



# Nurturing nature: the intersection of society and nature in the production of Nordic native breed horses

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**NORA**  
Nordic Atlantic Cooperation



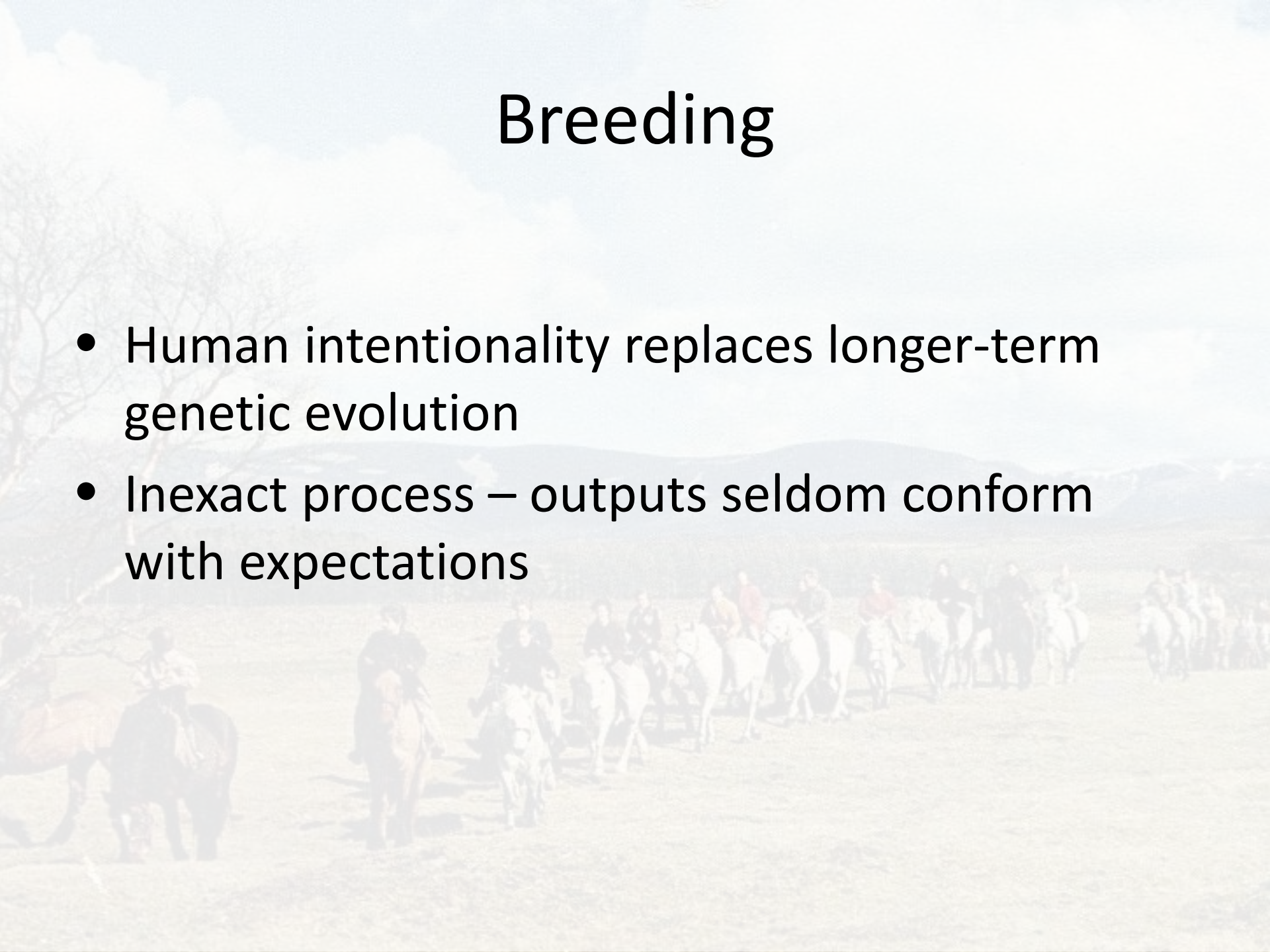
## contents

- 1) Breeding
- 2) Socio-natural assemblages
- 3) What is a Native Breed?
- 4) Native Breeds as Cultural Heritage Assets
- 5) The Faroyisk Röss



