

VOICES

MAGAZINE FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

july 2025





In April, I was sitting on campus in Ankara, just thinking about summer internship plans. I had no idea that in just a few weeks, everything in my life would change. While browsing through the university's programs, I came across a three-month volunteering opportunity in Skopje, Macedonia. At that moment, I realized that something important was about to begin.

This had been a dream of mine since childhood: to live in a foreign country, meet people from different cultures, work together, and be part of something meaningful. Suddenly, that dream was becoming real. My close friend Efe and I were about to travel to a place we had never been before, not for vacation, but to contribute, grow, and explore.

From the moment we landed in Skopje, everything felt different. New faces, new languages, and a completely different way of life surrounded us. At first, we felt like strangers, but very quickly, this place started to feel like home.

Three months might not seem like much, but within those three months, I'm gaining dozens of new friendships, a broader perspective, and most importantly, a new version of myself.

I learned that sometimes life can change entirely through a single decision or an online application. Looking back now, I know this was one of the best choices I have made in years.

So, don't hesitate. Accept the challenge and live.

Furkan Ögüt

Во април, седев на кампусот во Анкара, размислувајќи за плановите за летна пракса. Немав поим дека за само неколку недели, сè во мојот живот ќе се промени. Додека ги разгледував универзитетските програми, најдов на тримесечна можност за волонтирање во Скопје, Македонија. Во тој момент сфатив дека нешто важно ме чека.

Ова беше мој сон уште од детството: да живеам во странство, да запознавам луѓе од различни култури, да работиме заедно и да бидам дел од нешто големо. Одеднаш, тој сон стануваше реалност. Јас и мојот другар Ефе требаше да патуваме на место каде што никогаш порано не сме биле, но не поради одмор, туку за да придонесеме, да учиме и да истражуваме.

Од моментот кога слетавме во Скопје, сè се чувствуваше поинаку. Нè опкружуваа нови лица, нови јазици и сосема поинаков начин на живот. На почетокот се чувствувавме како странци, но многу брзо ова место почна да го чувствуваме како дом.

Три месеци можеби не изгледаат многу, но во овој период стекнувам десетици нови пријателства, поширока перспектива и, најважно од сè, нова верзија од себе.

Научив дека понекогаш животот може целосно да се промени преку една одлука или онлајн апликација. Сега, гледајќи наназад, знам дека ова беше еден од најдобрите избори што сум ги направил во последниве години.

Затоа, не двоумете се. Прифатете го предизвикот и живејте.

Фуркан Огут

VCS Director

Nikola Stankoski

Coordinators

Andrej Naumovski
Goran Adamovski
Goran Galabov
Ewelina Chańska
Jolanta Ciopcińska

Volunteers

Jakub Pokuciński
Anna Wojdziak
Sophia Abegg
Maike Seuffert
Terry Ruart
Chloe Gaschy
Cassandre Journoud
Efe Özyalçın
Furkan Ögüt
Camille Baudouin
Youna Léauté-Guillet
Narjesse Ahrrouq
Loline Thomas

Translators

Kristina Stamenova

External Writers

Jona Cenameri
Luzie Ada Welker
Anastasija Ilievska

Photo on front cover:

Ewelina Chańska |
Canva

Photos on back cover:

Tatjana Dimovska |
Unsplash

Designers

Ewelina Chańska
Jakub Pokuciński
Anna Wojdziak
Sophia Abegg
Maike Seuffert
Chloe Gaschy
Cassandre Journoud
Furkan Ögüt
Efe Özyalçın
Camille Baudouin
Youna Léauté-Guillet
Narjesse Ahrrouq
Loline Thomas

Contact

Volunteers Centre Skopje
Emil Zola 3/3-1, 1000, Skopje
+389 22 772 095
vcs_contact@yahoo.com
www.vcs.org.mk



Erasmus+

VOICES magazine is coordinated, designed and created by ESC and local volunteers with support of Erasmus+ program.

