Granular Perspectives on Longevity:
In-depth Narratives of Ourense Centenarians in a Rural Context

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Summary: We present the overall context, process and outcomes of our research with centenarians in the province of Ourense, within the European project GRANULAR (*Giving Rural Actors Novel Data and Re-useable Tools to Lead Public Action in Rural Areas*). The Universidade de Vigo is one of the 23 GRANULAR partners and responsible for the Spanish Living Lab, located in the province of Ourense. The qualitative information obtained through interviews with centenary people is revealing very concrete aspects of the daily life of this sector of the population, a group that is largely understudied from the point of view of holistic health, resilience, and adaptation and its contribution to the dynamics of the European rural ecosystem. The themes raised and the information analysed not only is providing a window into the personal history of the interviewees, but also offer valuable lessons on resilience, adaptation, and the evolution of rural society in Ourense. Bothe the process and the findings highlight the method of data collection - interviews - and emphasise the relevance of the personal perspectives brought by hyper-long-lived individuals, offering a direct and personalised approach to the study of longevity in Spanish and European rural areas.

Context: Our research stems from the **GRANULAR** research project (*Giving Rural Actors Novel Data and Re-useable Tools to Lead Public Action in Rural Areas*), a HORIZON-RIA project (HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions) funded by the Horizon Europe programme (HORIZON-CL6-2021-COMMUNITIES-01-01). This four-year project (2022-26) aims to activate rural territories through **Living Labs** as a mechanism for obtaining new data with greater granularity.

GRANULAR is generating new insights and novel datasets for characterising rural diversity based on a **multi-actor** and **interdisciplinary approach**, through a wide range of methods and primary data (such as remote sensing, crowd-sourced data, mobile phone data, and web scraping) (Stjemberg et al., 2023). This is also being combined with a variety of existing institutional data to derive indicators relevant to rural communities for the implementation of the **Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)** (ESPON, 2021), to measure resilience, well-being, quality of life, and attractiveness. The project is creating a **Rural Compass**, which takes into account the factors affecting rural communities and their functional characteristics, informing policy-makers and rural actors for the design of tailored rural policies. This novel conceptual and methodological approach will provide a comprehensive insight into the multiple factors and drivers that impact rural areas, accounting for their diversity. It will also directly support concrete **policies**, by informing rural action with the opportunities and requirements in terms of data-collection methods and indicator development to enhance and support the **co-creation** and **co-learning** with multiple actors in rural areas.

The Spanish Living Lab, located in the province of Ourense, is permanently collaborating with local stakeholders to obtain new datasets, tools, and methods to better understand rural areas through participatory procedures and interviews with relevant actors, such as the hyper-long-lived population (Merino et al. 2023; Reichstadt et al., 2010; Vega et al., 2024). The **Ourense province is at the epicentre of Spain's demographic challenge and in the mirror where the EU, sooner rather than later, will have to look at its future.** The Living Lab has its roots in:
- *C2 Agenda 2030 Local*, a INTERREG-POCTEP project that helps small rural municipalities to make the SDGs a priority for their own development.
- *Rio International Observatory of Rural Research* (analyses, researches and launches cutting-edge rural projects)
- **Ourense Rural Summit (2019) (**main output: *Declaración de Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil por unha Axenda Rural Europea* (selected by the ENRD -European Network of Rural Development- as a Good Practice for the EU's Long-term Vision for Rural)

https://rio.webs.uvigo.es/en/   https://www.ruralgranular.eu/

Source: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/

Specifically, GRANULAR aims at:

Supporting just digital, economic and ecological transitions in rural areas
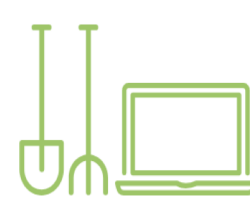
Conceptualising rural diversity, its multiple characteristics and functionalities

Informing rural actors on the diversity of rural areas

Empowering rural actors to engage in just, carbon-neutral and inclusive transitions

Objectives:
- To gather and analyze qualitative data from interviews with centenarians to understand specific aspects of their daily lives and experiences within the rural context of Ourense
- To examine their integral health, resilience and adaptation strategies
- To evaluate the contribution of centenarians to rural ecosystem dynamics
- To demonstrate the effectiveness of using personalized interviews as a method of data collection that highlights the importance of personal perspectives in the study of hyper longevity
- Contribute to rural proofing policies in Spain and Europe, enhancing the living conditions and societal structure.
- To deepen the understanding of longevity and aging in rural settings.

