

**Connecting and Building Democratic Space
Across Europe:
YOUROPE Consortium Gathers in Brussels**
<https://yourope-project.eu/>



Researchers and partners from across Europe gathered in Brussels this month for the latest YOUROPE Horizon Europe consortium meeting, hosted at the Coventry University Brussels Hub. For many participants, it was the first opportunity to finally meet in person at this scale, which proved to be an energising moment that strengthened relationships, deepened collaboration, and helped align the next stages of this ambitious research project.

Reflecting on the meeting, Coventry University Research Fellow Dr. Kayden J Schumacher noted:

“It was incredibly refreshing to finally meet so many of our partners and colleagues face-to-face. The energy in the room made it clear just how vital in-person connection is for meaningful collaboration across a project with so many intricate moving parts.”

The meeting, the third of its kind for some members of the consortium at the Brussels Hub, provided an important platform to share emerging work from the Community Led Research and Action (CLRA) initiatives taking place throughout the consortium. Dr. Luca Morini and Dr. Kayden J Schumacher presented several CLRAs currently underway in Coventry, developed in partnership with local community groups and Coventry University students.

For example, Luca and Kayden have been supporting a CLRA with master’s students in Project Design to co-create new energy interfaces with the help of Coventry Green New Deal and residents, for a recently developed net-zero neighbourhood in Hillfields, a neighbourhood Coventry. The issues surrounding the current interfaces are that they were developed with vastly different users in mind, and whilst bringing in technologically advanced energy infrastructure, many residents struggle to turn on their basic heating.

Another CLRA involves co-producing an art and activism exhibition between a local LGBT+ youth group and Coventry University psychology students. The exhibition is exploring creative methods of civic expression and democratic engagement, specially around issues currently affecting LGBT+ youth, their rights and their experiences.

Importantly, these CLRA projects are entirely driven by young people and community members, leading to far greater impact and significance not only for the research but for the young people and the community overall. The role of the research team has been to help facilitate the conditions for underrepresented youth and communities to lead the work and imagine sustainable democratic futures for their communities, including policy pathways to influence policy development up to European level policy making.

These local projects will form part of the wider Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) CLRA-COIL exchanges designed within the YOUROPE project, led by Professor Katherine Wimpenny, a recognised scholar in COIL pedagogy research internationally. Working together at Coventry University, Katherine and Kayden are developing structures to connect CLRA teams across YOUROPE partner countries (8 in total), supporting them to share knowledge, collaborate on outputs, and build cross-border CLRA-COIL youth networks and exchanges.

“Supporting Professor Katherine Wimpenny in developing the CLRA–COIL manual and getting these interactions going is a real privilege as her leadership and expertise in COIL are shaping a model that can meaningfully connect youth-led research across Europe and build underrepresented youth self-efficacy around democracy,” Kayden mentioned.

In addition to CLRA and CLRA-COIL development, the project continues to work toward linking community-generated insights with policy at local, national, and EU levels. Dr Mehmet Karakus from CU as well as YOUROPE researchers across the university partners in YOUROPE have also carried out an extensive review of academic literature on European Citizenship, democracy learning, and youth political efficacy, with a particular focus on how underrepresented young people develop confidence to participate in democratic spaces.

The Brussels meeting marked an important milestone for building momentum across YOUROPE. The in-person meeting renewed a sense of connection, commitment and shared purpose which will continue to guide the next phase of project delivery as partners work collectively to support underrepresented youth engagement, civic imagination, and democratic participation across Europe.



yourope-project.eu



... Post Bellum

