



GRANULAR

PRACTICE ABSTRACT

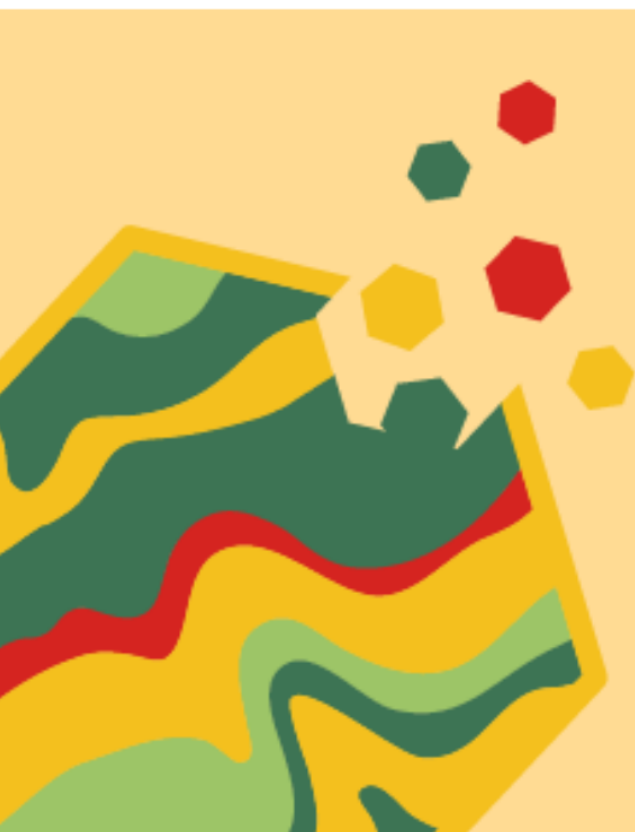
James Hutton Institute (Research organisation)



The James
Hutton
Institute

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The main purpose of rural proofing for public, private, and civil society initiatives is to assess, through a rural perspective, whether the objectives, actions, and measures of policies align with the challenges they aim to address. The goal is to ensure policy coherence across different sectors and regions in [rural Scotland](#). These policies involve **public, private, and civil society actors**, each having an impact on rural communities, land use, and resource governance.

The Living Lab members have experience with statutory requirements like **island and equality proofing**, giving them familiarity with the process and its goals. This experience includes understanding the limitations of broad consultation questions and the uncertainty around the use of the collected data.

Based on initial discussions, recommendations suggest learning from existing statutory proofing processes, especially the **Island Communities Impact Assessment**, which emphasizes **fairness, integration, inclusiveness, and the clarity of policy language**. In addition to these principles, the Living Lab advocates for adding **transparency and accessibility**. The Lab recommends incorporating rural proofing early in the policy design phase and using it as evidence in later stages of public consultations and deliberations. This includes conducting ex-ante impact assessments and revisiting the evidence in ex-post evaluations after policy implementation. Furthermore, the Lab suggests using **publicly available information that is easily understood by non-experts, while acknowledging that some assessments will require specialised scientific or local knowledge**.

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Thematic Priority:

- Demographic change
- Natural capital assets
- Climate change

More info:

https://www.ruralgranular.eu/living_lab/living-lab-united-kingdom-rural-scotland/

ABOUT THE LIVING LAB

The Living Lab encompasses rural Scotland, focusing on areas classified by the Scottish Government Urban Rural Classification 2022, including **Accessible Small Towns, Remote Small Towns, Accessible Rural Areas, and Remote Rural Areas**. These regions face structural challenges such as limited access to essential services (e.g., healthcare and administrative services), infrequent public transport, and restrictions on the types of economic activities available. These issues increase **residents' vulnerability to risks affecting their wellbeing**, such as mental health concerns, and threaten the sustainability of rural areas as places to live and work. Additionally, pressures on natural and cultural resources arise from climate change (e.g., flooding and landslides) and shifts in land use (e.g., forest expansion and renewable energy development), with ongoing discussions about the impacts on communities, landscapes, land reform, and economic diversification. The Living Lab, supported by the **James Hutton Institute**, has been established for the [GRANULAR project](#), drawing on existing Multi-Actor Platforms and networks formed through previous EU-funded initiatives like [SHERPA](#) and [UNISECO](#).