# Breeding

- Human intentionality replaces longer-term genetic evolution
- Inexact process – outputs seldom conform with expectations



# Breeding – Aims and Objectives

- Breeding has an “Aim”
  - ‘race winner’
  - ‘improve farm productivity’
- And breeders create “Objectives” to satisfy those Aims.
  - ‘better legs’, ‘better hoofs’, ‘spirit’
  - ‘better puller’, ‘efficient eater’, ‘intelligent and tractable’.

A group of people riding horses in a field with mountains in the background. The scene is outdoors, with a line of riders on various colored horses moving across a grassy field. In the distance, there are rolling hills or mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall tone is bright and slightly hazy.

From Cassidy:

The criteria used to assess this are:

- pedigree,
- conformation, and
- “that something extra.”

- This is a gamble, at best, because the year-old horses are immature and cannot be ridden.
- They will not race until they are 2-year-olds. Most reach a physical peak in their 3rd or 4th years
- Like most gambling, decision making is a combination of rigid method and mystical, non-rational processes

- And this is because the nature of racehorse physiognomy dictates that these predictions lack precision.
- This is about assessing *potential* based on past events (pedigree), current structure (conformation), and, at best, an educated guess (that *something extra*)

# Breeding Native Breeds

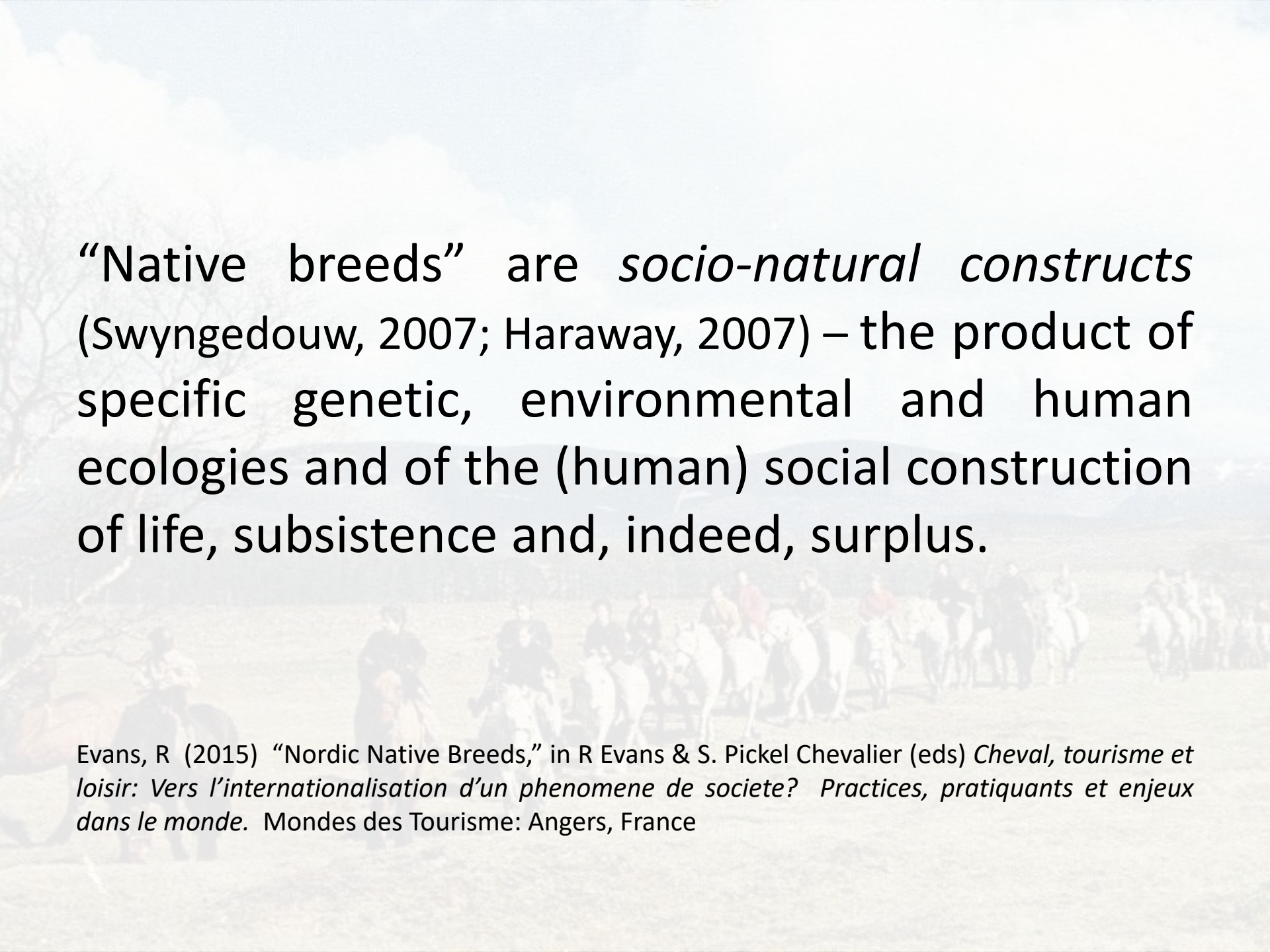
- Native Breed horses tend to come from historical rural landscapes
- Bred to be optimum helpmates in wresting a living from a landscape.
  - Landscape determines economic activity
  - Landscape delineates specific optimum strategies
- Breeders take advantage of genetic potential to optimise their activities in landscape



