

New formations and understandings of horse and society in the Nordic countries

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A photograph of two brown horses grazing in a lush green field. The horses are in the foreground, and a dense forest of green trees is in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

Change, change, change.....

Nordic societies = Norway, Færoes, Iceland,
but also, Finland, Denmark, Sweden

Modern, prosperous, increasingly urban and technologically
driven economies

Societies with a tendency to inhibit conspicuous consumption

‘Land of the Middle’ – middle incomes, aspirations.

A photograph of two brown horses grazing in a lush green field. The horses are in the foreground, with a dense forest of tall trees in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

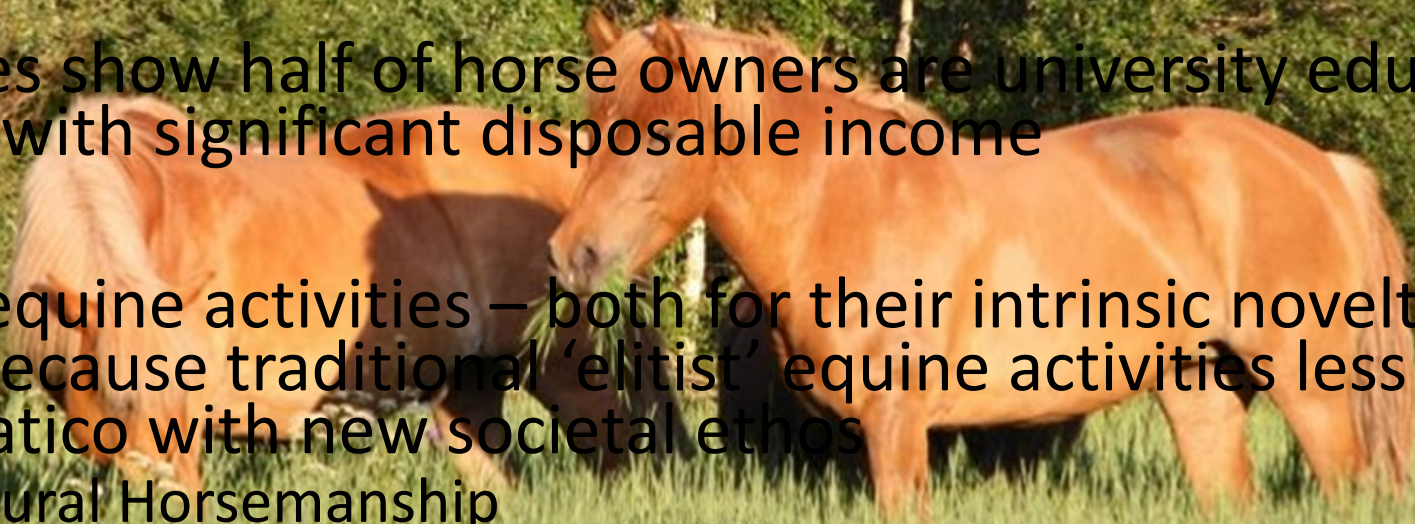
Modern lives = increasingly urban

Decreasingly rural

- less people involved in primary production sector (more machines)
- increased consumption of goods *and* services
- increased automobility/national and international mobility too
- increased management of data via machines

Horses??

- Growing between 7 & 10 % p. a. across Nordic region
- Increasingly gendered (averaging 79% female)
- Studies show half of horse owners are university educated, often with significant disposable income
- New equine activities – both for their intrinsic novelty and also because traditional ‘elitist’ equine activities less sympatico with new societal ethos
 - Natural Horsemanship
 - Le Trek, Agility, etc



Why horses??

- In highly urbanised lives, horses provide:
 1. Activity out of doors
 2. Physical recreation
 3. A field of learning that is effectively infinite
 4. Ineffible personal contact with non-human other
 5. New possibilities for social interaction with other enthusiasts



Implications

- New Equine Economy of the 21st Century
- Rise of particular breeds/types of horses (i.e. Icelandic, national native breeds)
- New activities outside remit of traditional horse sport
- New uses such as therapy (physical, social and mental), socio-pedagogical, tourism



New Equine Economy in the 21st Century

New uses of horses:

- Leisure riding
- Tourism riding
- Ethological riding
- Therapy
- Social rehabilitation

