

# **THESIS**

**RAYANE EL MAHDAOUI**

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**Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life  
Sciences  
Károly Róbert Campus**

**The utilization of horses in agro-  
tourism.**

**Supervisor  
Dr. Beatrix Beres Szabone**

**Written by  
Rayane El Mahdaoui**  
Agricultural Engineering  
Specializing in Agro-environmental  
Management  
Full-time education

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

Humans and horses' lives have always been intertwined ever since their domestication around 2200 BCE culture in the western parts of Eurasian steppe now day better known as Ukraine and Kazakhstan. We can easily notice throughout history the prominent presence of the horse with humans, from the replicas of horses painted in caves in Lascaux to the many statues of horses that carried influential leaders, such as the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius (Internet 1). Back then these animals were mainly used for transportation, trade, agricultural purposes and for meat production, strong, resilient, enduring and loyal, the horse also took place in several key battles in the human history, thus being a key element in the development of warfare (Internet 2). However, showing horses just for the sake of sport was not uncommon. In Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century jousting was popular amongst the knights and nobles, a martial game consistent of two horse riders charging at each other wielding lances, in the middle east Arabian horses were bred for racing across the dunes 7.300-6700 BC (WILKINSON, 2016).

Nowadays the horse industry reports strong numbers in revenue and investments in multiple. The European Horse Network website reports a total of 100 billion euro of yearly economic impact with a 5% rise in number of riders every year (Internet 3) and 400 000 full-time jobs offered by the sector (Internet 4).

In some parts of the world horses are still a part of farm duties, as an example horse are still used to drive cattle in the USA or Australia. However, the usage of horses has dramatically shifted to recreation for most, horses offer a wide range of recreational activities, whether the customer is an experienced rider or a novice the choice of activity can vary from sitting on the horse with the animal being manually led by trainers in the arena to multiple days horseback trail rides in the mountains or even exotic trail rides in the African Savannah. The horse enthusiasts also enjoy watching exhibitions or equestrian parades.

## **Research hypothesis and questions**

Equine tourism is a fast-growing sector of agro-tourism which have known success in many countries, As the horse sector continues growing, multiple methods and practices have been utilized including different horse breeds and various infrastructures all in order to maximize development of the horse-based tourism. This research aims to prove that horse-based tourism is sustainable through comparison with and Icelandic sectors to the situation in

Hungary. the reason for this comparison is to demonstrate the similarities between Hungarian and Icelandic resources that could lead to sustainable equine tourism

The current research has two main questions:

- Is horse-based tourism in Hungary sustained?
- Can horse-based tourism lead to rural development in Hungary?

In order to answer these questions, 2 hypotheses are proposed in order to bring to light the importance of Horses in agro tourism:

- Horse based tourism in Hungary is sustainable with a growth potential.
- Horse based tourism contributes to the development of rural areas in Hungary.

This research was built on different types of data collection including secondary data consistent of articles, research reviews, governmental websites, books and real time online sources and statistics. Primary data was collected through conducting a survey which was shared with both horse fanatics and people with no particular ties to equestrianism, with a wide range of age groups, and geographical positions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 An understanding of equestrian tourism**

The popularity of equestrian activities is growing, with horse tourism as one of them. It is becoming more precise, has a lot of potential, and has become one of the most established methods of improving horse riding. Italy, Iceland, France, as well as Hungary are currently among the most important equine tourism promoters. The total number of horses in the world today is 58.5 million, ensuring their continued growth (OLLENBURG, 2005; HELGADÓTTIR and SIGURDARDÓTTIR, 2008).

Countries like Hungary have already understood the potentially in basing tourism businesses around horses have instituted a governmental body to promote this industry provide an overview equestrian tourism sector (PIROSKA, 2013).

Recreational riding includes but is not limited to multiple disciplines like dressage, eventing and showjumping, but also endurance racing and many more activities, which are rather competitively done and offer a good spectacle for equestrian sports enthusiasts who would travel to see them. Different breeds are commonly used for each discipline, for English riding Warmbloods are more favorable while most horse races feature thoroughbreds, western riders prefer Quarter horses or Appaloosa for cattle work. Many geographical locations have their specific local breeds such as Iceland or Shetland and Connemara ponies (OLLENBURG, 2005).

Out of all these options only a few are available as actual commercial touristic products, and many of these activities do not actually feature limited horse to human altercation and does not categorize into any riding category, which is why it's useful to use a method of classification for these activities.

In her study Ollenburg (2005) classified the horse- based activities into four major classes as noticeable on table 1.

Table 1. Classification of commercial equestrian tourism products, OLLENBURG (2005)

<b>Product type</b>	<b>Tourism subsector</b>	<b>Position in horse-based tourism sector</b>
trail rides on horseback with a guide	Adventure or ecotourism	Core
Farm stays, pension in a ranch, dude ranch...	agro-tourism	Core
equestrian masterclasses and pony camps	educative	Peripheral
horse pulled carts	Urban	Minor

The two core categories feature guided horse treks tours and trail rides and fixed-site farm stays, guest and working ranches, the two more peripheral options include professional masterclasses and seminars that experts hold for training, or children's pony camps where children are introduced to riding, and horse drawn carriages where the customer have almost no interaction with the horse neither does he need to prepare for it (OLLENBURG, 2005).

The guest farms, and working ranches are rural or agrarian properties that function in portion as working farms but also provide on-site lodging for customers. Guest farms are offered on a variety of farms around the world, from recreational farms and small specialist businesses like herb farms or alpaca studs to extremely big Australian cattle stations. Even if guests do not actually partake in the duties of the farm it has become an expectation from people specially children to find horses and ponies in farms, and to stay in competition the businesses have to provide said horses to keep a market share. On the other hand, in working ranches the customer pays to live and experience the duties of a cowboy which usually involves cattle driving and require strong western skills, riding skills and good levels of physical ability and stamina (OLLENBURG, 2005).

## 2.2 Horse-based tourism in Hungary

Hungarians have a long history of horsemanship from agriculture to transportation, the horse in Hungary was even an essential part of warfare, horses were used for agrarian and military purposes for many centuries. starting from the 19th century the UK counted 326 horse per square meter, meanwhile in Hungary there was only 112 per square meter (SZÉCHENYI,

1828). Fortunately, when Count Széchenyi reformed horse progeny and the equine business on the British model at the beginning of the nineteenth century, horse breeding and equestrianism were able to flourish once more in Hungary. The role of horses in competition sports and recreational riding has grown in importance, yet it was still only accessible to the rich (OBÁDOVICS and KULCSÁR, 2004). There were about 900 000 horses in Hungary right before the first world war where the stock decreased by 20%, since then it managed to recover to its former glory only to dramatically fall again in 1942 to 330 000 due to the second world war, as noticed on figure 1 the second world war damage was the strongest. Hungary tried to reform its agricultural practices 1945-1958, but this process was halted after this date due to a forced shift in agricultural policy priorities favoring cooperatives over private farms. Until the 1990s, the horse numbers began to decline significantly.