# Horses as socio-natural constructs

Native breeds became part of a *productive* process transforming landscape to support human civilization





“Native breeds” are *socio-natural constructs* (Swyngedouw, 2007; Haraway, 2007) – the product of specific genetic, environmental and human ecologies and of the (human) social construction of life, subsistence and, indeed, surplus.

Evans, R (2015) “Nordic Native Breeds,” in R Evans & S. Pickel Chevalier (eds) *Cheval, tourisme et loisir: Vers l'internationalisation d'un phenomene de societe? Practices, pratiquants et enjeux dans le monde*. Mondes des Tourisme: Angers, France

Horses are therefore the intersection of:

1. Human skill and aspiration
2. Their genetic potential
3. The conditions and constraints of the external physical environment



- Horses (and native breeds in particular) are ‘constructs’ assembled from factors from these three realms.
- They are the material manifestation of the intersection of these conditions and constrains.
- We can say that they are ‘assemblages’ of factors from these three realms.

# Socio-natural 'constructs'

'Natural' or 'ecological' conditions and processes do not operate separately from social processes and the actually existing socio-natural conditions are always the result of intricate transformations of pre-existing conditions which are themselves inherently natural and social.

(Harraway (2008). *When Species Meet*)

# Socio-natural constructs

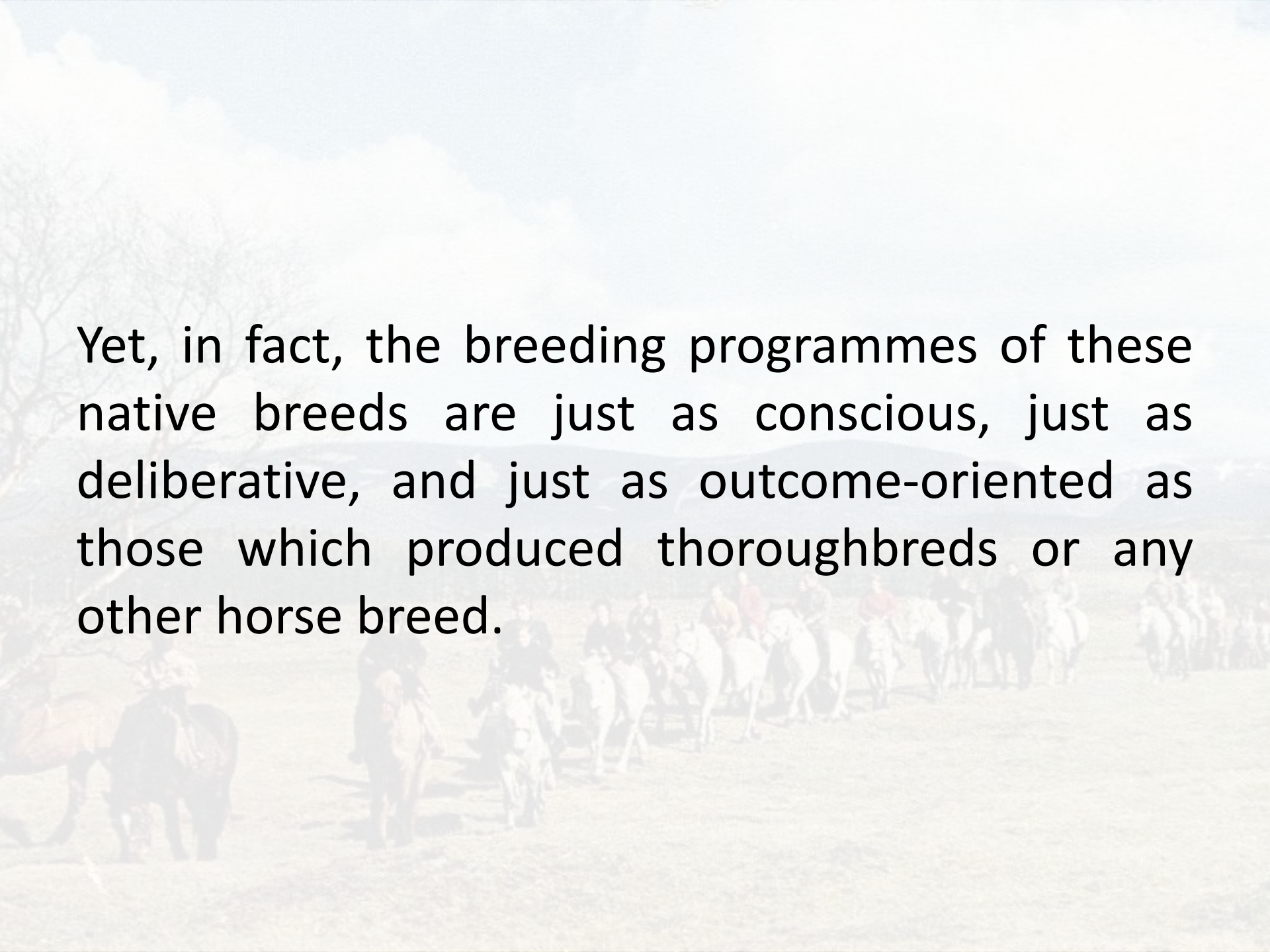
