



Animals and Cities: The potential of the human-animal bond in a New European Bauhaus dimension

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INTRODUCTION

Cities are expected to host most of the world population in the future in parallel with growing environmental and socio-economic challenges. The **New European Bauhaus** (NEB), an interdisciplinary project launched by the European Commission in 2020 [1], reflects on enriching, sustainable and inclusive urban places and aims to work together for beautiful and sustainable places to enhance urban living. NEB is bonded to the promotion of **Nature-Based Solutions** (NBS) - “inspired and supported by nature, cost-effective, able to simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more, and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.” [2]. NBS are supported towards social innovation paths to co-design NEB and urban life improvements.

Although the debate on NBS is increasingly part of cities’ development, resilience and sustainability, it’s mainly focused on solutions based on the use of plants to improve livable cities, human wellbeing and mental health [3-5].

Meanwhile there is a new increasing presence in terms of numbers as well as attentions to the role of animals in cities; their wider presence in cities opens space for a reflection on their possible impacts in the society as **Animal-NBS**. As for the “green solutions”, animals might offer support to urban inhabitants and generate opportunities for improving the urban quality of life and to better include people in need by generating inclusive and sustainable urban public spaces and opportunities.

The paper aims to look at the inclusive process of mobilization of the animal resource as a NBS in enhancing the quality of life of people in cities from different perspectives (i.e. education, social inclusion, health and wellbeing, economic activities, citizenship) in a NEB perspective.

METHODS

The adoption of the A-NBS at city level to support NEB implies a mindset shift in many of the public and private stakeholders involved. From a research point of view a **Participatory Action Research** (PAR) was organised in the frame of the EU-IN-HABIT (Inclusive Health And wellBeing In small and medium size ciTies) project (GA 869227) that involves 4 European cities - Cordoba (Spain), Riga (Latvia), **Lucca** (Italy) and Nitra (Slovakia) - and it aims at increasing inclusive health and wellbeing by mobilising existing resources (like culture, food, **human-animal bonds**

and environment) through **visionary and integrated solutions** (VIS), co-designed, co-developed and co-managed (**co-co-co**) by local citizens and key stakeholders.

In Lucca, PAR is aimed at codifying an integrated policy to enhance human-animal bonds and their positive outcomes in the perspective of a **restorative city** to be then up-scaled and transferred in other cities.

To enhance A-NBS in supporting a restorative process in the city in the NEB perspective, Lucca project works on different aspects of the human-animal bonds by co-co-co (in a devoted **participatory hub**) innovative solutions able to keep value from the interaction of animals with people in diverse circumstances [6,7] and with the focus on possible connections between animals, people, and various urban policies – such as public building, education, social policies, environment, tourism, policies related to the enhancement of animals’ related economic and professional activities (Figure 1). The PAR has been accompanied towards different participatory tools, like focus group, workshops, interviews, storytelling, pilot initiatives installation, reflexive meetings, questionnaires. The pilots, according with the focus emerging along the co-design process, have been focused on the reorganisation of devoted spaces (Animal Lines and relational human-animal areas), educational activities in the schools, Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) with elders with dementia in nursing homes, supporting the reorganisation of business oriented on the pet-economy and facilitating a mindset shift at political as well stakeholders level.

At this moment, the project in Lucca is focusing on monitoring, up-scaling and replicating the solutions, as well as co-designing an **integrated urban hum-animal policy**.

RESULTS

The Lucca IN-HABIT project in the perspective of A-NBS and NEB and towards a PAR and co-co-co activities organised in the participatory Hub until now: reshaped urban spaces (15 km of Animal Lines and 2 relational areas), organised innovative services for elders, educational activities for children in the schools, a board game (City Pets) as educational game, introduced a pet-care service for fragile people with pets at home, launched devote hum-animal events and games, trained new entrepreneurs on pet-economy solutions. It is also planning to work on devoted seminars supporting tourism with animals, a city map with services devoted to hum-animal fruition, replicating educational and gaming activities with schools, as well as AAI. Each pilot contributed to the overall project with specific outcomes. As for the **Animal Lines** and the **relational hum-animal areas**, they supported social dialogue among different social strata, active people and gaming, space for individual reflection in beautiful urban spaces (Parco del Serchio , old walls and Nottolini acqueduct). **Educational activities** in schools involving children in urban planning and active

citizenship, besides social inclusion and dialogue among peers.

AAI with elders improved mobility skills due to willingness to participate in activities with dogs; in terms of psychological aspects different elements emerged: memory’s improvement (the days in which they had activities and the names of the dogs), calm level improvement as sessions progressed, maintenance of the attention due to willingness of carrying out the activity with the dog. From a social interaction perspective indirect benefit in seeing other elderly people having interactions with dogs, better interaction between older people and with educators and other practitioners, improvement in the expression of emotions and conflict reactions have been highlighted.

