

The new equine industry, Stakeholders and land use planning – a challenge for participatory planning

Research plan

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1 Background, objectives and significance

As late as in the 1960s, horses were still primarily used as working creatures in agriculture and forestry. During the latest decades horses have been used mainly in equestrian sports such as trotting races and, increasingly, horseback riding. The decline in the number of horses discernable since 1950s has thus stopped and has in fact turned into a distinctive increase (see table 1). However, the logic of the equine industry has completely changed, as pointed out above: the working horse has been replaced with leisure, sports and recreation horses (Nationella stiftelsen för hästhållningens främjande 2000).

Table 1: The number of horses in Finland during 1920-2004

Year	Number of horses
1920	390 000
1940	375 000
1960	251 000
1980	31 500
2004	61 055

Source: Suomen Hippos

(http://www.hippos.fi/hippos/tilastot/jalostus_ja_kasvatus/hevoskannan_kehitys.php)

The contemporary equine history follows the development of the society and especially the countryside. The decline in the number of horses is linked with the mechanisation of agriculture and forestry (Westermarck 1967). The decrease in the number of horses and especially their changed function reflect the transformation of the countryside from a production landscape into a consumption landscape that can be observed in Finland and in the Western world in general. This transformation concerns the society in general; there has been a shift from a Fordist production economy into a post-modern consumption economy. The horse and its changed function is not only a simple indicator of this macro-level development: in cultural terms the horse can be seen e.g. as an important symbol for nature and a green orientation or as a symbol for an exclusive social standing. Therefore, an analysis focused on the equestrian activities represents well the field of social science

that has characterised the consumption-oriented, post-modern era and is concerned with social constructions, discourses and symbols.

From the rural development point of view the new equine industry / the transformed role of the horse has a completely different significance. In a period of a more and more comprehensive structural change of agriculture and forestry, there is an acute need for alternative industries and ways of making a living. In Finland, tourism and leisure industries have for a long time been seen as the main alternatives for the restructured primary industries but the capacity to offer tourist attractions and attractive services is limited in most localities. In this respect the equestrian sport enjoys a unique position: it is possible to pursue horseback riding and other equestrian activities practically anywhere in the countryside independent from the existence or lack of “touristic beauty” of the landscape – a deciding factor for most other rural tourism activities. Further, with a flexible organisation of the activities it is possible to guarantee demand in most localities even if the rural areas in the vicinity of larger cities are at a distinct advantage. Even more importantly, equine industry supports and exists in symbiosis with agriculture and cultivation. In fact, a developed equine industry can also support economically disadvantaged areas through increased demand for the production of fodder.

The significance of the equine industry is strengthened through the continuously increasing and broadening supply of forms of activities: new types of equestrian sports are developed or adopted in Finland at the same time as new consumer segments are added to the traditional ones. Horseback riding and trotting are complemented by new activity forms such as therapeutic and sociopedagogic riding, stable work and grooming. In short, the significance of the horse increases with the increase of commercial stables and riding-schools and with the increase of private (hobby) horse-owners. Both these trends are often fruitfully combined in boarding stables which are being established and developed on various principles over the country.

However, the expansion of the new equine industry is not unproblematic. Establishment of stables, especially in densely-built areas, can lead to environmental issues. Increased riding in the terrain – on public roads and on lands of different legal status – can easily give rise to opposition and NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) type reactions. It is especially difficult to handle changes in the situation that characterises Finland today: a combination of

decentralised land-use planning, a broad procedure for lodging complaints and an intensive mass media follow-up of conflicts. A conflict between neighbours can easily escalate into a municipality-wide scandal which puts the whole industry into a dubious light and threatens one of the most important future niches of the countryside. The situation is not helped by the well-documented fact that horseback riding is a female-dominated hobby and that women have traditionally had a weak position in governance and planning.

This research project has two objectives. First, the purpose is to map and analyse cooperation and conflicts within the new equine industry, among involved stakeholders and in land-use planning. Second, the aim is to find solutions for the conflicts based on examples of best practices. The study is focused on five research questions which represent the five workpackages of the project:

- 1) Which are the most important groups of consumers and stakeholders in current equine industry?
- 2) What are their spatial needs?
- 3) What types of conflicts – primarily concerning land-use and road-use – are there in relation to the different groups of stakeholders?
- 4) How does the current planning system operate in issues concerning development, governance and conflicts in connection to the new equine industry?
- 5) Development of best practices for preventing and solving conflicts within the new equine industry gleaned from the three case studies

These five workpackages follow a mainly chronological order. Questions 3 to 5 are mainly studied on the basis of three case studies and the analysis of questions 1 to 2 is also informed by the case studies. The case studies are described in more detail in section three of the research plan. The project does not exclude any part of the equine industry in Finland but the focus is on horseback riding and related activities. Thus, the focus will be on the new equine industry in the countryside near big cities. On one hand this sort of activity has a great importance in the countryside, while on the other hand it generates conflicts. Women are the largest group of stakeholders in equestrian and related activities and thus the project will put special focus on women's role in current rural development.