“Each culture constructs its own world out of the infinite variety of nature. [Nature] is socialized... reorganized... [and] made into a material manifestation of social structure.”

(Busch 1989, 7 cited in Greider & Garkovich 1994, 6)

## ***What is a Native Breed?***

*Native breeds* represent something different from the purebred equine breeds developed for sport and leisure riding in Europe during the last two to three centuries.

Their association with their homelands and native landscapes mark them as special, and the term “native breed” suggests a *naturalness* removed from the conscious, “civilized”, aristocratic breeding programmes of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe.



Yet, in fact, the breeding programmes of these native breeds are just as conscious, just as deliberative, and just as outcome-oriented as those which produced thoroughbreds or any other horse breed.



# What is a “Native Breed”?

- Native Breed horses were always bred to be optimal in the conditions (*relations of production?*) in which they exist.
- Although individual breeding produces mixed results, overall there is a trend towards ‘improvement’
- Thus, in their native landscape and time, native breed horses represent ever-growing improvement in human life. At these times, they represent “progress”.

# Native Breeds

- Native Breeds are now Cultural Heritage Assets.
- Like many Cultural Heritage assets, they must be “Re-purposed” as times change.
- Failure to repurpose risks breed extinction

# Re-purposing

Cultural Heritage assets go through three phases, historically.