Hypotheses:
H 1: Individuals in rural Ourense who have reached hyper longevity possess unique personal histories and life experiences that contribute to their resilience and adaptation.
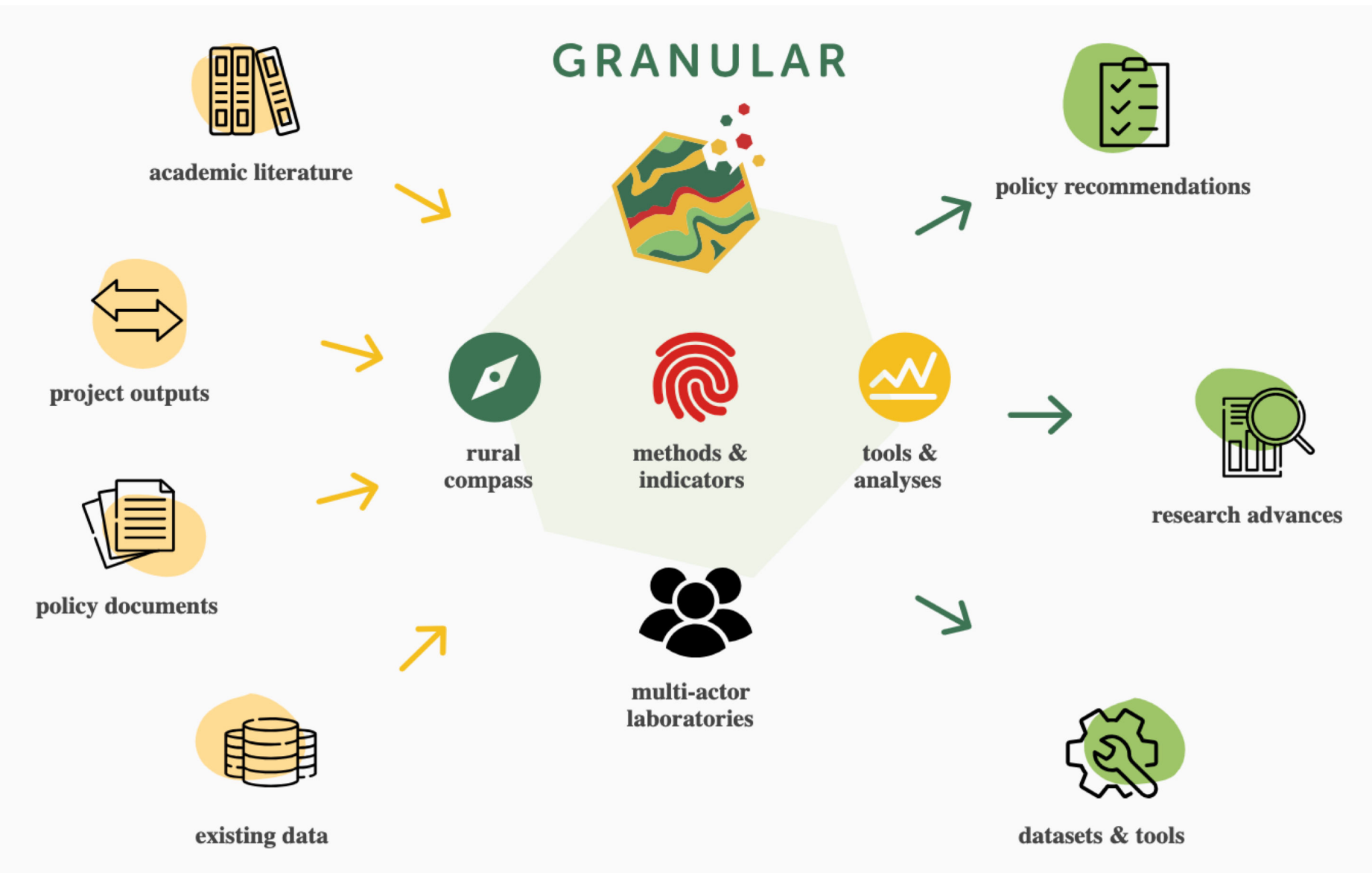**H 2**: The evolution of rural society in Ourense can be traced and understood through the personal narratives of hyper-long-lived individuals, providing valuable insights into broader socio-cultural dynamics.
H 3: The qualitative information obtained through interviews can unearth detailed aspects of daily life that are crucial to understanding what contributes to a long and healthy life in the specific rural context.

