



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT

Regnr Östersjöstiftelsen: 2013-0043

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Project title: Horse Cultures in Transition. Interaction and Ethics between Human and Horse in Sweden and Poland / Hästkulturer i omvandling - interaktion och etik mellan människa och häst i Sverige och Polen

### 1. Purpose of the project

Today we can observe an overall cultural shift where man increasingly questions his supremacy in nature and in relation to animals. Animal ethics, animal rights perspectives, demands for sustainable development and ideas that animals can contribute more to humanity than being a unit of production, are increasingly common in the public debate. New approaches, ethics and linguistic concepts are generated that shed light on how humans reposition themselves in relation to the horse and to established traditions around it.

In relation to this, this project aimed at exploring how established traditions meets new ideas in human-horse practices in Sweden and Poland. The project also aimed at developing theories and methods in practical knowledge and deepen the understanding of complex cultures of knowledge that human beings create around horses. Yet another aim was to stand in dialogue with Equine science educations (hippologutbildningar), especially riding instructor educations, which are becoming more academical, and provide them with perspectives from humanities and practical knowledge.

### 2. The three most important results of the project and what conclusions can be drawn from them

Human-horse interactions and practices are in rapid change and our three most important results point toward the interrelated ingredients of this change.

#### 1) Subjectivity of the horse

During the 80's and 90's natural horsemanship become increasingly popular in Sweden, and to a lesser extent also in Poland. This practice have in research been understood as an interest for the changed view on the subjectivity of the horse: the horse whose language we should learn, rather than the horse that the human being should "break in." It is equally interesting to note that today, natural horsemanship is criticized exactly for not taking the subjectivity of the horse fully into account, as it is built upon negative reinforcement and, it is argued, on a hidden threat of violence and strong demand of submission. The subjectivity of the horse has thus increasingly come to the center, i.e. the horse as a subject with its own will, feelings, and experiences.



This shift means that neither medical nor ethological perspectives are enough anymore. A horse is not only a biological system or a species with its species-typical behavior; it is also a unique individual that belongs to different cultural practices, which have been formed across the species boundaries. This also means that perspectives from the natural sciences need to be complemented with perspectives from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. It also turned out that practical knowledge perspectives were useful to turn the gaze to the “subjective” dimension of both humans and horses, in a practice where research has been centered around “objective findings.”

This situation also creates great demands on post-humanistic social sciences, humanities, and arts. Not only human subjectivity can be taken into account, other animals can no longer be excluded. This, in turn, demands a developed reflection upon the scientific methodology used. How do we reach the subjectivity of the horse when it is not part of our abstract, verbal language? It does not mean that we can only gain knowledge of the horse by making it into an object for science; it means that we need to develop new approaches toward subjectivity. And it means that we need to develop ethical reflections not only on the horse, but also through listening to the voice of the horse.

The subjectivity of the horse is a central component in all the results (articles, books, organized conferences etc.) of this project.

## 2) Ethical questions at the center

The traditional neglect of the subjectivity of horses raise many different ethical questions, do we treat the horse as a living creature, as a subject with a perspective of his/her own? What does such an approach make visible in existing practices? Can we consider the practices that we are in the midst of as ethically sound? The ethical questions were simply much more at the front than we first thought.

The insights in horse subjectivity produce a displacement in concepts such as ”horse welfare” and we can see a movement from a medical and technocratic concept of freedom from disease and injury, to a concept where welfare means lack of pain, suffering and other negative affective states, via an ethological concept with an emphasis on space for natural behavior, to a welfare concept that pays respect to the horse as an individual with a perspective and will of its own.

But the results of this project shows that fair ethics does not always have to be symmetrical, instead we need to explore asymmetrical ethics and how different perspectives, needs, desires, and power positions are negotiated. This research also points toward the need to rethink subjectivity. Here, the animal rights tradition tend to have a too narrow understanding of subjectivity, still mapped on human subjectivity and thus part of an anthropocentric tradition. Instead subjectivity should not be understood as an autonomous will of someone who should make rational choices on a free market, but rather always a contextual becoming within which desires and cognitions arise.

Ethical questions was the theme of the anthology published at Routledge, and also the theme of the second co-organized conference (which was centered upon asymmetrical ethics).



### 3) A great public interest

It might seem strange to put “a great public interest in the project” as a result, but to us it showed that we really are in the midst of a big cultural change. We can even conclude that there is an interrelated change in theory/research and practices. Research is discussed in equine practices, nose bands, rollkur and facial expressions on statues have been discussed as well as training methods. Negative and positive reinforcement is now widely discussed in many different practices. We can also see an increasing interest of new practices (or new versions with new training methods of old practices). It should also be mentioned that the findings in this project also has been of great interest to practitioners and organizations focused on other domestic animals, as there is even less research from this angle on dogs, cats etc. There has thus also been a great medial interest in this project, both in relation to equine culture, but also at a more general level in the changes we see between humans and other animals.

This has also lead the researchers in this project to engage in public debates and dialogues. We can for example mention that we were asked to write a debate article from a daily magazine editor (which was also published). As this is such a new area we have also been asked to be part of different committees in regard to both scientific and ethical work.