- Phase One: Used in the productive process
- Phase Two: Replaced by disruptive technology
- Phase Three: Re-purposed into the consumption or service economy

## Native breeds now

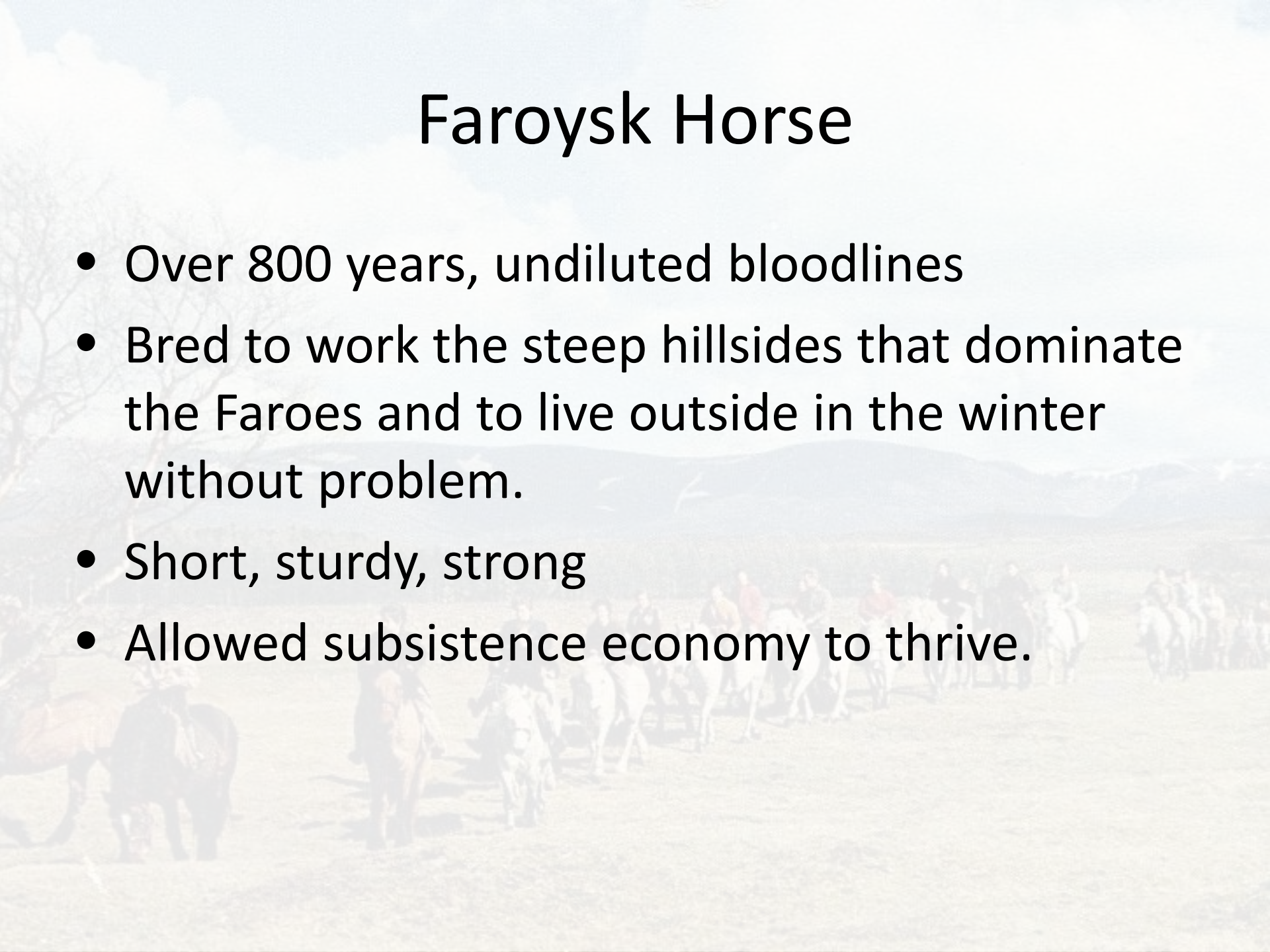
- There must be an *economic imperative* for investment in heritage assets.
- Without the economic imperative, breeds face decline, and even extinction.
- Like all Cultural Heritage assets, some breed's original formation included traits appropriate for new post-production uses. And some do not.