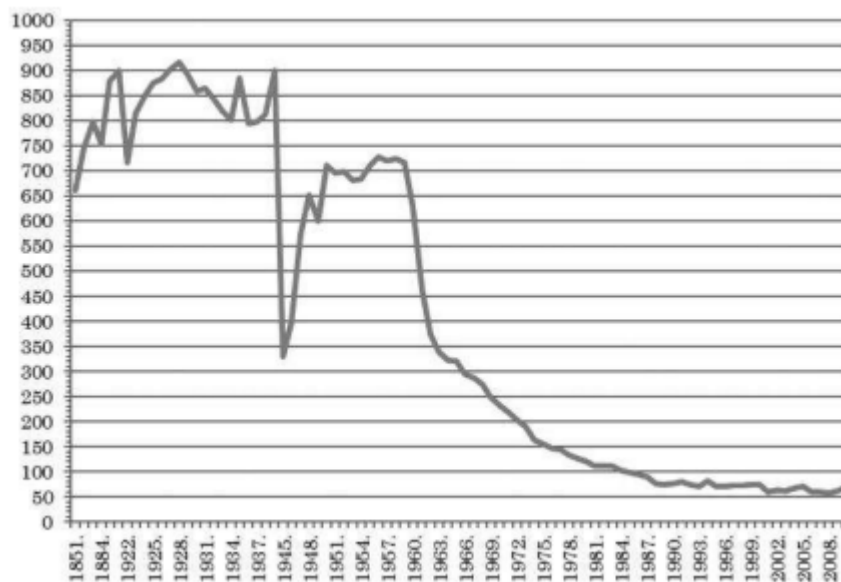


Figure 1: Horse stock (in thousands) in Hungary (1851-2010). Source: (Internet 5)

After such catastrophic events the horse industry was very weak in Hungary yet not decimated, as you can notice on figure 2, Hungary is clearly falling behind with the number of horses per person, with only 6 horses per 1000 Hungarian it is bested by Sweden with 31 horses for every 1000 citizen closely followed by Belgium with 28 horses while the European union average is at 12'.



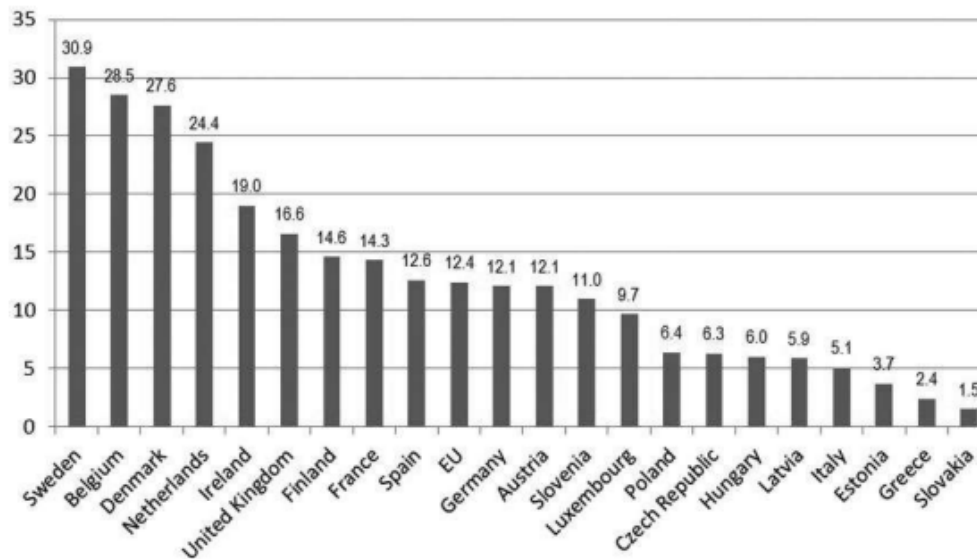


Figure 2. Number of horses per 1,000 inhabitants in EU countries (2009). Source: (OBADOVICS and KULCSAR, 2015)

#### 2.1.1 Hungarian horse breeds

The western border population regularly shipped grains and other crops to Austria in the 18th century. All whilst, they introduced to the nation the huge, heavy-loading horse breeds known as Nóri and Pinzgau horses. These two specimens of horses gave rise to two horse breeds with similar origins but distinct characteristics, the Mura horse, a small yet mighty horse, and the much bigger Pinkafő horse. The country had already acknowledged cold-blooded cultures in the second half of the nineteenth century, and by 1904, the government had already provided 140 breeders of coldblooded studs. The western horses of different breeds were transported from the west to improve and unify the stock, but they did not turn into a cold-blooded unity. According to recent studies carried out the breeding research findings clearly illustrated that the Mura horse, as well as the Hungarian cold-blooded horse and the Pinkaf horse, the existent was justified (CSIZMÁR et al., 2018).

According to studies carried out by Csizmár et al. (2018) to develop conservation strategies for valuable genetic stocks, the Hungarian heavy draft currently numbers only 800 mares and survives solely due to breeding programs; thus, the frequency of each haplotype depends on the extent to which mares are involved in breeding. Because most breeders do not possess paperwork, for their horses the current stud book features unknown individuals in the

pedigree. Nevertheless, the multiple origins of national horse breeds in the maternal lineage have been confirmed (CSIZMÁR et al. 2018).



Picture 1: The Hungarian Mura horse. Source: (Internet 6)

The variance in character makes almost any breed eligible for agro tourism. The Hungarian cold-blooded horse, also known as the Hungarian Draft, and the Mura-horse both belong here. Cold-blooded horse breeds are easy to operate and work with integrity. Unfortunately, because they are not widely used in farming, their prospects seemed to be bleak. However, due to the popularity of organic farming might hide potential for these animals as the horses oppose no threat to the agricultural ecosystem, their use in small scale farms can be more economical and environmentally conscious than heavy machinery (NÉMETHY and BARTOS, 2019).

#### 2.1.2 Potential for rural development in Hungary

Even with all its historical relation to horses Hungary does not recognize horse resulted in the longest network of coherent riding trails with approximately 10000 kilometers with consistent tourism as a principal sector of tourism in accordance with a survey conducted in 2011 in which it was found that only 6% of the rural tourism ventures were based on horses in the country (PANYIK et al., 2011). Regardless of that, Hungary holds immense potential of growth. Horseback trail rides in natural scenery is one of the most popular and demanded horse activities, yet most European countries cannot free rides in the outdoors, due to the privatization of territory, the blockage caused by gates, or even just the simple inadequacy

of the trail path which could put both rider and horse at risk. One of the biggest advantages in the Hungarian horse tourism sector is the ability to ride freely in the nature with very few restrictions in both private properties and national parks (SEBESTYÉN, 2009). Unfortunately, foresters and forest owners were in the freedom to approve or deny a rider to ride in their forest. It was important to come up with a decree of a law that protects riders and their right to ride freely, and amendment just as the Forestry Law and animal protection regulations, and with that the building of a trail described in the Kincsem National Equestrian Program was set, starting in Hungary, and ending in Carpathian Basin (PIROSKA, 2013). This network is a brilliant example of rural development due to equestrian tourism. Unfortunately, the low standard of equestrian ventures in Hungary prevents them from growing faster, as you can notice on figure 3 even the most developed regions such as central Hungary or lake Balaton the level of quality is still too low.

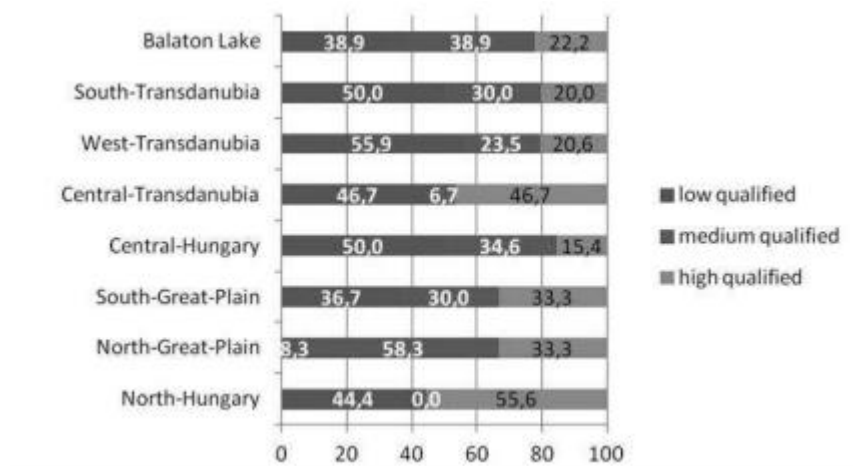
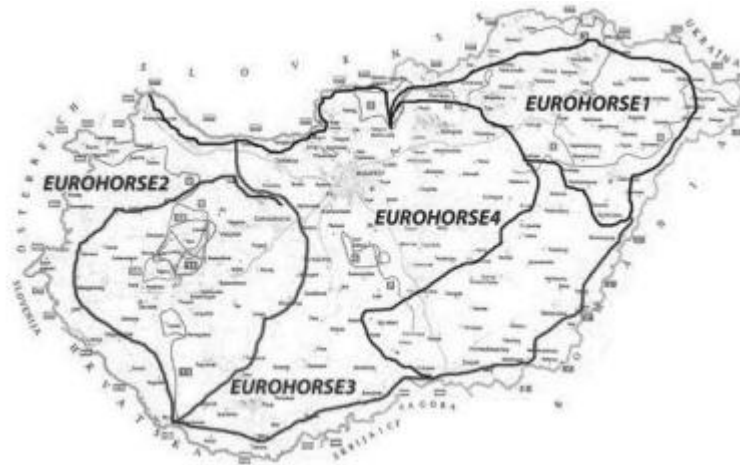


Figure 3: Classification of equestrian tourism ventures in Hungary on a regional basis based on qualification. Source: (OBADOVICS and KULCSAR, 2015)

The fact that most ventures in Hungary offer its customer's lacking service is a big disadvantage which if fixed could permit Hungary to host many riding trails as represented in picture 2.



