impurity
27 and dirt has always been an issue in this relationship, at least in the urban environment (Kete
28 1995). The contradictions shown in our urban cases, align perfectly with the definition of dirt
29 being 'matter out of a place' by the philosopher Mary Douglas (1994 [1966]). As we have
30 seen, the dog can be seen as part of nature in the city centre, where it would be out of its
31 place, and vice versa 'urban' in wild nature. Mostly these restrictions draw on health issues in
32 a modern society: asthma and allergies, and questions of spreading bacteria and diseases.
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41 When restrictions focus on dirt, the sole 'being' of dogs is no more the object of the
42 restriction but the action, defecating, and its results, feces. This kind of specified restriction is
43 shown in the dog signs in the form of some kind of added element as seen in Figure 8.
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48 insert Figure 8

49 Figure 8. A parking lot near swimming hall and school in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.
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54 Figure 8 was posted by the city administration, displaying the familiar terrier-like sketched
55 profile image of an urban, small dog. A partial line beneath the picture is added, indexing a
56 squirt of urine. A specified restriction can also be done verbally through a text, like in the
57 case of Figure 9, which was photographed on a private property fence.
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5 insert Figure 9

6 Figure 9. A fence of a private property in Jyväskylä. (In Finnish.) © Author 1.
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10 In Figure 9, there is both the word *ei* ‘no’ straight under the profile of the dog and a phrase *ei*
11 *koirien kusetuspaikka* which could be paraphrased as ‘not a space to take a dog to slash’
12 containing a colloquial expression, a vulgarity for ‘taking to pee’. When restricting is done
13 through a verbal imperative negation (Finnish *ei*, ‘no’), it is easy to change the restriction into
14 a recommendation simply by scratching off the negation word *ei* ‘no’. Thus ‘not a space for’
15 changes into ‘a space for’. This is an extremely frequent, almost default and thus normal,
16 transgressive (see Pennycook 2009) semiotic trick done with signs of this type. Using vulgar
17 language here serves to convey dislike, phobia or aggression towards dogs. This seems to
18 motivate some people to place ‘vulgar’ dog restriction signs on urban private property.
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27 The significance of the text also stands out because the area’s restriction of dogs is already
28 fully expressed through the visuals in the sign. The function of the text is thus reserved to
29 specify the strict object of the restriction and set the tone of it. In some cases, the text can also
30 function as the main conveyer of the meaning of the sign (see Author 2, 2016). There are
31 signs where there is only a plain (profile) image of a dog in which only the text specifies what
32 the sign is about. For example, in some urban beaches the texts indicate that the restriction
33 applies to the swimming of the dogs, not their ‘being’ on the beach area. Similarly to the
34 defecation restrictions, the motivation of the restriction is the potential impurity of dogs. This
35 is again an example of perceiving the dog as more of a cultural creature, the behaviour and
36 secretions of which can be controlled, as opposed to all the wild animals living in the area –
37 the being and defecating of which cannot be controlled by any kind of signs in the absence of
38 a controlling human master. Most signs in our urban data do not have texts, and when they do
39 have them like in this case, the text is not capitalized as seen in the rural signs (see next
40 section). This is in line with the usual semiotics of “smallness” in the urban pet dogscape.
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53 According to Kete (1995), the Western pet dog has lived together with humans since the 19th
54 century in Paris, where dogs were perceived as harmless freetime entertainment. What is
55 more, pets were means of marking and highlighting social distinction: pets soon became
56 general signifiers of upper and middle class. They indexed social capital (Bourdieu, 1986),
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3 distinctive from working class' livestock. Owning a pet and controlling it became a mean to
4 control the ever-changing world.
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8 The dog can be seen among one of the solutions to the lack of communality in an urban
9 environment. Through living with dog(s), it can be argued that humans construct their new
10 flock. The family dog has thus become the cliché of the modern lifestyle. Owning a pet in a
11 city is however ambivalent in essence; in the end, the dog is an animal and thus potentially
12 impure, dirty, and violent (Kete 1995).
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18 As the analyses above indicate, this kind of dualism involving both axis of hygiene (clean-
19 dirty) and morality (pure-impure) present in 19th century Paris (Kete 1995), is relevant today
20 as well (cf. Douglas, 1994 [1966]). On the one hand, dogs often get humanized (see Clutton-
21 Brock, 2012: 26; Leppänen, 2015). On the other hand, because of potential hygienic and
22 moral impurity, their 'being' is often restricted and controlled in urban environments (Kete,
23 1995: 133, 137). This is presented in the restrictive dog signs whereby the dog is treated as an
24 impure animal, denied entrance into various spaces in the city. However, at the same time,
25 the signs do not treat dogs as animals or part of nature at all: their being is restricted in areas
26 such as parks or beaches.
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36 In the previous analyses, we have shown how the Jyväskylä dog signscape reflects a 'pet dog
37 culture'. In the typically top-down signs placed in public urban 'tight' spaces, dogs are
38 iconically presented through silhouettes of generic small (terrier) pet dogs with a collar. In
39 order to tease out the cultural specificity of Western pet dog culture even more clearly, we
40 will next contrast it with different types of cases. In the next section, we proceed to analyse
41 Eastern European rural cases, which differ clearly from the Northern urban dogscape.
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50 **5 Working dog culture in 'East' European villages (Romania)**