# Faroyisk Horse



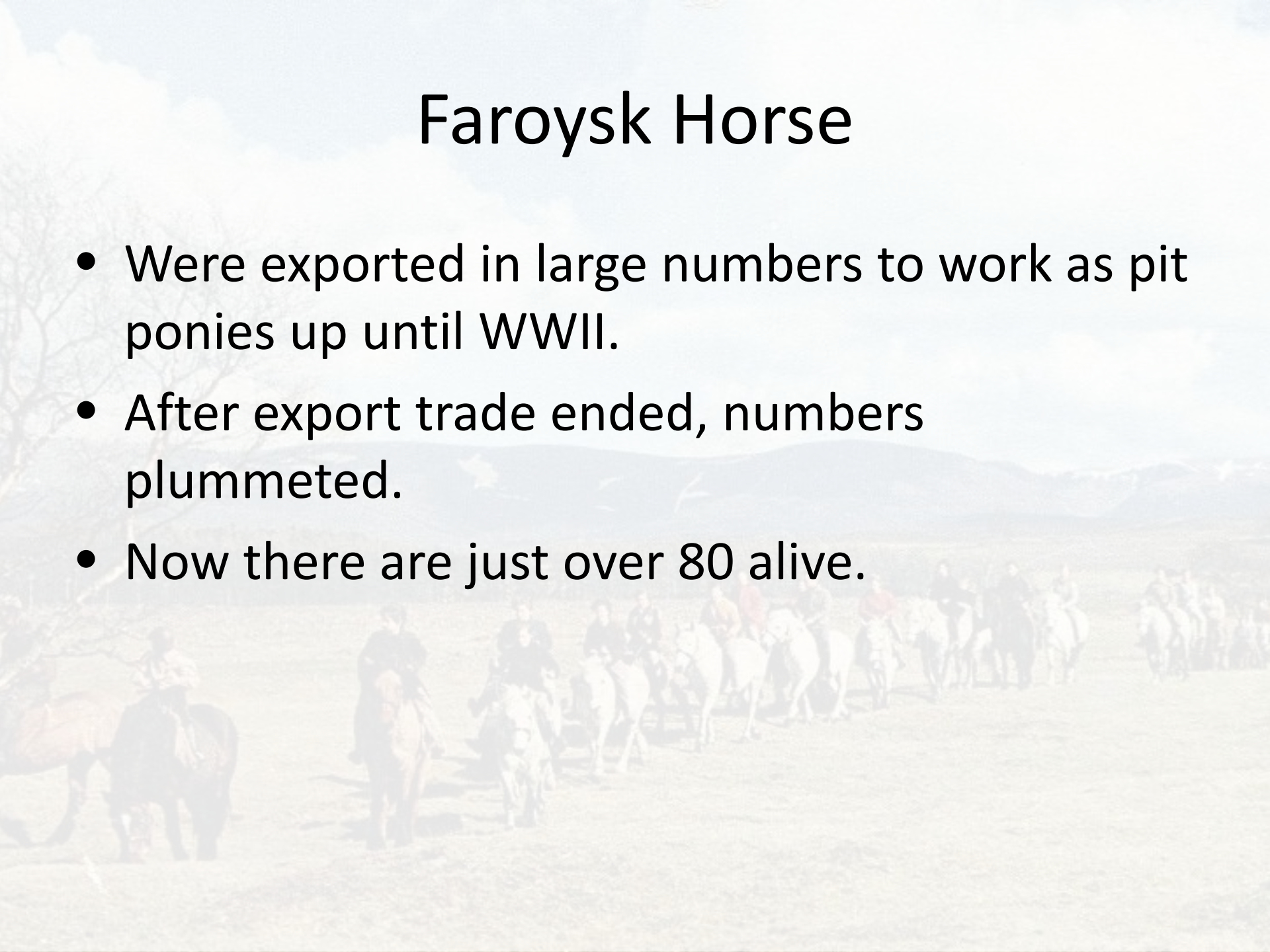
# Faroyisk Horse

- Over 800 years, undiluted bloodlines
- Bred to work the steep hillsides that dominate the Faroes and to live outside in the winter without problem.
- Short, sturdy, strong
- Allowed subsistence economy to thrive.



