

# Final report

## *A Human Side of Horse Welfare*

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*H-18-47-401*

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**Main applicant:**

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*None*

**Part 1: Detailed summary**

Projektet syftade till att undersöka vad, vilka faktorer i bred mening, som hästhållare (stallägare) i Sverige ser som positiva respektive negativa när det gäller att realisera en god hästvälfärd för de hästar man har uppstallade. Det ingick också i syftet att om möjligt klargöra vilka typer av förbättrade villkor stallägarna skulle vilja se. Med hjälp av dels en enkät som distribuerades i olika sociala kanaler där hästmänniskor – och hästhållare bland dem – är aktiva, dels ett antal förberedande mer informativa intervjuer med vad som kan ses som relevanta nyckelpersoner i Hästsverige – såväl de hästrelaterade organisationerna som forskningen om hästar - sammanställdes en intervjumall för semistrukturerade intervjuer.

Den ursprungliga planen var att genomföra både individuella intervjuer och fokusgrupper/gruppintervjuer, men på grund av restriktionerna under pandemin, kunde gruppintervjuer inte genomföras. Istället utvidgades antalet enskilda intervjuer till närmare 40 stycken, de flesta genomförda på zoom och ett par på telefon. Samtliga intervjuer ägde rum på svenska, samtliga intervjuade var personer som ansvarar för någon form av stall för hästar i Sverige, relativt jämnt fördelat över landet geografiskt och mellan häst- och ridsporternas olika grenar och inriktningar. Efter dessa intervjuer var det tydligt att svarsräddnad hade uppstått; intervjuade upprepade sedan i hög grad intervju svar som redan hade erhållits. Då studien inte var av kvantitativ art, bedömdes därför antalet intervjuer som tillräckligt för att ge material för analys. Intervjuerna spelades in (genom inspelningsfunktionen som finns i Zoom) och de transkriberades delvis. (I sina mest relevanta delar, småprat om den intervjuades egen häst och liknande, transkriberades inte.)

De förväntade resultaten, hypoteserna på förhand, var att många skulle svara att viktiga faktorer för hästvälfärd var tillgång på hagmark och andra ekonomiska och materiella resurser, samt i viss mån att lagar och regler ibland skulle anses ställa till det. Så blev inte alls fallet, istället svarade en

väldigt stor majoritet att de ansåg att det största hindret för att förverkliga en god hästvelfärd är risken att hästen ses som en vara; det vill säga kommodifiering av hästen. Många uttryckte oro för att hästen ska ses som en slags slit och släng-produkt utan nämnvärt egenvärde. Dessa svar upprepades påfallande ofta, utan att någon av intervjufrågorna egentligen innehöll några formuleringar i den riktningen. Övriga intressanta resultat var att få av hästhållarna uttryckte någon egen uppfattning om vad hästvelfärd är, utöver i mycket allmänna ordalag som att ”hästarna har det bra och får sina behov tillgodosedda”. Detta, tillsammans med andra huvudsakligen svepande formuleringar, gör att vi måste förstå som ett resultat av studien att de värderingar som ändå finns - kanske inom hästsverige i stort, men åtminstone - bland de intervjuade, är att betrakta som tyst kunskap. Man vet kanske vad man värderar och finner viktigt för hästar, men man har ganska få ord att uttrycka det med, av dessa intervjuer att döma.

Det är därför min bedömning att en viktig lärdom av detta projekt, är att hästsverige framstår som ganska omedvetet om såväl de värderingar som är verksamma inom hästsverige, som om de värderingar som många enskilda kanske skulle vilja lyfta fram. Man tycks sakna språk för att tala om den värderingsmässiga sidan av hästarnas tillvaro och välfärd. Här torde olika utbildningsinsatser och möjligheter för gemensam reflektion och samtal kunna bidra till höjd medvetandegrad, vilket i sin tur skulle kunna skärpa den etiska medvetenheten i hästsverige generellt, vilket i sin tur vore en förbättring. Det skulle kunna bidra till att man ser en etisk medvetenhet, en moralisk kompass, som en viktig del av hästmänniskans kunskapsbas. För att kunna komma dit, måste värderingsfrågorna verbaliseras och conceptualiseras, annars förblir kunskapen tyst i den mening att det är kunskap som inte har möjlighet att ta den plats som den nog borde.