### **3. The project’s contribution to the international research frontline**

On an international level this project has been crucial to organize a new research area. As studies of the animal has traditionally belonged to the natural sciences it has not been simple to create a different kind of room for studies in human-horse relations. Many researchers in humanities, social sciences and arts, around the world, has been engaged in human-horse relations, but they have had difficulties getting funding and they have only been loosely connected to each other. Very few researchers had funding in a project mainly focusing on human-horse research. In this way this project is ground breaking with regard to its size and scope. In Sweden a network for researchers in humanities’ and social sciences’ human-horse studies was created 2013 (i.e. just before the beginning of this project). The soil was thus just right to grow an international community, which we did by means of organizing the conference “Equine Cultures in Transition,” which took place in Stockholm, 27-29 October, 2016. This conference gathered 48 participants from 14 countries.

At the end of this conference it was decided that this conference should become a biannual conference, organized by different persons. There also was a second meeting 2018 in Leeds, and a third meeting 2021 Uppsala is coming up (cancelled 2020 due to covid-19).

<https://www.slu.se/en/ew-calendar/2021/6/equine-cultures-in-transition-conference---past-present-and-future-challenges/>

At the first conference, it become very obvious that the ethical questions was at the center, and the researchers in this project gathered contributions on this theme into an anthology published at Routledge. This was the first anthology to focus solely on the ethical question in human-horse relations in humanities, social sciences and arts.



A second, smaller and co-organized conference focused on asymmetrical ethics. Also this conference broke new ground on an international arena, as there is a growing need to develop ethical thinking on relations that are not, and does not strive to become, symmetrical.

#### **4. New research questions that the project has led to**

As this research project has helped to open up a new research area the field of possible new research questions is vast.

- There is a great need to verbalize and raise awareness on the perspective of the horse, both in teaching riding and in equine sport at large. What role does the horse play in different equine practices?
- There is also a great need to continue the ethical aspects of equine practices and ask basic questions, such as: Is horseback riding ethical? Or, what kind of horseback riding and driving is ethical? Is it ethical to use horses for sport? Or, how is it ethical to use horses for sport? Which training methods are more ethical? Or is the focus on training as such problematic? How should and could we relate to the ageing horse? Etc.
- Equine cultures are changing, but what are the new practices we see? How are they different? What kind of relations arise in these new practices?
- Another line of questions, goes back to the horse as a subject, and would explore the horse as a knowledge-producer. What does the horse know? What does the “centaur” know? I.e. what kind of knowledge can a horse and a human being produce together (which is not possible in only one of them).
- Related to that we should also give attention to mutual becomings. How is the horse formed, how does it form itself, and how does it form human beings?
- There is also a great need to continue to develop methods, not least interdisciplinary methods. Here new methods could be developed through combining qualitative, quantitative and artistic approaches.

#### **5. The contribution of the research to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe**

Three (of four) of the researchers in the project have conducted interviews in Poland and Eastern Germany. We were startled how international the horse culture is, especially when it comes to competition horses (dressage), as there were very little differences between Swedish and Polish trainers and riders. It also showed how strong and “hold together” this tradition is. Even so, there are of course differences between Poland and Sweden when it comes to accessibility and questions of class.

Another result was how important the tacit knowledge is in this field, and how unexplored this kind of knowledge is. Because of the different nationalities and languages in interviewed trainers and riders, the lack of verbalization in certain areas become clear.

When it comes to research the humanistic human-animal-research is less developed in Poland, but we did find several collaborate partners, we could take part of their research conferences and vice versa.



As this project was very successful when it came to establish an international human-horse research environment (in humanities, social sciences and the arts), we gave extra attention to making this environment accessible to polish researchers. Two polish researchers also presented at the conference 2016. The polish research is notably strong when it comes to historical perspectives.

## **6. Dissemination of the results of the project within and outside the research community**

### **Anthology**

*Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions*, edited by Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, Ulla Ekström von Essen, London: Routledge, 2019.

### **Dissertation**

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, *Interaction Between Rider, Horse and Equestrian Trainer – A Challenging Puzzle*, (Doctoral dissertation 162). Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2019.

### **Articles**

Andersson, Petra, "A Horse Is a Horse Is a Horse: Changing Ideas in a Diversified Equestrian World" in *Humans and Animals. Intersecting Lives and Worlds*, eds. Anja Höing and Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett, pp. 107-114, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2016.

Andersson, Petra, "Who is the horse? Horse assisted therapy as a possibility for understanding horses" in *Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions*, eds. Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, Ulla Ekström von Essen, London: Routledge, 2019.

Bornemark, Jonna, "Introduction: Subjectivity and ethical questions in an equestrian world in transformation" in *Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions*, eds. Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, Ulla Ekström von Essen, London: Routledge, 2019.

Bornemark, Jonna & Gold, Edwin, "The Phenomenology of The Centaur: On the Oneness of Equestrian Bodies" in *Humanimalia – a Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies*, under review.

