Work Package 8 Community and Civic Engagement

Deliverable 8.1. (Due M24): Conference on university-community relations (organised in a hybrid form)

YUFE CommUNIty Conference: Connecting University & Communities

November 2024

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The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is one of the dynamic European University Alliances, selected by the European Commission. YUFE aims to shape a holistic and inclusive future for students and learners, and their society in Europe. The YUFE Alliance strives to be the front-running Alliance of European Higher Education in which students, learners, and staff are co-leaders, co-dreamers, and co-creators. YUFE's mission is to become a successful model of a socially responsible European University.

Co-funded by the European Union

1. Executive Summary

The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is shaping a leading model of European universities, with a strong commitment to expanding its impact beyond partner institutions. By prioritizing social responsibility, YUFE seeks to embed itself as a transformative force within each local community it touches.

The YUFE Conference on University-Community Relations served as a dynamic platform for fostering meaningful dialogue among university leaders, academics, researchers, students, and community representatives. This intersectoral two-day event showcased YUFE's accomplishments and explored innovative strategies to strengthen the bond between universities and their surrounding communities.

The conference delved into various aspects of community engagement, spotlighting successful collaborations and best practices between YUFE universities and local partners. Central to the event was the goal of catalysing deeper collaboration between academic institutions and community actors, while also building connections among partners from diverse local settings. The overarching ambition was to establish a robust, interdisciplinary network of community engagement experts, encompassing academic and non-academic representatives, to collaboratively address global challenges.

Throughout the conference, participants examined significant societal challenges, including social injustice, migration and refugee crises, disparities in education, and racial equity. These discussions highlighted the critical role universities play as drivers of change and reinforced the importance of engaging local communities in addressing these pressing issues.

A notable challenge was ensuring the active participation of diverse community representatives and local actors engaged in practices mapped across YUFE universities. This diversity of perspectives was essential to achieving the conference's goals. YUFE universities demonstrated a strong commitment to inclusivity by covering travel costs for their community partners, ensuring that financial barriers did not hinder meaningful participation. This effort was a testament to YUFE's vision of fostering a truly socially responsible and engaged European University.

2. YUFE CommUNIty Conference 2024: connecting university & communities

The first YUFE CommUNIty Conference took place on November 14 and 15 in Rijeka, Croatia. As the main aim of the conference was to bring together different stakeholders (NGOs, academics, students, researchers and public institutions), we decided that the premises of the local NGO "My Place in the Sun" would be the perfect venue for the conference.

In order to reach a wider audience and offer the possibility to follow the conference outside the conference venue, both conference days were streamed live on YouTube, via the official account of the University of Rijeka.

A total of 49 people attended the conference on site (excluding the users of the host NGO who were present on the first day of the conference) and the online broadcast was followed by more than 150 users. At the conference were present representatives from thirteen different local organizations and institutions.

During the 2-day event, ten cherry-picked initiatives were presented (from eight YUFE universities) together with the three guest lectures and two panel sessions with academic and community stakeholders.

Figure 1 Conference Venue: My Place Under the Sun

2.1 Summary & Highlights

(Keynote Speeches and Panel Sessions)

Day 1 / 14 November 2024

A. KEYNOTE SPEECH: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING COMMUNITY ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES

Rector of the University of Rijeka, prof. Snježana Prijić Samaržija has opened the conference with the lecture that emphasized the role of universities as proactive agents in addressing societal challenges. Community engagement, a core principle of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) alliance and the University of Rijeka (UNIRI), was highlighted as a critical element in fostering inclusivity, equity, and social justice. Rector Prijić Samaržija, during her lecture outlined two interconnected crises impacting our society: Democratic Crisis (The erosion of global democracy due to the rise of authoritarianism, "illiberal democracies," and attacks on pluralism and human rights) and Crisis of Enlightenment (the growing "culture of ignorance" marked by anti-intellectualism, misinformation, and scepticism toward evidence-based science). The universities should play a leading role in facing those challenges, especially in driving social innovation and addressing sustainability challenges through stronger partnership with civil society and local governments.

During her lecture, Prijić Samaržija emphasized the importance of leadership commitment to community engagement, and the importance of a collaborative culture across the university. Also, to be able to develop a truly societal impact, science needs to be present in the community, universities need to create and support centres dedicated to co-creating research and educational programs with societal impact.

Prijić Samaržija concluded that universities must prioritize community engagement to uphold democratic and intellectual values. Collaboration between universities and communities are vital for addressing global challenges. Embracing civic mission and becoming transnational community-engaged actors will foster a new age of enlightenment characterized by inclusivity, resilience, and societal impact.

B. Panel 1: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME (WIFM) / University perspective

The panel session "What's In It For Me: University Perspective" gave an insights on how higher education institutions (HEIs) connect with their communities, debating questions of openness, transparency, and societal impact. Panellists agreed that universities generally

possess values and attitudes conducive to openness, especially in smaller regions, yet it is not clear if these efforts translate into meaningful community impact. Concerns were raised about the extent of political influence and the focus on research and teaching that may not address (g)local challenges effectively. One of the panellists raised a question about public funds that might even support knowledge irrelevant to societal needs.