Picture 2: Planned European routes for equestrian tourism in Hungary. Source: (Internet 7)

From data gathered in 2007 by RÁCZ (2008) about 500 horse related businesses registered in the Hungarian Equestrian Tourism Association and 300 of them reported data about the kind of services they offer, the results are as shown on table 2:

Table 2: Services in the equestrian tourism sector (2007). Source: RÁCZ, 2008

Service	Number of respondent ventures (N=286)	Proportion of equestrian ventures
Training	246	86%
Competition	199	69.6%
Livery	179	62.6%
Trail riding	168	60.5%
Carriage driving	173	58.7%
Catering	155	54.2%
accommodation	141	49.3%
Stud farm visits	49	17.1%
Therapeutic riding	29	10.1%

The majority, composed of 86% of them, offer training, with competition-related services coming in second. At 70%, and carriage touring came in third with 61%, while the lastly was trail which was only offered by 59%, stud visits are low due to specificity of placement and therapeutic riding due to the number of complicated regulations to comply with (RÁCZ, 2008).

To further prove the growth potential of horse-based tourism in Hungary, SWOT Analyses were conducted by Némethy and Bartos (2019) as presented in Table 3 for the Hungarian portion of the study area in order to examine the current situation and assess hypothetical outcomes in which required strategic actions could be developed and carried out.

Table 3: SWOT analysis of the Hungarian area. Source: (NÉMETHY and BARTOS, 2019)

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•adequate geography</li> <li>• beauty and diversity of natural scenery</li> <li>• favorable riding opportunities due to less restrictions on riding freedom</li> <li>• Unique natural resources such as thermal waters, natural mineral water springs, unique flora and fauna</li> <li>• favorable soil</li> <li>• use of forest is without charge</li> <li>• the Hungarian horsemanship have good reputation</li> <li>• strong cultural heritage with horses</li> <li>•growth in interest in equestrianism both in Hungary and abroad</li> <li>• more people want to spend their leisure time in a natural environment.</li> <li>• Hungary offers goods and services at a much lower rate than other countries</li> <li>• adequate price to quality ratio</li> <li>• the horse pedigree and training make him very enduring in Hungary</li> <li>• except of small issues, Hungarian staff is professional and well trained</li> <li>•prolific Hungarian breeds which are new to clients and couldn't be seen outside of their home country</li> <li>• diverse activities which can be linked to equine tourism and sold as a package.</li> <li>•very famous cuisine and world-renowned wines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• very little if no information is offered to tourists about board, programs, prices ..etc</li> <li>• Lodging conditions (nursing, barn environment)</li> <li>• there is no expert marketing done</li> <li>• Niche marketing</li> <li>• lack of language knowledge</li> <li>• most venues don't offer insurance</li> <li>• there are almost no collaborations between businesses</li> <li>• Hungary doesn't give added bundles or packages to equine touristic activities</li> <li>•inadequate management of the current facilities</li> <li>• there is no existing national trail ride organized</li> <li>• lack of maps with trails and stations on it</li> <li>• very inadequate communication</li> <li>•less than good international outreach</li> <li>• equipment of horses is lacking due to money problems</li> <li>• jobs in connection with the equine world such as blacksmith, saddle maker, belt fitter are disappearing</li> <li>• Shortcomings in organized education at all levels</li> <li>•most well-educated employees choose to work abroad due to better salaries</li> <li>• computer skills aren't present enough</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hungary gives longer tourism season</li> <li>• equine activities to be bundled with extra packages to maximize the stays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•the outside competition can have more financial power</li> <li>• buildings and urbanization of legally owned land and forests</li> </ul>

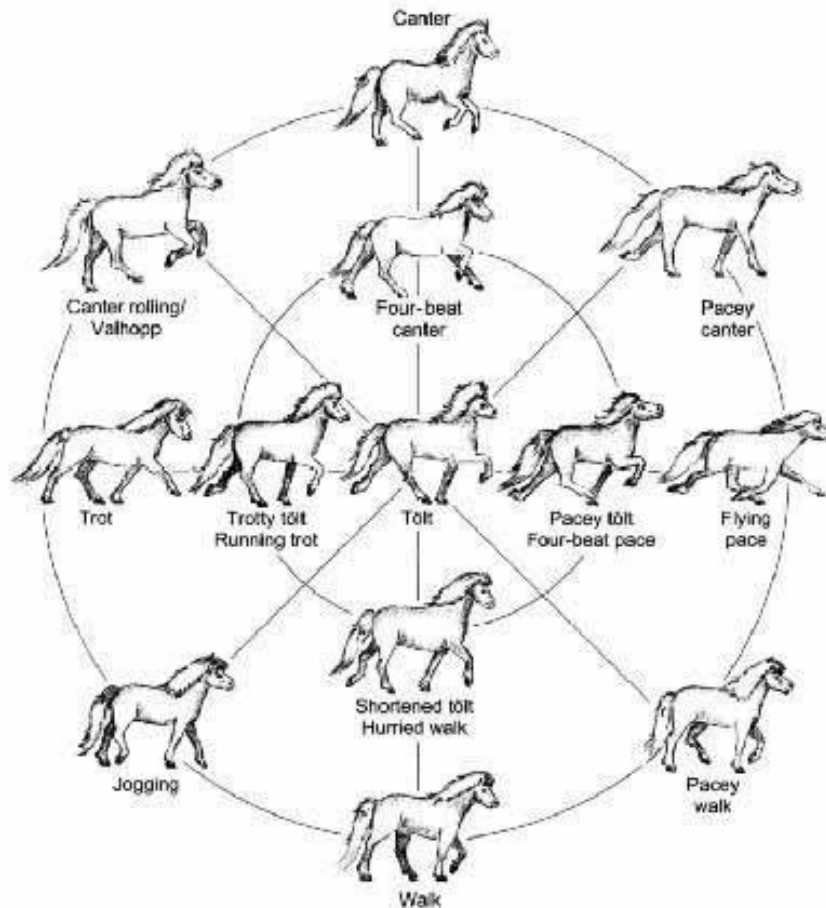
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the ability to gain familiarity with the rural lifestyle on a farm</li> <li>• as organic agriculture grows in popularity, using horses would be the most sustainable approach</li> <li>• Support for conservation of cultural heritage</li> <li>• as the product is lacking in Europe it gives Hungary the opportunity to be the first to innovate in it</li> <li>• making revenue from tourism bigger</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• without the collaboration and regroupment of Hungarian equine tourism participants it is difficult to present a product that is unified</li> <li>• the access restriction from private landowners</li> <li>• today's tax rate can be very difficult to manage for business</li> </ul>
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## 2.3 The Icelandic horse

### 2.3.1 The equine tourism sector in Iceland

Having a specific breed that shapes the marketing around the touristic destination could be a good advantage, but the operators of such businesses give importance to the breed selection, as horses come in different sizes and temperaments depending on their breeding or surroundings it is crucial for the building of a sustainable equestrian touristic destination (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006; OLLENBURG, 2005).

