GRANULAR

PRACTICE ABSTRACT

Cross-visits that change practice

How to run peer learning between rural territories

Rural areas learn well from each other, but only if the exchange is organised. GRANULAR ran **seven cross-visits that brought 133 participants** into each other's territories, and this is what made them work.

Each visit followed the same structure: the host Lab presented its context and challenges; participants went out to see initiatives on the ground; they met local stakeholders; a facilitated session drew out reflections; and the group identified what could be taken home.

Visits were hosted across Spain, Scotland, Sweden, Poland, Italy and France, and covered **mobility**, **wellbeing**, **sustainable tourism**, **short food chains**, **natural resource management**, **rural proofing**, **digital tools and governance**.

Participants came from very different positions — researchers, local and regional authorities, rural development agencies, farmers and rural entrepreneurs, community and environmental organisations, tourism actors and policy practitioners— enriching the discussions.

Four lessons stand out:

- Rural territories differ enormously yet share the same underlying problems.
- Meeting face to face produced deeper learning than online exchange.
- Combining local knowledge with data made the policy discussion sharper
- Peer learning works best when it identifies practices to adapt rather than to copy.

⬢ **Recommendations**: balance field visits with structured reflection; bring in several stakeholder groups rather than homogeneous actors; steer discussion explicitly towards transferability and what would have to change locally; and document the lessons systematically, so that the knowledge circulates instead of staying only with those who travelled.

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Methodological context and rationale

Rural territories face **comparable challenges** and **rarely have a structured way of learning from one another**. Written outputs travel poorly, and online exchange conveys little of the context in which a practice works.

Cross-visits address this by placing **practitioners inside another territory**, where a practice can be seen in the conditions that produced it. They support the process of empowering through the sharing knowledge on **challenges and practices**, techniques of **analysis and data collection** across local actors, Labs, researchers, civil servants, policy makers.

Description of the method

The Cross-Visit methodology consisted of:

- Presentation of **local context and challenges**;
- **Field visits** to relevant initiatives and projects;
- **Meetings with local stakeholders**;
- Facilitated **discussion** and **reflection sessions**;
- Identification of **transferable lessons** and **opportunities**.

A total of seven Cross-Visits were organised involving 133 participants from Living Labs and Replication Labs.

Stakeholder groups represented **researchers and universities**, **local and regional authorities**, **rural development agencies**, **farmers** and **rural entrepreneurs**, **community organisations**, **environmental organisations**, **tourism actors**, **policy practitioners**, Living Lab and Replication Lab **facilitators**.

Testing and application in Multi-Actor Labs

The methodology was tested across multiple territorial contexts including **Spain, Scotland, Sweden, Poland, Italy and France**.

The visits explored **diverse themes** including:

- Rural mobility
- Rural wellbeing
- Sustainable tourism
- Short food supply chains
- Natural resource management
- Rural proofing
- Data and digital tools
- Governance and participation

Despite territorial differences, participants identified **common challenges and opportunities** related to **rural resilience, sustainability and evidence-based policymaking**. What participants observed most consistently was that the transferable element is rarely the practice itself but the **conditions that allow it to work**: who convenes the actors, what data they hold, and how decisions are taken.

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Lessons learned and practical recommendations

- Rural territories are **highly diverse** but face many **shared challenges**.
- **Direct interaction with stakeholders** generates deeper learning than online exchanges.
- **Combining local knowledge with data and evidence** strengthens policy design.
- Peer learning helps identify **practices that can be adapted** rather than simply replicated.
- **Living Labs** provide an effective environment for **experimentation and mutual learning**.

Recommendations

Include a balance between **field activities and structured reflection**.
Ensure **participation from multiple stakeholder groups**.
Focus **discussions on transferability and adaptation**.
Document lessons systematically to support wider dissemination.

Scalability and replicability

The methodology is **highly replicable** and can be **applied in different rural contexts**. Key conditions include **local host organisations**, **stakeholder engagement**, **clear thematic focus**, structured **facilitation**, **documentation of lessons learned**.

Further information:

- GRANULAR project www.ruralgranular.eu & Digital Platform https://platform.ruralgranular.eu
- Multi-Actor Labs cross-visit dossiers: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/news/granular-releases-multi-actor-labs-cross-visit-dossiers-from-across-europe/
- Cross-visit on rural mobility in France: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/news/granular-kicks-off-first-cross-visit-on-rural-mobility-in-france/
- Cross-visit in Scotland: https://www.ruralgranular.eu/news/exploring-rural-futures-granular-cross-visit-in-scotland/

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