Transparency emerged as another critical challenge. Universities need to better communicate their contributions and respond more efficiently to community requests. There is often a mismatch between what communities need and the solutions provided, perpetuating the perception of universities as “ivory towers.”

Teaching and learning were central to the discussion, focusing on how study programs can balance educating socially responsible citizens with preparing productive professionals. Panellists called for participatory, community-engaged activities to become core components of curricula rather than optional extras. Student representative emphasized the importance of modernizing teaching methods to meet the expectations of younger generations. Lifelong learning is also another potentially engaged activity that universities can embark on.

Student participation in community engagement activities remains a barrier, partly due to outdated institutional communication strategies that fail to resonate with younger audiences. Finally, while European policies encourage community engagement, concerns were raised about a lack of genuine institutional commitment, with some efforts perceived as superficial or performative “greenwashing.”

International alliances such as YUFE offer a way forward by fostering collaboration, transparency and actionable frameworks that enable universities to achieve sustainable societal impact. Ultimately, communication and a willingness to listen is one of the most important starting points for truly engaged universities.

Day 2 / 15 November 2024

C. KEYNOTE SPEECH: CHARITY OR JUSTICE? NGOS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FIGHTING CHILD POVERTY

The second day of the conference was opened with the keynote speech of Zoran Grozdanov, co-founder of the “My Place Under the Sun” and Associate professor at the at the Protestant Faculty of Theology Matthias Flacius Illyricus, University of Zagreb. Grozdanov presented Data from studies reveal alarming realities: 25% of children suffer health issues due to poor housing, 31% face bullying based on social status, and over 30% feel excluded from society. The initiative My Place Under the Sun addresses urban child poverty in Rijeka, tackling systemic inequalities that hinder children's opportunities for success.

Grozdanov emphasised that 100 children and 73 families have participated since the beginning of the initiative, supported by 180 volunteers and more than 50 business partners, including the University of Rijeka. The university has played a crucial role, from providing meals to conducting research and developing solutions for an equitable childhood. A very important role in the development of the initiative was played by the entire local community (from citizens to public figures), who participated in a large national campaign necessary for the reconstruction of the space and the launch of the project.

Participants have expressed deep gratitude, noting how the program fosters belonging, safety, and growth. As one parent stated, "*They see in my children what I cannot. They lead us on the right path so we don't give up.*" With a crowdfunding goal of 300,000 euros, *My Place Under the Sun* is not just a program but a beacon of hope for countless families striving to overcome adversity.

D. Panel 2: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME (WIFM) / Community perspective

The panel started by referring to the TEFCE and the definition of 'Community Engagement'. For the panellists it means educating and helping others, creating win-win scenarios, building connections, sharing knowledge, feeling valuable and it's fun.

The panel highlighted the need to step out of the university's "ivory towers", which was also mentioned during the first panel session. We tend to 'know better'. The university needs to be more aligned with the community's interests. Effective collaboration involves mutual understanding, shared knowledge, and active outreach to the community and go beyond the traditional boundaries.

Maintaining long-term relations is difficult due to the short-term stays of (student) volunteers, short-term funding, and overburdened academics. Sustainable collaboration requires a clear identity, an understanding of community culture, and a balanced approach to mutual responsibilities.

Universities were criticized for forming "narrow-minded elites" disconnected from real-world problems. The need for diversity in teaching and research, learning skills and being open-minded are more important than theoretical knowledge. Institutions must balance research neutrality with inclusivity, ensuring that findings resonate with and benefit the community.

Beyond knowledge, the panel stressed the importance of practical skills. Universities should equip students to engage with communities, and skills such as critical thinking and active listening are very important.

The panellists stressed that community engagement must be proactive, collaborative, and rooted in shared goals, not just financial incentives (even though fundings have a major impact).

The discussion concluded with a call to engage directly with communities rather than speaking about them, emphasizing the importance of opening academic spaces for dialogue and exchange. Participants stressed that universities must prioritize teaching critical thinking and active listening while fostering real-world problem-solving to bridge the gap between academia and society. Effective collaboration requires modesty, a focus on shared benefits, and a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing societal needs in a meaningful and inclusive way.

E. KEYNOTE SPEECH: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The keynote by Thomas Farnell emphasizes the importance of community engagement as a central mission for universities, addressing societal challenges like inequality, climate change, and social justice. Community engagement involves collaborative efforts between universities and external stakeholders—government, businesses, and civil society—to create mutually beneficial solutions. Despite competing pressures like global rankings and innovation priorities, it is re-emerging as a policy priority across Europe.

Key tools and frameworks have been developed to support this mission, such as the TEFCE Toolbox for institutional self-reflection, action-planning methodologies, and forthcoming guidelines for engaged teaching. European initiatives have incorporated community engagement into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) goals, including the "Democratic Mission of Higher Education."