As the goal in most trail rides is to discover natural sceneries on horseback that in other ways would be too difficult to access, usually the terrain for these places is rugged and that is why the Icelandic breed of horses constitutes the perfect trail companion. Coming in a compact size of 138 cm for 360 kg and a variety of 11 colors that constituted a very cherished trait, these animals are experienced in climbing and covering long distances of difficult ground using not 4 but 5 gaits, unlike other horses the Icelandic horse can perform one more gait called Toelt (HELGADÓTTIR and SIGURDARDÓTTIR, 2008).



Picture 3: The gates of the Icelandic horse. Source: (Internet 8)

Iceland is the home country of origin for this specific breed, as agreed upon by the Iceland minister of agriculture and the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006), and there is no doubt that the breeders, owners and enthusiasts of this breed abroad would be inclined to visit the official birth place of the breed they cherish which could enrich the country agro touristic revenue. Nowadays, Iceland records more than 72 000 domesticated horse, and an estimate head count approximate between 130 000 and 200 000 Icelandic horse all over the rest of the world (HELGADÓTTIR and SIGURÐARDÓTTIR, 2008). The horse to human relationship and special characteristics of the breed have played a key element in showcasing Iceland as a touristic destination, as far as making it a theme in the public views of touristic attractions (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006).

## 2.3.2 The status of horse-based tourism in Iceland

### 2.3.2.1 Operating an equine tourism project on a farm

It has been said that equestrian touristic businesses are of the lifestyle kind as they usually generate from the passion an individual holds for horses and from there the operators gain a livelihood from their hobby (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006). According to the study conducted by BELL (2006) entrepreneurs find joy in their profession and therefore do not restrict themselves in working hours and use any free time to grow their opportunities, so the job becomes more of a manner of living.

Since the development of agro tourism, many horse businesses originated from farming, yet the research points to the fact that these two industries often compete over territory and work (HERMANS, 1981). Which implicates the question on whether farm tourism and tourism on a farm is different? Clarke (1996) defines farm tourism as when the customer is accommodated separately from the farm while if we think of tourism on the farm then the customer is most likely involved in the farm lifestyle and activities .in this case going on a horse trail ride with the farm members can be considered as tourism on the farm if we take Clarke's definition. A farm would make a very suitable horse business location as it features vast lands, and animal care facilities in the addition of a skilled trained staff who must not only care for and ride the horses but also have impeccable customer service skills to be able to manage the clients (OLLENBURG, 2005).

The mixture of agricultural work and tourism operations happens to be very fruitful as the resources seems to be managed much more efficiently by farm workers than other kinds of operators, according to Fleischer and Tchetchik (2005). It is very interesting to notice that the Icelandic farmers benefiting from the existing farm structure when operating a horse tourism business all by more efficient labor (HELGADO'TTIR, 2006).

### 2.3.2.2 Standards of the business in Iceland

The provided customer support and attention plays a key role in the growth of equestrian venues. It is absolutely crucial to be able to distinguish the approach taken while dealing with the guests and be able to understand if they want a familiar or customerlike treatment which inevitably better their experience. It is then an advantage that Icelandic operators give



more value to the horses and what the guests could ask rather than making financial gain (HELGADÓTTIR and SIGURDARDÓTTIR, 2008).

As important as the service offered to customers is and the extra attention can make the whole experience better, findings argue that it is only a segment of several things that factors into customer value (BERG and LUNE, 2007; KOMPPULA, 2007). As an example, it has been shown that Icelandic quality of horse rental have more to do with the guest's overall satisfaction than the service (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006).

#### 2.3.2.3 Icelandic trail rides

In the warm months of the summer, Icelandic horse rides are organized through the highlands and on trails far from traffic. The ride can last for days and due to the rigorous land, each rider goes with 3-5 horses and changes rides along the way as to not exhaust the animal. This means that a group composed of 10 participants would most likely be taking with them up to 40 horses, which is a fascinating spectacle to assist to the riders are usually both leading the herd and keeping an eye on the end as horses run freely, however dealing with unexpected situations count as part of the entertainment (Internet 9).

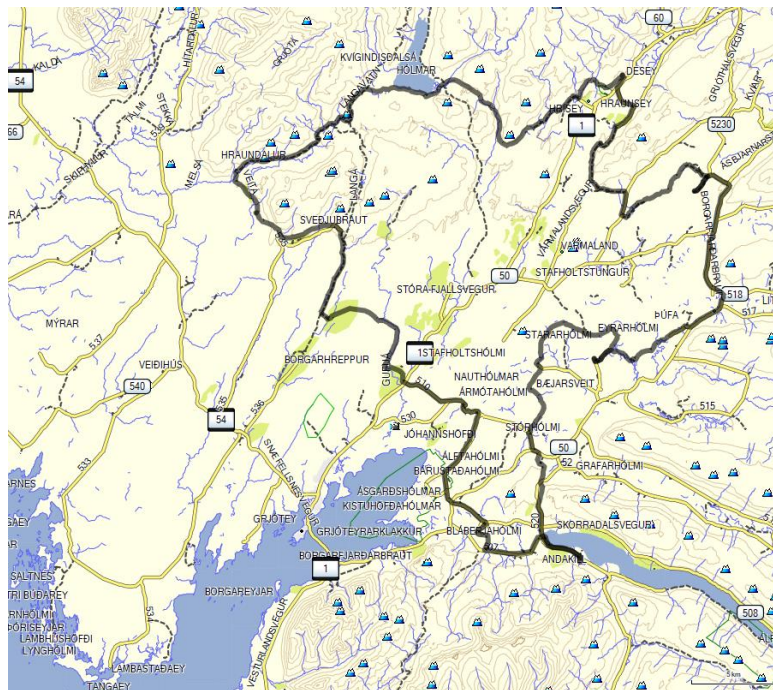


Picture 4. The herd and riders on a trail ride in Iceland. Source: Internet 10

As magnificent as a group of Icelandic horses running free is, a herd of this magnitude must be led with a lot of care as the more horses in the group the higher the chances of injury can

occur due to trampling or bad environmental impact, in these situations lack of experience can be seen as bad horsemanship, but even with upmost care the practice may be subjected to scrutiny (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006).

A study of the mounting destination capacity in the Landmannalaugar area of the southern highlands revealed that riding traffic caused damage, partly due to lack of appropriate treks, railings, and enclosures, but also because of the sheer number of the riders and their herds. Slight missteps, like horses escaping or having to stop in a moss-covered area on a humid day, can result in trampling, which leaves sores in the natural vegetation and enhances soil erosion. Aside of the effect on environment, the beautiful sight of horses running free might not be favored by all tourists, and specially not hikers which leaves door for disagreements (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006).



Picture 5: The Icelandic trail ride map. Source: (Internet 11)

The usual day of riding can go up to 40 kilometers very similar to what you can notice on the map (picture 5). Therefore, one of the leaders' responsibilities is to explore the trails, analyze the maps, and steer the group. Part of these responsibilities is to select which horses would fit best to which part of the trail and decide when riders change mounts. The person leading the herd must be on a trustworthy sure-footed horse, to be able to keep up with the groups speed and stop any horse from stealing ahead, while the people in the back must keep an eye out for any sign of lameness or lost shoe all while maintaining the herds pace to match

the leader. In case the group have green horses or unexperienced riders, they are assigned to guard the end of the herd, best if they stay away from it (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006).

## 2.4 Comparison between the Hungarian and Icelandic equine tourism structures

As horse tourism grows around the world, we can clearly notice from previously mentioned data that the development does not happen at the same pace everywhere. For example, different countries base their promotion approaches on different structures. The trail ride, the public satisfaction, governmental bodies and promotion of local breeds all play a very important role into making equestrian tourism sustainable.