Bornemark, Jonna, "The Body as Movement and Reflection" in *Studio Talks: thinking through painting*, eds. Rydén, Jan, Habib Engqvist, Jonatan, Bength, Kristina & Sandström, Sigrid, Stockholm: Arvinius+Orfeus Publishing, 2014.

Ekström von Essen, Ulla & Bornemark, Jonna, "Between behaviourism, posthumanism and animal rights theory. Negative and positive reinforcement in liberty dressage" in *Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical Questions*, eds. Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, Ulla Ekström von Essen, London: Routledge, 2019.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari & Andersson, Petra, "Riders' understanding of the role of their horse in sports dressage" in *Equine Cultures in Transition: Ethical*



*Questions*, eds. Jonna Bornemark, Petra Andersson, Ulla Ekström von Essen, London: Routledge, 2019.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, "The Praxis of Horse Riding. An Autoethnographic study" in *Humanimalia – a Journal of Human/Animal Interface Studies*, 9(2), 2018. <https://www.depauw.edu/humanimalia/issue%2018/pdfs/blokhuis-pdf.pdf>

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari and Lundgren, Charlotte, "Riders' perception of equestrian communication in sports dressage" in *Society & Animals*, pp. 573-591, 25, 2017.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari. "Teaching horse riding; is the role of the horse recognised," *accepted for publication in Society & Animals on March 27, 2020.*

### Conferences organized

"Equine Cultures in Transition," Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry, Stockholm, 27-29 October 2016.

"Toward an Asymmetrical Ethics: Power, Relations, and the Diversity of Subjectivities," Södertörn University, November 13-15, 2019.

### Popular science

Andersson, Petra, Bornemark, Jonna, Ekström von Essen, Ulla, Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari "Dags att se över människans roll som härskare över hästen", debate article in *Göteborgsposten*, 22/12, 2019, <https://www.gp.se/debatt/dags-att-se-%C3%B6ver-m%C3%A4nniskans-roll-som-h%C3%A4rskare-%C3%B6ver-h%C3%A4sten-1.21647616>

Andersson, Petra, several articles in *Hippson Magazine* 2014-2021.

Bornemark, Jonna, "Återupprättelse för det levande" in *10-tal*, nr 26, 2017.

Bornemark, Jonna, "Djur och människa" in *Filosofiska rummet*, P1, February 2017, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/avsnitt/849098?programid=793>

Bornemark, Jonna, "Posthumanism" in *Filosofiska rummet*, P1, June 2019, <https://sverigesradio.se/avsnitt/1298661>

Ekström von Essen, Ulla, "The Animal Turn", pod "Lite passé", Lund University, April, 2014.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, "Vad är ryttarkänsla?" in *Kentaurmagasinet. Magasinet för häst och människa*, nr 4, 2017, pp. 59-61.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, "Den som ifrågasätter riskerar att bli utfrys" in *Hippson Magasin*, nr 4, 2019, p. 85.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, "Lyssna! Vad säger hästen?" in *Kentaurmagasinet. Magasinet för häst och människa*, nr 1, 2020, pp. 77-80.

### 5 most important conference papers (out of 25)

Andersson, Petra, "A Horse is a Horse is a Horse: Changing Ideas in a Diversified Equestrian World", at *Making Sense of the Animal – Human Bond and Relationship(s)*, Oxford, United Kingdom, 20-21 July 20-21, 2015.

Andersson, Petra and Ekström von Essen, Ulla, "Thought styles of horses – current crucial and conflicting idea elements" at *European Association for Horse*



*Assisted Education (EAHAE)* Global Conference, Radzie, Poland, September 19-20, 2014.

Andersson, Petra and Ekström von Essen, Ulla, "Horse Cultures in Transition. Interaction between Human and Horse in Sweden and Poland", *Exploring the Animal Turn*, Pufendorf Institute, Lund University, March 4, 2014.

Bornemark, Jonna, "How does Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Changes the Psychotherapist and the Horse?" at *Second Nordic Seminar on Equine Assisted Therapy*, Ersta Sköndal högskola, November 14, 2014.

Zetterqvist Blokhuis, Mari, "Teaching horse riding in a practical knowledge perspective" at *Equine Cultures in transition; Human-horse relationships in work and play: Interspecies encounters in business, tourism and beyond*, Leeds, UK, June 19-21, 2018.

### **Special adviser, commission of trust etc**

Bornemark, Jonna, Opponent at Erica Hagströms final seminar, pedagogy, Luleå technical University, 24/1, 2018 as well as member of the committee at the defence of *Mellan människa och häst, Djur-blivande i den pedagogiska relationens mellanrum*, Luleå technical university, 14/9, 2018.

Bornemark, Jonna, Expert for humanities and social sciences at the Research foundation of Agria and Swedish Kennel Club, 2021-

Ekström von Essen, Ulla, Expert for humanities and social sciences at Hästnäringens Nationella Stiftelse (HNS ) 2015-2019.

Ekström von Essen, Ulla, Commissioner at the nomination committee for experts at Stiftelsen Hästforskning 2020 –.

Ekström von Essen, Ulla, 2020 – Commissioner at the newly established "Hästvälfärdsrådet" at Svenska Ridsportförbundet