

THE ROLE OF DESIGN AND QUALITY CONTENT IN THE LANDSCAPE- ARCHITECTURAL PROPOSAL OF AN EDUCATIONAL TRAIL

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Abstract

Horseback riding tourism is still a relatively unknown phenomenon in Slovakia. The Paper brings overview of the issue of hippotherapy in Slovakia. It also presents landscape-architectural proposal of the horse trail in Nitra region, with the aim to arouse interest in this type of recreation and highlight the harmony between humans, animals, and the nature. The proposed route, with a total length of 63.5 km, connects eight villages and four key ranches, and is logistically designed to allow for shorter, thematically coherent stages. Given its length and the attractiveness of the environment, it is not intended exclusively for riders, but functions as a multifunctional corridor that offers a full experience for hikers as well.

Key words: leisure time, recreational and educational activities, horse trail, Nitra region

Introduction

Rural tourism encompasses a broad range of activities carried out in natural and rural settings. Unlike mass tourism, it focuses on tranquility, authenticity, and direct contact with local residents. According to Gúčik (2012), the fundamental characteristic of rural tourism is its integration into the rural environment, with the range of services closely tied to local traditions and the landscape. Equestrian tourism is a modern form for different categories of tourists, who are searching for entertainment or recreational adventure or activities, or therapeutic tourism in the open landscape (Petroman, 2015). Equestrian tourism is a growing sector that uses horses as the main attraction for visits to the countryside. It can be divided into three basic categories: 1. Recreational riding: Outings in nature (leisure trails). 2. Competitive equestrian tourism: Participation in horse races or training courses. 3. Hippotherapy: A therapeutic method using the movement of a horse for rehabilitation (Krajňák, 2022). These forms of tourism generate what is known as a multiplier effect. They boost employment in rural areas, support local artisans, and encourage environmental protection.

Designing of the educational trails represents a valuable means of environmental education, sustainable tourism, and public engagement with natural and cultural heritage (Juško et al., 2025). Design strategy should leads to fostering the relationship between humans and their environment, to support the Genius loci of the locality, to create the connection between „users“ and „landscape“ (Tóth et al., 2018).

Material and methods

The study area represents a characteristic section of the Ponitrie cultural landscape, where the flat terrain of the Danubian Hills meets the first foothills of the Tribeč Mountains. The landscape structure is defined by the striking dynamics of the relief and the alternation of various forms of land use, creating a visually attractive and spatially diverse environment for equestrian tourism.

The route begins in the flat agricultural landscape around Malý Lapáš. It gradually transitions into gently rolling hills, dominated by slopes with vineyards. This rhythm of alternating open fields and cultivated vineyards gives the route a dynamic feel. In the final section, the route climbs into the Tribeč mountain range. Although the terrain is uphill, the slope is long and gentle, which is ideal for recreational cycling as well as for hikers seeking a moderate physical challenge.

The route follows existing infrastructure consisting of a diverse network of roads:

- Built-up areas in the villages: Paved asphalt surfaces ensure smooth passage through villages and access to ranches.
- Agricultural landscape: Unpaved roads with natural soil surfaces.
- Forest areas: Narrower forest trails with soft ground, which are gentle on horses' musculoskeletal systems and provide shade and protection from the wind.

This mix of surfaces and environments makes the route multifunctional and ensures that, even at its length of 63.5 km, it remains constantly stimulating for visitors.

Results

The proposed equestrian trail is designed as a comprehensive system that combines recreational activities with education and artistic interpretations of the landscape. The trail is designed as an educational path that guides visitors through the world of horses. Along the trail, there are 8 thematic panels covering a wide range of specialized and cultural topics:

1. The Horse as a Therapeutic Partner: An Introduction to Hippotherapy.
2. Shepherding Traditions and Working with Horses: The Region's Cultural Heritage.
3. Landscape, Meadows, and Pastures: The Importance of Preserving the Landscape's Character.
4. Horse Breeds and Their Characteristics: Diversity and Genetic Potential.
5. Communicating with Horses: Basics of Safety and Understanding.
6. The Roots of Horsemanship Around the World: The Historical Development of the Relationship Between Humans and Horses.
7. Equestrian Disciplines: From Sport to Recreation.
8. Common Myths About Horses: Educational Outreach for the General Public.