The YUFE alliance is highlighted as a leader in integrating these principles. By fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion, universities are driving a shift towards sustainable partnerships that address global and local challenges. As Farnell concludes, effective engagement relies on both top-down policies and grassroots initiatives, ensuring universities serve society holistically.

3. Conclusions and takeaways

The main aim of the conference was to demonstrate how diverse, vivid and enriching the connections between universities and communities are and can be. The selection of best practices from the YUFE partners, inspired by the dimensions used in the Tefce toolbox, generated a list of inspiring testimonials. From supporting children on the verge of poverty to the collaboration with film producers in developing a sustainability label, from the support to refugees to observing court cases, from linking students to business to a collaboration between researchers and the funeral sector: all cases demonstrated that universities and communities have much value to share with each other.

The presentation of the cases, and the discussions afterwards, also demonstrated that still too much of this value remains hidden for the other. Needs, ideas and opportunities need mutual openness in order to be exchanged. The main conclusion therefore was that all parties benefit greatly from more and sustained openness towards each other. This way, for instance, engineers discover how they can make a difference in the fight against energy poverty and linguists experience the impact in childrens' lifes throught the support of their educators. Or universities discover the energy brought by retired volunteers, while researchers co-create science with citizens.

The importance of this broad openness as a step to engagement with society was a red thread throughout the conference. Rector Snježana Prijić Samaržija underlined the importance in today's society of YUFE's policy choice to be community oriented and emphasized the role universities can, and should, play as loud centers of rationalism and drivers of a new social contract.

The ideas as they have been formulated in the YUFE declaration for community engagement, therefore, ran as a multi-faceted red line throughout the conference:

- *Togetherness*
- *Transition*

- *Social innovation*
- *Impact*
- *Openness*
- *Collaboration*
- *Synergy*
- *Outside in thinking (what's in it for citizens)*

This lead the members of WP 8 to look forward to the future with a great drive to strengthen current and explore new initiatives – inspired by take away messages from the panel sessions and testimonials:

- *We see how the current polycrisis can generate drivers for change*
- *We see academia's potential to reach out, to go outside, to listen and to collaborate*
- *We see multiple ways to be a socially responsible neighbour, to fight the danger of ignorance and cynicism, to ..*
- *We learn from unexpected answers to unasked questions*
- *We see ways for universities to keep up with the pace of society*

The next steps WP8 will therefore take:

- *look into possibilities to organize a meet-up between university and community representatives more often, ideally in a live setting in one of the YUFE partner cities*
- *integrate both the lessons learned and the ideas and challenges identified at the conference into the community engagement framework*

This way, we aim to contribute to the main conclusion of the event: it is of great importance that communities and universities keep talking, and YUFE can make a substantial contribution to this for the benefit of all partners.

4. Communication & Dissemination

Figure 2 YUFE CONFERENCE visual

YUFE CommUNIty Conference 2024: connecting university & communities was the first edition of such as conference within YUFE Alliance. It was important to promote conference, not only within the YUFE alliance members, but also within their (YUFE) local communities.

A dedicated subpage at the university website was created where all information about the conference were published and where a streaming link was provided (no pre-registration was required for the online participation).

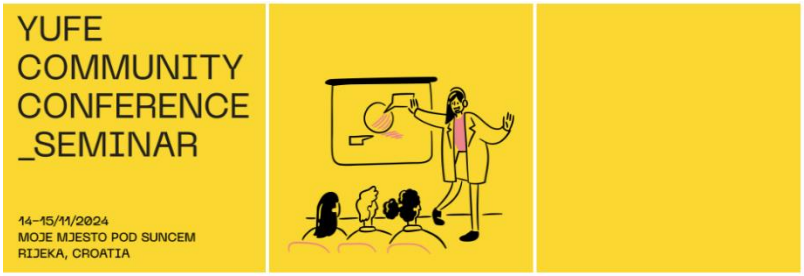

Figure 3 Social Media post

Also, a Communication Team created conference visual, social media posts, and web article and event. Partner universities within the YUFE alliance amplified the message by sharing event details through their networks.

Following the event, recordings of key sessions will be uploaded also to the YUFE website and YouTube channel, accompanied by summaries and key takeaways to extend the conference's impact. A short digital report compiling insights from panelists and participants will be distributed in December 2024.

