



## SCIENTIFIC FINAL REPORT – RESEARCH NETWORKS

Registration number, Östersjöstiftelsen: 22-RN-0002

Project manager: Björn Hassler

Project title: *Mapping key challenges to sustainability transitions in agriculture and food production in Armenia and beyond*

### 1. Purpose of the research network

The main purpose of this research network project was to map possibilities to establish a research network on agriculture and food production in Southern Caucasus, focussing especially on cooperation between Armenian universities and Södertörn University.

### 2. A description of the research network's activities funded by Östersjöstiftelsen

During the start-up period (September 2022 – April 2023), we held several meetings (at Campus with Swedish partners and on-line with Armenian colleagues and a researcher from Notre Dame University in the US), preparing for the workshop to be held in Yerevan, Armenia, on May 10-12, 2023. During these deliberations we decided that the main components of the workshop were to be:

- 1) Oral presentations from all project participants, followed by discussions. Students and researchers were to be invited to take part of these presentations.
- 2) Visits to research departments and facilities in Yerevan, focusing on Armenian State University of Economics and National Agrarian University of Armenia.
- 3) Study visits to selected agricultural and food production facilities in Yerevan with surroundings.

The part on oral presentations followed up by discussions turned out very well. In total, 10 presentations were held at Campus, and one on-line. Topics included analyses of contemporary agricultural challenges, food production trends including, for example, ecological fruit processing and wine production, historic developments, political aspects related to energy dependence on Russia, and theoretical perspectives with focus on sustainability transition literatures among others.

One area that attracted quite a lot of interest was similarities and differences in how local small-scale producers marketed their products locally, using digital channels and social networks to establish contacts between producers and consumers. Here, important experiences and challenges were shared, discussed, and reflected upon. Another important theme was related to large scale production of high-quality fruits, wine, and brandy.

The group visited ArLeAM which is a modern fruit and beverage producer that has adopted modern techniques and efficient drip watering solutions, while at the same time collaborates with small-scale farmers of, for example, grapes for wine production. The group also visited Armenia Wine, which is an expanding producer of Armenian wine and brandy. It also hosts a museum on historic wine production methods. The group was given a very interesting tour around production facilities as well as the museum. It was especially interesting to see how this company works on several dimensions, striving not only to produce high quality products for



national and international distribution, but also offering the museum, a restaurant serving local products etc.

The ambition to invite students and researchers turned out rather well, and we are quite sure that discussions on workshop topics has continued at various places especially at Armenian State University of Economics that hosted the workshop. Moreover, despite being busy with a large research conference that took place in parallel, but the Rector and Vice rector visited one of our thematic presentations and took active part in the follow-up discussions.

The group's visits to, among others, Armenian State University of Economics facilities and the National Agrarian University of Armenia Wine laboratory and their field facility where researchers, students and start-ups collaborated on practical experiments on various agro-food projects proved to be valuable ways to get a closer look at what is going on in these sectors in the interfaces between science, agriculture, and food production.

### **3. The output from the research network, for example applications for research funding**

One of the objectives of this project was to explore the possibilities for a joint research project proposal, focussing on comparisons between Sweden and Armenia on selected aspects of sustainability transitions. We found that the potential for such a project is considerable, not least concerning how local business models for small-scale production of fruit products can be promoted, using combinations of traditional methods and modern digital applications. In this area, circumstances are often rather similar in Sweden and Armenia, which means that interaction and sharing of ideas is likely to be rewarding. Furthermore, such an initiative could lead to more diverse production and distribution networks, which in turn can decrease dependence on specific outlets, and increase resilience. However, we found that for such a project application to be successful, additional contacts, identification of additional expertise in certain areas, and sharing of ideas are required. We are therefore looking forward to such a continuation of our initial work at the workshop in Yerevan.

### **4. The research network's contribution to research and/or doctoral studies at Södertörn University**

We think that this network, despite its challenges, has a good potential to become of great value to especially CBEES/BEEGS at Södertörn University, because it places its focus on a region, Southern Caucasus, that has not been much covered yet. It will require additional work, but our contacts can potentially enrich research in, and on, this region. We think it would be especially interesting to target young scholars who are more familiar with modern research, master English, and are eager to collaborate with researchers in, for example, Nordic countries. We also have very good contacts with administrations in the two universities we visited, which we found to be helpful, efficient, and competent.

### **5. The contribution of the research network to the knowledge of the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe**

As noted above (under item 4), we think our work is to be regarded as a first step towards deeper and broader collaboration between Södertörn University and academics in Southern Caucasus. Thus, while the contribution to knowledge may not have been large so far, the potential is promising. Apart from exploring further into research institutions in Southern Caucasus, it would be interesting to further map possible nodes of relevance in CBEES/BEEGS,



as well as on-going research at other departments at Södertörn University with relevance to Sustainability transitions in the agri-food sector.