For the comfort of both cyclists and hikers, unique mobiliar has been designed:

Rest areas: Benches and trash bins with a design that blends in with the rural environment. Specific features: Horse tethers located near information boards and rest areas, allowing riders to stop safely. Orientation: Map boards at key intersections facilitate navigation and divide the route into smaller sections.

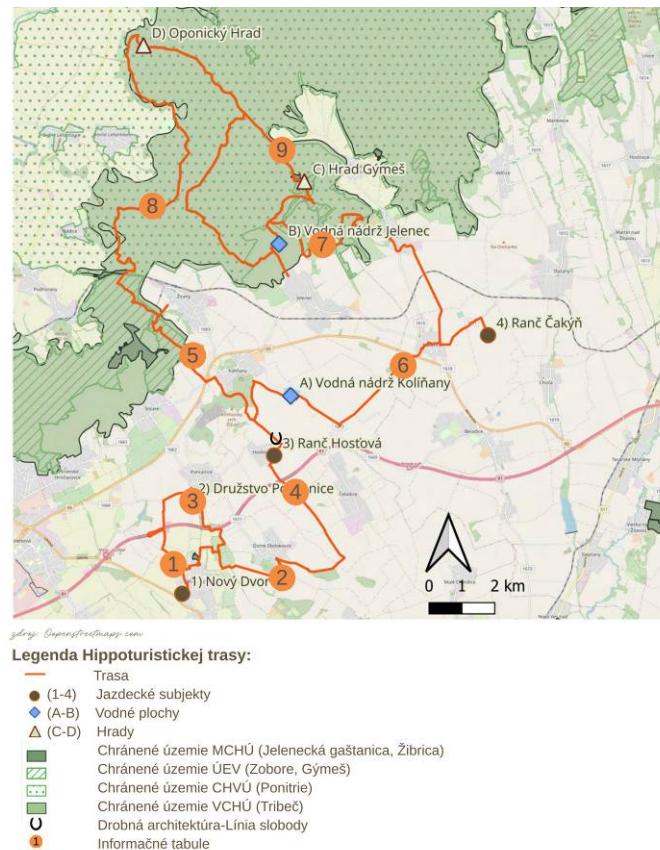


Fig. 1: Landscape-architectural proposal of the trail with the placement of the educational boards (numbers refer to the thematic stops)

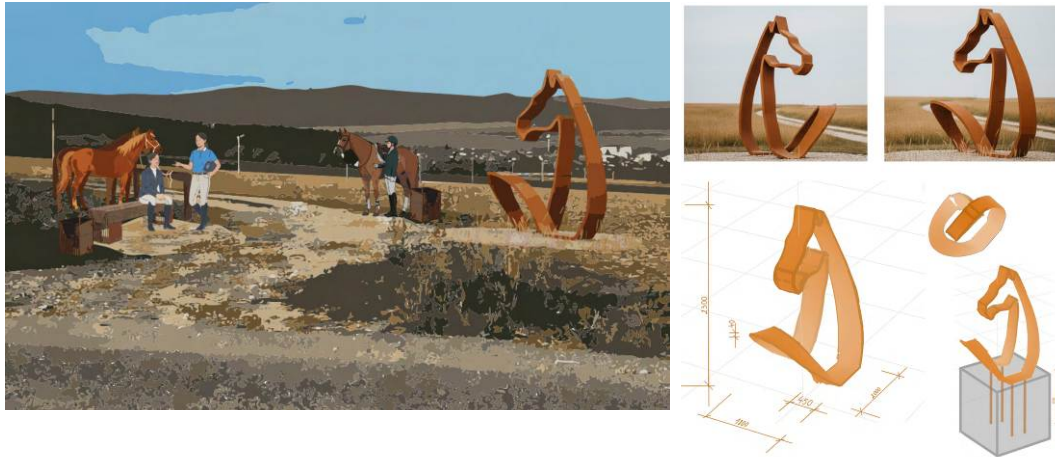


Fig. 2 and 3: Visualisation of the place of relax and sketch of the art element

The project's sustainability is based on close cooperation with local entities. The proposed model involves dividing the trail into sections managed by individual ranches (Čakýň, Nový Dvor, Host'ová).

