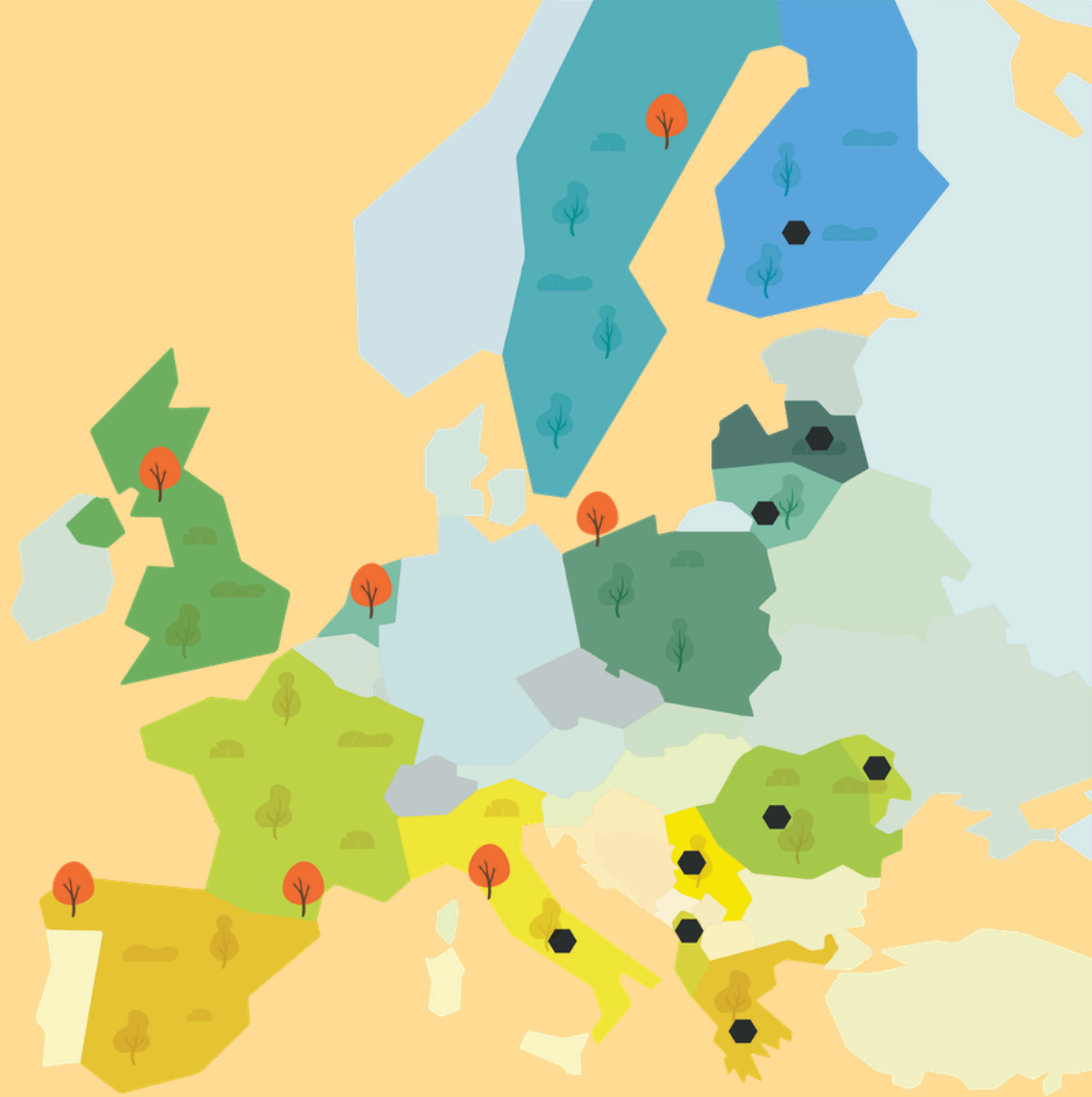




GRANULAR

LIVING LABS CROSS VISIT DOSSIER

Netherlands: P10



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P10

ABOUT THE CROSS VISIT

At the beginning of April, an inspiring three-day cross-visit took place in the Netherlands, organized by the P10 network within the European GRANULAR project. Participants from seven different countries came together to exchange knowledge and experiences on rural development and the role of rural municipalities.

