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Animal welfare research in the last three decades in the Danube region – a bibliographic study

Miroslav Radeski¹, Tomislav Mikus², Manja Zupan³, Katarina Nenadovic⁴, Mario Ostovic⁵, Viktor Jurkovich⁶, Ludovic T. Csiszter⁷, Radka Sarova⁸, Ivan Dimitrov⁹, Marlene K. Kirchner¹⁰

¹Animal Welfare Centre, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, St. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, Macedonia

²Animal Welfare Unit, Croatian Veterinary Institute, Zagreb, Croatia

³Department of Animal Science, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Domzale, Slovenia

⁴Department of Animal Hygiene, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

⁵Department of Animal Hygiene, Behaviour and Welfare, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia

⁶Department of Animal Hygiene, Herd Health and Veterinary Ethology, Faculty of Veterinary Science, Szent István

University, Budapest, Hungary

⁷Faculty of Animal Science & Biotechnologies, USAMVB Timisoara, Romania

⁸Department of Ethology, Institute of Animal Science in Prague, Czech Republic

⁹Agricultural Institute, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

¹⁰ Department of Large Animal Sciences, Institute of Animal Welfare and Disease Control, University of Copenhagen, Frederiksberg C, Denmark, mk@sund.ku.dk

The objective of this bibliographic study was to reveal and summarize published scientific literature on animal welfare (AW) over the last 30 years in the Danube region countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic and Slovenia. The literature taken into consideration comprised AW assessment protocols, their indicators and local AW topics in domestic animals. Prior the searching and the collecting process, 14 keywords were identified, including animal behaviour, human-animal relationship and animal's emotional state. Defining and translating of the keywords in different languages resulted in a multilingual matrix. Total 497 publications with first or last authors from respective countries were found for the Danube region. The predominant were scientific papers published in local/national scientific journals (40%), followed by considerably lower amount in international scientific journals (19%) and the least among Master, Graduation theses and Monographs (<3%). According to the animal species observed, most publications were for cattle, pigs and chickens (43, 17 and 11%, respectively), particularly in Serbia, Romania, Croatia, Czech Republic, Austria and Hungary. Less than 3% of the total findings referred to horses (Romania and Serbia), sheep (Romania, Bulgaria and Macedonia) and goats (Austria). Exponential growth of the publishing timeline in 30 years was indicated by only 9% within 1985-1999; 37% in the first decade of 21st century, while in the last 6 years, 54% of the total literature was published. This trend indicates future even greater involvement of the Danube region on topics like animal behaviour and welfare. A review and database on AW assessment in the Danube region will follow, enabling visibility and solid ground for future applied ethology and AW research in this region.