Iceland have built their marketing and business strategies on their local breed (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006), the Icelandic horse. From mentioned data, we can understand that a few visitors may transport to Iceland solely for the purpose of being in contact with the horse in his homeland even if we have established the existence and breeding of a large number of Icelandic horses abroad (HELGADÓTTIR, 2006). Furthermore, the entire folkloric experience the horse drive organized yearly in Iceland, which again features the specific breed due to their solid orientation and having the reputation of being sure footed, is an activity which insists more on the utilization of this breed to attract adventure tourism fanatics. It is also of a great benefit that the horsemanship culture in Iceland is very popular, as it brings more to the experience when the host is more focused on his guests and horses while sharing his knowledge rather than making financial gain (HELGADÓTTIR and SIGURDARDOTTIR, 2008).

However, in Hungary the horse breed, as impressive as they are not properly showcased on an international level. The Mura horse as described by Némethy and Bartos have good suitability for agro tourism activities such as horseback riding or cart driving, due to the horse being cold blooded which explains their livelier temperament, but also their impressive stamina and good looks with a lower demand in feed than most horses for the same task (NÉMETHY and BARTOS, 2019).

This in my understanding that both Hungarian and Icelandic breeds have principal features in common including resistance, good temperament, and elegance. This goes to show that there is a real potential in production and promotion of the Mura horse as an agro touristic

asset can be as valuable and profitable, as the Icelandic breed is to its homeland. Furthermore, Hungary shows a true geographical advantage as Kincsem National Equestrian Program (2012) route constitutes one of the world's most impressive trails which hold potential to host international trekking events (Internet 6). The nature in Hungary holds less restrictions of passage for riders and the Hungarian people have a long heritage with horses, which would make the scenery of horsemen rather pleasant to hikers. Another issue, that Hungary faces is the provided quality that its equestrian venues have to offer. The studies have shown that quality is just a segment of what constitutes value for customers (KOMPPULA, 2007). Nevertheless, Helgado'ttir (2006) examines host-guest relationships in horse-based tourism, concluding that the concept of community, defined as a sense of shared experience and purpose of the endeavor, is critical. Which leads me to think that one of the reasons Hungary finds difficulty to reach its full potential in equine tourism is due to a lack of customer handling experience which the Icelandic people have mastered in order to be able to connect more with their clients?

### **3. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This research aims to prove that Hungary holds a real potential in building a sustainable equine based touristic business, furthermore the study also demonstrates how the investment in the equine sector as a touristic venue can result in a growth in the rural areas.

In order to demonstrate the proper standards of adequate equine tourism Hungary is being compared to Iceland, a destination which is known for its horses and related activities and has managed to market itself into the agro tourism sectors as a strong contestant.

This research was made in Europe as the comparison is made between the Hungarian and Icelandic equine sectors and built on different types of data collection including secondary data consistent with articles, governmental websites, books and internet sources. The research aims to outline the potential that Hungary holds as well as the flaws and obstacles preventing a faster growth of the equestrian tourism while showcasing the success of Icelandic operations and what led to their development in horse-based leisure. To introduction or we change it

Primary data was collected through conducting a survey on google forms which allows the respondents to consent before partaking in the questionnaire. The questions were shared at random with both horse-riding fanatics and people with no particular interest in horses, with a wide range of age groups, and geographical positions. The survey aims to showcase the desired details and standards a client bases his choice of vacation destination on and how it matches the Hungarian resources. Through the questions, the levels of riding were analyzed in order to point out that the participants in horse tourism activities are not required to be experienced riders, which helps to prove that equine tourism venues in Hungary can be mainstreamed as a major tourist destination. The questionnaire also addresses the willingness of participation from the respondents in activities that does not involve riding, thus underlining the fact that equine tourism can include more than ridden activities which makes room for more rural development.

The respondents of the questionnaire were primarily from European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands or Belgium. This goes to demonstrate the general preferences in Europe, and with the growth that the equine touristic sector knows, the data provides an

insight on where is the areas that could be bettered inn the Hungarian sectors in order to please the customers.

This survey was conducted in October of 2022. It was made using google form, which is a free of charge platform and easily accessed by a link. The link was shared on several social media groups to gather as many participants with various backgrounds, age, and interests, as possible.

The questionnaire consists of 12 questions that include demographic details such as their location or their age and questions about personal preferences when it comes to horse-based activities as well as some questions that might shed light on the standards required by tourists to make an equine venue successful.

The survey collected 183 answers including males and females, while the rest of the participants chose not to specify.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

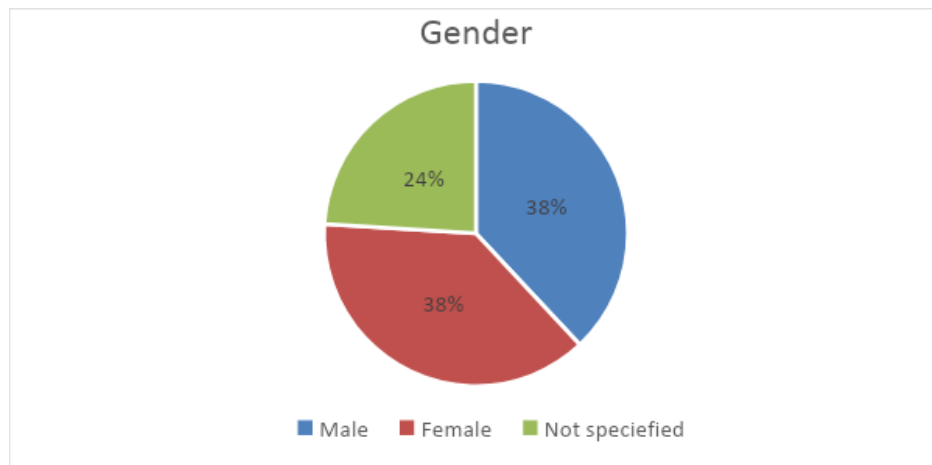


Figure 4: Gender of participants in percentage

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

From the respondents that chose to specify their gender, we can notice that there is balance in the numbers. Which was important to demonstrate that the interest in equestrian activities for tourism isn't specific to a single gender, but rather enjoyed by all. This fact helps in proving that the popularization of equestrian tourism can be done in many ways.

Table 4: Location of the respondents of the survey

Location	Number of respondents
Hungary	35
Belgium	19
Germany	34
Russia	5
Italy	7
France	15
Netherlands	17
Lithuania	2
Morocco	17
Sweden	2

Serbia	4
Spain	5
Portugal	11
The UK	20

As noticed on the table, the biggest number of respondents are from European countries, including big horse exporters such as Germany, Netherlands and France, but also answers from Hungary which is the studied field. Regardless of that, I also reached out to multilateral people from all over the world and that is in the goal of broadening the choices of opinion and receiving a more international view of what a customer may expect from an equestrian touristic venue.

The participants were selected at random and showed differences in age and geographical position. The reason for that is to be able to obtain a variety of data with the goal of repairing the common choices between tourists.

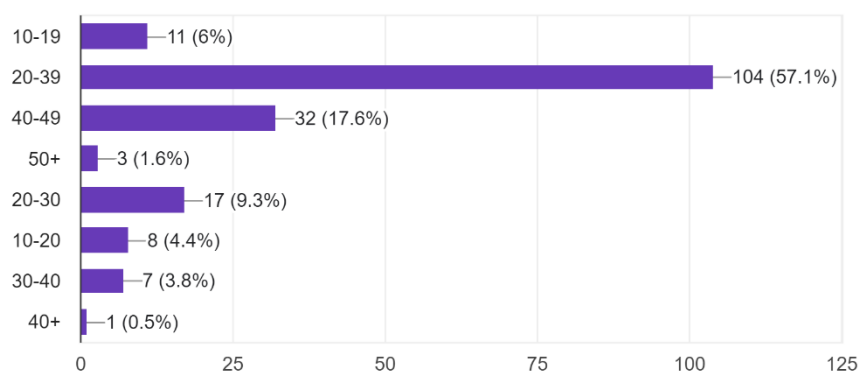


Figure 5: The age of participants of the survey for utilization of horse in agro tourism

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

With the knowledge that this survey was shared to participants from all over the world with different ethnicities and backgrounds, most of them were between 20-39 years old with a colossal rate of 57.1% of the participating respondents followed by 40-49 with 17.6%.