Pet care services supported fragile people - mainly elders - with an aid in three dimensions (at home, outside with the person involved, outside with the only pet), reducing anxiety and promoting the positive benefit of the hum-animal interaction.

The **City Pets** game facilitates gaming and social interaction among participants (children, young and families). Hum-animal events enriched the social activities involving people in ecological walks, gaming, and reading of book with children including animal stories.

The training activities on pet economy involved 20 people with innovative ideas and solutions related to the hum-animal topic so enriching opportunities for them and in the society.

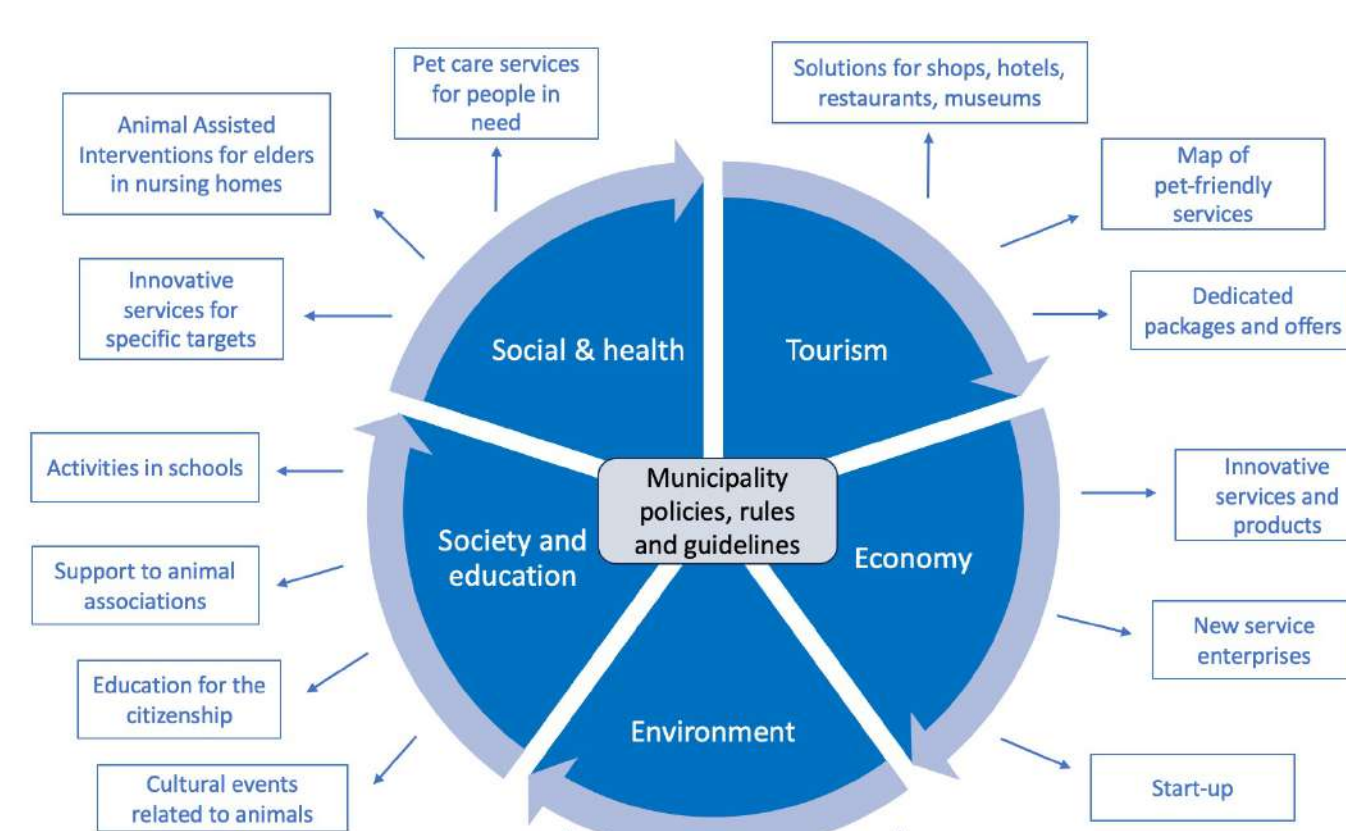
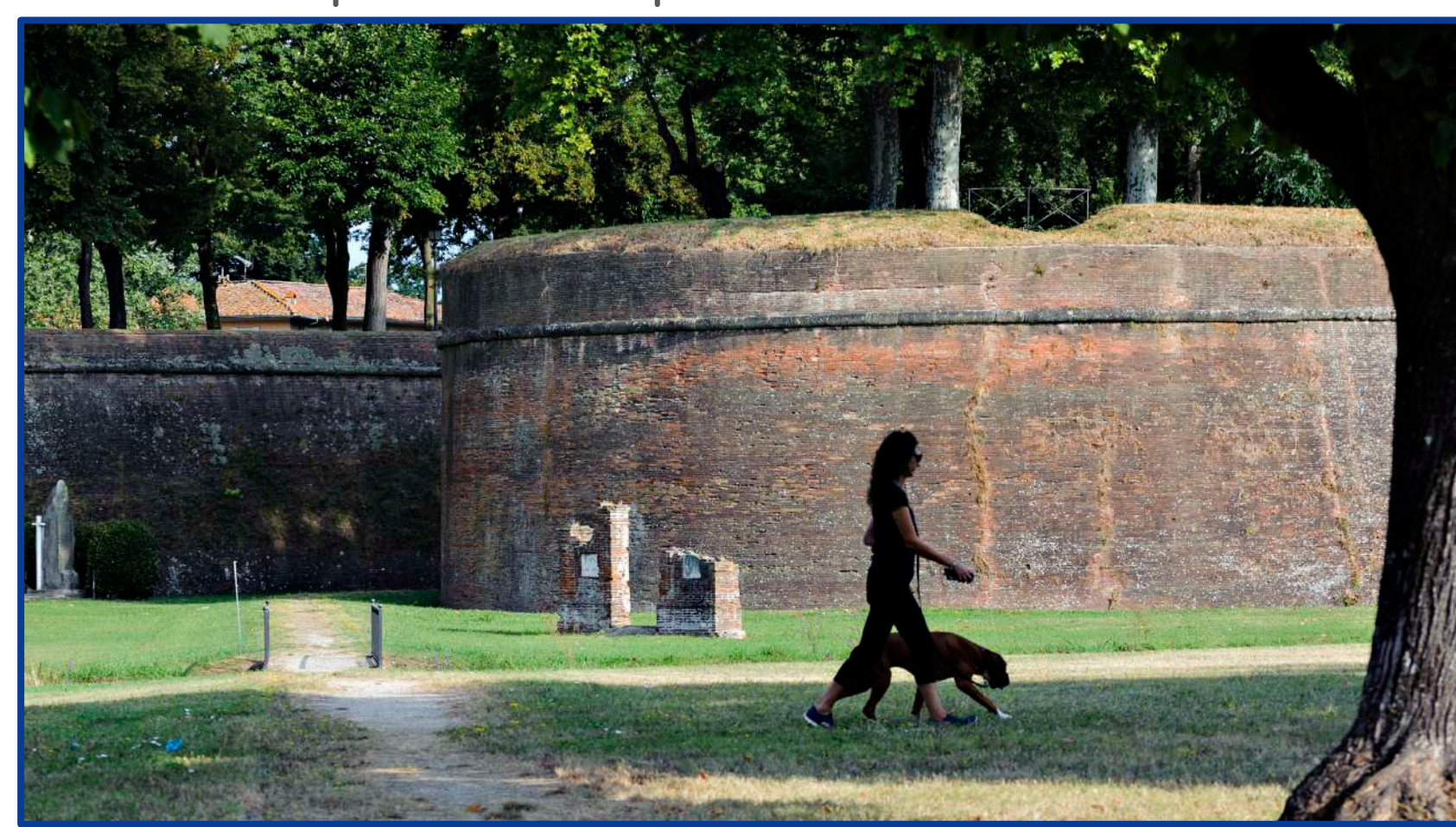
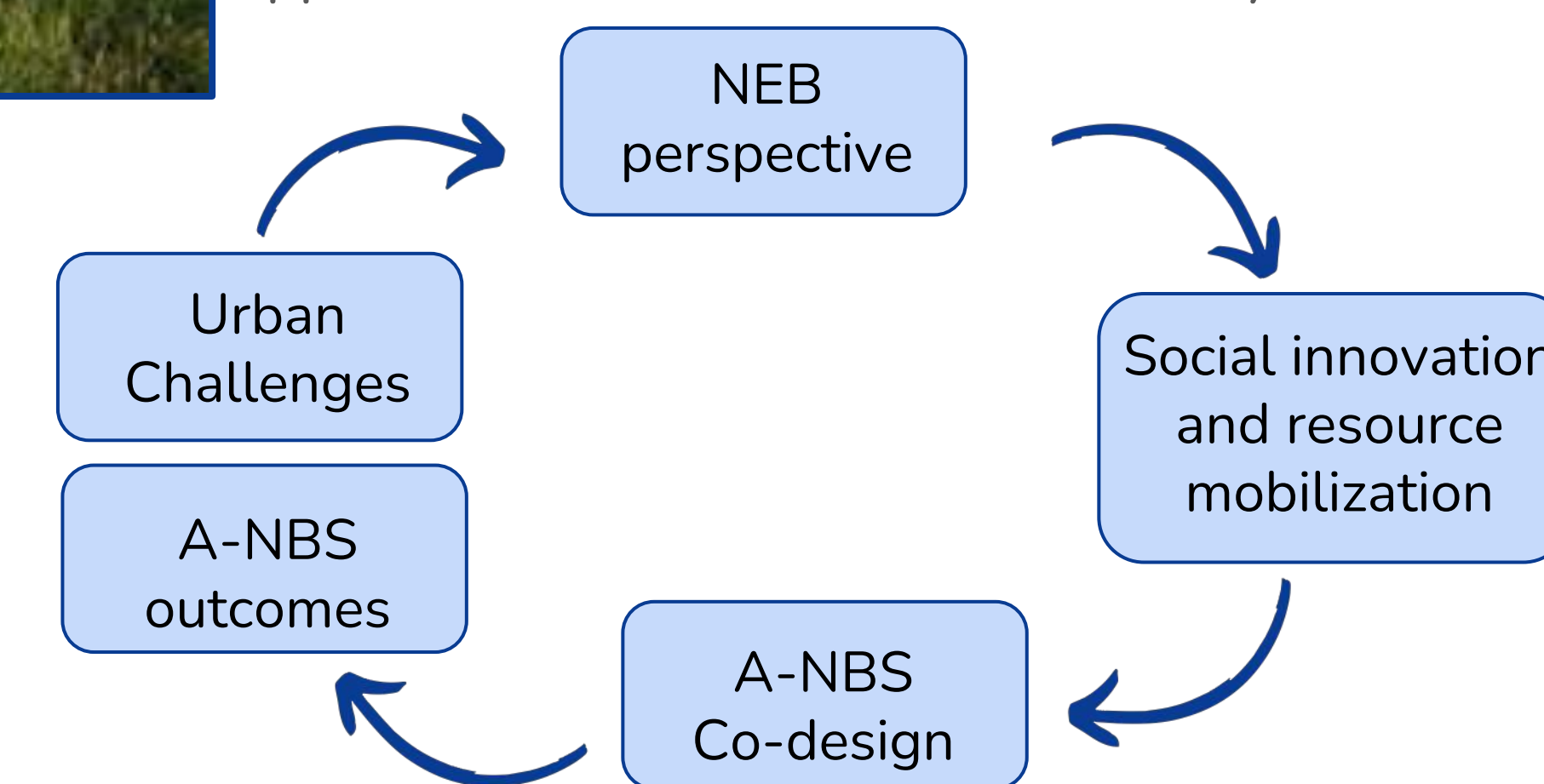