Themes/Results	Future framework for exploring hyper longevity
Longitudinal analysis of life experiences	Comparative study of biographical narratives over several decades
Sociocultural evolution and technological adaptation	Research on the perception of and adaptation to significant technological and social changes
Determinants of hyper longevity (self-perception)	Analysis of behavioural and environmental factors contributing to exceptional longevity
Family dynamics and social networks over time	A study on the evolution of family structures and their impact on longevity
Work and educational trajectories in changing contexts	Assessing the impact of career and education (formal and non-formal) on older Individuals
Perceptions of historical events and influential figures	Analysis of historical memory and its influence on cognition and well-being in old age
Health management and well-being strategies	Research on health practices and their relationship to longevity in centenarians (Telecare, loneliness...)
Philosophical and spiritual perspectives	Study on the influence of philosophy of life and spirituality on longevity
Intergenerational knowledge transmission	Analysis of the perspectives and advice imparted by hyper-longevity individuals to younger generations
Contributions to longevity and rural sciences	Evaluation of the role of hyper-long-lived participants in scientific studies on ageing, rurality and longevity

Source: Own elaboration

Methodology: The research was conducted through the analysis of **22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted during the last 10 years by one of our local partners, a rural audiovisual producer, with a representative sample of 22 people over 85 years of age: age range 85-107 years (4 of them centenarians), 10 men/11 women, from 15 different parishes, in the rural area of Ourense**. Transcription text analysis was implemented based on the detailed review and coding of textual data to identify themes, patterns, and underlying meanings. An inductive approach was used in the analysis process, allowing themes and concepts to emerge organically from the data. Techniques such as open and axial coding (Cao *et al.*, 2019) were employed to organize and categorize data into meaningful units. Additionally, specialized software (Atlas.ti & Open AI) was used to facilitate the management and efficient analysis of large volumes of textual data.

Results: The results revealed a series of recurring themes: **longitudinal analysis of life experiences, sociocultural evolution and technological adaptation, determinants of hyper longevity, family dynamics and social networks over time, work and educational trajectories in changing contexts, perceptions of historical events and influential figures, health management and wellness strategies in hyper longevity, philosophical and spiritual perspectives on ageing, intergenerational knowledge transmission, contributions to longevity science,** among others. Sub-themes and relationships among them were identified, providing a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, opinions, and needs. These insights are leading to **future framework for exploring hyper longevity.**

Agri-environmental Performances	Amenities	Basic Services	Climate Change Effects
Cohesion & Wellbeing	Cultural Attractiveness & Heritage	Demographic Trends	Digital transformation
Economic Performances	Foodscapes	Infrastructure	Renewable Energy

Category of data to which our project is contributing, on the digital platform GRANULAR (Source: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/)

Conclusions: The themes raised and the information analysed not only is providing a window into the personal history of the interviewees, but also offer **valuable lessons on resilience, adaptation, and the evolution of rural society in Ourense**. Both the process and the findings highlight the method of data collection - interviews - and emphasise the **relevance of the personal perspectives brought by hyper-long-lived individuals**, offering a direct and personalised approach to the study of longevity in Spanish and European rural areas.
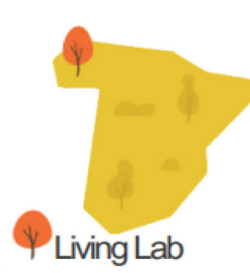
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Living Lab

Priorities

Ageing   E-governance   Large forest fires

Source: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/

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3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

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