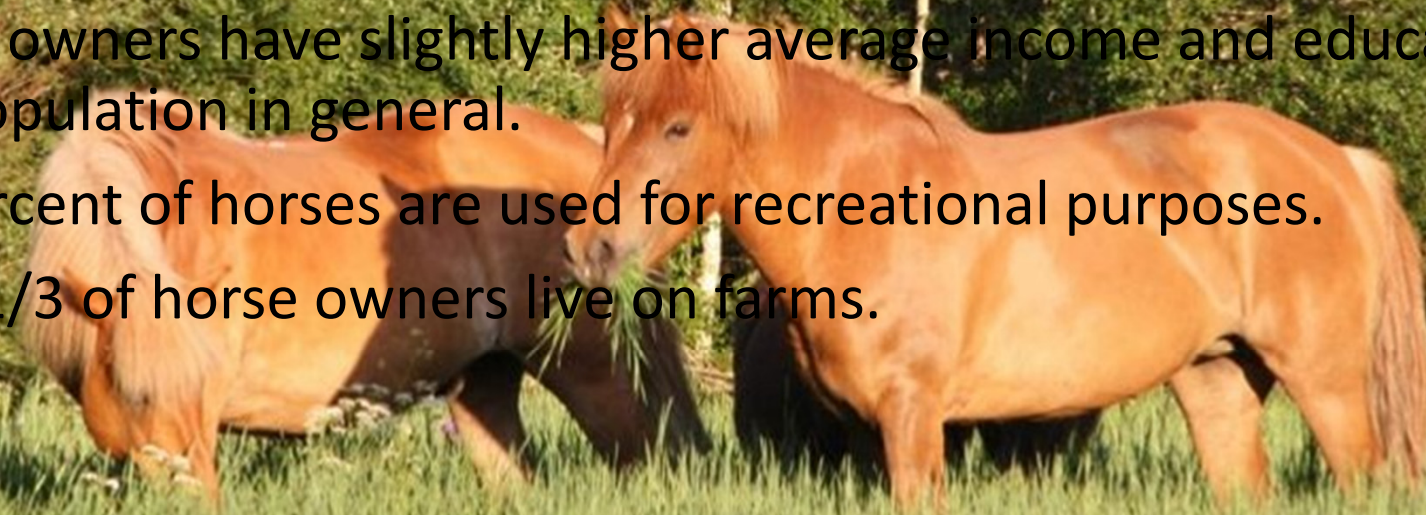
New objectives for practitioners:

- Stress reduction
- Human-horse relations
- Pleasure, comfort
- Independence, freedom



Horses in Norway

- the number of horse owners is about 50 000,
- estimate the number of horses in Norway to be around 125 000 horses.
- Horse owners have slightly higher average income and education than the population in general.
- 72 percent of horses are used for recreational purposes.
- Only 1/3 of horse owners live on farms.



Horses in Norway

- 72 percent of horses are used for recreational purposes.
- Only 1/3 of horse owners live on farms
- Four Norwegian Native Breeds:
 - Fjord
 - Dale
 - Norlands
 - Lyngs (Heather)



Horses in Norway

- Main sport = «trav» (trotting) but this is declining
- Wide variety of organised activities from other jurisdictions being adopted – from Trek to traditional Eventing.



Horses & Society in Norway

- In many rural places, the use of horses on farms remains within living memory
- Norsk breeds remain held in high affection
- Many farm families retain horses as a hobby or passion of a younger generation



Nordic native breeds

- Fjordhest
- Icelandic horse
- Nordland/Lynghest
- Dalehest
- Færoese pony, etc



- The Nordic Native breeds were bred to assist people wrest a living from a cold and difficult environment.
- Bred for *efficiency*, for easy temperament, for sturdiness, to aid humans accomplish specific tasks



- Efficiency:
 - Little or no supplementary feeding
 - Low inputs
- Sturdiness
 - Cope with cold winters without rugs, etc
 - Resistant to illness
 - Strong confirmation to pull, push, carry
- Temperament
 - All members of the family can work them
 - Can 'take responsibility' in their tasks
 - Quick learners



Native vs Non-native breeds

- Native breeds bred to be in competition with the natural environment and the tasks necessary to wrest a living from it
- Non-native breeds bred to be in competition in sport, in war, and in modern industry



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What happened to native breeds?

- Advent of internal combustion engine removed the need for all horses, and native breeds in particular.
- Numbers decline precipitously
- No *economic imperative* to breed



There must be an *economic imperative* or people will not breed them.



Native breeds and the New Equine Economy

- Native breeds are much more than just horses!
- Native breed horses are part of the story of heritage, of people and their lives in particular places
- Native breeds *embody* the values, aspirations, ambitions, acts and experiences of the peoples who bred and used them to make their lives better.



The Experience Economy and the New Equine Economy

When we sell equine activities to customers, we sell them *experiences* whether touristic, or therapeutic, or recuperative.

Authentic experiences are rare and valuable commodities

Real experiences linger in the mind of those who experienced them and can become part of their identity.



- Thus, the Native Breeds provide riders with a direct link to their Nordic past.
- And provide a link between people and landscape



Recent research

- Developing equine therapy services as a local economic development strategy in rural areas
- Native Breed Equine Tourism in Norway, Færoes, Iceland
- Development of Arctic Winter horse tourism in the North
- Growth of Green Care Farming use of horses



In summary

- Not «The Sport of Kings»
Rather, the sport of working people!
- Delivering health, fitness, access to the outdoors and wild landscapes
- Offerring new futures for young people in the New Equine Economy
- Continued steady growth and new opportunities.