Figure 1. Areas and proposal of interventions (elaboration from the authors)

ORGANIZATIONAL ASPECTS IN THE PILOT'S ORGANISATION

- Proper preparation of the setting and of the groups to involve
- Participation of different stakeholders in the co-design phase meetings
- Involvement of stakeholders and staff in the activities



DISCUSSION

In the Lucca study case, the **co-co-co** of innovative **A-NBS** has been facilitated by the process of mindset change itself organised in the **participatory hub**.

The preparatory phases, even if time consuming, emerged as crucial to accommodate local stakeholders in an innovative perspective – in our case the idea of **A-NBS as a common good** - in the urban context. Another achievement regards the idea that vision and knowledge shifts might happen when a cluster of diverse **pilot initiatives** contributes to create and to consolidate the new idea as progressively emerging from the **social innovation path**. In our path such evidence comes from the evaluation of the **impact** of some first A-NBS. As described in the results section.

In each pilot the emerging positive outcomes can be linked to diverse aspects like: a **strong and open co-design, co-deployment and co-management** phase where new actors start copying in a diverse perspective and with innovative procedures; the opportunity to introduce in well fixed (urban, social/health, educational, economic) environments **transforming solutions** although under a **well-established and formalized process** able to mediate *breaking innovation with existing and consolidate responsibility and procedures*.

The IN-HABIT project, through participation, implementation, and new services, developed **effective solutions based on a new relationship between people and animals** that can now be codified in an **urban integrated hum-animal policy** to be managed in the future and transferred to other cities interested. The impact of such social innovation processes is not only based on the process itself but also in giving back a **sense of new expectation and perspectives in many actors**, from the more fragile ones to the citizens and public actors active in the urban contexts and willing to find new solutions to face emerging challenges. **In the NEB perspective A-NBS were enriching, sustainable and inclusive for the most, able to redesign urban beautiful and sustainable places toward the enhancement of an active participation of public, private, and people in a progressively consolidating partnership.**

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