I believe that this can be explained by the fact that the millennials and previous generations have been exposed to the popularization of horse riding and assisted to the revolution the



industry have undergone, furthermore it is starting from the 20s that a person can have the independence and financial means to plan a vacation.

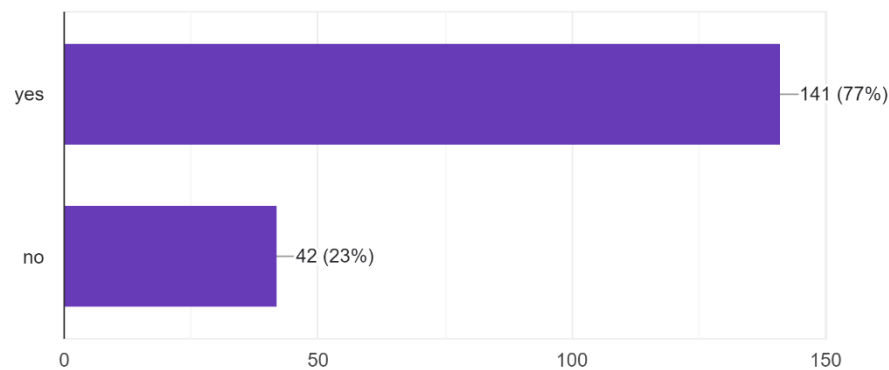


Figure 6: The responses to question (Have you ever had a horse-related activity during your holiday?)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

As a follow up to the previous graph we can see that the participants having been involved in equine activities for leisure are willing to do it again as more than half of the participants voted 5 which.

I believe it is related to the advancements in the equine tourism industry which not only have made horse riding more accessible to different social classes but also have gained international fame. Horse riding is also an elemental part of the culture of many countries over the world, which can create a strong common point between hosts and guests and a prime choice of activity to offer.

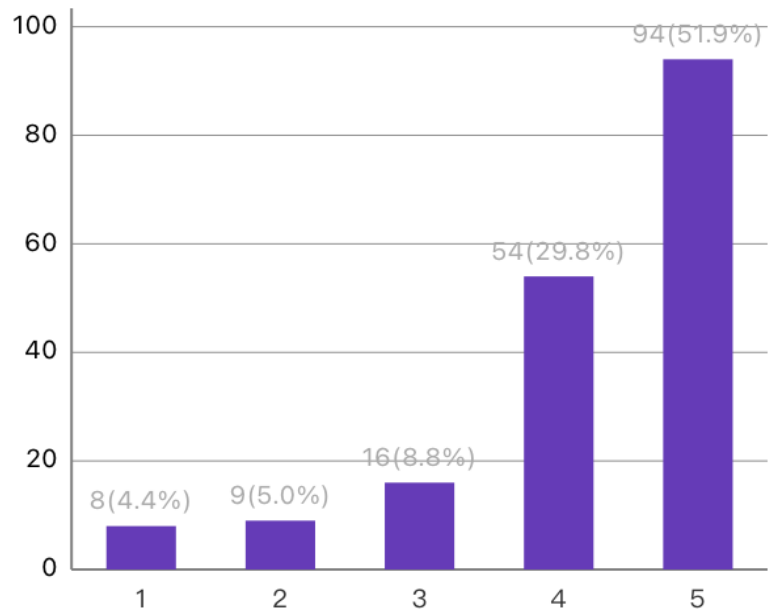


Figure 7: The likelihood of participant to repeat trail ride activity on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being never and 5 most likely)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

183 responses

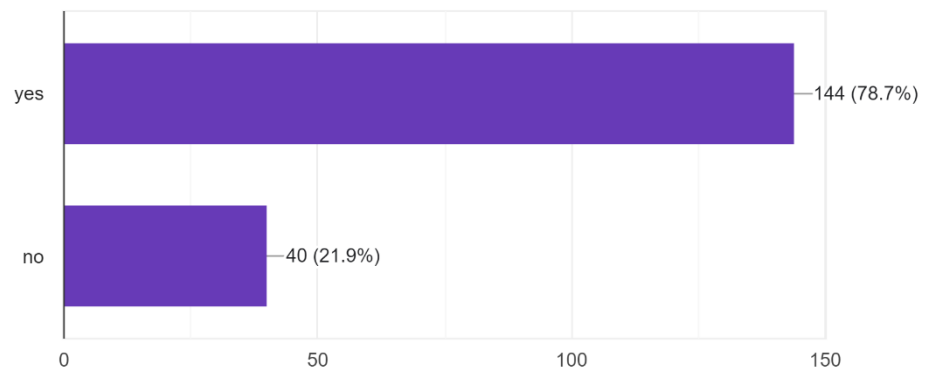


Figure 8: The responses to the question (Would you be interested in participating in a multiple days horse-riding experience as vacation plans?)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

On this graph we can notice that the biggest number of participants have expressed interest in participating in horse-based vacation plans that would last more than a day, as a majority of 78.7% voted yes.

In my opinion the globalization of trail rides along with the culture of adventure tourism have created an opportunity for horse fanatics to enjoy their holiday and visit beautiful natural scenery on horseback.

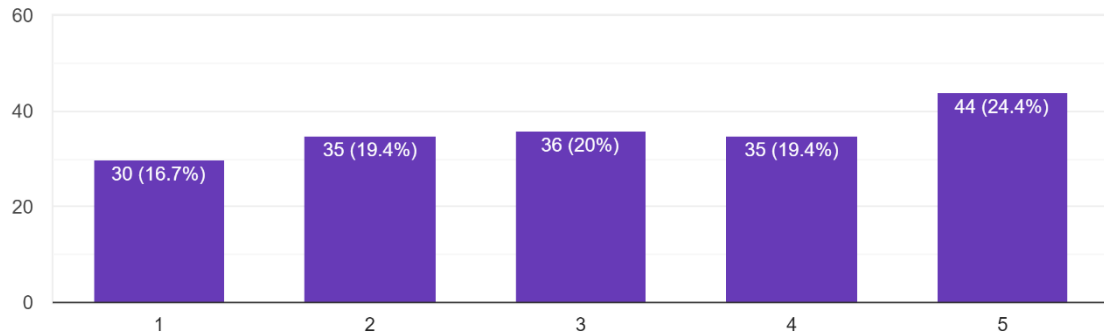


Figure 9: The level of riding experience of participants on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being no experience at all and 5 an experienced rider)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

The riding skills of the participants vary greatly from beginners all the way to experienced riders. As we can see from the graph most people that took part in the survey have a certain level of riding experience as only 16% voted for inexperienced.

this goes to show that most of the participants are already familiar with the industry or involved in riding outside of their vacations, yet they would still like to spend their holidays on horseback which in my opinion is a clear indicators that the participants have access to horses or horse riding in their daily lives but choose to live equine tourism experiences for leisure as well , since in my personal experience it takes years of practice to master riding. Furthermore, it also goes to show that even people who do not have experience riding do not see their lack of skill as an obstacle in participating in horse riding leisure activities.

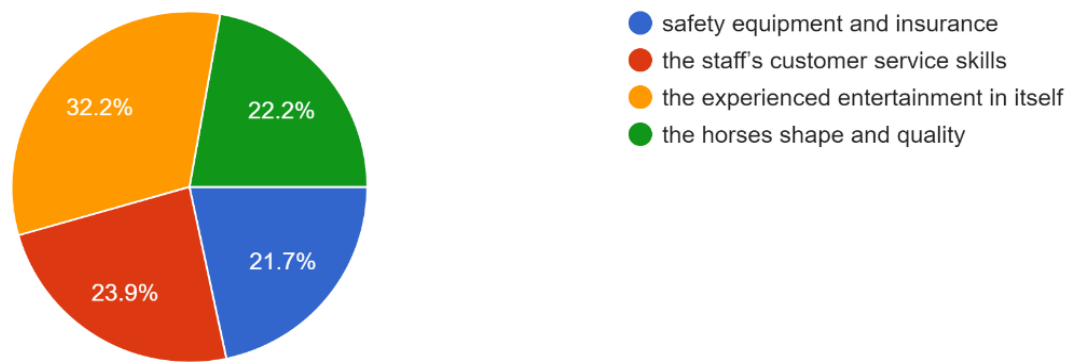


Figure 10: The proportions of the most important criteria of customer satisfaction while on a horse trail ride.

