

Constructing our own discourse

The autumn of 2011 brought with it activities and novelties which are worth summarizing here.

In its first term, the “Master in Animal Law and Society” set off on its path in September with a good group of students (lawyers, veterinarians, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, and journalists), who have participated with dedication and enthusiasm in the classes. This first year of the Masters program, which was preceded by the “Postgraduate Degree in Animals, Law and Society” in the previous year (2010-2011), relies on the enthusiastic support of an international group of professors, who, as can be seen in the list published on our website, are professionals of the highest order who communicate their knowledge with surety and passion¹. I know of no one who can effectively communicate something – a message, a lecture, a discourse – unless they are convinced and passionate about what they are communicating. It is a clear and simple rule: speak about what you know with conviction and enthusiasm. Eugenio d’Ors, the father of my teacher, Mr. Alvaro d’Ors, said it in a concise form: “you have to repeat with enthusiasm; this is the mission of one who teaches!” The first part of the rule: that you speak about what you know - is summed up in one word: “expertise”, or, with the term coined in Rome: *auctoritas* - that is the widely accepted knowledge. Knowing is not enough, however; you have to communicate with enthusiasm and repeat the same enthusiasm that you had the first time. That is one of the values of this Masters program, thanks to the group of professors who take part in it, to their generosity, their enthusiasm and to their devotion as well as to our excellent students.

When studies like these begin – ones that were unknown in Europe until our program started – the plan was to reunite experts on each type of material and to construct an interdisciplinary program. The perspective of study – legal statute and animal welfare – was unique both for its objective as for its intention: to provide better individual education, greater professionalization to the field, to help each and every student coming from differing professional and educational backgrounds to construct their own discourse and to communicate their message in all areas where their knowledge can help animals. It seems like an ambitious plan, and it is; we do not want only to inform, but rather to mold independent professionals committed to animal welfare. This is one of the great goals taken up by the European Union, through the DG SANCO, summarized in the brief and incisive slogan: “Everyone is responsible.”

In the Masters program, our aspiration is that each participant constructs his or her own discourse in the defense and protection of animals. A short time ago, I was speaking with a colleague, an expert in teaching English, and she told me: languages are learned in a contextualized form, that is to say, speaking in English about what interests you most. In our version of learning and communication of knowledge, we humbly acknowledge that one never stops learning and you can always improve the ways you teach what you know. Dynamic teaching and contextualized learning means that our Masters students find themselves comfortable in utilizing their own discourse as each day goes past. Our students do not merely repeat distant ideas, which last only briefly in one’s memory and do not define a good professional, but rather they learn to speak and create their own ideas and advance their education, within the program and in dialogue with the professors of the Masters program.

Secondly, with the Masters classes having only recently begun, the Research Group ADS (Animals, Law and Society) directed and organized the Congress “Animals and the Law” on the 24th and 25th of October,

¹ <http://www.derechoanimal.info/esp/page/1666/profesores>

with the help and participation of the MICINN I+D (Ministry of Science and Innovation, Research and Design) Project DER 2010-21301 from the European Commission DG SANCO and the international association Minding Animals. The intention of the Congress was to bring closer together two worlds which had previously been separate: Law and Animals. The Congress sought to dive deeply into the problems and demands that today's society has with regards to animals and analyze the responses which the legal world has to offer for effective improvement in the treatment of animals. Additionally, the congress sought especially to examine the responses to these social demands, which are becoming more and more sensitive to animal needs, and how these responses have been formulated in the two great Western legal traditions: Common Law and Civil Law.

The convocation of the Congress brought together some of the world's greatest experts in this field, coming from Europe, the United States of America, Canada and Australia. As a novelty for this type of meeting, at least here in Spain, a section called "New Voices" was included, destined to help the youngest participants present their projects in front of experienced researchers, to receive suggestions and critiques; work groups, at least those worthy of the name, have to open their doors to incorporate new talent. It was an initiative which provided a magnificent result and served to stimulate others, both participants and the audience.

The list of the works presented and of participants can be found on our website². What is perhaps not so easy to perceive is the environment of hard work and intellectual exchange which was created among the audience members. The sessions took place in the Hotel Campus of the UAB, which is an excellent place for these types of events, for the means which they have available as well as for the staff which tend to the participants. You cannot forget that the Hotel is also a hospitality training school, and the students performing internships were often those who helped take care of the different services. Seeing them so young and helpful created a very relaxed and warm environment from the beginning which was felt by all involved.

There were periods of animated discussion both during the question and answer sessions as well as in the hallways. I remember a chat which Steven Wise formed around himself in the hall of the Hotel which brought together more and more people, until in the end we formed one big circle, with some even sitting on the floor. I also have to highlight an especially emotional moment in the formulation of the "Conclusions" at the end of the Congress. I asked Professor David Favre to be the one to lead the session. With his words, measured and tested, he galvanized the audience to remember that the most important part of a Congress are the results achieved. In our case, he asked us what we can do from our work places to improve the situation of animals, what initiatives and public policies to promote in order to further respect for animals.

Thirdly, on the 1st and 2nd of December, I had the honor of co-organizing the projects of a Workshop promoted by the European Commission DG SANCO³, the European Federation of Veterinarians (FVE), the Council of the College of Veterinarians⁴ and the Ministry of Agriculture, dedicated to the education of clinical veterinarians in countries in the south of Europe (Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Malta), under the title: "Improving Animal Welfare". The legal component of these Educational Workshops, the first of which took place in Budapest, sought to highlight that legislation must be a faithful reflection of the scientific advances in the area of animal welfare, and as such, veterinarians and jurists must work together in close collaboration.

Many participants were attracted to the Workshop, which consisted of two sessions perfectly organized by the team from DG SANCO, represented by Oana Barbulete, Carine Crouquet and Adrian Brouwn and by the Executive Director of the FVE, Nancy de Brijne. The Workshop was divided into conference sessions, one part practical – preparing to visit farms according to the protocol elaborated by Welfare Quality⁵ - whose group included the Chair of Etology at the UAB, Xavier Manteca, and in a day visit to the farms

2 <http://www.derechoanimal.info/esp/page/1409/programa>

3 <http://www.onetec.be/animalwelfare/>; <http://www.animalwelfare-education.eu/eu-aw-education/workshop-for-vet-practitioners-2011.html>;

4 <http://www.colvet.es/>

5 <http://www.welfarequality.net/everyone/26536/5/0/22>

(dairy farms, pig farms and bird farms) and to the Barcelona Zoo.

Thus ends 2011, a year full of work, with the intention of continuing to work harder and working better for the Animals.

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