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53 As an Eastern European context, post-socialist Romania (see Verdery, 1991) has been
54 characterized first by internal de-urbanization in the 1990's (see Antonescu and Popa 2012)
55 and then by immigration of the workforce to Western Europe in the new millenium. People
56 that returned to the villages after the failed socialist industrialisation and modernisation have
57 re-learnt farming and gardening skills, and thus the number of shepherd dogs has also
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3 increased. De-urbanization and westward migration have also transformed the village life in
4 different ways.
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8 In the comparative data from villages in Romania, there were no signs prohibiting dogs from
9 different public spaces, even though there are obviously relatively more dogs per inhabitants
10 in villages than in towns. There are also public marketplaces, shops and bars where dogs are
11 unwanted and stray dogs are routinely driven away from such places. However, local dog
12 owners did not walk the dogs in public spaces like they did in Jyväskylä. Most of the local
13 dogs had flocks (sheep or cattle) to shepherd or a house to guard.
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20 Since dog owners do not take their dogs into public spaces, most of the dog signs are placed
21 by private people and thus constitute bottom-up (see Ben-Rafael et al., 2006: 10) policies and
22 norms in comparison to our previous mostly top-down Northern European urban examples.
23 Signs that read beware of the dog are private signs, since they are voluntarily placed by
24 private persons and are available for public view in these open rural spaces. The bottom-up
25 dog signs address other private persons horizontally (see Author 2, 2016). These signs warn
26 people from dogs that guard homes. They also threaten potential trespassers with a dog that
27 bites. Next, we briefly discuss these two basic communicative actions mediated through dog
28 signs, *warning and threatening*, and their relationship to dogs in the society and the social
29 norms that they convey.
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41 **5.1 Warnings: Beware the dog bites!**

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44 insert Figure 10

45 Figure 10. Beware! The dog bites! (In Hungarian, Romania.) © Author 2.
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51 The sign with the text BEWARE! THE DOG BITES! (Figure 10) was photographed on a gate
52 in a Hungarian village in Romania. It is clearly directed towards humans and is intended to
53 restrict people's behaviour. It might be directed against trespassers such as potential thieves,
54 as a typical crime in Romanian villages is stealing from gardens. Therefore, in some cases,
55 there is no dog behind the gate, but a warning sign might be enough to keep tramps or other
56 unwanted strangers away.
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5 The dog in Figure 10 is a Komondor, which is a livestock guarding large shepherd dog. A
6 Komondor ‘is calm and steady when things are normal, but in case of trouble, the dog will
7 fearlessly defend its charges’. It is also ‘wary of strangers’ and ‘instinctively very protective
8 of its family, home and possessions’. An image of a Komondor on the gate thus tells the
9 passer by that there is a very large guard dog, which has the reputation of ‘knocking down the
10 intruder and keeping them down until the owner arrives’. (citations:
11 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Komondor>).

