



<http://www.diva-portal.org>

This is the published version of a paper presented at *ECER 2023, European Conference on Educational Research, 22-25 August, Glasgow*.

Citation for the original published paper:

Waerner, T., Redelius, K., Thedin Jakobsson, B., Morgan, K. (2023)

Perspectives of participation rights in youth sport – voices from young equestrians

In:

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:gih:diva-7788>

Perspectives of participation rights in youth sport – voices from young equestrians

Author(s) of proposal including affiliations and email addresses

Therese Waerner (therese.waerner@gih.se) is a PhD student at the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences (GIH), this abstract is a presentation of one part of her first sub study in the PhD-project “Having a voice in the stable”. Main supervisor is Professor Karin Redelius, GIH and assistant supervisors are Karin Morgan (PhD associate professor, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU) and Britta Thedin Jakobsson (PhD senior lecturer, GIH)

Keywords: youth sport, children’s rights, equestrian sport, youth voice agenda, UNCRC

General description on research questions, objectives and theoretical framework

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is fundamental to the well-being and development of children and youth. One of the essential parts of the UNCRC is article 12 that stipulates: *"All children shall have the opportunity to make their voices heard on matters relating to them, taking into account age and maturity"* (UN, 1989). Article 12 requires that the child should have the possibility to take an active part in the exercise of the rights and *participation* is therefore a fundamental issue even if the word itself is not explicitly used. In sport, which is an important part of life for many young people, almost no attention has been given to youth voices and participation rights. Although the implementation of human rights issues in general is a growing field within sport (David, 2005; Donnelly, 2008; Sinohara, 2020), Lang (2022) points out that hardly anything is known about the views of young athletes or whether their voices are genuinely incorporated into sporting practice. In fact, the voices of young athletes are still largely unheard (Lang, 2022; UNICEF, 2011).

Equestrian sport is one of the largest youth sports in Sweden and according to the Swedish Equestrian Federation is more than half of the members of the country's equestrian clubs under the age of 26 years. As many as 150,000 young people ride at some point every year (Swedish Equestrian Federation, 2020). The context within equestrian sport provides opportunities to interact with others and take care of horses which have proved to cultivate several leadership-skills (Forsberg & Tebelius, 2011). In connection with #metoo, however, negative experiences

ABSTRACT ECER 2023

from young equestrian girls have become public. This has included stories of exploitation by adults who had the power to decide who would gain advantages in the stable, such as riding the best horse, take part in competitions or receiving other sought-after benefits (#visparkarbakut, 2017). Today, five years later, such stories are still being told and spread (Aftonbladet, 2022; Dagens Nyheter, 2022). Both emotional and sexual abuse are voiced. The situation is thus paradoxical: equestrianism seems to provide a sporting environment that is empowering and fosters young girls to become leaders, but it is also a place where hierarchies and a culture of silence seem to prevail. More knowledge is needed about the conditions that enable young equestrians to exercise their participation rights and have a voice within the sport.

The objectives in this presentation are to describe how young equestrians perceive their possibilities to have a voice. The theoretical frame to analyze this is from a sociocultural perspective and the notion that participation is not either or but exists on a continuum (Hart, 1992; 2008). We see human actions as situated in social practices and consider that young equestrians as well as riding instructors and coaches act on the basis of their own knowledge and experience and according to what they consciously or unconsciously perceive is required, permitted or possible (Säljö, 2014). The participation can be seen both from a social (the right to take part and be included) and a political (the right to influence and have ‘a voice’) perspective (Thomas, 2007; Elvstrand, 2009; Redelius & Eliasson, 2022).

Methods/methodology

An online survey for equestrians aged 15-17 years old was carried out, and 566 youths responded. The youths answered 66 questions about how, when and in what matters they could influence their sport and have a voice.

The questionnaire was distributed online. In order to reach as many young equestrians as possible, the link to the survey was shared via organizations within the Swedish equine sector, social media (Facebook, Instagram), and upper secondary schools with subjects related to equestrianism in the curriculum. The survey was also noticed on various well-known websites

ABSTRACT ECER 2023

within equestrian sport in Sweden. The link to the survey was thus shared on social media by both organizations and youths themselves. The intention behind using social media for distribution was to reach young equestrians from different types and sizes of stables.

