

GRANULAR

LIVING LABS CROSS VISIT DOSSIER

United Kingdom: Rural Scotland



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. UK participants in the GRANULAR project are supported by UKRI- Grant numbers 10039965 (James Hutton Institute) and 10041831 (University of Southampton).

Authors: David Miller (James Hutton Institute)

Review: Maite Iglesias (AEIDL)

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Rural Scotland


ABOUT THE CROSS VISIT

The dossier describes a three-day cross-visit to north-east Scotland, UK. The cross-visit was planned to enable contributions to the [6th European Rural Parliament](#), held in Inverurie, 20th to 23rd October 2025. The cross-visit also formed part of an [EU Week of Regions and Cities Close to You](#) event.

The first day was mainly devoted to the opening sessions of the European Rural Parliament and a GRANULAR led workshop on rural typologies. The workshop attracted with 24 participants in person, from 12 countries, including two from the European Commission and four from the Scottish Government, with several more participants joining online. The focus of the workshop was on rural diversity, the limitations of existing typologies, and recommendations for future classification tools.

The second day started with a visit to the James Hutton Institute's Glensaugh research farm discussing land use management, digital sensors of land characteristics, and mapping. This was followed by a visit to the Fettercairn distillery, highlighting the economic role of whisky and its sustainability initiatives. The second part of the day was in contributing to sessions at the European Rural Parliament on funding and rural resilience. On the third day the group visited the coastal town of Stonehaven to discuss challenges and opportunities linked to tourism, second homes, and risks and responses to flooding. The visit concluded with a session at the James Hutton Institute, Aberdeen, in the National Soli Archive and viewing virtual and augmented reality models, and digital twin of the Glensaugh research farm, presented in the Institute's visualisation and immersive suite.

The event highlighted the awareness raising and educational benefits for decision-makers and participants, and added value through direct engagement with European and national policy-makers, elected representatives, civil society, businesses and researchers.

Location

Topic
Rural typologies & rural diversity
Number of participants
6 participants + Living Lab Members in Scottish Rural Action, organising the European Rural Parliament
Contacts
David Miller david.miller@hutton.ac.uk
Related work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural proofing reports • General information

DAY 1: Overview of Activities

The first day of the cross-visit was spent at the 6th European Rural Parliament (ERP), which was held in Inverurie, north-east Scotland. During the journey to Inverurie participants were given background information about the history of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, particularly how the recent development of the region has been shaped by the offshore oil and gas industry. At the [European Rural Parliament](#), we attended a summit talks. The group ran the GRANULAR workshop on Rural Typologies, which had 24 registered attendees from 12 countries (including presenters) on site, and several online. The workshop included presentations by Elin Słdttmo (“Rural typologies to grasp rural diversity”) on the review of typologies undertaken in GRANULAR, Jon Hopkins (“Measuring rurality in Scotland and the UK: directions in policy and research”), and an intervention by Orsolya Frizon Somogyi (European Commission: DG Agriculture and Rural Development). This was followed by a discussion on what is missing from existing typologies and recommendations for the development of future typologies. After the workshop, participants had lunch and were free to attend an ERP workshop of their choice during the afternoon sessions. Then the group reconvened to discuss what had been learnt, and travelled back to Aberdeen. Discussion continued over an evening meal.

DAY 2: Overview of Activities

The second day of the cross-visit started with a visit to the [James Hutton Institute](#) Glensaugh Research Farm and the climate positive farming initiative. Participants were given presentations about the history of the farm and their nature-friendly farming techniques, with an introduction to land use management, digital sensor networks and mapping and monitoring of natural capital. A short tour and in-field discussion covered agroforestry, on-farm renewable energy, soil and habitat management. After lunch, participants had a guided tour and tasting session at the Fettercairn Distillery, at which the importance of the whisky industry to Scotland, and sustainability initiatives undertaken by the distillery were explained, such as planting trees for future use as whisky casks and water management. The group travelled back to Inverurie for the evening session of the European Rural Parliament. Participants attended a session on EU funding mechanisms for rural development and the Michael Dower awards for Rural Resilience. The evening concluded with participate in a Ceilidh – a traditional Scottish Dance evening.

DAY 3: Overview of Activities

The final day of the cross-visit began with a short trip to Stonehaven, a small coastal town south of Aberdeen which has faced development challenges and opportunities which reflect changing tourism practices, second-home ownership and flooding events. These challenges were discussed in a walk along the seafront, viewing evidence of initiatives to protect and promote the town, including the annual traditional Hogmanay fireball throwing celebrations which have gained worldwide news coverage. The afternoon comprised a visit to the James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen, with a tour of the new visualisation suite facilities, including an explanation of a digital twin mapping of the Glensaugh farm and which links to near-real time environmental sensor data. These facilities form part of the presentation of virtual and augmented reality materials of GRANULAR (WP5). The groups visited the National Soil Archive and discussed the importance of long-term monitoring of indicators of natural capital in rural areas. The day concluded with an evening meal together with hosts and visitors an opportunity for final discussions and goodbyes.

INSIGHTS & LEARNINGS

Participants in the cross-visits provided positive verbal feedback. Benefits included participation in the European Rural Parliament (ERP) and European Week or Cities and Regions Close to You, recognised as a significant European-wide at which they were able to interact with members of the EU Commission. The visits to the climate positive research farm and novel visualisation facilities were of particular interest to the Spanish participants.

The discussions, field visits and engagement in the European Rural Parliament enabled a thorough overview of rural issues at multiple scales, from European to local and regional levels. The workshop at the European Rural Parliament, and in particular the discussion points raised on what is missing from rural typologies, and the limitations of existing typologies, were identified as particularly useful as the GRANULAR project develops its own typology.

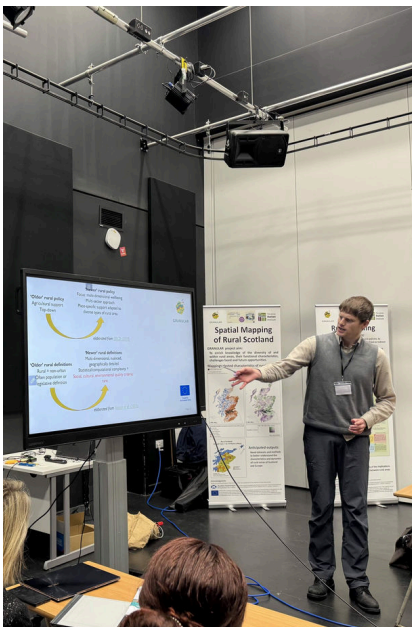
Participants would have appreciated more time for introductions and group-bonding at the beginning of the first day in advance of going straight into the wider-group setting of the European Rural Parliament. An introduction to the ERP and the GRANULAR workshop prior to the event and visit would also have been helpful. This was unavoidable due to the programme of the ERP being outwith control of the project organisation. This was mitigated by doing introductions on the minibus journey to the ERP venue.

USEFULNESS FOR DECISION MARKERS

The decision-makers in the group were given a thorough overview of research in GRANULAR and at the James Hutton Institute on rural typologies and of analysis to understand rural diversity more broadly.

Participants learned about natural capital management, value chains in the whisky sector and the resources of the James Hutton Institute for landscape visualisation and the representation of natural capital in virtual and augmented reality, and Scotland's National Soil Archive.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS





GRANULAR

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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