Inte minst blir detta behov tydligt i kombination med att det flertalet intervjuade ser som det största hotet mot hästvelfärden är att hästarna riskerar att ses som varor, som ”slit och släng”. Intressant här är att de allra flesta av de intervjuade inte ägde stallar för elithästar, utan snarare kom de flesta från vad vi kan kalla breddidrotten. Det vill säga, deras inackorderade har inte häst för att tjäna pengar på den eller vinna stora mästerskap. Ändå hyste så många en oro för kommodifiering.

En stark rekommendation till hästsveriges organisationer och aktörer blir därför att arbeta för att utveckla metoder för etiskt samtal med hästvelfärd som gemensamt tema. Detta behov motiverar också fortsatt forskning, för att utveckla fruktbara modeller för sådana samtal, till exempel.

## Part 2: Main report (max. 10 pages)

### Introduction

Horse welfare has been under debate from time to time for several years now, both within the horse industry and in equine research as well. These debates address training methods, use of equipment, horses in competitive equestrian sports and horse keeping systems, among other aspects. One of the conditions for the project was the conviction that the current debates on horse welfare suggest that horse welfare is not completely understood if it is viewed as a subject exclusively for natural sciences. The question of horse welfare cannot be “value-free” in the way natural science seeks and also often positions itself as being (Rollin, 2010). The scientific knowledge about horses should inform the ethical consideration (Fraser, 1999; Fraser et al, 1997; Crony & Anthony, 2009), but the scientific knowledge cannot avoid ethical valuation, nor solves conflicts of interest.

Assessment of horse welfare often includes both resource-, management- and animal-based measures as well (Hitchens et al, 2017). In the project, that contributed to explain how horse

welfare is not only an issue for natural sciences, but also an issue for humanities and social sciences. The resource- and management-based criteria for horse welfare are closely linked to human actions, human considerations and to the wider context the stall owners are facing. A point of departure for the project was that the human role in horse welfare has been paid insufficient attention.

The project aimed to fill an important knowledge gap: point out the values, valuations and conflicts of interest that are at stake when making decisions that effects horse welfare one way or another. When horse welfare is understood as dependent of ethical consideration, the understanding of horse welfare is at the same time deepened and expanded as it is then made possible – unavoidable, even! – to ask questions that cannot be answered by natural science.

In the study, the aim was to learn about the stall owners understanding of their work with horse welfare. The project took a step further with an in-depth analysis of the stall owners' views by clarifying that, and when, and how, ethical values are at stake and need to be taken into consideration. Through philosophical and ethical analysis, the project aimed to make some "tacit" knowledge to be conceptualised and verbalised. Until now, there have been a lack of this kind of knowledge about stall owners and their work with horse welfare.

The objectives of the project was

- What positive opportunities do the stall owners experience that they have in their work for good horse welfare?
- What difficulties do the stall owners face in their work for good horse welfare?
- What kind of improved opportunities do the stall owners ask for?

## Material and methods

Stall owners are key persons when it comes to horse welfare. They are responsible for the yards, with or without co-workers and/or employees. They also have specific insights, experience and knowledge about the conditions for housing horses on a yard, surrounded by other kind of management, authorities, and customers and so on. In addition, they often live close to the horses and spend a lot of time in the horses' immediate nearness, hence taking part of the horses' everyday life. This is why the study focused on stall owners (in Sweden).

During the first phase of the project, an internet survey was distributed through social media including several horse related organizations and horse related social groups. I received about 750 responds. Unfortunately it became obvious that at least 50 % of respondents were not members of my target group, that is, they did not own a stable (but almost all of them owned one or more horses). Since statistics over horses and stables is still so poor (this was before the last registration of stables and horses) it is unclear how to reach the target group and not at the same time reach a lot of other people related to the horse industry. Perhaps the new registers can help with that in future surveys. Nevertheless, the responds to the survey was useful for generating hypotheses and will be useful for that also in my coming research (in the near future).

During the first phase of the project period, I also met with several people from different, pretty central, positions in the Swedish horse industry and people with a good overview of it. These meetings/interviews were used to develop the interview scheme for the coming interviews, and to make sure that my questions made sense to respondents. I also used these reference persons to find interviewees for the following interviews.