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19 The image and text of a sign can carry independent meanings. In this case, the image of a
20 Komondor should suffice to communicate that there is a guard dog. The text BEWARE! THE
21 DOG BITES! is thus redundant, repeating the information already expressed by the image.
22 Besides the largeness of the dog in the image, the text is also capitalized, adding an additional
23 element to the semiotics of bigness, typical for the rural dog signs in our data. The text can be
24 interpreted to emphasize the aspect of violence through the Hungarian expression *harapós*
25 ‘bites’. In the urban context, violence is a major characteristic to be tamed and kept under
26 strict control (Kete 1995), whereas in this rural and private (see Pandey 2017) environment it
27 can be constructed as a legitimate threat communicated to strangers.
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36 The dog’s breed as a shepherd dog is threatening, however its position or gaze in the sign is
37 not. Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 117–118), an image of a dog looking the
38 reader in the eyes would indicate that the dog is going to do something to the viewer. In
39 Figure 10, the dog is positioned sideways and its eyes are not visible. That is, the threat of a
40 dog is constructed in the sign through the breed of the dog and the text. The dog is displayed
41 in a photographic, naturalistic manner, not in an iconic way as any dog would be, but as a
42 particular kind of a dog with a specific function of guarding a space. To convincingly
43 communicate the message of a dog guarding a space, the dog should be a large, strong dog
44 capable of violence if needed.
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53 The text is in the local language, Hungarian, thus directed to fellow minority language
54 speakers. Semiotics and code choice in Figure 10 seem to indicate that it is a benevolent
55 warning. The sign in Figure 11 both controls space and builds good social relations in the
56 local community. According to interactional research, a warning is benevolent, whereas a
57 threat is intimidating and coercive (Chong Ho Shon, 2005; Hepburn and Potter, 2011). There
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3 is also a basic distinction of the agency of both the sign producer and the addressee at stake:
4 In the case of a warning, the visitor is advised to contact the owner before entering the space;
5 in the case of a threat, the intruder is threatened by the dog owner that the dog will bite him.
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10 The semiotics of the sign in Figure 10 is not particularly threatening, or at least this sign has
11 not been directly designed as such. The local intercommunity communication is emphasized
12 by the fact that the text is in the local language, Hungarian, not in the national official
13 language, Romanian. The semiotics and code choice seem to indicate that the sign in Figure
14 10 contains a benevolent warning, which both controls space and builds good social relations
15 between the locals. However, it still leaves some room for interpreting it as a threat at least in
16 the case of strangers, for example, non-speakers of the minority language, Hungarian who are
17 excluded through code choice of the sign. In this manner, the interpretation of this sign as
18 either a benevolent warning or an intimidating threat depends on its viewer.
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29 **5.2 Threats: the dog is dangerous**

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32 insert Figure 11

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34 Figure 11. Attention! The dog is dangerous. (In Romanian.) © Author 2.
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39 Figure 11 communicates a warning for humans not to enter the gate without permission of the
40 dog's master. This dog sign is also much less naturalistic than the previous one in its design.
41 The sign does not include an image of a dog, but has the teeth which explicitly underlines the
42 threatening, violent side of the dog and its moral impurity (Kete 1995): it might bite. The
43 teeth, pictured in an exaggerated form, are placed directly towards the reader of the sign, not
44 sideways (and hidden) as in the previous example, which further stresses that they are going
45 to do something to the viewer (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 117–118).
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52 The placement of the sign is on a high gate and fence, which you cannot see through. As in
53 the next example (see Figure 12) it indicates that the space is restricted but that people might
54 still attempt to enter it without permission. The text of the sign in Figure 11: 'ATTENTION!
55 THE DOG IS DANGEROUS' is in Romanian, which is locally a minority language, but
56 nationally the majority and official language. The text is again capitalized, which is in line
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3 with the over-sized teeth in the image. In comparison to the previous example (Figure 10),
4 the aggressive semiotics of the image in Figure 11 do not indicate a symmetrical social
5 relationship and frequent horizontal communication between the sign producer, interpreted as
6 'urban' and 'national', and its rural and local readers. In this manner, the dog sign displayed
7 in Figure 11 can be interpreted to communicate an unwelcoming message that says, 'stay
8 away', rather than a benevolent warning mitigated by semiotical means as in Figure 10.
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15 insert Figure 12

