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Companion Animals and Civil Action

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The attention towards abandoned animals, whose number in Spain (according to the [Affinity Foundation's annual reports](#)) is extremely high, is generally afforded through the generous compassion, efforts and dedication of free time of many thousands of people, professionals of varying origins, and mostly anonymous; volunteers! Everyday, thousands of emails circulate between protection agencies, shelters, animal-friendly groups, of varying names and statutory situations, carrying messages about cases of mistreatment, abandonment, and malnutrition of companion animals that require urgent veterinary attention, that need a new home to start a new life and leave their old life of suffering behind, who need someone to file a report for them, to inform other animals that they can avoid death by euthanasia. This civil movement in favour of animals is not given publicity. Most of the time, this work remains hidden from the eyes of most citizens of this country; it is, however, efficient work, silent work, resistant to any adversity.

I refer to what is technically known as the tertiary sector, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), that privately and without profit take on tasks aimed at solving social needs through personal compromise in situations that, without such interventions, would remain unresolved. It is in this spirit that they were approved, and given regulation.[2]

This community, flexible and permeable to the ever-changing needs, has through NGOs become a helping hand for animals. Some are not granted this legal status, but they share this spirit that defines their activities; without profit, civil (in the best sense of the word), because they are born of the initiative of the *cives*, the common, day-to-day citizen.

The social movement for animals was born in the 60s in Great Britain. In the heat of the revolution that shortened women's skirts, widened trouser legs, changed pop music forever with the Beatles, and liberalised the social conception of sexual relations, British citizens, already having been very conscious of animal suffering since the 19th century,[3] began to organise themselves into animalist, protectionist, abolitionist associations, fighting for animal welfare. One mustn't forget that a book was published only a few years earlier that contributed towards establishing the bases of this new legal concept of Animal Welfare; I am of course referring to the appearance of *Animal Machines*,[4] a book that laid bare the sad reality for production animals, the confinement and exploitation of animals intended for the consumer, and their cruel death in slaughterhouses, where, as if it were some bloody Olympiad ("citius, altius, fortius") more meat, greater quantity, and greater speed were the most important factors, because the market demanded it that way.

In effect, Great Britain had since the 17th century been nourished by the works of great thinkers, philosophers, animalists, the cultivating mix necessary for their laws to reflect social sensibility.[5] The first animal protection association that appeared with this name

is the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ([RSPCA](#)), which remains active today, and whose first President was Queen Victoria. The current Queen Elizabeth continues, as a tradition of the Royal Family, presiding and honouring it with her patronage.[6]

From this perspective, the reality is that current regulations in Spain, which regulate the subsidies for all social activities in favour of animals, are clearly insufficient, and neither cover nor influence the work that many associations, shelters, voluntary groups, and the most modest among us, accomplish. In fact, they must make a personal effort, at their own cost, which is rarely recognised and is most of the time not compensated by public appreciation and support towards very effective and indispensable jobs.

It would be great for regulations to be adapted to this sector (an incredibly important part of the tertiary sector); that their work be made public, and that, as in other countries, big economic groups give a part of their profit as subsidies and support to citizens that work for the sole purpose of helping animals. Their mission is very simple and very important; to give voice, warmth and affection to the beings that are without these, but cannot claim it. In this way, we can start to end abandonment; but this is a topic that I will deal with shortly.

The Editor

(1) [See a map for locations](#)

(2) Law 38/2003 of 30 November, BOE number 276 of 18/11/2003, p. 40505 to 40532 (vid. regulation [Download](#)).

(3) The first Animal Protection law was elaborated in Great Britain in 1802 (Bull Baiting Bill; vid. [text](#))

(4) R. HARRISON, *Animal Machines: The New Factory Farming Industry* (New York 1966)

(5) N.PEDERSEN, *Overview of European Animal Welfare Laws: 2003 to Present* Vid. ([complete article](#))

(6) The members of the Royal Families of other countries do not declare themselves in favour of any practice that disguises the cruel treatment of animals, and what is more, Her Royal Highness of Britain endorsed – as she is constitutionally permitted – the ending of the very traditional and old practice – an icon of the United Kingdom for centuries – of foxhunting (Hunting Act 2004; vid. [text](#)).