THE HORSE AS AN “ENABLER” IN HORSEBACK RIDING – THE HISTORY OF THERAPEUTIC HORSEMANSHIP

The purpose of this paper is to explore and analyse the history of therapeutic horsemanship in Sweden since WW2 and to open up for international comparisons.
TODAY

- Horse riding is the biggest sport for disabled people in Sweden today and it is organised within the Equestrian Federation – not in an organisation of it’s own (as most other sports for disabled people).
- About 5000 people in the ”handicap section” of the SEF
- Therapeutic horse riding within the care sector is growing – 27 000 Swedish hits on Internet
METHOD AND SOURCES

• History and mapping out
• Discourse analyses in two periods on media coverage and texts on therapeutic riding and horse riding for disabled people today
THEORY

Inspirations from posthumanism in the analysis of how the horse is discussed as a subject in history and human/animal studies (e.g. Lynda Birke)
SOME CONCLUSIONS: SPORT AND CARE

Therapeutic riding in Sweden today comes from two traditions – Sport and Leisure in the horse riding school as well as physiotherapy.

The horse which used to be a physical enabler has become an enabler in a social meaning: healer, care taker, therapist and coach.
EQUINE HISTORY IN SWEDEN

From agriculture, forestry, transport, army to horse riding schools and other uses of the horse…

From 720 000 horses, to 60 000 horses, to 400 000 horses…

From military training to leisure sport…

From masculine to feminine…
In Britain in the 1940’s therapeutic (training) methods were developed.

1948, Stoke Mandeville (hospital) International wheelchair games (in connection to the London Olympic Games

1960 the first international Paralympics with 400 athletes from 23 countries.

Now – about 4000 athletes from 146 countries.
EQUESTRIAN SPORTS IN PARALYMPICS

• In the Equestrian Paralympic Competitions there is only dressage.
• Paralympic dressage developed in the 1970’s – first events in GB and Scandinavia.
• Appeared in Paralympics in 1984 in Stoke Mandeville and NY and has featured in every Games since Atlanta 1996.
• Up until the Olympic Games in Athens the competitors did not bring their own horses for the competitions.
THE BEGINNING IN SWEDEN: THE OLYMPIC GAMES IN STOCKHOLM 1956

Liz Hartel the Silver medalist had Polio and the Swedish media and audience was shown that it was possible.
BEGINNING: THERAPEUTIC RIDING IN SWEDEN

- Started in the late 1950’s
- Physiotherapist Kristina af Geijerstam introduced horse riding to children and adults with Polio.
- Geijerstam visited Denmark to see how Ulla Harpoth worked with therapeutic riding there since 1955.
- Talked one of the horse riding schools in to that this was an important activity.
THE BEGINNING: THERAPEUTIC RIDING IN SWEDEN

• The first group started in 1959
• From 1962 summer camps and competitions
• Show jumping and dressage
• The first organisation was established in the 1950’s – Stockholm Horse Riding Club for Disabled People (soon many others)
DISCOURSE 1960-1970

The horse as an physical enabler…

• Motor learning and muscle strength
• Sport and leisure for all
• Joy for all
• Equity in experiences of nature
• Nor any horse….
CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE

The horse as a healer, care taker, therapist and coach

- Motor learning and muscle strength and psychological well being
- When giving care – a person gets taken care off (anorexia, bulimi)
- When observing the horse a person observe oneself and can be opened up verbally
- Social learning - leadership
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