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17 Figure 12. Stop! The dog bites! (In Romanian.) © Author 2.
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22 In Figure 12, this modern and less naturalistic design includes exaggerated teeth such as those
23 depicted in the previous sign. However, the gaze and ear of the dog also emphasize the
24 threatening aspect. The text 'STOP! THE DOG BITES! Contains a new element, a directive
25 *Stop!*. Directives typically occur in the context of threats. As in the interaction between
26 parents and children (Hepburn and Potter, 2011) or police and people (Chong Ho Shon,
27 2005), the use of directives in signs indicates a hierarchical relationship between the sign
28 producer and the reader. In this context, where urban and affluent Romanians have bought
29 houses for vacation in the villages where most of the permanent residents are Hungarian
30 speakers, it seems likely that the social distance is indexed in visual communication through
31 both code choice and other semiotics of the beware of the dog signs.
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40 The breed of the dog is a Doberman, which is not a typical village dog, such as the
41 Komondor shepherd dog; rather it is associated with a guard dog protecting humans from
42 other humans (eg. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dobermann>). Newer dog breeds like
43 Doberman, Pit bull or Rottweiler, are often associated with violence and aggressive
44 behaviour. In the sign in Figure 12, it relates to the use of directives, which can be seen as
45 similarly aggressive communication associated with army or police communication (see
46 Chong Ho Shon, 2005). During fieldwork, we did not see any such dogs in the villages but
47 they are fairly common in Western cityscapes and the global Beware of the dog! imagery
48 available e.g. on the Internet.
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57 It is notable that most, if not all, 'beware of the dog!' signs in the Romanian villages contain
58 both an image and a text. In comparison to those beware of the dog! signs where there is only
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3 text or image (see Author 2, 2016: 387), they certainly get the warning or threat through, and
4 at the same time indicate a code preference, local, national, or in rare cases bilingual. In the
5 image, there is great variety, from the naturalistic semiotics of photography to ‘modern’
6 stylized use of contrast, caricature, and play with fonts. However, as is typical for images, the
7 verbal text is ‘rigorously controlled and codified’ (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006: 26–27),
8 and a language must be chosen to establish a preference for a code. In this case, the explicit
9 verbal warnings or threats, although ‘redundant’, are present in all beware of the dog signs in
10 our Romanian corpus. In other contexts, we can find examples of texts or images that are
11 inconsistent in conveying the beware of the dog! message; rather, they use playful text or a
12 pet dog that result in the mitigation of the threat into a humorous warning instead (see Author
13 2, 2016: 384). Humour seems to be one of the key elements that mitigates face threatening
14 interactional activities in dog signs as well. It is also a key element that implies that the sign
15 should be interpreted as a benevolent warning and not as an intimidating threat.
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27 To sum up, for the dog signs in the Hungarian villages of Romania, there seems to be two
28 types of development, first a traditionalistic and a local one, and secondly one of a
29 modernizing global and national development. The choice of code for the text (Hungarian vs.
30 Romanian), the design and style of the image (naturalistic vs. modern), and the dog breed
31 (shepherd dog vs. ‘violent’ guard dog) index the different developmental strands. Although
32 suburbs in Western cities might have similar Beware of the dog! genres, in our case of
33 Jyväskylä we found mainly a pet dogscape with the message ‘no dogs here!’. At the same
34 time, a ‘no dogs here’ genre is now emerging in shopping malls at the outskirts of Romanian
35 towns as well but not yet in the villages we investigated here.
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47 **6 Discussion**

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49 In the analyses above, we have examined the ways dog signs in public spaces reflect and
50 construct shared ‘normalcy’ in the given community (cf. Blommaert, 2013: 39). Based on our
51 analysis, we argue that dog signs reveal where the two societies and communities in this
52 study stand in terms of what we call a ‘dog index continuum’. Our main criteria here is
53 whether they display characteristics of ‘dog as a (co)worker’ or ‘dog as a pet’ communities.
54 We also argue that the analysed dog signs not only reflect the dog-human relationship
55 continuum but that by reflecting it they also index a more general picture of a society in
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relation to features like the everyday practices and norms of (visual) communication, phase or degree of urbanization, demography, language practices, and the nature of economies.

The common semiotic features of the signs we have studied in this article are widespread, typical and well-known in the semiotic landscapes of our research sites. The dog signs serve to regulate human-animal relationships through restrictions. In all the signs, an image of a dog is the signifier conveying the meaning (but see Author 2, 2016: 387). In the urban Jyväskylä, the mediated restrictions target dogs' owners ('no dogs here'); in the Ethnic Hungarian villages in Romania, they target bypassers ('do not enter!'). This functional dichotomy of the signs is shown both in the design and the placement of the signs. We have gathered the recurrent features in table 1.

Table 1. The most prominent aspects and differences in the signs of the two research sites.