# Faroyisk Horse

- Were exported in large numbers to work as pit ponies up until WWII.
- After export trade ended, numbers plummeted.
- Now there are just over 80 alive.

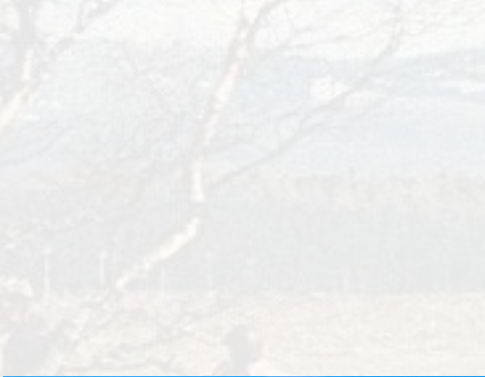
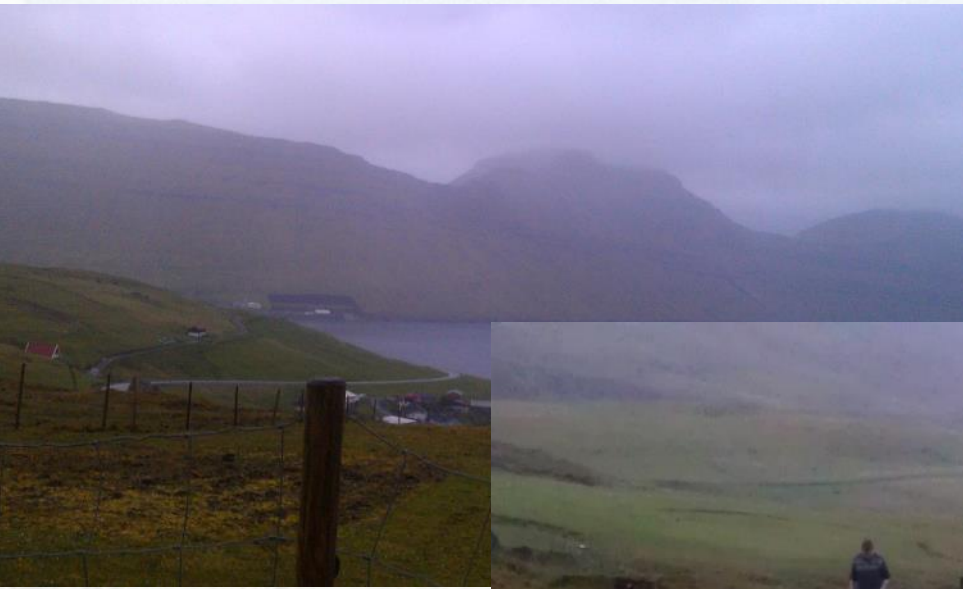


# Faroyisk Horse

- Currently subject of a campaign to change fortunes of the breed through:
  - Scientific breeding (both genetic and improved fertilization techniques)
  - Establishing a Registry and Breed Standards
  - Looking to create new opportunities in tourism, breeding for export and other activities.
  - A strong community working to raise awareness and improve breed fortunes



