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NAVIGATING THE GREEN FUTURE: DIVERGENT YOUTH CLIMATE NARRATIVES IN SLOVENIA

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Navigating the Green Future: Divergent Youth Climate Narratives in Slovenia

In January 2024, activists from *Mladi za podnebno pravičnost* (MZPP), a youth climate justice movement in Slovenia, staged a die-in outside the country's Ministry of Environment. The young people lay motionless on the pavement, blocking the entrance to a ministerial meeting, and issuing five demands for the revision of the country's National Energy and Climate Plan. Later that year, *Mladinski svet Slovenije* (MSS), the National Youth Council of Slovenia, co-organized a government-funded youth forum with the same Ministry to help shape Slovenia's position for COP29. These two events were published on Facebook by two youth organizations, capturing different youth climate engagement in the country. Both were driven by the same crisis, but they were telling fundamentally different stories about what that crisis is, who is responsible for it, and what it will take to address it. This essay examines the difference and explores what it reveals about the limits of current climate governance.

Slovenia's Climate Gap and Study Context

MSS is Slovenia's national youth council. It represents more than 36 youth organizations and works through recognized institutional channels, including a joint Youth Climate Delegate Program with the Ministry of Environment. MZPP is an autonomous grassroots movement linked to Fridays for Future, with no formal state affiliation. They operate in the same country and respond to the same climate crisis, but they start from different assumptions about how political change happens.

Slovenia provides a sharp context for this comparison. Although Slovenia has been committed to the European Green Deal and an active National Energy and Climate Plan (NEPN) process, the SGI Network's 2024 environmental sustainability report placed it among the lower-performing EU member states in meeting its own 2030 climate targets. This gap between policy commitment and delivery is the landscape on which both youth organizations operate, and where their divergence becomes consequential.

This essay collected and analyzed climate-related Facebook posts published by MSS and MZPP between 2020 and 2026, with 21 posts from MSS and 24 posts from MZPP. Both organizations use Facebook and Instagram as their main online communication channels. However, Facebook provides a larger follower base, more stable public archives, and a richer corpus of long-form organizational communication, including policy statements, campaign documentation, event explanations, and press-style announcements. For these reasons, this study selected Facebook as the primary platform for research. The analysis applies narrative analysis across eight dimensions (problem definition, narrative actor positioning, causality, conflict form, temporality, scalar positioning, action script, and affective register) to examine not just what each organization says about climate change, but how their digital practices construct two distinct forms of political engagement.

What the Data Shows: Eight Dimensions of Divergence

Across the dataset, the same lines of difference keep re-appearing. They show up in how each organization defines the problem, who it treats as responsible, what kind of action it asks for, and how it positions young people in relation to institutions. The table below summarizes those recurring differences in eight dimensions.

DIMENSION	MSS	MZPP
Problem definition	Governance challenge: addressable through better coordination, policy reform, and inclusive participation	Systemic crisis: capital's pursuit of profit produces climate breakdown structurally; better governance alone is insufficient
Narrative actor positioning	Youth as governance partners contributing expertise and civic service within existing institutions	Youth as political subjects who refuse marginalization; capital interests and complicit decision-makers as antagonists
Causality	Insufficient institutional ambition and coordination gaps	Capital logic and the political actors who serve it; capitalism as the structural system that generates crisis
Conflict form	Negotiable policy disagreement, resolvable through better process design and expert dialogue	Structural antagonism between civil society and capital; consultation processes described as legitimizing facades

Temporality	Long-range: 2030 Agenda, COP cycles, 2050 planning horizons, climate is a multi-decade institutional project	Immediate: *takoj in zdaj* (immediately), crisis is happening now; incremental reform is insufficient
Scalar positioning	National-to-global: EU framework, UN mechanisms, international delegation as the primary channels	Local-to-global simultaneously: Slovenian NEPN, Serbian lithium mining, local pollution, all linked to global capital
Action script	Apply, attend, co-design, represent; participation as entry into existing governance processes	Protest, blockade, assemble, link struggles; participation as pressure and construction of alternative institutions
Affective register	Cooperative, professional, responsibility-centered institutional language that signals partnership	Urgent, denunciatory, solidarity-centered political language that signals confrontation

How Each Organization Frames the Problem and Why It Matters

One of the key divergences in climate narratives between the two organizations lies in how they describe the problem. That difference matters because once the problem is framed differently, everything else shifts with it: who is responsible, what counts as meaningful participation, and what kind of action seems reasonable.

For MSS, climate change is a governance challenge: existing institutions are not solving it well enough, but they can be

improved. The state, the EU, and the UN are legitimate partners. Forum reports, delegate programs, and sustainability handbooks are the appropriate outputs.