Monitoring: As natural hubs of activity in the area, the ranches regularly monitor the condition of "their" section of the trail, ensuring it is clean and passable.

Logistical support: Cooperation with the Pohranice Cooperative provides technical support, trail surface maintenance, and agricultural resources for forage.

Inclusion: The ranches also serve as a first point of contact for families with children, where initial education and a safe introduction to horses take place.

Discussion and Conclusion

Horseback tourism remains a relatively unknown phenomenon in Slovakia. The main goal of the project is therefore not only to mark a trail through the countryside, but above all to spark interest in this type of recreation and highlight the harmony between humans, animals, and nature. The proposed route, with a total length of 63.5 km, connects eight municipalities and four key ranches, and is logistically designed to allow for shorter, thematically cohesive stages. Given its length and the attractiveness of the surroundings, it is not intended exclusively for riders, but functions as a multifunctional corridor that offers a full-fledged experience for hikers as well.

Petroman (2015) proposes, with the aim of reducing the negative impact on horse back riding on tourism paths or roads the need to develop a management strategies for both path size preservation and tourists. Hrůza et al (2025) studied regulation of horse riders' movement, whose activities may interfere with the idea of leisure by other forest visitors and with forest operations. On the other hand Godosi, Picuno (2024) pointed on the current growing interest in rediscovering places of cultural and natural interest and the possibility of a recovery of the old rural routes, linked to local cultural traditions. Also consider them as essential to raise awareness of landscape resources poorly perceived (Tóth et al., 2018).

The Ponitrie Agritourism Route is not merely a transportation link connecting eight villages, but a new vision for experiencing the Slovak countryside. The project demonstrates that modern agritourism can successfully build upon the foundations of historical heritage—from the medieval castles of Gýmeš and Oponice to the royal traditions of Host'ová.

The main benefit of the proposal is the transformation of a fragmented landscape into a coherent, functional whole that respects nature while offering people a space for peace, harmony, and freedom. The creation of a safe and educational infrastructure opens the region not only to professional riders but also to families with children and people with special needs.

The design philosophy rests on three pillars: peace, harmony, and freedom. The route strategically leads to historical landmarks (Gýmeš and Oponice Castles) and natural spots (water reservoirs), while an important social aspect of the project is raising awareness about hippotherapy. The goal is not to create a closed therapeutic facility, but a "healing landscape," where visitors naturally learn about the positive impact of horses on human physical and mental health. The project thus offers a new vision for the use of the Ponitrie rural landscape, combining tradition, sports, and modern agritourism.

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Souhrn

Turistika na koních je na Slovensku stále relatívne neznámym javom. Hlavným cieľom projektu proto není pouze vyznačit trasu vedoucí krajinou, ale především vzbudit zájem o tento druh rekreace a zdůraznit harmonii mezi člověkem, zvířaty a přírodou. Navrhovaná trasa o celkové délce 63,5 km spojuje osm obcí a čtyři klíčové ranče a je logisticky navržena tak, aby umožňovala kratší, tematicky ucelené etapy. Vzhledem k její délce a atraktivitě okolí není určena výhradně pro jezdce, ale funguje jako multifunkční koridor, který nabízí plnohodnotný zážitek i pro pěší turisty.

Filozofie návrhu spočívá na třech pilířích: klidu, harmonii a svobodě. Trasa strategicky vede k historickým památkám (zámky Gýmeš a Oponice) a přírodním lokalitám (vodní nádrže), přičemž důležitým společenským aspektem projektu je zvyšování povědomí o hipoterapii. Cílem není vytvořit uzavřené terapeutické zařízení, ale „léčivou krajinu“, kde se návštěvníci přirozeně dozvídají o pozitivním vlivu koní na fyzické a duševní zdraví člověka. Projekt tak nabízí novou vizi využití venkovské krajiny Ponitrie, která kombinuje tradici, sport a moderní agroturistiku.

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