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

Even if the results are very close, the highest number of respondents chose the experienced entertainment itself as one of the most important factors when making their choice of a venue. as mentioned above 32,2% of the answering people care more about what they will experience than how or where, which goes to ensure that the interest of the client is in the activity, therefore it is my understanding that if you want to make a successful equine business, the host must be able to entertain the guests properly.

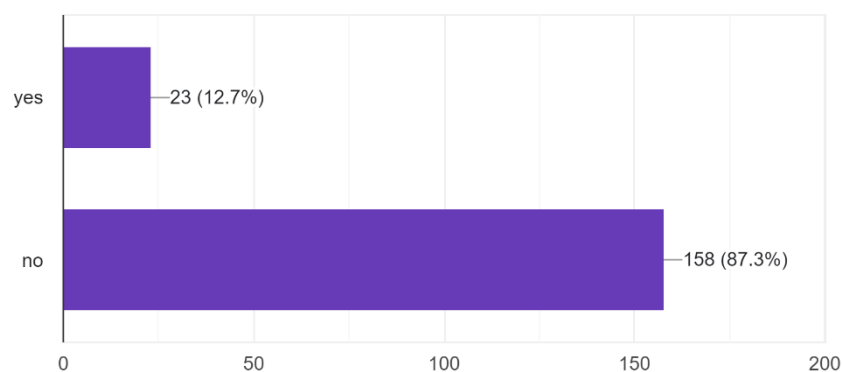


Figure 11: The responses for the question 2 (Have you ever had negative experience while on a horse trail ride?)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

As demonstrated by the answers of the respondents, very few people have had a negative experience riding horse outdoors. This could be explained in my opinion by the choice of

horses for these trail rides. Usually, the horses know the road and very rarely spook, they have a docile temperament which allows for a lot of patience with the less experienced riders and last but definitely not least breeds like the Icelandic or Mura horse are very resilient as proven in the secondary data part of this research which means they can go on long distances and in rough terrain with efficacy. Furthermore, I would like to add that the preparation and training of the staff also plays an important role in giving the customer a positive experience.

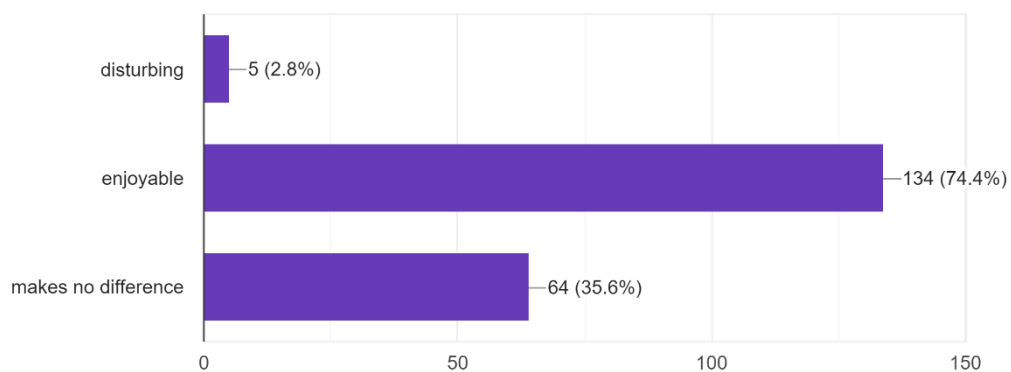


Figure 12: The participants' view on running into horse riders in nature

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

As mentioned on the graph, most answers indicate that the public not only do not mind horse riders in nature, but it is also actually very enjoyable scenery.

It is my belief that this has a relation with horsemanship having a strong influence on many cultures all over the world, as the horse has been the human companion for thousands of years. Moreover, the opening of free passage for horse riders can make better trails easier to access and therefore boost the equine tourism market by giving the riders more comfort to roam around, and to organizations the chance to structure events better.

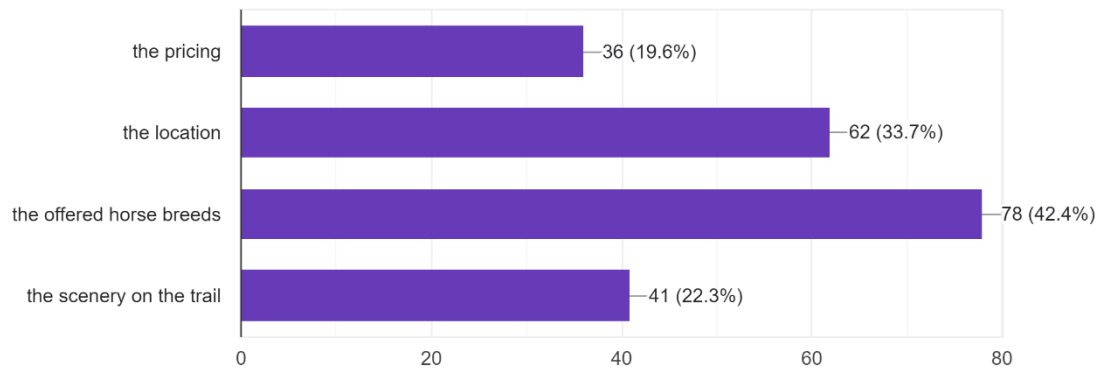


Figure 13: The participants' view on the most important factor for choosing the horse trail ride. Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

As mentioned in the comparison, specific breeds of horses can be very profitable for an equine touristic venue as they tend to attract the enthusiasts of this breed. As demonstrated in the graph the highest number of participants were more interested in the breeds offered by the venues than the pricing or location.

It is my understanding that when a specific breed that stands out with its features such as the Icelandic horse and his ability to perform one gait more than the other, it attracts a wider base of customers not only interested in horse riding activities but also in admiring the breed in its original homeland .furthermore we can also notice that basing the choice of the customers on location came in close second with 33.7% of the respondents , which goes to show that an easily accessible venue with a pleasant scenery is required

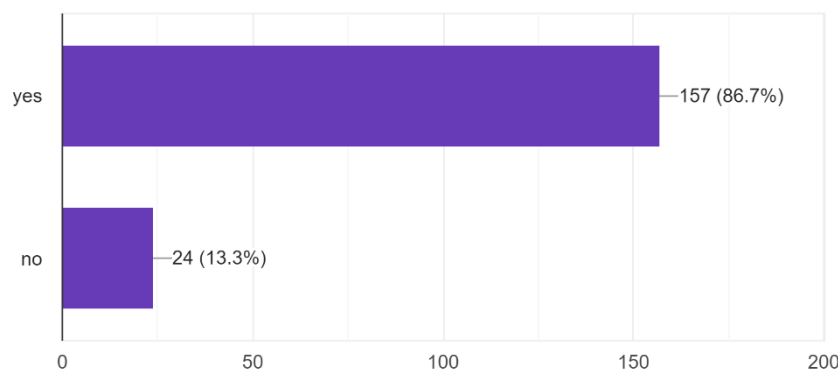


Figure 14: The responses for the question (Would you still want to be involved in a horse-based activity, if it did not include riding?)

Source: Survey results of this study, 2022

Even if horse riding is not involved, most of the participants choose to still be part of the equestrian activities.

I see this as the potential that equine tourism industry holds as there is a variety of horse show that attract tourism such as sporting events, military parades, traditional riding presentation, Arabian horse beauty shows and etc. The horse in itself is the heart of the investment as the animal, it does not require to be ridden in order to be cherished by customers.