MZPP operates on a different premise. In its posts, climate breakdown is not mainly presented as a matter of weak coordination or insufficient ambition. It is linked to political choices, profit-driven interests, and a wider economic logic that perpetuates the same kind of crisis. Sometimes the posts name immediate decision-makers; sometimes they point to the system behind them. Often, they do both at once.

One of the clearest examples came in November 2023, when MZPP responded to the first recorded breach of the 2°C threshold with a post that combined crisis language, blame, and mobilization in just a few lines:

Svet plava in gori, odločevalcev in kapitala pa to ne skrbi. Le skozi povezovanje bojev se bomo lahko zoperstavili kapitalističnim silam.

[The world is flooding and burning, but decision-makers and capital do not care. Only by linking struggles can we confront capitalist forces.]

— MZPP, Facebook, 2023-11-22

This framing was visible as early as 2020, when MZPP interrupted an environment minister's speech to reject what it described as the myth of green growth, and it has remained consistent throughout the entire study period. For MSS, the consultation processes through which climate policy is shaped are legitimate instruments with which to engage. For MZPP, in its own characterization, these same processes risk becoming facades for preserving the existing situation. When MZPP organized a People's Climate Assembly outside the government building in June 2023, explicitly positioned as an alternative to the official NEPN consultation, and submitted a 15-page formal response demanding 65% rather than the government's proposed 22% emissions reduction, it was not rejecting participation. MZPP was proposing a different theory of what genuine participation requires.

How Each Organization Turns Digital Space into Political Practice

Another key finding from this study is how the two organizations use Facebook as a political engagement platform. MSS uses Facebook in a recognizable organizational way. Posts consistently tag co-organizing partners: the Ministry of Environment, the Association for the United Nations for Slovenia, affiliated youth bodies. The communicative act is coordination within a governance ecosystem. They also circulate deadlines and registration links, and direct readers to forums, delegate programs, or sustainability initiatives. The implicit reader is a motivated young person seeking pathways into institutional participation. MSS uses the platform to connect young people to existing institutional pathways and to make those pathways legible and accessible.

MZPP employs Facebook differently. The noted November 2023 post did not tag partner organizations; it tagged the Government, Parliament, five individual ministries, three political parties, and four media organizations. They were making responsibility public, other than coordinating a partner network. Naming power by name in a public post, and routing that post to media organizations at the same time, enacts MZPP's theory that visibility and pressure are the primary instruments through which civil society can influence governance. Their posts are usually structured accordingly: problem statement, responsibility attribution, concrete demands, call for physical presence, and political interventions rather than procedural announcements.

MSS generally uses Facebook to bring young people closer to institutions. MZPP uses it to put institutions under pressure in public. That difference matters because it shows that the platform is not just carrying different messages – it is helping to organize different relationships between audiences, organizations, and political power.

The same contrast appears in how each organization links issues across scales. MSS tends to frame Slovenian youth participation through EU frameworks, UN mechanisms, and COP processes. Their posts usually move outward through established institutional channels, placing local action within a broader gov-

ernance structure. MZPP, by contrast, connects issues across scales in a more deliberate and more overtly political way. A Slovenian policy document is read alongside the Paris Agreement; a Serbian lithium mining conflict is tied to debates about the European green transition; and local pollution is linked to wider questions of capital and regulation. Facebook thus becomes a platform for MZPP to bring dispersed crises together into a coherent political argument.

What the Engagement Data Reveals

The engagement data adds another layer to the comparative picture. In MSS's case, most posts attracted limited visible response. Across the posts for which engagement data was available, the mean number of likes is 11.6, and the median is 3. Nineteen of the 21 posts received zero comments, and two posts received neither likes nor comments at all. The organization's highest-performing post, which was published in September 2024 and included an announcement of the second Youth Energy-Climate Forum, co-organized with the Ministry of Environment, received 100 likes and 16 comments, making it a significant outlier. These figures show visibility to a degree, not sustained online exchange. MSS did not regularly use the comment section to develop a conversation with its audience.

MZPP's engagement was markedly higher. Across 23 posts with available data, the mean number of likes is 75, and the median is 44. MZPP's highest-performing post, the January 2023 campaign against urban forest clearance on Ljubljana's Rožnik Hill, received 390 likes, 132 comments, and 191 shares. The difference is large enough to matter, but it should not be overstated. Higher engagement does not automatically mean deeper interaction. Moreover, MZPP did not consistently use comment threads to sustain extended dialogue with followers. What these figures show more clearly is that MZPP's posts generated a stronger visible response and circulated more widely within the audiences that encountered them.

The engagement gap is consistent with the narrative and

strategic differences identified above. Posts from the MZPP are often sharper, more localized, and easier to interpret as political signals of agreement or solidarity. Posts from MSS are more procedural and more closely tied to preexisting governance networks, which gives readers less reason to circulate them beyond those circles. Still, neither organization appears to be reaching a mass audience on Facebook. In both cases, the platform seems to be functioning within relatively small political publics rather than across Slovenian society at large. Besides, this finding suggests that Facebook is best seen in this dataset as a space of signaling, visibility, and issue articulation rather than as a place of sustained online dialogue. It also indicates that both organizations still depend heavily on offline networks and physical political presence, but that conclusion would require evidence beyond post-level metrics alone.

