This research is about how Helsinki urbanites get meaning and sociality in a concrete manner into their lives by getting a pet dog. This is experienced in a bricoleur manner as described by Levi-Strauss. I especially analyze how a general meaning of a dog becomes a particular one and a sign that in a metonymical way profiles its owner. I analyze also what the sociality of urban dog-owners is like. My research gets situated into urban sociology and multidisciplinary studies of man-animal relations.

I also review the totemic qualities that dog owners have in terms of their dogs and each other. These are identification, solidarity, reciprocity and self-denial. The sociality of dog owners is considered as being a form of urban neo-tribalism. The indirect objective of my research is to provide evidence for the question of whether post-modern neo-tribalism has become a central form of social life.

The data of the research consists of 20 theme interviews of dog owners which I have supplanted with my own experience and observations. It is argued that getting a dog is an act that reinforces social ties. Usually this means friendship or kinship ties even though in the background there looms a feeling of emptiness for which a concrete dog acquisition is expected to bring content, continuity, regularity and warmth.

In terms of relations to each other five different groups of dog owners can be found. There are those who share their feelings, those who enjoy talking, those who want to keep a distance because of dog trouble as well as the elitist dog-owner ideologists. There are features of modern tribalism in the dog owners’ sociality but it cannot be considered the main feature. The sociality is to dog owners more like a “fringe benefit” and it is not as important as the authentic feelings connected to dog-owner totemism.

The central sources of the research is Levi-Strauss (1966) for bricoleur, totemicity and sign. Knight and Descola are important for their new interpretations of totemism. Goffman, Hickrod & Schmidt (1982) give theoretical grounds for formulating the idea of becoming a dog owner and Maffesoli (1995) for the thin sociality and modern tribes.