The P10 is a collaboration of 34 large rural municipalities in the Netherlands. These areas face shared challenges such as ageing populations, accessibility, and housing shortages. At the same time, they highlight the strength of rural areas: space, nature, strong communities, and a resilient local economy. By working together, they ensure that rural voices are heard in The Hague and Brussels.

During the cross-visit, international participants were introduced to several Dutch municipalities and initiatives. The program offered a rich mix of policies, practical examples, and direct engagement with local communities.

Location

Topic
Wel-being
Number of participants
24 participants
Contacts
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DAY 1: Overview of Activities

The first day started at the municipality building of Hof van Twente, where members of the P10 board and several aldermen were present. The mayor, who is also chair of the P10, gave an inspiring presentation about engagement with Europe and the Dutch governmental structure.

We then visited an organic pig farm in Bentelo. The farmer, also a Nuffield scholar, shared his personal journey towards organic farming. His story showed how passion for animal welfare, sustainability, and innovation can come together in practice.

Here, natural animal behaviour is the norm. Sows are not restrained, straw is used extensively, piglets can go outside. These choices are not symbolic, they have tangible impact. Antibiotic use has been reduced by 80%, animals are calmer and healthier, and the system functions daily, not only on spreadsheets. One reflection stayed with many of us: the Netherlands should not try to outproduce the world, but outperform on quality, animal welfare and identity. That includes telling your story better, explaining why you farm the way you do. Through social media, especially Instagram, consumers are invited into that story.

During lunch at Twentewijn, we saw how local initiatives can grow into something special. In this small village, high-quality wines are produced from locally grown grapes, with strong connections to regional producers. The initiative also provides opportunities for people with a distance to the labour market. Walking through the vineyard and tasting the wine together, we were reminded how many choices shape a final product, soil management, pruning, harvesting, processing, branding. Everything matters.

What made this visit especially memorable was the intergenerational dialogue. Mother and son sometimes think differently about methods and direction, yet both are deeply passionate about what they create. That tension, rather than being a weakness, turns out to be a strength. Twentewijn showed us that rural entrepreneurship thrives when it is rooted in place, pride and patience.

In the village of Stokkum, we experienced the power of an active community. Residents are deeply involved in maintaining liveability. Housing projects are developed with the community, not imposed by external developers. That leads to architecture that fits the village, green connections between former farms, and smaller, more affordable homes. With only around 40 houses, the village managed to create 10 new homes, an impressive achievement. Projects such as planting hedges also contribute to biodiversity and help restore the traditional landscape.

The day ended at Weldam estate, where we learned how nature management, economic activities, and social values are carefully balanced. Every decision is part of a long-term vision, with biodiversity playing a central role. The estate has always played an important role in connecting people, to each other and to their surroundings. This social dimension remains central today, especially through new residential concepts such as the knooperf: a shared courtyard with several homes. These homes are intentionally smaller and more affordable, making living on the estate accessible to a broader group of people while strengthening community life. At Weldam we learned how nature management, economic activities, and social values are carefully balanced. Every decision is part of a long-term vision, with biodiversity playing a central role. This balance ensures that the estate remains livable, meaningful, and resilient for future generations.

We concluded the day with a typical Dutch dinner: pancakes with syrup.

DAY 2: Overview of Activities

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DAY 3: Overview of Activities

The third day took place in Peel en Maas and started with Limburg “vlaai”, a traditional pie that symbolises hospitality in the region.

Peel en Maas is well known for its approach to self-governance. Residents take the initiative, develop their own plans, and shape the future of their villages. The municipality supports where needed and works together with residents to assess feasibility and responsibilities. This trust-based approach leads to strong, widely supported initiatives. The municipality supports when needed, and steps back when possible. The guiding principle is refreshingly modest: don't get in the way. Sometimes residents lead, sometimes civil servants do. Ownership shifts depending on the issue at hand. Diversity is not a slogan here but a core value. Welfare policies are seen as enabling participation, not managing problems. When people are supported, they step forward, and extraordinary initiatives become ordinary.