From the collection of answers taken in this survey, it is my understanding that the customers' standards for an equestrian touristic venue and the details that influence their choice of establishment are in great accordance with the Hungarian resources. As discussed in earlier in this study, Hungary have vast terrains that make up the biggest horse trail in Europe, the regulations are in favor of free riding in the woods and the Hungarian people have a long history that binds them to horses, which makes them much less likely to refuse passage to riders. Furthermore, as the horses in Hungary are bred in rural areas, the commercialization of equine touristic venues can open a big door of opportunity for the people surrounding those areas. To the same example of the Icelandic people which have farm stays and include in the farmers income touristic revenue. It is my belief that introducing the same business model will yield multiple benefits.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Through the examination of the secondary and primary data, it is my firm belief that equestrian tourism can become a sustainable and growing sector of the economy of the country. There are several methods that can be used in order to build a functional equine touristic venue in Hungary.

As proven in the Icelandic approach, basing your marketing strategy around a specific breed native to the land is in fact very effective as many enthusiasts would travel long distances to see their favorite breed regardless of its existence abroad. Furthermore, the answers from the survey demonstrate that the majority of people have taken the horse breed to be a very important detail when choosing a venue. There are breeds in Hungary of excellent quality and lineage, however it is my opinion that the Mura horse would be the perfect contestant for the face of equine tourism in Hungary. The endurance capabilities that this horse possesses in addition to his elegance combined with his low feed needs make him a very good specimen to employ in trail rides.

One of the obstacles that people have faced taking trail rides in Iceland is the quality of the soil and the restrictions of passage due to privatization of land. Hungary on the other hand has fewer restrictions and more solid grounds with less chances of erosion. I believe that Hungary holds the potential to host numerous events and competitions because of their impeccable trail. Furthermore, the beauty of Hungarian scenery is breathtaking and equine touristic venues are a very good way to market this ecological treasure.

The horse based touristic businesses will inevitably be instituted in rural areas in order to easily access trails in the woods. The creation of any business comes with positions that need to be filled, and as mentioned before in the chapter 2.3, it is proven in Iceland that it is more efficient to employ equestrian tourism farm workers than it would be to train employees that aren't familiar with rural environments. Therefore, we can conclude that the organization and investments in equine tourism in Hungary will eventually lead to rural development both in employment opportunities and infrastructure.

Impeccable horsemanship is a skill that is very sought when one thinks of equine touristic businesses. As mentioned in the literature review, the Icelandic business owners would rather focus on their animals and sharing their culture rather than making financial gain. Hungarians are themselves known to have a deep historical connection with the equine



world. It would be very beneficial to share the Hungarian traditional horsemanship with the guests, as per the literature review it is mentioned that skilled Hungarians often emigrate to work abroad, these individuals would need to migrate if the opportunities to practice were available which would make the equine experience more authentic to the guests.

Hungarian breeding stables are all well located in n natural rural areas, considering the fact that these are functional stables that host mainly Hungarian breeds. They would make, in my opinion, excellent equestrian venues for touristic activities. The staff on the farm are efficiently trained and have a vast understanding of Hungarian horsemanship from professional experience which adds to the experience. In addition to that, the location in the middle of nice scenery is one of the most important factors a guest bases his choice of destination on as per the answers provided from the survey.

## 6. SUMMARY

Equine tourism is a continuously growing industry all over the world. Now more than ever the horse plays a strong part in the agro touristic sectors of multiple countries all over the world. The literature review presents us with a comparison of the Icelandic approach to equine tourism and the current Hungarian situation. As I understand Iceland was able to build their marketing strategy surrounding, they uniqueness of their local breed and promote it as the face of equine tourism in the country. Icelandic people have a historical heritage that involves equine practices and trail rides which in itself as an equestrian culture is considered a valuable attraction for tourists. In the same model Hungary owns as well local horse breeds that present unique traits such as endurance and reliability supplemented by low maintenance cost and attractive looks, making the Hungarian horses perfect to be used as trail horses. Furthermore, in the primary data I outlined the importance that guests give to trails and activities, which includes as a well experiences that do not involve riding.

The feedback from the survey proves that the principal reasons people travel for equine tourism activities are related to the horse itself and the activities performed with that understanding I would say that Hungary is equipped to revolutionize the horse-based leisure sector by providing adequate trails, beautiful natural scenery, and elegant strong horses. Furthermore, the Hungarian culture features a lot of equestrian parades and demonstrations due to the long heritage of horsemanship that the country holds. Finally, this growth will undoubtedly provide more opportunities for the development of rural areas as both horses and staff are present in farms and breeding stables located remotely.

In general, I would say that by collecting and analyzing these materials I have demonstrated how the implementation of the right structure of equine business would embolden the touristic sector. The main reasons demonstrated by the survey on why people choose to take on an equestrian activity as a vacation plan is to explore more natural sceneries on horseback. I can conclude based on various researches that I cited on the equestrian tourism sector in Hungary that this country have incredible natural potential to host multiple events and activities related to equine leisure due to their very convenient trail system, beautiful forest and mountains and also long and old heritage relating Hungarians to horses. The success that Icelandic equine tourism knows can be traced back to basically the same choices that could potentially.

Contribute to the growth of the sector in Hungary and can potentially lead to rural development since historical horsemanship happens to serve as a strong marketing tool. The farms across Hungary that breed Hungarian horses can also benefit from the touristic development as they can invest in organized farm stays and introduce the guests to traditional Hungarian equestrian culture, as it has been proven that tourists pay great deal of attention to that, as an example, the historic Icelandic trail rides for which guests could travel long distances to participate in.

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## ANNEXES

Survey the utilization of horse in agro tourism.

1. Where are you located?

2. How old are you?

-10-20

-20-30

-30-40

-40+

3. Have you ever had a horse-related activity during your holiday?

-yes

-no

4. If you have already been on a trail ride, how likely are you to repeat that activity on a scale of 1-5?

1 being never

1

2

3

4

5

5 being most likely

5. Would you be interested in participating in a multiple days horse riding experience as a vacation plan?

yes

no

6. How would you describe running into horse riders in nature?

disturbing

enjoyable

makes no difference

7. When going for a horse trail ride what do you choose depending on?

the pricing



the location  
the offered horse breeds  
the scenery on the trail

8. While on a horse trail ride, what would you say is the most important for your satisfaction as a customer?

safety equipment and insurance  
the staff's customer service skills  
the experienced entertainment in itself  
the horses shape and quality

9. From a scale of 1 to 5 what are your riding skills?

	1 being no knowledge at all
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
	5 being experienced rider

10. Have you ever had a negative experience while on a horse trail ride?

-yes  
-no

11. Would you still want to be involved in a horse-based activity, if it did not include riding?

-yes  
-no

## Declaration of Consultations with Supervisor

Name of Student: EL MAHDAOUI LAYANE  
Programme and specialization: BSc. Agriculture Engineering  
Name of Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Beatrix Scabi- Bères

### First personal consultation

Date and time: 2021.05.30.

Topic discussed: General information, discussion of the content and format of the Thesis.

Signature of Supervisor: Dr. Beatrix Scabi- Bères

### Second personal consultation

Date and time: 2021.06.18.

Topic discussed: Methods of the collecting material, discussion of literary sources.

Signature of Supervisor: Dr. Beatrix Scabi- Bères

### Third personal consultation

Date and time: 2022.09.16.

Topic discussed: Organise the data and interpret the results related to the topic under study. Finalising the Thesis and proofreading it.

Signature of Supervisor: Dr. Beatrix Scabi- Bères

This has to be attached to the Thesis /Diploma thesis

Appendix 3: Student's declaration

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, EL MAHDAOUI RAYANE hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the thesis I submitted under the title

The Utilisation of horses in agro-tourism is entirely the result of my own work. When I used other authors' works, either printed or electronic, I accurately cited the sources.

I understand that the electronic copy of the thesis / diploma thesis will be placed in the library of the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences after the defense where the readers of the library will have access to it.

Signed in Gyöngyös on 06 (day) 10 (month), 2022 (year)

Signature of thesis writer:

