D2

Discussion

Proposer: Green Youth of Serbia (decided on: 17.11.2026)

Title: **Whose River Is It? Citizen Power in Environmental Decisions**

Environmental decisions directly affect the lives and livelihoods of local communities, yet the people most affected by these decisions are often given little meaningful influence over them. Public consultations and participation mechanisms may formally exist, but their actual impact on decision-making is frequently limited, particularly in contexts where democratic institutions and civic space are under pressure.

Across Eastern Europe, local communities have mobilised against projects threatening rivers, forests and agricultural land. These experiences demonstrate that environmental protection is closely connected to democratic participation, access to information and the ability of citizens to hold decision-makers accountable.

This session will explore what makes public participation meaningful rather than merely procedural. Through a simulated public consultation and the exchange of experiences from different countries, participants will examine how communities can influence environmental decisions and identify practical tools that youth and civil society organisations can use to strengthen democratic participation at the local level.