2 Frame of reference

2.1 The new countryside

Until the 1970s, the modernisation of agriculture was the main theme in social scientific rural studies. During recent decades the dominating themes have been the restructuring of primary industries and the emergence of / demand for new industries. Beside these mostly politically motivated research themes the changed logic of the countryside in relation to the urban and in relation to social development in general has become an object of analysis. Marc Mormont (1990) is one of the main representatives for the latter field of study. In some groundbreaking articles he has shown that the “meaning” of countryside today is completely different than before. The countryside is to a large extent inhabited by quite other groups of people than the traditional farmers and primary producers. These new groups are mobile and only partially anchored in the countryside – they use it as a leisure space. Furthermore, the countryside is a part of a comprehensive societal network with increasing global features as a consequence of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) development. One result of this is that the countryside has become a projection screen onto which different groups can project their ideas of the “good society”: it is a society which is genuine, close to nature, healthy etc. It is also an arena for many symbolic conflicts, especially of the NIMBY type. The various new activities have to co-exist and share space with traditional activities and primary industries which gives rise to significant governance and conflict solving problems. However, the new trends also fuel and result in the development of new industries in the countryside and this is the primary focus of the current rural studies.

The research at hand can be divided in two lines of research: “consumption countryside” and the ambiguously denominated “critique of the modern agriculture / rural development” (Andersson 2005). These principal lines of research are related to social scientific research of nature and environmental protection which often focuses on issues of income and industry as well. Furthermore, they touch upon research focused on rural development policies and administration, often in relation to EU.

The idea of consumption countryside is based on the notion that countryside has been transformed from a production landscape to a consumption landscape. The primary industries, while in most places still dominating the landscape, can no longer support the

rural population and the countryside must be utilised in a new way with urban middle-class consumers in mind – for rural living, rural tourism, culture events etc. The main focus in this line of research is on demand i.e. the late-modern consumers and their subtle tastes are seen as the main prerequisite and impetus for the development of a new rural economy and the countryside can only try and find its place in a new economic logic and division of labour (Dagevos et al. 2004).

The critique of the modern agriculture / rural development has a different perspective: the point of departure being that the modernisation of agriculture has created so many problems that neither continued development nor status quo is a feasible alternative. Agriculture must be radically restructured and the new urban demand is an important point of departure for this. This category of thinking includes the so-called culture economy, which according to Christopher Ray (1998) will revitalise rural areas by taking care of and developing the time-honoured culture both for local pleasure and for marketing to outsiders. Environmental and nature protection research contribute to this development through increased development of marketing mechanisms linked to nature and environmental protection. A typical example of this is certified products. Similarly, development programmes and project machinery of the EU are central for the rural development.

The horse as a product and the equestrians as consumers are a perfect match for the above described rural development inquiry. The new equine industry can actually be seen as a textbook case for illustrating the potential and problems of the development of new rural industries (cf. Emmervall 2000).

2.2 Governance – transformation of the public administration and planning

The diminishing role of the state to the advantage of the private sector and the third sector has been one central feature in politics and in governance during the recent decades. An ideological incentive for this development has been neoliberalism. However, it has been pointed out that the perception of the diminished role of the state in the society may not be quite adequate: as a result of its increased “mass” and complexity, society actually has a broader coordination and governance than before. The state has been able to engage private and third sector actors and networks and has a more hidden role in steering and coordinating these (Metcalf 2001, 430). At the same time, the conditions for governance

and planning have been radically altered on all levels of the society. Hierarchical models of governance have been generally disreputed or become dysfunctional. Instead, different horizontal models have been developed, often in combination with the metaphor of network. The horizontal models focus on cooperation between partners from different sectors (public, private, the third sector) and the concept of partnership has been coined to describe this type of cooperation and governance. For example from the Finnish perspective, this development has signified a radical decentralisation of power and societal steering from the state, but also from the municipalities, to various diffuse or even obscure networks. In parallel with this decentralisation of power, governance and administration have been temporarily split up from long-term planning and “administration with memory” into short-term projects based on programmes but mainly governed and controlled through evaluation. In international social scientific debate this development has been described and gathered under the concept of governance (Rhodes 1996).