One example is MFA Beringe Buiten, where sports facilities, childcare, and healthcare services are combined in one multifunctional building, largely maintained by volunteers. When we asked how such centres are sustained over time, the answer was simple: keep the design low-maintenance, the organisation simple, and the community committed. As one volunteer said: “You're not a customer here. You're an owner.”

We concluded the visit at the Belfort, a 22-metre-high observation tower located in the De Peel nature area. From here, visitors can explore themes such as peat extraction, nature, war, and art, while enjoying a panoramic view of the landscape. We reflected on rural proofing in terms of

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We also finalized the cross visit activities in the forest below the Belfort observation tower, where we had a small rural proofing exercise, involving the different actors you need in rural proofing and which role we see for ourselves and why. We reflected on rural proofing in terms of Generators (of knowledge and lived experience), Translators (who turn insights into policy-relevant messages) and Validators who ensure solutions actually work in practice. Our conclusion was that sustainable rural development starts with people who are closely connected to the place where they live, work, and build their daily lives.

We finished the cross visit with a thankyou to the involved and curious group. The bus dropped everyone of at Venlo railway station, where they could start their journey home with the Dutch public transport.

INSIGHTS & LEARNINGS

The cross-visit demonstrated the power of collaboration between residents, governments, and organisations. From bottom-up initiatives to innovative agriculture and strong communities, the Dutch countryside offers valuable inspiration.

From our organizers perspective, it's always interesting to see how others perceive the initiatives in the Netherlands and what the differences are there between countries and people. We visited two different estates and their stewards, which is not something you easily find in Southern Europe but this piece of history is very important for the Netherlands, and the estates play a big role in maintaining the landscapes. We also learned that we have very active communities in the Netherlands and we should be proud of the initiatives that we have and keep thinking along with our inhabitants that have great ideas. And there is much to learn from dialogue with each other and the cross visits really help to give energy to keep pushing for great rural communities!

Participants indicated that they are taking home many useful insights, for example:

- the concept of wellbeing-good life that the communities and municipalities expressed;
- the attention on the “future perspective” and the long view that allows to plan, monitor and evaluate the path;
- the link with the territory, such as in the pig farm, stress a lot in a positive way, the importance of “openness” to the citizens/territory and the relevance in terms of recognition from the territory;
- It seems that, at least, in the initiatives that we visited that there are a direct presence and connection with the municipalities in terms of relationship. Direct contact, not only administrative, but also human relations.
- The participants got useful information and contacts, it was very useful in terms of networking and knowledge and they will try and replicate some ideas in their countries.

We also sent out a survey to our participants, asking how satisfied they were with the program, organization, topics etc. The results were as follows:

Question	Score (max score is 5)
Overall experience. How satisfied were you with the overall cross-visit?	4,9
Relevance of topics. Did the sessions address your interest in access to public services?	4,9
P10 network. Did you learn what you wanted to about the P10 network and how this is organised in the Netherlands?	4,5
Organisation and Logistics. Were the schedule, transportation, food and accommodations well-organised?	4,9
How valuable were the activities and visits on day 1 (Municipality of Hof van Twente)?	5
How valuable were the activities and visits on day 2 (Municipality of Bronckhorst)?	5
How valuable were the activities and visits on day 3 (Municipality of Peel en Maas)?	5
Interaction and opportunities. Did you have enough time to network with local stakeholders and participants?	4,9
Materials and information. Were details and information clear and sufficient?	5

This exchange highlights the importance of international cooperation: by learning from each other, we can strengthen rural areas across Europe.

We are looking back to a very successful cross visit. We would not want to change anything, because we think it worked out really well and the group was very curious and asked a lot of questions. There was enough time for dialogue. The only thing we heard is that we couldn't show any tulip fields, since they are located in a different region of the Netherlands. It would have been easier to arrange a visit where we didn't move around between villages and areas, but we believe this added value to see more of the Netherlands, since the P10 is a national network and not only regional.

USEFULNESS FOR DECISION MARKERS

It was useful for decisions makers of the different municipalities that we visited to discuss with decision makers of other countries. What are the differences? How do things work in the Netherlands and why do we think these initiatives we have seen work here? The dialogue was very useful for the decision makers.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS





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GRANULAR is a four-year multi-disciplinary and transnational project. It aims at generating new datasets, tools and methods to better understand rural diversity and to promote place-based rural policies.



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