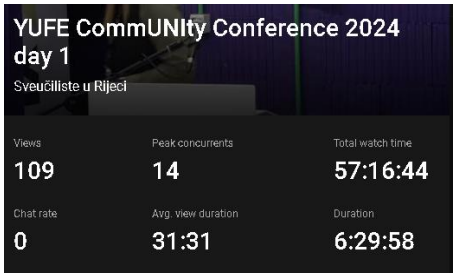

Figure 4 Analytics for the online participation_Day1

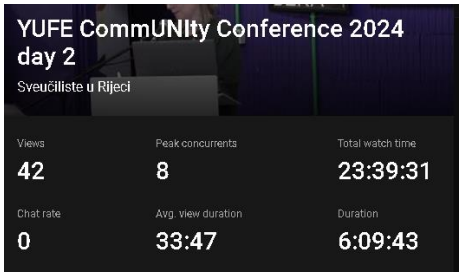

Figure 5 Analytics for the online participation_Day2

5. Annex

1. YUFE CommUNIty Conference 2024 Agenda
2. Biographies of Active participants
3. List of participants

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Annex 1 YUFE CommUNIty Conference 2024 Agenda

14–15
11/24

YUFE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE – SEMINAR: CONNECTING COMMUNITY & UNIVERSITIES

INTRODUCTION

YUFE is building a leading model of the European University striving to expand its impact beyond partner universities, and becoming a truly socially responsible part of each local community. YUFE Conference on university-community relations is a dynamic event which brings together university leaders, academics, researchers, students and community actors to present YUFE accomplishments, as well as to explore diverse YUFE strategies for fostering positive relationships between universities and their surrounding communities.

DATE/LOCATION

14–15/11/2024
RIJEKA

MY PLACE UNDER THE SUN
Janka Polića Kamova 19,
Rijeka, Croatia

ORGANIZERS

UNIRI | YUFE

THURSDAY
14/11/24
MY PLACE UNDER THE SUN
Janka Polića Kamova 19, Rijeka

TIME	EVENT	DESCRIPTION
9:00—9:30	REGISTRATIONS	
9:30—10:00	WELCOMING REMARKS	
10:00—11:00	THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BEING COMMUNITY ENGAGED UNIVERSITIES	Snježana Prijić Samaržija, Rector, University of Rijeka
11:00—11:30	COFFEE BREAK	
11:30—12:45	PANEL 1 WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME (WIFM) —UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE Moderator: Silvia Gallart Parramon, Universidad Carlos III Madrid	Magdalena Barwiołek, Vice-Rector for International Relations, Nicolaus Copernicus University Constantinos Deltas, University of Cyprus Aleksandra Kuchta, student member of YUFE Help Desks Laurence Allard, Sorbonne Nouvelle University Vedran Kružić, EDIH, Prigoda
12:45—13:45	LUNCH	
13:45—16:00	PRESENTATIONS 1 YUFE CHERRY PICKED COLLABORATIONS	My Place Under the Sun: Bojana Ćulum Ilić, University of Rijeka RaProChe, Caroline Masson, Sorbonne Nouvelle University Disconnected yet in the spotlight: energy poverty in Cañada Real Galiana: Ulpiano Ruiz-Rivas, Universidad Carlos III Madrid Death Care: Building the framework for a sustainable funeral industry in a superdiverse society: Katrien Schaubroeck, University of Antwerp Refugee Project Maastricht: Mohanad Salloum & Azia Lafleur, RPM Community Relations in Bremen/Germany: Mirja Uschkureit, University of Bremen
16:00—16:15	WRAP UP 1ST DAY	
19:00	JOINT DINNER	

ORGANIZERS

FRIDAY
15/11/24
MY PLACE UNDER THE SUN
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TIME	EVENT	DESCRIPTION
9:30—10:00	WALK IN & COFFEE	
10:00—10:45	CHARITY OR JUSTICE? NGOS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS FIGHTING CHILD POVERTY	Zoran Grozdanov, PhD, CeKaDe, My Place Under the Sun
10:45—11:45	PANEL 2 WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME (WIFM) —COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE Moderator: Cheyenne Dohmen, Maastricht University	Johan Dexters, societal stakeholder in CER project Death Care, Antwerp Bartosz Pilitowski, Court Watch Poland Foundation Ulpiano Ruiz-Rivas, Universidad Carlos III Madrid Mohanad Salloum, Refugee Project Maastricht
11:45—12:15	COFFEE BREAK	
12:15—12:45	TEFCE – TOWARDS A EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION	Thomas Farnell, Institute for the Development of Education
12:45—14:45	PRESENTATIONS 2 YUFE CHERRY PICKED COLLABORATIONS	University's SeniorCitizen community: Thomas Neumann, University of Bremen Pilot for refugees or asylum-seeking women: how can university train and foster integration: Silvia Gallart Paramon & Victor Gros, Universidad Carlos III Madrid YUFE volunteering at the Business Support Centre in Toruń: Piotr Zariczny, Business Support Centre in Toruń Biobanking and the Cyprus Human Genome Project: Constantinos Deltas, University of Cyprus ECOProd: Laurent Creton & Laurence Allard, Sorbonne Nouvelle University
14:45—15:45	LUNCH	
15:45—16:30	NEXT STEPS & CLOSING REMARKS Moderator: Els Grieten, University of Antwerp	Community Engagement Network & YUFE Community Engagement Declaration

ORGANIZERS

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Annex 2 Biographies of Active participants