The above described development has its pros and cons. One advantage of this model is that all society’s resources falls in the hands of governance and public administration, while in the traditional models steering remains the responsibility of politicians and civil servants (politics and public administration). In today’s complex and knowledge-intensive and knowledge-dependent society it is stressed that both expert knowledge and tacit knowledge must be used to benefit societal development and governance. Furthermore, it is maintained that neither type of knowledge is being optimally used in traditional steering and administration. Another advantage of this model is the element of participatory democracy which stems from participation in different processes at different levels. In addition, the governance model implies involvement of all parties in negotiation processes which should make it possible to solve conflicts at an early stage.

However, there are also negative sides to the governance model. Governance as a system often becomes very complicated, heavy, limitless and non-transparent – quite contrary to what its proponents maintain. Paradoxically, this paves the way for oligarchy because powerful interests are better equipped to manoeuvre and grasp power in a situation that requires knowledge, initiative, resources and power than traditionally weak groups.

Regulation of the equine industry can also in this respect be used as a typical example. Today, when a dispute concerning the equine industry is brought to the fore in a Finnish

municipality, the regulative model put into practice is governance – this is guaranteed by the reforms of Finnish local, regional and planning administration made since the end of the 1980s (Andersson et al. 2003). The model presents good conditions for settling disputes but at the same time it must be constantly adjusted through evaluation in respect to best-practices for this to succeed. The most important group of actors in equestrian sport is (young) women who as a group are generally characterised by little power in Finnish public administration. To what extent does this impair the conditions for the equine industry in Finnish local governance?

2.3 Need for a gender perspective – horses, stables and stakeholders

Since the end of the 1970s, sex and gender has been an important dimension in social scientific research. Empirical research makes a clear connection between sex and gender and power and economic resources, while sex and gender has been given an even more central role in the development of theories in connection to the so-called cultural turn and social constructionism in social sciences in the 1980s. Sex and gender can be said to be an archetype of the power-signifying categories that constitutes discourses and are basis for discourse analysis.

However, sex and gender studies have by no means been only analytical or academic. Sex and gender studies have given rise to new cultural and political perspectives. The term empowerment refers to an effort – closely linked with feminism – to create a gender-political consciousness, to re-position and strengthen the resources of girls and women through knowledge, new practices etc. In the same way as theory is here linked to action it is also brought together with body and space. It is precisely in the area of physical space that the new resources can be developed and used. This makes physical arenas for girls and women, such as stables and equestrian environments, especially interesting (cf. Dahlgren & Dahlgren 1990, Tolonen 1992). In the case of stables the central practice is contra-feminine – the stable is a space for heavy physical labour and dangerous exercises. It requires discipline and an adjustment to the stable as a specific institution. The question is to what extent do the practices in stables help the equestrians in their struggle for space and rights in the society and in the planning process?

In Finland, there has been an increase in the interest of adult women in equestrian sport and this group presently constitutes over half of all equestrians, closely followed by girls

(The Equestrian Federation of Finland, 2005). The fact that equestrian sport is a female sport is an important aspect for example in conflicts over land-use since power and land are often associated with masculinity.

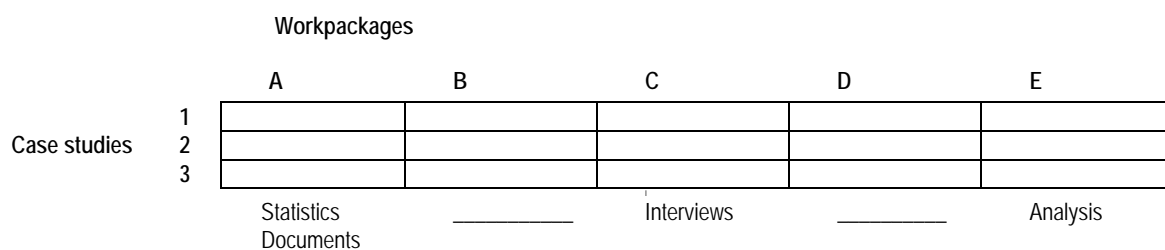
Gender studies have had a tendency to perceive the structures of sex and gender as strongly self-reproducing and as difficult to change. However, there are cracks in the wall. Judith Butler, a well-known theorist, maintains that sex and gender structures are reproduced through repetition of performances in which participation is not voluntary but is structurally determined. At the same time there are subversive repetitions that give room to act or rather that dissolve the dichotomy of structure-action and enable a transformation of sex and gender structures (Butler 1999, 2004).

3 Material and method

3.1 General

This study is carried out in two phases: First, mapping and analysis of the equine industry and involved governance; Second, Development of new practices and models for conflict solving.