# Faroes

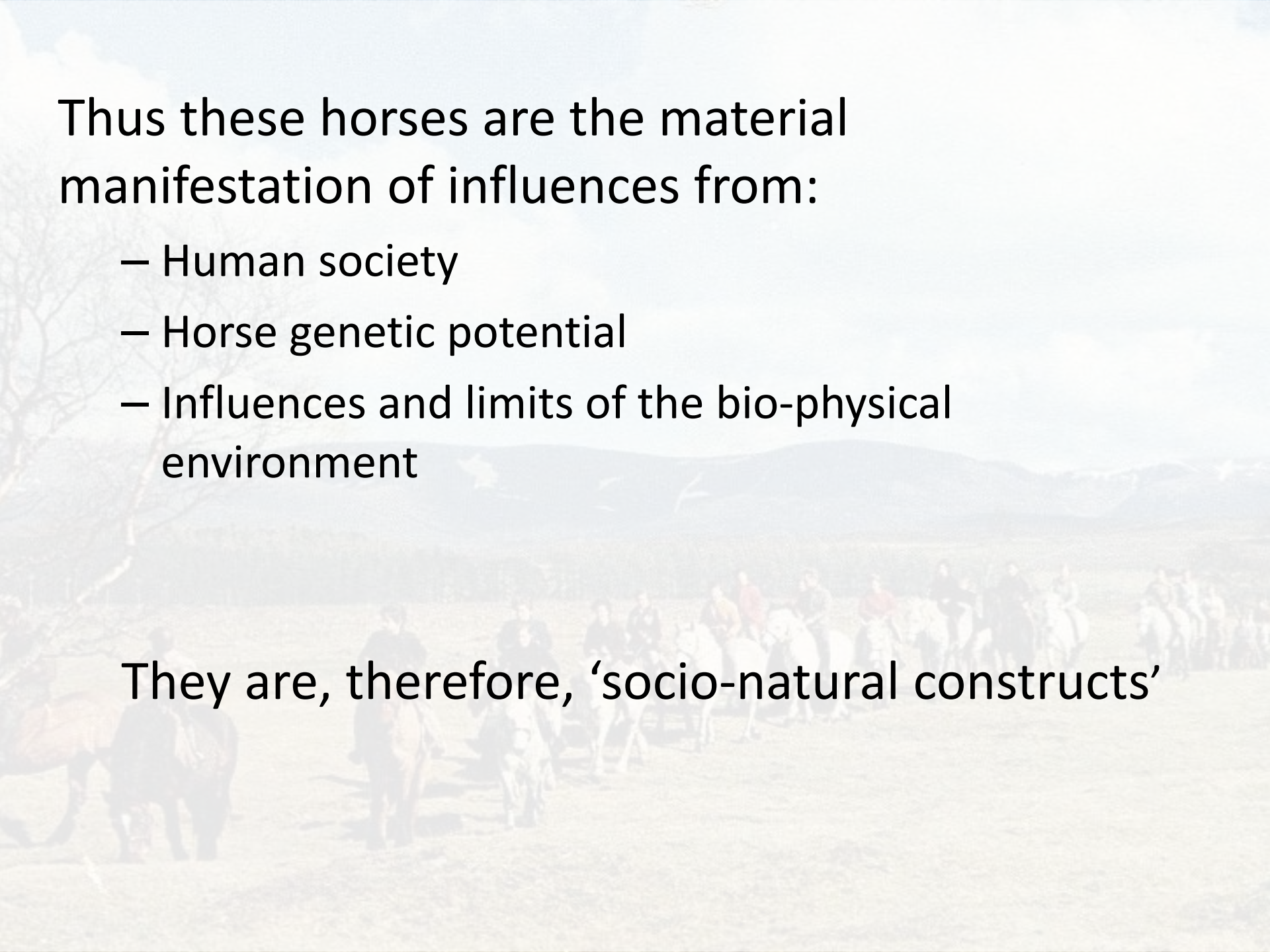


Faroyisk horses are the result of hundreds of years of decision-making by largely anonymous individuals in an attempt to breed horses which are superiorly adapted to life in the Nordic environments in which they were situated.



- The Faroysk horse, like the Faroysk sheep and other aspects of rural life are important identity resources for contemporary Faroese society.





Thus these horses are the material  
manifestation of influences from:

- Human society
- Horse genetic potential
- Influences and limits of the bio-physical  
environment

They are, therefore, ‘socio-natural constructs’

# Thank you!

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