THURSDAY
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YUFE CONFERENCE & COMMUNITY MEETING

SPEAKERS

SNJEŽANA PRIJIĆ SAMARŽIJA

Rector, University of Rijeka

Snježana Prijić Samaržija, Ph.D., is a Full Professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Rijeka. An expert in social philosophy, political epistemology, and applied ethics, she is the key founder and first director of the University of Rijeka Foundation. She has also founded and directs the Centre for Advanced Studies South-East Europe. Before her rector's mandate, she was the vice-rector for students and studies for eight years. Rector Prijić-Samaržija was appointed to the Steering Committee to draft the European University Association (EUA) Strategy plan (2020). She was president of the Alps Adriatic Rectors Conference and Young European Research University Network (YERUN), a member of the Strategy Board of the European University Alliance – Young Universities for Future of Europe (YUFE), and a member of the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practices at the Council of Europe. She is the president of Rectors Forum of South East Europe and Wester Balkans.

SILVIA GALLART PARRAMÓN

Director of Institutional Relations and Sustainable Development, UC3M

Silvia is Director of Institutional Relations and Cooperation at UC3M, where she works since 2004. She has been Director of International Relations and Cooperation between 2014 and 2022, and since 2004 until 2014, Director of the University Development Cooperation Office. With a Diploma in Translation and a Degree in Political Science, she has also been involved in the Spanish Rector's Conference as a Secretary of the Cooperation for Development Group and she has served as Director of the University Development Cooperation Observatory (OCUD) between 2012 and 2014. She has been involved in the international networks such as YERUN and the European University YUFE since their inception. She coordinated international mobility and cooperation programmes mostly funded by Erasmus+, university local and international volunteering programmes as well as international development projects both in Europe and in Latin America or Africa.

MAGDALENA BARWIOŁEK

Vice-Rector for International Relations, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland

Magdalena Barwiolek„ graduate of the Faculty of Chemistry at NCU in Toruń. In 2019, she received a postdoctoral degree in science, with specialization in chemical sciences. Scientifically, she is interested in issues related to imine systems, coordination compounds of copper, zinc or silver, among others, the phenomenon of luminescence, OLEDs, and sensory systems. She directs the HORIZON Europe SENSACORN4 grant on novel optical nanocomposite sensors for the analysis of micro- and macronutrients in corn plants, in collaboration with researchers from Italy, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, France, and Ukraine. From 2021 to 2024, she served as an Associate Dean for Organization and Collaboration at the Faculty of Chemistry. She was also a member of the Faculty Committee for Educational Quality, as well as the Program Council of the chemistry major. In addition, for years she has been active in the Team for Promotion and Popularization of Science at the Faculty of Chemistry.

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YUFE CONFERENCE

YUFE COMMUNITY

SPEAKERS

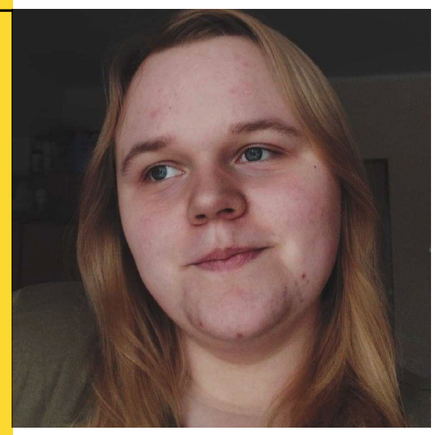
CONSTATINUS DELTAS

Professor of Medical & Molecular Genetics, Medical School, University of Cyprus

Professor Deltas graduated in 1982 from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens with a degree in Pharmaceutics. He earned his PhD in Biochemistry at Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, USA in 1988.
In 2002, he was elected to the position of Genetics Professor at the newly created Department of Biological Sciences of the University of Cyprus. He served twice as elected Chairman and had a key role in establishing the Department, implementing undergraduate and graduate study programs and hiring new faculty. Since September 1, 2020, he is a Professor at the Medical School of the University of Cyprus. He founded and directed the Molecular Medicine Research Centre and most recently the Centre of Excellence for Biobanking and Biomedical Research. The Centre of Excellence maintains and develops the first and largest Biobank in Cyprus, as a national medical research infrastructure.

ALEKSANDRA KUCHTA

NCU student, Poland



YUFE Civic Star Awardee and a master's student in Information Architecture at the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń. She has been actively involved in the Information Verification and Cyberpathology Prevention Clinic (part of the YUFE service-learning Help Desks network), whose mission is to transfer knowledge and support the development of skills and competencies in information verification, cyberthreat, and cyberpathology prevention. Her research interests include media education, fact-checking, and OSINT. She enjoys going to the cinema and museums with friends.

LAURENCE ALLARD

IRCAV-Sorbonne Nouvelle

Laurence Allard is a researcher at IRCAV-Sorbonne Nouvelle. She is currently working on the relationships between ecology, culture, and digital technology. Her latest book, co-coordinated with Alexandre Monnin and Nicolas Nova, is Ecologies du smartphone, Editions Le Bord de l'eau (2022).
The project presented is a survey with professionals from the cinema and audiovisual sector in France in the legal development of an eco-production label and the deployment of reflective practices regarding the material methods of film production.