The research is methodologically divided in two main lines: workpackages conducted in logical/chronological order and parallel case studies. The relation between workpackages and case studies is illustrated in the figure below:



The main method for gathering data is interviews with key persons and experts. Another method is participatory observation, e.g. at meetings dealing with governance issues linked to the equine industry. Other sources of data include existing statistics and documents and analysis of newspaper and other media material. An active internet based equestrian discussion site (www.hevostalli.net), will be subject to an in-depth discourse analysis with focus on analysis of conflicts/cooperation as reflected on cultural and discursive levels. The research project has an interactive character and involves active cooperation with the equine industry, different interest organisations and authorities. Obviously, the prerequisite for successful research is that the project maintains its independence from the studied stakeholders and interests.

3. 2 Case studies – motivation for the choice of cases and description of the cases

The main criterion in the choice of cases was that they should represent three different levels of conflict/cooperation. The three cases fall into a continuum from significant/high level of conflicts to the other extreme of using the horse as a PR tool and a part of a positive municipal image. Based on preliminary studies three municipalities/regions were chosen for case studies but these may be supplemented during the research process. There are protests to the development of equine industry in densely populated municipalities near urban centres but it has been shown that also existing equine industry is pressed and rendered difficult by other expansive activities which disregard the space requirements of the equine industry. All the cases are linked to localities where urban meets rural, which is a special characteristic of the equine industry (Rantamäki-Lahtinen & Vihinen 2004).

3.2.1 Sjundeå – a municipality with active equine industry and high level of conflicts

One characteristic feature in the municipality of Sjundeå is the significant influence of individuals and families with background in equestrian sports and hobbies. Conflicts between them and other groups of inhabitants have led the municipality to plan a change of the building code, which would imply a significant accentuation of the stipulations for keeping horses and building stables etc. These measures have led to intensive discussions about the relationship between the norms of land-use planning at different levels. What are the boundaries for municipalities' right to regulate equine industry and what is the relationship between, for example, the building code and the more general planning instruments such as general plans and detail plans? The situation has led to a mobilisation

of different interests, both “pro and contra” the equine industry. One pro-equine industry association has recently been founded (www.siuntionprohevonen.net) and different critical groups have expressed their opinions in the local press.

3.2.2 Sibbo – a municipality with a high number of horses, different levels of cooperation and a broad debate on equine and equestrian issues

Sibbo is probably among the municipalities with the highest number of horses in Finland (approx. 1000 horses). The number of stables and equine enthusiasts has been high for some time. In Sibbo there is an ongoing intensive debate among different groups of equine enthusiasts and those involved in equestrian sports. One example of this is www.hevostalli.net, which is Finland’s largest internet-based equestrian discussion site with several thousand entries per day. The debate on this site is an excellent source for analysis of a part of the “new equine field”. The case study in Sibbo will also include interviews and desk research.

3.2.3 Vasa region – a region with active equine industry where horses are used as a PR tool to attract new residents

Vasa region is an interesting case because the whole region – as opposed to just one municipality as in the cases of e.g. Ypäjä and Oravais – wishes to create an image of itself as an “equine region”. Several actors have taken an initiative to present the Vasa region as a pro-equine region, e.g. through a proposal to the town council and a project within the framework of a development company VASEK (Pajakko 2005). There are plans to make a comprehensive plan for development of the equine industry with elements such as housing in close proximity to horses, equestrian paths etc. In this respect one can compare the Vasa region with areas which have made strong investments in Sweden, where separate municipalities use equine industry as a key in development and for attracting new inhabitants. (To read more about this development visit e.g. www.hastiheby.se). Swedish research (Tillberg-Mattsson 2004) shows that horses are significant factor in current drive to move to the countryside.

4 Expected results

The results will be presented in annual research reports and in national and international scientific journals. It is also important that the equine industry, different parties in disputes over establishing and regulating the equine industry and the interested public at large have access to the results. This will be accomplished through regular meetings and seminars during the project and through media.

Expected results:

- Identification of the most important groups of consumers and stakeholders in the current equine industry and increased knowledge of their spatial needs
- Understanding of the types of conflicts – primarily concerning land-use and road use – in relation to the different groups of stakeholders
- Insight into the operation of the current planning system in issues concerning development, governance and conflicts within the new equine industry
- Development of best practices for preventing and solving conflicts within the new equine industry based on the three case studies

We would like to emphasise that best practice should not be understood as the equivalent of the practices of the most pro-equine case localities. Best practices are examples of well-functioning systems and procedures in all circumstances, even in the most conflict-ridden ones.

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