A person is riding a dark horse through a grassy field. In the background, a river flows through a valley, and some buildings are visible on the right side. The scene is captured in a soft, slightly blurred style, giving it a serene and natural feel.

Rural sociology with a focus on human/horse relationship: a contribution of the Equine Research Network (EqRN)

www.integrateconsulting.co.uk/eqrn

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Equine Research Network (EqRN)

An international social science network of scholars who share ideas, publications, collaborations and a passion for the human-horse relationship



origins

- European Society of Rural Sociology Annual Congress, Vasa, 2009
- “Equine Landscapes” Working Group 3.3
- International call brought 18 papers and approximately 25 participants throughout the week.
- Second largest working group at the conference

origins

- High quality of papers and participants and high enthusiasm
- Most social science equine researchers work in departments where they are the only one with equine interests
- Decision made to form an international network

EqRN

- Began as an informal web-based network in October 2009.
- Website created in November 2009
 - Hosted by Integrate Consulting UK but moving to own domain name in 2010.
- Started with approx 25 members
- Now over 45 members from 13 countries and multiple social science disciplines
- New members every month

EqRN

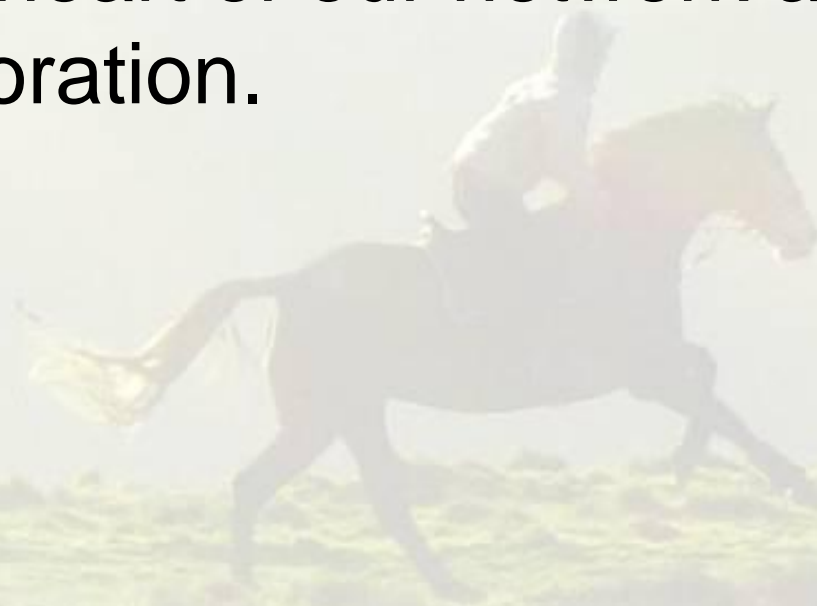
(www.integrateconsulting.co.uk/eqrn)

- Website contains:
 - Member profiles
 - Relevant equine news and links
 - Conference reports
 - Password-protected section with working papers and shared publications
 - Image bank using Creative Commons copywrite, images submitted by members

EqRN

- Future Website features:
 - National equine sector 'snap shots' from each member's country
 - Position papers on key equine issues
 - Theme development, i.e. Equine Assisted Therapy from member expertise, including special links section
 - Interactive theme map

The following section illustrates some of the questions, themes and issues which lie at the heart of our network and our collaboration.



Themes which emerged at the ESRS conference, Vasa 2009

- Performing Equine Landscapes:** the symbolic and material production of time and space.
- Equine Landscapes of economic and social development:** consumption of and in rural spaces.
- Gender & meaning:** construction of the gendered self through equine activities.
- Human-animal interaction:** Embodiment; Learning, Discipline.
- Equine Landscapes:** therapeutic landscapes and landscapes of recovery and recuperation

Some social science questions about human-equine issues

- Geography:
 - Production of rural spaces
 - In the twenty-first Century horses continue to make a major contribution to sustaining the rural economy. Whereas they once facilitated production on and of the rural landscape, they now facilitate the consumption of it.
 - Where is the growing equine sector located and how can we make optimal planning policy to support it?
- Sociology
 - Gender and identity
 - Increasingly, the gender balance of those who keep and ride horses overwhelmingly female. What does this mean for the types of identities, social practices and norms for the equine community?

Some social science questions about human-equine issues

– Anthrozoology

- How does the human-horse partnership co-construct identities and meanings?

– Anthropology

- What historic and new meanings are created by human-horse interactions?
- How are horses specifically integrated into contemporary national and local identities?
- What new and emerging ideas, norms and principles are symbolized by new equine practices?

interdisciplinarity

Many emerging themes are interdisciplinary, requiring social scientists, veterinary scientists and ethologists to work together to address key questions such as:

- what is 'horse welfare' and how is it constructed?
- how can we deal with 'anthro-centricism when thinking of equines?

- 
- These and many other issues and questions form the heart of our collaboration.
 - We welcome new members from all disciplines (social and other sciences) to join in addressing these questions and raising new ones
 - Membership details can be found on the website at: <http://integrateconsulting.co.uk/eqrn/members>

Collaboration

- EqRN members have the potential to form collaborations with other members in other countries for research and education purposes
 - Sharing best practice and national models
 - Developing parts of the equine sector such as equine tourism
 - Reporting to governments, agencies and equine organisations on issues, topics and status.