The use of an online survey was appropriate as the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and youth sport was restricted in many ways. In equestrian sport, riding was allowed to proceed, but there were restrictions on other activities. For example, no space for interaction or 'hanging out' in the stable was allowed. The survey was introduced with a letter of information about the aim of the research project and contact details in case of any questions. Participants were also requested to answer the survey according to their 'normal' sporting context, without pandemic-restrictions. The letter of information clearly stated that participation was voluntary, and that names or riding clubs should not be stated. This ensured that answers could not be traced to respondents, and individuals could not be identified. The data collection was carried out in accordance with the Swedish Research Council (2017) guidelines for research ethics. Since the age group was 15-17, parental consent was not needed and youths could decide for themselves if they wanted to participate in the survey. Also, this category of young equestrians is considered old enough to reflect on their participation rights (Swedish Research Council, 2017). No answers were possible to trace to a specific person or stable.

Expected outcomes/results

When the young equestrians themselves describe how they want to make their voice heard different perspectives emerge. The ways in which they can make their voices heard seem to differ depending on which type of stable they are in (riding schools or private stables) where access to the horse(s) is an aspect to consider.

However, there seem to be many ways of working with participation rights for young equestrians and participation can take several forms. Social participation and being a part of the community is an important aspect stated by the young equestrians. This community contains both friends and horses. To be seen as a person with knowledge and be asked to help in different matters is another aspect of how the young equestrians want to participate/have a voice. The stable also

seems to be a free zone where the young equestrians can relax and forget “the rest” in life. Overall, it is clear that the young equestrians want to be taken seriously and have a voice.

Thus, we claim the importance of hearing the voices of young equestrians not only in the context of the horse-riding activity itself but also in the stable when taking care of the horses. It is possible to see that access to the horse has a central role in how young equestrians perceive their participation. It is not just the horse riding that is important, the interaction within the stable and the caretaking of horses are also important for young riders if they are to exercise their participation rights. In sum, to work with young equestrians’ participation rights can be done from several perspectives in order to hear their voices.

Intent of publication:

These results are not published. An article is planned to be submitted to a scientific journal during spring/summer 2023.

References

- Aftonbladet (2022). *Stallslavarna*, retrieved 26 september 2022, from: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/sportbladet/a/0G5nx2/ridsport-unga-tjejer-utnyttjas-pa-stora-hastgardar-stallslavarna>
- Dagens Nyheter. (2022). *Ung landslagsryttare trakasserade med sexmeddelanden – får behålla ryttarlicensen*. Retrieved 7 september 2022, from <https://www.dn.se/sport/ung-landslagsryttare-trakasserade-med-sex-meddelanden-far-behalla-ryttarlicensen/>
- David, P. (2005). *Human rights in youth sport. A critical review of children's rights in competitive sports*. New York: Routledge.
- Donnelly, P. (2008) Sport and human rights. *Sports in Society*, 11(4), 381-394.
- Elvstrand, H. (2009). *Delaktighet i skolans vardagsarbete*. Doktorsavhandling Linköpings universitet: Institutionen för beteendevetenskap och lärande. Linköping: LiU-Tryck.
- Forsberg, L. & Tebelius, U. (2011). The riding school as a site for gender identity construction among Swedish teenage girls. *World Leisure Journal*, 53(1), 42-56.
- Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. UNICEF Innocenti Essays, No. 4, Florence, Italy: International Child Development Centre of UNICEF.

Hart, R. A. (2008). Stepping back from “The ladder”: Reflections on a Model of Participatory Work with Children. In Reid et al. (Eds.), *Participation and Learning* (pp 19-31). Springer

Lang, M. (2022). Advancing children’s rights in sport: coaching, childhood agency and the participatory agenda. *Sports Coaching Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2021.1990655>

Redelius, K & Eliasson, I (2022) *Vår idrott – eller deras? Unga idrottares perspektiv på delaktighet*. Riksidrottsförbundet 2022:2.

Sinohara, T. (2020). Child rights and sports law: how can we protect young athletes’ human rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child? *International Sports Law Review Pandektis*, 13(1-2), 136-154.

Swedish Equestrian Federation (2020). *Ridsporten i siffror, årsredovisning Svenska Ridsportförbundet 2020*. Strömsholm: Svenska ridsportförbundet.

Säljö, Roger (2014). *Lärande: perspektiv och metaforer*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.

United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Right of the Child*. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner.

UNICEF (2011). *Every child’s right to be heard. A resource guide on the un committee on the rights of the child general comment no. 12*. UK: The Save the Children Fund. Typeset: Grasshopper Design Company.

Swedish Research Council (2017). *God forskningssed*. Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie; 1:2017. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet.

Thomas, N. P. (2007). Towards a theory of childrens participation. *International Journal of Children’s Rights*, 15, 199–218.

#visparkarbakut (2017) i.e: <https://www.tidningenridsport.se/tag/visparkarbakut/> (march 2022)