The project has been financed by:

After that, more than half of the project period, the pandemic and so the mandatory social distancing made things complicated. I had to do all interviews on telephone or zoom, and it soon became clear that focus groups on zoom was not a good idea. It was tested, but failed. Instead, I made more individual interviews than originally planned for. 40 interviews were done, with stable owners from different parts of the horse industry and from different parts of the country. It was important that interviewees were widely spread over the country, since the conditions for horse keeping vary with geography in many aspects. Interviews were time demanding, since many of the interviewees needed instructions and help regarding how to handle with Zoom before we could start, and also because conversations on Zoom are slower than real life conversations are (according to my experience).

Interviews were semi-structured. I do believe that respondents would have answered more or less different, had we not been stuck to Zoom, mainly because you feel more free in a sense when meeting face to face in real life and also because so many of the interviewees were unused to zoom. Interviewees expressed that using Zoom was outside their comfort zone (this was early in the pandemic, people had not had time to fully adapt at that time).

When all the 40 interviews were done, it was clear that response saturation had occurred, e.g. new responses were repetitions of previous answers (Wibeck, 2010; Trost, 2005).

Interviews were recorded and, partly, transcribed by me. The interviews also undergone analysis with focus on values and conflicts of value and conflicts of interest. The seminar at my department was used for support in this work and so was the seminar sometimes arranged in the *Nätverk för hästforskning i HumSamKonst*. These seminars all took place on Zoom.

The planned seminars with invited guests from the Swedish horse sector could not take place, due to the pandemic. Instead, zoom meetings were arranged, with one participant at time (and me). These meetings were fruitful for the interpretation of results from the interviews.

## Results and discussion

The most striking result from the interviews is that most suggested hypotheses from the application for the project were not confirmed. Hypotheses like the stable owners would stress lack of land (paddocks and pastures), lack of knowledgeable veterinarians and farriers, horse owners that do not know enough about horses and horse owners hence choosing trainers and other professionals that are not skilled enough, were all proven wrong in this study. That differs drastically from an earlier pilot study (Andersson, 2010).

The aim for the study was not to analyse how stall owners define horse welfare, but what factors they think influence their possibilities to realize horse welfare as they understand the concept. In interviews, it became obvious that many stall owners do not think in terms of horse welfare. This is an interesting result from the interviews. That of course does not mean that they do not care about horse welfare, but it is interesting that horse welfare is almost not conceptualised at all among seemingly many stable owners and horse people. Suggested definitions of horse welfare were vague, like “horses are feeling well”, “horses got their needs fulfilled”, among other.

Another result was that many of the interviewees labelled themselves, and the horse sector in general, as kind of “traditionalistic” or “conservative”. That was not surprising, but fully in accordance with hypotheses. Similar results are shown by Thorell et al. (2015). Already when talking about horse management as conservative, the reasoning takes yet a step into the humanities and social science aspects of horse welfare, hence ought to be interpreted accordingly. The idea of conservatism places the horses in a specific position rather than the possible

alternative positions, and that in turn affects horse welfare (Dashper, 2016; Birke, 2009). I am working on an essay about tradition and renewal for a forthcoming book. Analysis is not finished yet.

We could also see that interviewees seemed very pleased by being asked to explain what the judge as important when it comes to our use of horses. Despite the self-image of being somewhat conservative, many of them emphasised the importance of learning from new research and from new ideas about horses, e.g. learning theory. At the same time they made it clear that in case of problems, they would rather trust traditional knowledge about horses than new findings and trends – scientific or not. That result, I believe, is related to the hypotheses about much of the knowledge in the horse sector as tacit knowledge. This is a theme for future research, but was also briefly analysed by Zetterqvist Blokhuis & Andersson (2019). In our network, we are planning for some activity, e.g., a workshop, about tradition and renewal in the horse sector.

Despite hypotheses, the interviewees did not talk very much about different factors that put horse welfare at risk. Or, of course there were some signs of that, but these were not spelled out very much, they were very different between the interviewees and they appeared as pretty accidental. This is worth of future analysis, though.

What was not hypothesized was that a large majority of interviewees pointed out the risk that the horses become a commodity on a market, or that an attitude throw away consumption will be more and more accepted.

## **Conclusions**

Conclusions can be grouped in two themes.

The first theme is about knowledge, language and self-image in the horse sector. My results show that to the extent that knowledge about horse welfare is spread in the horse sector, it is a matter of tacit knowledge. What is not tacit, is the self-image of being conservative and stuck to traditions. It is striking that when it comes to horse welfare, it often happens within the context of emphasizing the horse sector as conservative and traditional.