Collaboration

- Potential collaborations include applications for:
 - EC COST Action on equine issues
 - Northern periphery collaboration on equine tourism development
 - International comparisons of human perceptions of horse welfare
 - Developing existing farm assets into equine enterprises for farm pluriactivity

The future?

- Continue to develop:
 - Interaction between individual members
 - International collaborations
 - Delivery of unique social science perspectives on the human-horse relationship in all its diverse manifestations

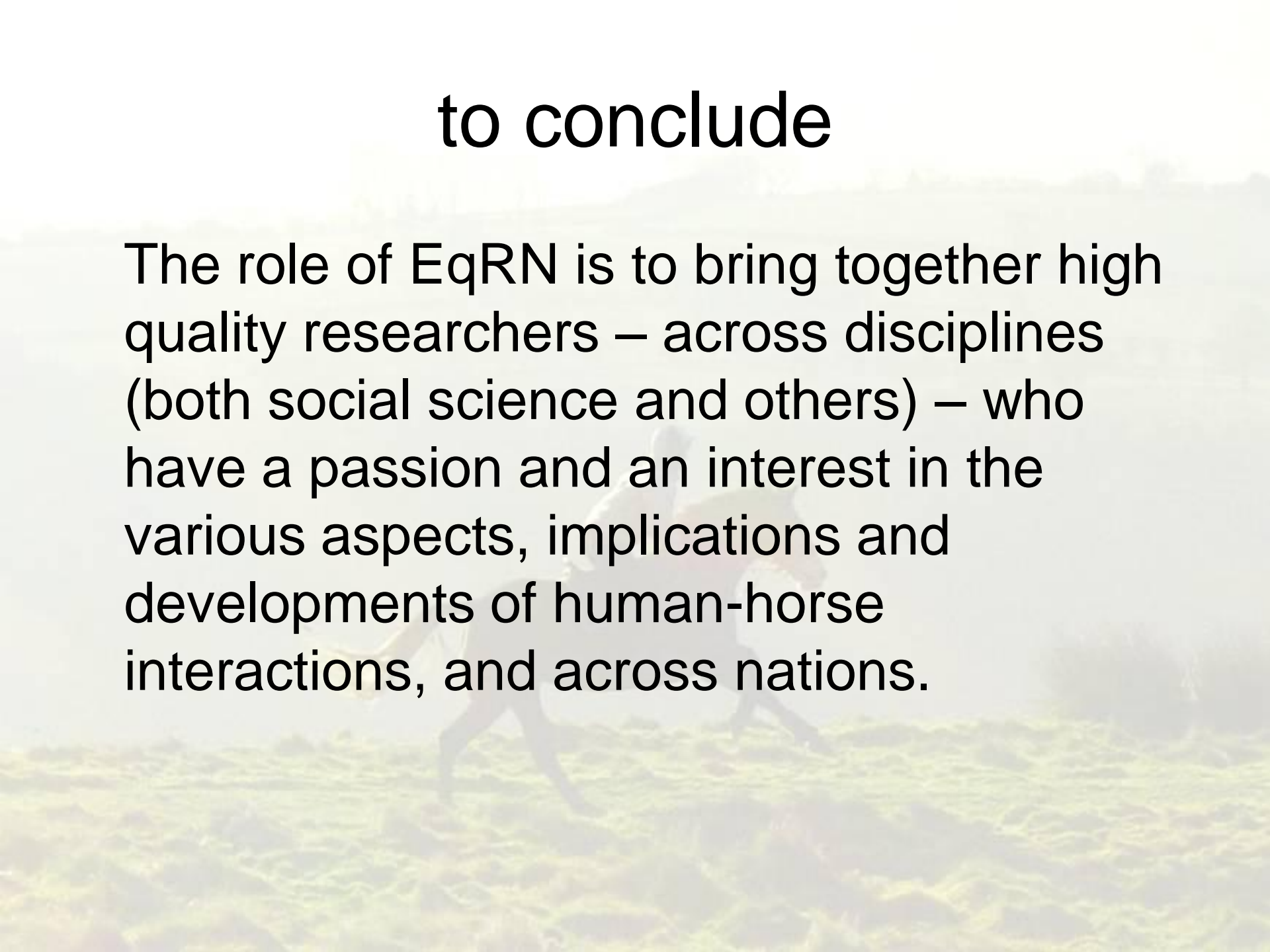


the future?

- Possibilities:
 - Links with academic human-animal networks such as
 - Anthro-zoology,
 - Human-animal relations networks
 - Links with practitioner networks
 - various Equine-assisted therapy and learning organisations,
 - National equine and equestrian organisations
 - Links with veterinary and ethological researchers

to conclude

The role of EqRN is to bring together high quality researchers – across disciplines (both social science and others) – who have a passion and an interest in the various aspects, implications and developments of human-horse interactions, and across nations.

A faint, artistic background image showing a person riding a horse in a field. The image is semi-transparent and serves as a backdrop for the text.