City of Jyväskylä		Romanian villages
	Design	
Hyperstylised mass-produced icons		(Realistic) Photographs
Small pet breed(s) tamed in collars and/or leashes		Big shepherd or guard dogs
No text (if text, descriptive declaratives, no capitalization)		Text (directives: warnings and threats, capitalized)
	Placement	
Doors, fences and other borders of/in public spaces		Doors, fences or other borders of private properties

Following the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 8, 25-30) on realistic versus stylised images, we argue that the urban signs in Jyväskylä can be characterized as hyperstylised mass produced icons (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2003) of a small collared and/or leashed pet, placed as a part of top-down communication in various borders in and of 'tight' public spaces, generalise the idea of a humanized (tamed, domesticated and disciplined, see Kete 1995) dog. As iconic representations of the Western pet dog, these signs address any owner with any kind of a dog. In contrast, the (realistic) photographs of big shepherd or guard dogs in the private Romanian village spaces refer, through their 'naturalism,' in each case to some specific dog who probably and concretely bites if the property is trespassed. However, at the

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3 same time, such dogs have private owners establishing bottom-up norms and hierarchies in
4 the communities, who in some specific cases may turn the intimidating threats of violence
5 into benevolent and humorous warnings.
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10 Based on this kind of a distribution of function and the more or less systematic differences in
11 the semiotic landscapes of the two data sets, we argue that the status of dogs and how it is
12 presented in signs could form an index of the type of community and society. Thus, the
13 typical dog sign type could also index the major characteristics of an economy: whether it is
14 mainly agricultural or knowledge and service based, and thus whether the dogs' function is to
15 entertain or to work; or whether social norms are constructed through top-down (public) or
16 bottom-up (private) interactions.
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24 In the light of our analyses, dogs in the city of Jyväskylä are perceived to be a creature
25 between nature and culture, and the signs are all addressed to the dog owners to restrict the
26 being and acting of dogs. In 'Western' societies based on consumption, dogs seem to be pets
27 and even humanized family members (cf. Clutton-Brock, 2012: 18; Irvine 2002: 49-50; Kete,
28 1995: 137). In turn, dogs in Romanian villages are treated and perceived as fellow workers
29 and guards, and the dog signs aim to restrict the being and acting of humans. In this type of
30 an agricultural society, dogs are perceived and treated as workforce, colleagues, guards of
31 property and shepherds of the livestock.
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39 Both restrictions and warnings function through negation, that is, negative imperative:
40 'don't'. Negation shows what is considered normal and ordinary and exactly for that reason
41 something that has to be restricted and controlled (see, Sacks, 1992 [1970]: 267–268; Author
42 1, 2005: 292). Dog signs seem to create a kind of societal continuum in which on one hand
43 display the 'normalcies' or typicalities, and on the other hand the rules that have been created
44 to regulate those normalcies are shown. We find signs and the semiotic landscape extremely
45 revealing and empirically important data to study the type of society, its characteristics, and
46 their ongoing changes. The apparently small signs, such as dog signs, show what is probable
47 and expected in the large scale, and also what could be done with it – and in this way reveals
48 both typicalities and moralities of different communities and societies.
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Figure 1. Jyväskylä, Finland (By Original artist: Ningyou. SVG-map created by Care - SVG map of Finland is created by user Care. Original bitmap map is created by User: Ningyou, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4312488>).

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Figure 2. The region of ethnic Hungarian villages in Romania © Author 2.

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Figure 3. Post office door in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.

79x141mm (96 x 96 DPI)



Figure 4. 'Beware, the dog bites'. (In Hungarian.) On a house gate in Romania. © Author 2.

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Figure 5. Mall door in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.

397x298mm (180 x 180 DPI)



Figure 6. Nature reserve area in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.

67x90mm (180 x 180 DPI)

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Figure 7. Köhniö beach in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.

320x240mm (180 x 180 DPI)



Figure 8. A parking lot near swimming hall and school in Jyväskylä. © Author 1.

90x67mm (180 x 180 DPI)

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Figure 9. A fence of a private property in Jyväskylä. (In Finnish.) © Author 1.

399x586mm (96 x 96 DPI)



Figure 10. Beware! The dog bites! (In Hungarian, Romania.) © Author 2.

423x564mm (180 x 180 DPI)

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Figure 11. Attention! The dog is dangerous. (In Romanian.) © Author 2.

564x423mm (180 x 180 DPI)



Figure 12. Stop! The dog bites! (In Romanian.) © Author 2.

564x423mm (180 x 180 DPI)