An important conclusion is that there are severe worries in the horse sector about commodification of the horses. At the other hand, it is not obvious what do the interviewees mean when talking about commodification and a culture of throw away consumption. Suggestions are that they fear that results in competitions become more important than the love for and care of the horses, that they fear that the commodification of horses results in horse owners keeping their horses for their own benefit, not for horse welfare and a fear that the horses are seen more as competition equipment than as horses; subjects in their own right. There is also an idea that the horses were less commodified back in “the good old days”. It is surprising that this commodification is described not as something general in the society, but as a process that is going on particularly in the horse sector.

## **Relevance for the practical horse sector incl. recommendations**

*Describe how the project results can be used in the practical horse sector, what is needed for the results to be implemented, and (if applicable) what needs further investigation after the project.*

The project disclosed an interesting tension between at one hand “the Tradition” and “the Commodification/Economy” at the other. And also a tension between “loyalty” to “the Tradition” at one hand and distancing from “the Tradition” at the other.

The project aimed (among some other things) to be able to suggest applicable ethical standpoints to, or about, how to work together with stable owners to improve horse welfare. That aim has been fulfilled. The project shows that there is a need to conceptualize, give words to, the tacit knowledge about horse welfare that has been shown to exist among the stable owners. By putting words to this tacit knowledge, both the discussions about horse welfare would become more fruitful and real improvement - if necessary - would come much more within reach. Such a process, would also shed light over horse welfare as a concrete and comprehensible area of knowledge, which is much more trustworthy than diffuse statements. Horse welfare is not something that can be detected through the stable owners emotions, at least not sufficiently.

Further investigation about self-images of being conservative and traditional within the horse sector, and further investigation tacit knowledge about horse welfare – that in fact is a subject of knowledge that can possibly be conceptualised (it is not magic!) – is needed and also promising and interesting.

Further investigation of commodification of the horses, and further investigation of fear of such commodification as well, is also important. From the interviews, it seems like it is unavoidable and self-evident that commodification is a welfare risk for horses, but we do not know about that – partly because we do not know exactly what is meant by the term commodification in the context.

A strong recommendation to the Swedish horse sector is to work for developing methods for ethical deliberation and conversations with horse welfare as the common theme. This need also motivates further research, e.g. to develop fruitful models for such conversations.

## References

*References that are cited in the report including references to earlier projects finances by the Foundation.*

*Note that all references/publications that is a result of the current project needs to be given in the table in Part 3. Result dissemination.*

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## Part 3: Result dissemination

State both scientific publication and popular scientific communication for approval of final report. State all result dissemination from the financed project into the appropriate section, including information as indicated. Additional rows can be added to the table.

<b>Scientific publications, published</b>	<i>Author(s), year, title, journal, Vol, No, pp. (doi/link if applicable)</i>
<b>Scientific publications, submitted</b>	Andersson, Petra. [accepted] Conservatism and New Ideas: Horse Welfare in Changing Times. Society and Animals Journal [forthcoming 2022]
	Andersson, Petra. [submitted] A Commodity among Commodities. Horse welfare at risk? Animal Studies Journal [forthcoming]
<b>Scientific publications, manuscript</b>	I have written two chapters to my coming book, for the time being under the title Horse Welfare, Animal Ethics and Philosophy (Hästvelfärd, djuretik och filosofi), using results from the project. Carlssons förlag has shown great interest in that book. Forthcoming.
<b>Conference publications/presentations</b>	Andersson, Petra. Commodification of Horses, Animal Welfare Symposium, SLU, June 2022. Uppsala, Sweden.
	Andersson, Petra. Horse Welfare According to Swedish Stable Owners, DEL CABALLO DO CAVALO ON HORSES CONFERENCE, November, 2022, UNIVERSIDAD DE EXTREMADURA Cáceres, Spain
<b>Other publications, media etc.</b>	<i>Title, year/date, place of publication (link if applicable)</i>
<b>Oral communication, to horse sector, students etc.</b>	I will present at "Smedjeveckan", SLU Skara in September.
	I will also present at the Gothenburg Horse Show in Scandinavium spring 2023 and at Stockholm International Horse Show autumn 2022.
<b>Student theses</b>	<i>Author/Student, co-authors/supervisors, year, title, type of thesis (doi/link if applicable)</i>
<b>Other</b>	

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