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YUFE COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

SPEAKERS

VEDRAN KRUŽIĆ

EDIH, Prigoda

Vedran Kružić graduated from the Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka. From 2002 to 2012, he held the positions of manager for key business users, manager of business sales for the West region, and manager of sales to key business users and state institutions in Hrvatski Telekom d.d. In 2002, he was an assistant to the Minister of Economy for trade and the internal market. In 2018, he was appointed as Director of the Regional Development Agency of the Primorje-Gorski kotar County (Prigoda), a public institution whose activities are aimed at providing expert and advisory assistance in the preparation and implementation of projects and the creation of strategic development documents for public law bodies.

BOJANA ĆULUM ILIĆ

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka

Bojana Ćulum Ilić is a full professor at the Department of Education, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. Her research focuses on engaged university, engaged teaching, learning pedagogy, and youth civic education. She is one of the experts that contributed to the development of TEFCE Toolbox, the first and only (European) institutional self-reflection framework for community engagement in higher education. She collaborates frequently with civil society organisations, public institutions, and local authorities on numerous projects in the local community.
She is the current Director of the University of Rijeka Foundation and serves as a member of the National Council for Youth Work. She is also a Fulbright alumna (Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, 2015/2016).

CAROLINE MASSON

Sorbnne Nouvelle University

Caroline Masson is a professor at the Linguistics Department of Sorbonne Nouvelle University and in the CLESTHIA research unit. Her research and teaching focus on language acquisition in children under six, following three guidelines: the dynamics of adult-child interactions, language practices in educational, clinical and school contexts, and the development of speech corpora for research in language acquisition and clinical linguistics. Since 2018, she has been leading the RaProChe project, a research project on childcare settings.

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SPEAKERS

ULPIANO RUIZ-RIVAS

Universidad
Carlos III
Madrid

Ulpiano Ruiz-Rivas Hernando studied at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid where he obtained a degree in Industrial Engineering in 1991. After a two-year fellowship at CERN (AT division, Vacuum Group), he joined the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid in 1994. He presented his PhD Thesis in 2000 (about PIV measurements and visualization techniques on forced, co-flowing water jets).
Ulpiano Ruiz-Rivas currently works at the Department of Thermal and Fluids Engineering, University Carlos III de Madrid. His current areas of interest focus on the energy vulnerability of households and communities, both in Europe and in undersupplied regions.
He participated in the consolidated Research Groups Energy Systems Engineering, Appropriate Technologies for Sustainable Development and, since 2023, in the research group Technique and Ecological Humanities (THECO). He also participates in the Cooperation Group Engineering for Human Development (IDH), a consolidated group of the UC3M with more than ten years of activity.

KATRIEN SCHAUBROECK

University of
Antwerp

Katrien Schaubroeck is a full professor at the Philosophy Department of the University of Antwerp. She specializes in the domains of moral psychology and feminist philosophy. She wrote on moral emotions such as shame, guilt, love, and grief.
She published a book for a wide audience on the philosophy of Iris Murdoch (Letterwerk 2020). She defended her PhD on the topic of practical reasons in 2008, after which she published The Normativity of What We Care About (Leuven University Press, 2013). With Kristien Hens she co-founded Metrodora, a Health Humanities Expertise Centre, at the University of Antwerp. From 2024-2028, she will run the interdisciplinary project 'Death Care: Building the framework for a sustainable funeral industry in a superdiverse society', co-created together with the funeral industry and other relevant societal actors (religious communities, local and federal government).

AZIA LAFLEUR

Refugee Project
Maastricht

Azia Lafleur, Interdisciplinary scholar and community project manager. Raised in Spain, and of Dutch, American and Ecuadorian heritage. Master's graduate in Cultural Studies specializing in Health Humanities. Currently on the Advisory Board of Refugee Project Maastricht, and a research assistant at Museum Vrolik at Amsterdam University Hospital. Azias' academic foundation is complemented by her professional expertise in collaborative community engagement, organizational leadership, and diversity and inclusion efforts. She is committed to applying creative and critical thinking to real-world felt challenges. Her work, passion and intercultural sensitivity are intrinsically informed by personal migration and health background.

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YUFE CONFERENCE COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

SPEAKERS

MOHANAD SALLOUM

Refugee Project
Maastricht

With a background in International Business, his work at Rode Kruis Nederland (Red Cross) and Refugee Project Maastricht (RPM) is driven by a mission to foster sustainable community empowerment. As the Cultural Café Team Leader at RPM, Mohanad leverages his skills in cross-cultural communication, event coordination, and international NGO collaboration to support refugees and asylum seekers in their integration journey.
Mohanads' approach is centred around creating inclusive environments and facilitating constructive dialogue. Their team's efforts have enabled a significant increase in the assimilation of diverse groups into the local community, with a focus on promoting mutual understanding and respect. He is committed to connecting with organizations and individuals to further collective impact on social sustainability and cultural integration.

