

# Children, pets and nature-based solutions: An eco-anthropological view of urban health

*I explore the multiple roles of children and pets/domestic animals as challenges and opportunities for 'Nature-Based Solutions' (NBS) particularly for urban environmental health and well-being. I specifically address the relations between species and generations, and mental and cultural aspects of problems and solutions.*

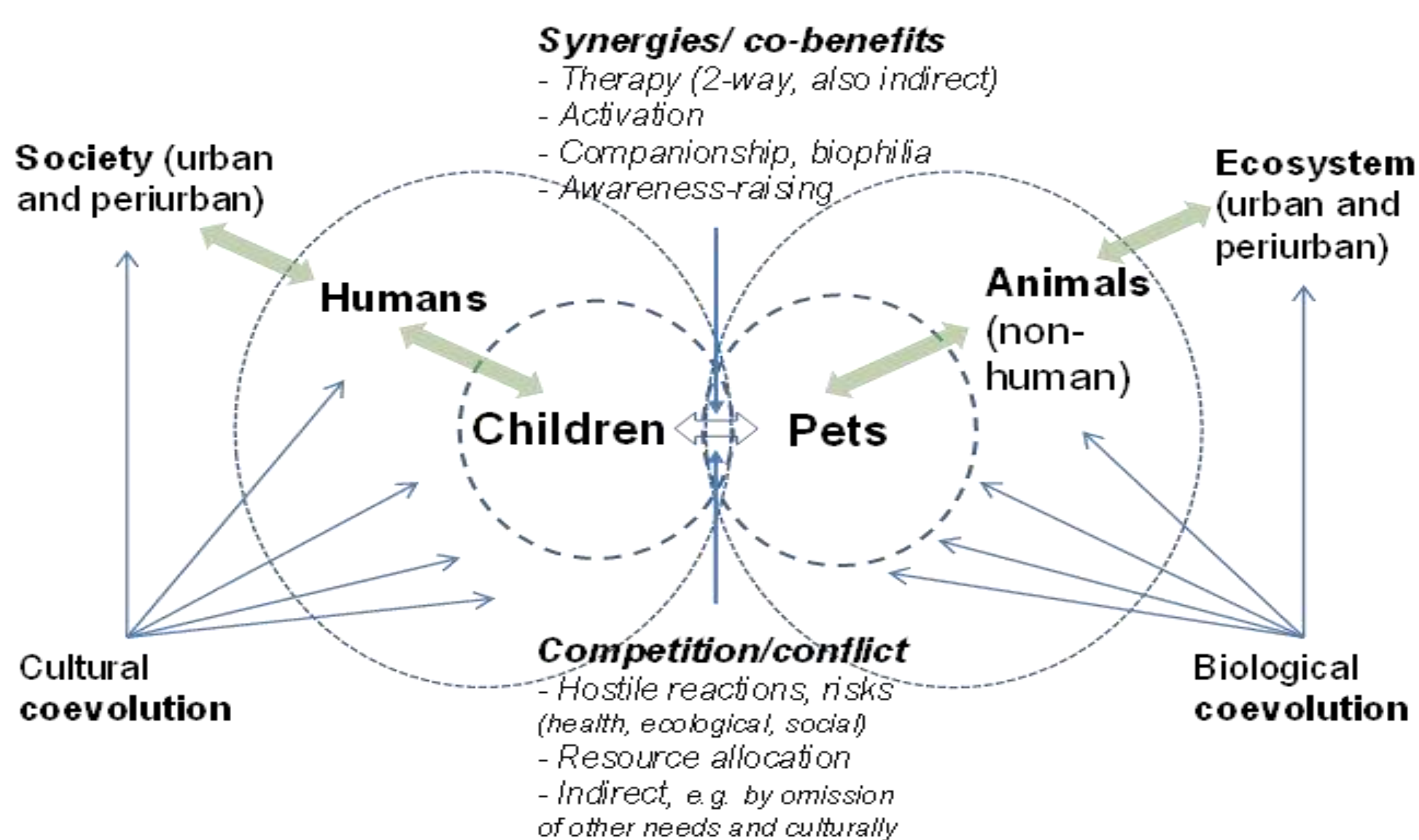


Fig. 1. A conceptual model of children and pets in a community health and wellbeing context.



## Approach and Methods

I focus on children and pets and objects of affection and as heuristic tools to explore human ecology more generally.

I integrate ecological and biomedical (biophysical) with social and anthropological perspectives, on a reflexive methodology.

I use frameworks in animal studies (Assmuth, 2013), community ecology and comparative anthropology, and biosemiotics.

I emphasize relations between children and pets – synergistic, competitive and conflicting – in urban and general policy, as well as dynamic learning processes.

I draw on work on children's environmental health and safety risks, in normal and non-normal conditions (Assmuth, 2013).

The cultural roles of children for well-being, such as in providing a sense of coherence and meaning are stressed on salutogenetic models of Antonovsky (1996) to complement risk factor based paradigms.

## Results and Discussion

- Pets, children and adults have **multi-directional relationships** shaped by **bio-cultural evolution** and steered in **salutogenetic processes**
- **Children**, besides posing socio-economic, demographic and moral problems by their vulnerability, are **keys to societal solutions**
- **Pets can promote health** e.g. through physical activity, animal therapy, awareness-raising and social networks for natural life-styles
- Children and pets **motivate biophilic** ideas and practices
- While there are many **synergies** between children, pets and adults in urban life, there are also **conflicts**, and tradeoffs in ecological and socio-economic terms to be made.

## Conclusions

- **Children and pets** are besides burdens and victims also **enablers and beneficiaries of solutions to societal challenges**.
- Specifically, children and pets are at once **pupils and teachers** for development, and solutions aimed for them need to be developed organically together with them.
- The findings indicate needs to
  - **study child-pet-adult relations** in more depth, also empirically (e.g. in allergology, public health, and ecological economics)
  - **refine quality criteria for NBS** to identify and avoid conflicts.
- The information and perspectives applied are relevant to researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and others engaged in NBS.

## References

- Antonovsky A. The salutogenetic model as a theory to guide health promotion. *Health Promotion Int.* 1996;11(1):11-18;
- Assmuth T. War and Children's Environmental Health: Continuity and Change In the Last Century. Talk and poster, 7<sup>th</sup> Conf. Children's Environmental Health, Jerusalem, Nov 20-22 2013.
- Assmuth T. Humans and other animals, feelings and knowings. Abstract and slides of talk at 1st Finnish meeting on social and cultural animal studies, Joensuu, Finland, April 19th-20th 2012.