OBJECTIVES

- The Living Lab aims to support the testing and implementation of a rural proofing process for policies affecting rural areas, both public and private. This approach considers the real-world experiences and needs of the members and organisations involved in the Lab. It will explore various perspectives on rurality and the diversity of rural areas. These insights will guide the analysis of the changing spatial distribution of assets that contribute to a wellbeing economy, foundational activities, and their associated outcomes. Ultimately, this process is expected to help identify tailored development pathways and achievable outcomes for specific places, driving positive change.
- **Key participants** in the Living Lab include representatives from public agencies, the private sector, civil society (focused on health and wellbeing), NGOs (working on environmental, cultural, and historical assets), and researchers (focused on rural spatial data).
- The Living Lab will produce a **commentary on rurality in rural Scotland through the lens of the rural compass**, which will inform the rural proofing of public and private sector policies. Testing this process will occur alongside other GRANULAR Living Labs, allowing for comparisons across different socio-economic, cultural, and geographic contexts. [The rural compass](#) will support work on rural proofing. Materials will be shared with Living Lab members for feedback on their relevance to rural Scotland. This feedback will be used to refine policies and ensure they are appropriately tailored for future use.

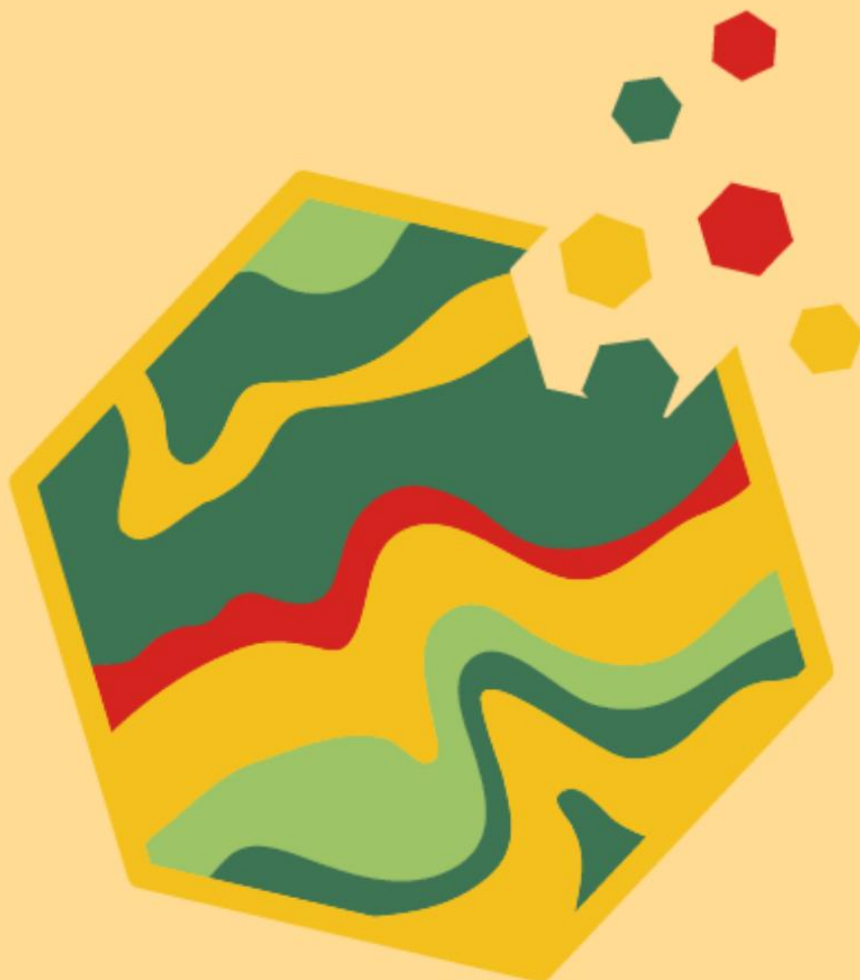
DATA TO BE COLLECTED

The Living Lab will examine initial results from new data collection efforts in rural Scotland. The aim is that sharing these analyses will offer early insights into the emerging types of data that may become available. As part of the GRANULAR project, data sources are expected to include **crowdsourcing, web scraping, and earth observation, as well as indicators that describe rural diversity, such as socio-economic resilience, social cohesion, vulnerability, wellbeing, and rural attractiveness**. Additional data will likely be necessary for conducting rural proofing of public and private sector policies, in alignment with the rural compass. Specific areas of focus will include:

- Analysing data related to islands and remote areas, given their significance in public policy, including the project team's work on the **National Islands Plan Survey (2022-2023)** and the upcoming survey for 2023-2024.
- An updated version of the **Socio-Economic Performance Index**, which incorporates thematic indicators based on the **Scottish Government's strategic** goals of being wealthier/fairer, healthier, safer/stronger, and smarter, with data mapped at the data zone level.
- A metric for measuring **economic diversification in rural Scotland**.



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