MIRJA USCHKUREIT

Academy HERE
AHEAD Bremen,
Germany

Mirja Uschkureit is a marketing and communication expert at the Academy HERE AHEAD, a joint institution of the five state-run universities in the Federal State of Bremen, Germany. Furthermore, she is responsible for the program coordination of the Foundation Program :prime. The Academy HERE AHEAD with its :here programs, studies, and :prime program offers student preparation on Bremen and is thereby an equivalent to a Studienkolleg.
Since 1998, Mirja Uschkureit is working in the field of Marketing and Communication. From 2011 to 2016, she was Content Manager at the University of Bremen and responsible for the central website of the University. Since fall 2016, she is part of the Academy team. Her expertise is student marketing and student recruitment. She is a member of the Bremen Network for Scientific Communication.

FRIDAY
15/11/24
MY PLACE
UNDER THE
SUN
Janka Polića
Kamova 19,
Rijeka

YOUR COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

SPEAKERS

ZORAN GROZDANOV

CeKaDe, My Place Under the Sun

Zoran Grozdanov is a lecturer at the Protestant Faculty of Theology Matthias Flacius Illyricus, University of Zagreb, Croatia. Grozdanov is the founder and editor of Ecumenica and Ars haeretica series at Ex Libris in Rijeka, Croatia. He has also coordinated the national initiative "No VAT on Food Donations," which succeeded in tax exemptions for all food donations to charities in Croatia. His works include Repugnant Word: The Death of God in Early Hegel and Early Moltmann (2016) in Croatian; an issue of Concilium: International Journal of Theology called Religion and Identity: Theology in Postconflict Societies (2015) in English, German, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, and Croatian; Faith in a Dialogue: Conversation Between Secular and Religious Domain (2017) in Croatian; and coedited with Ryan McAnnally Linz and Matthew Croasmun Flourishing in Christ: Essays in Honor of Miroslav Volf (Wipf & Stock, forthcoming).

JOHAN DEXTERS

Johan has dedicated over 30 years to the funeral industry, becoming a prominent figure in both national and international funeral services. For the past two decades, he has served as President of the Royal Federation of Belgian Funeral Directors (FUNEBRA), an organization that has represented funeral professionals since 1965. In addition to his national role, Johan is the First Vice President of FIAT–IFTA, the World Organization of Funeral Operatives, and will serve as President from 2026 to 2028. He is also Vice President and founding chairman of the Guarantee and Social Fund for Funeral Enterprises (PC320). His commitment to ethical standards extends to his board membership with the European Federation of Funeral Services (EFFS). Beyond his professional endeavours, Johan remains socially engaged, serving in various capacities such as Past Governor of Rotary International (2007–2008) and Vice President of the Royal College of Honorary Deans of Labor.

FRIDAY
15/11/24
MY PLACE UNDER THE SUN
Janka Polića Kamova 19, Rijeka

YOUTH COMMUNITY CONFERENCE

SPEAKERS

BARTOSZ PILITOWSKI

Court Watch Poland Foundation, Poland

Founder and president of the Court Watch Poland Foundation, an NGO that has engaged over 3.000 volunteers to monitor courts and improve the quality of justice. With a background in sociology of law, he conducts empirical research and analytical work on the right to a fair and public trial, procedural and restorative justice, and judicial management. He is the author of more than 50 academic articles and reports on various aspects of the justice system. In 2018, he received the Polish Business Roundtable Award for his work for the common good. His research and advocacy focus on fostering a judicial system where every individual entering the court can be confident of fair and respectful treatment.

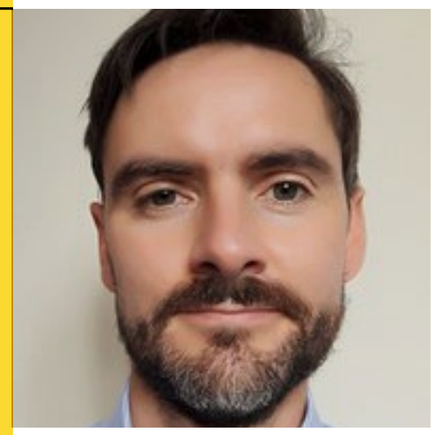
CHEYENNE DOHMEN

Maastricht University

As Project Leader of Civic Engagement Activities at Maastricht University and WP8 YUFE Representative, Cheyenne focuses on bridging the gap between students and local community. Through civic engagement activities, they support students to expand their social networks, enhance their sense of belonging, and contribute positively to society's essential steps toward becoming global citizens. Driven by mutual respect, enthusiasm, and collaboration, she aims to build meaningful connections. Her background in Organisation Studies and experience in the public sector support her work in strengthening community ties, promoting social engagement, and connecting diverse stakeholders. Each new experience reinforces Cheyenne's commitment to creating a lasting impact through civic engagement.