What This Means

The evidence suggests a structural imbalance that should be stated clearly. During the revision of Slovenia's National Energy and Climate Plan (NEPN), MSS participated through a forum co-organized with the Ministry of Environment. MZPP, by contrast, submitted a lengthy formal response, mobilized 48 supporting organizations, and organized a People's Climate Assembly outside the government building, but did not receive a comparable institutional response to its demands. The difference between the two organizations lies not in whether they participated, but in how their participation was institutionally received. This suggests that the current consultation architecture is structurally better equipped to recognize and absorb one form of youth engagement than the other.

These findings point to three broader challenges for climate governance. First, from the perspective of institutional responsiveness, it raises the question of whether organizations such as MZPP can participate in ways that are substantively heard, rather than absorbed into processes that preserve the appearance of inclusion without altering the terms of debate. Sec-

ond, the available platform data suggests that the visible reach of online engagement remains limited. On Facebook, neither MSS nor MZPP appears to be reaching a broad public, and the debate about climate ambition is unfolding within relatively narrow online circles on both sides. This should not be taken as a measure of youth participation in Slovenia more generally; it only indicates the limited scale of publicly visible engagement on the platforms analyzed here. A fuller assessment of broader youth participation would require additional empirical research beyond single-platform metrics alone. Third, the findings also suggest that digital space is currently being used for signaling, visibility, and issue articulation more effectively than for sustained public dialogue. This pattern is not confined to Facebook. Instagram engagement is weaker still, reinforcing the view that these platforms function more as channels of public expression than as robust arenas of interactive communication. These challenges do not have simple solutions, but they do suggest that the way forward involves more than technical adjustments to existing consultation formats.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are addressed to two sets of stakeholders: first, institutional actors responsible for consultation and follow-up in climate governance; second, youth organizations and youth climate actors seeking to strengthen their public engagement.

- **For institutional actors: Improve visibility and institutional reception for non-partner youth organizations.**

Youth participation should not stop at access to consultation; it should also receive visible, traceable, and public follow-up.

- **For youth organizations and youth climate actors: Broaden the social reach of youth climate engagement beyond established activist and institutional circles.**

More local, school-based, and community-level formats could enable wider youth involvement beyond activist or institutional circles.

- **For youth organizations and youth climate actors: Develop more interactive forms of digital communication and public engagement.**

Social media should not be used for announcements and signaling only, but also for dialogue, clarification, and sustained exchange.

The first recommendation is addressed to institutional actors involved in climate governance in Slovenia. The NEPN case with MZPP shows that participation is not the same as recognition. MZPP submitted a lengthy formal response, mobilized supporting organizations, and created its own public forum around the consultation. However, these demands do not appear to have received a comparable institutional response, as suggested by MZPP's continued efforts to press for substantive engagement beyond the formal consultation process. The issue, then, is not simply whether such organizations can enter the process, but whether their participation is met with clear, traceable, and public forms of response. The same problem appears in the media sphere. Public visibility seems easier to secure for institutional actors than for grassroots organizations, which may help explain why media access needs to be actively fought for rather than taken for granted. A more credible system would make both consultation access and follow-up response more transparent for youth organizations, whether they work inside or outside formal institutional partnerships.

The second recommendation is directed at youth organizations and youth climate actors seeking to broaden their social reach. The platform data suggests that neither MSS nor MZPP is reaching a broad youth public through Facebook. Although it should not be viewed as a measure of youth participation in Slovenia as a whole, it does indicate that the public-facing debate captured here is unfolding within relatively limited circles. If climate governance is to speak to a wider range of young Slovenians, participation cannot depend solely on prior activist commitment or institutional affiliation. Youth organizations may need to supplement their existing communication practices with more local, school-based, and community-level formats that make partici-

pation easier for young people who do not consider themselves politically engaged.

The third recommendation is directed at youth organizations and youth climate actors in their use of digital platforms. In both cases, Facebook functions mainly as a channel for posting statements, announcements, and positions: MSS uses it to circulate institutional opportunities, while MZPP uses it to issue claims, demands, and public critiques. What is largely missing is sustained exchange. While these platforms create visibility, they do not currently support much back-and-forth discussion, clarification, or debate. The pattern appears to be even stronger on Instagram, where engagement is weaker still. This suggests that social media, as used here, remains closer to a space of signaling and public expression than to a robust arena of dialogue. If youth climate organizations are to build a wider online audience, they may need to experiment with more interactive formats that invite response, discussion, and ongoing exchange rather than just one-way transmission.

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