THOMAS FARNELL

Higher Education Policy Expert at Institute for the Development of Education



Thomas Farnell works as a Higher Education Policy Expert at the Institute for the Development of Education, a think-tank for higher education based in Zagreb, Croatia.
His main area of interest is the social role and social responsibility of higher education. He has led a series of European-level projects to build the capacity of universities and policymakers for community engagement in higher education and he is leading a national network of experts on tacking educational inequality from early childhood to higher education.
He is a member of the European Commission's Network of Experts on the Social Dimension of Education and Training (NESET) and is the main author of the European Commission reports Community engagement in higher education: trends, practices and policies (2020) and The impact of COVID-19 on higher education: a review of the emerging evidence (2021).

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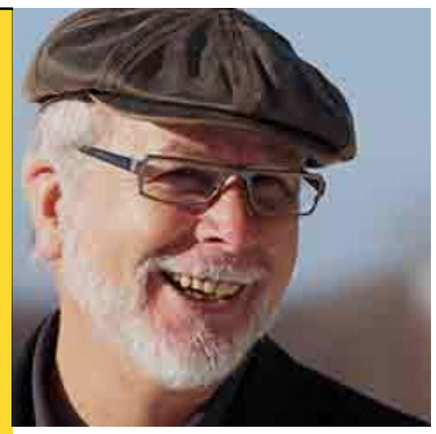
SPEAKERS

THOMAS NEUMANN



Up until his retirement a few years ago, Thomas was a high school teacher of German literature, politics, and Protestant religion. Thomas enjoys a life full of culture and art and wanted to remain active after retirement by spending his time on something inspiring, meaningful and fun. As part of the University's Senior Citizen community, Thomas supports the international students and researchers and helps them understand the peculiarities of German culture. Due to his empathy and willingness to listen, he is successful in helping international guests carry out their studies and research in Germany. He himself utilizes the University to further explore his interests and hobbies such as theatre and cultural involvement.

VICTOR GROS

Universidad
Carlos III
Madrid

Victor has been working at UC3M since January 2023 as part of the Institutional Relations and Cooperation Unit. Within YUFE, he actively participates in WP8 Civic and Community Engagement, coordinating UC3M local volunteering and help desk programmes. He is also involved in WP3 Lifelong Learning, particularly in the task dedicated to the upscaling and upgrading of the YUFE Stars.

From 2021 to 2023, he worked as a scientific cooperation officer at the French Embassy in Spain. Before that time, he volunteered for several months at the House of Europe, in Paris. He has a dual Master's degree in the International Strategy of Local Stakeholders from Sciences Po Grenoble (France) and Universidad del Norte (Colombia), as well as a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Université Lumière Lyon 2 (France).

PIOTR ZARICZNY

Business Support
Centre in Toruń,
Poland

Piotr Zariczny is an Economic promotion expert at the Business Support Centre of the City of Toruń, member of the YUFE4Postdocs Selection Committee, and the Dronetech World Meeting Scientific Council. Piotr has a PhD of Social Sciences in the field of Politics and Media Studies. He is an academic teacher at the State University of Appliad Sciences in Wloclawek, sworn translator of German, ISO 9001, 14001 and 18001 management system auditor.

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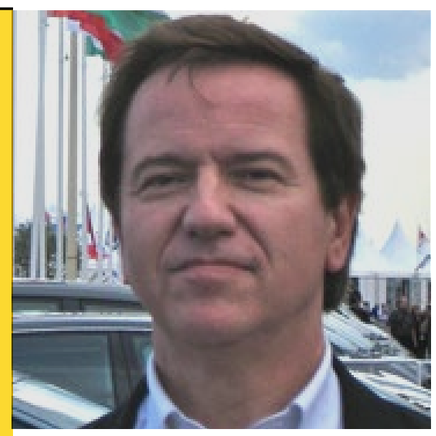
SPEAKERS

LAURENT CRETON

University
Sorbonne
Nouvelle



Laurent Creton is a researcher at the University Sorbonne Nouvelle. Member of the IRCAV and the LabEx ICCA, he is currently working on the economy of cinema, audiovisual and new medias, with a special interest in relationships between ecology, culture, and digital technology. He has published numerous articles, and 15 books devoted to these issues, including L'Économie du cinéma, Armand Colin, 2024; Cinéma et stratégies: économie des interdépendances (ed.), PSN, 2008; "The Political Economy of French Cinema. Attendance and Movie Theaters", in A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema, 2015.
The project presented is a survey with professionals from the cinema and audiovisual sector in France in the legal development of an eco-production label and the deployment of reflective practices regarding the material methods of film production.

ELS GRIETEN

University of
Antwerp

As coordinator of the University of Antwerp's science communication team, Els Grieten helps researchers build bridges to society. This includes organizing hands-on activities for children, lectures and science bars, connecting researchers to video and podcast platforms, and providing them with opportunities to explore and try out their communication skills. She is currently a co-chair of an interuniversity working group on science communication at the Flemish Interuniversity Council and co-represents the Antwerp University Association (AUHA) science communication team at the AUHA board. Science communication being a bridge between academia and society brought Els to contribute to the YUFE focus on society engagement.