topic of the month

- 4 **A summer of sport, youth and unity**
Camille Baudouin
- 34 **Лето на спорт, младешки дух и обединетост**
Ками Бодуен

interview

- 6 **Macedonia, a biodiversity hotspot**
Maïke Seuffert
- 16 **The Juggler and the Road**
Cassandre Journoud

opinion

- 8 **Drama first, love later**
Anna Wojdziak
- 12 **Beneath Big Brother's Relentless Gaze**
Jona Cenameri
- 18 **Relationships matter**
Sophia Abegg
- 26 **Nën Syrin e Pamëshirshëm të Vëllait të Madh**
Jona Cenameri
- 32 **What if Epicurus was right?**
Narjesse Ahrrouq

reportage

- 10 **Green travel or how to consider the journey as well as the destination**
Youna Léauté-Guillet
- 22 **A Retrospective on Beauty Influencer Culture**
Chloe Gaschy
- 30 **Different traditions, one goal**
Jakub Pokuciński

poetry

- 14 **Killing Annabel Lee**
Luzie Ada Welker

travel

- 20 **Cappadocia - the most fabulous face of nature**
Efe Özyalçın
- 28 **4 Countries, 4 Friends, 4 Unique Days**
Furkan Ögüt

erasmus+

- 24 **How 50 Strangers Became a Family Through Music**
Anastasija Ilievska



A summer of sport, youth and unity



All eyes on sport in Macedonia this July!

From July 20 to 26, 2025, Macedonia will host the 18th edition of the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF), a major event that promises to transform not only the country's capital, Skopje, but also the broader perception of what a small country can achieve on the international stage. Over 4,000 athletes aged 14 to 18, representing 48 countries, will compete in 15 sports across three cities: Skopje, Kumanovo, and interestingly, Osijek in Croatia, which will host gymnastics. It's a huge moment for Macedonia and for European sport.

Created in 1990 through the vision of Jacques Rogge, former president of the European Olympic Committee, the EYOF has become Europe's leading multi-sport event for young athletes. The first edition took place in Brussels in 1991, nearly two decades before the launch of a worldwide Youth Olympic Games. Since then, EYOF has grown into a major milestone for future Olympians, offering them a first taste of high-level international competition in an Olympic-like atmosphere.

This year marks the first time EYOF will be hosted in Macedonia. And for those of us who have been following the event for years, myself since 2015, especially for gymnastics, it feels incredibly special to see it come to this part of the Balkans. It's a statement that ambition, energy, and vision matter more than size. Macedonia is ready not just to host, but to impress.

Hosting this event is not only a logistical or sporting challenge, it's a cultural and symbolic moment. It's about showing the rest of Europe that Macedonia is dynamic, youthful, and full of potential.

While the country has hosted international competitions before, such as EuroVolley 2023, EYOF 2025 will be its biggest sporting event ever. The stakes are high, and the opportunities even higher. The legacy of EYOF will go far beyond a single week in July. It will include upgraded sports infrastructure, newly trained professionals, a revitalized volunteer network, and most importantly, a generation of

young people inspired by the Olympic values of respect, friendship, and excellence. With such an international event, this is a unique opportunity for Macedonia to show Europe just how dynamic, youthful and welcoming this country is. Through media coverage, international attendance, and broad public engagement, EYOF will shine a positive light on the country and open new opportunities for partnerships, investment, and growth.

There's something truly powerful about what an event like this can ignite. Just as France saw a rise in table tennis participation after its Olympic successes, Macedonia might see a youth sports revival sparked by the excitement and visibility of EYOF. Local kids will get to watch international athletes up close, maybe for the first time. They'll discover sports they've never seen before, meet role models, and dream bigger.

The event program is impressively diverse, showcasing both individual and team sports. The disciplines include athletics, badminton, 3x3 basketball, traditional basketball, canoe slalom, road and mountain biking, handball, swimming, shooting, table tennis, taekwondo, volleyball, and gymnastics. These events are about more than winning medals. They're about growth, connection, and passion. For many athletes, this will be their first taste of international competition. For the spectators, it will be a chance to witness history being made by athletes who could one day become global stars.

But none of this would be possible without the volunteers, around 800 of us, coming from across Europe, all working behind the scenes to keep everything running. From welcoming delegations to supporting athletes and handling logistics, volunteers will be the silent heroes of EYOF 2025. And I can say from personal experience: volunteering for an event like this is unforgettable. You don't just help out. You grow. You meet people from different cultures. You develop skills. You feel part of something much bigger than yourself.

For volunteers from Macedonia, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to represent your country, to share its culture and energy with the world, and to leave a lasting mark on the history of Macedonian sport. For sports lovers, this is a dream come true: being at the heart of the action, supporting athletes, and contributing to a festival that celebrates the Olympic values. That spirit of teamwork and collective energy will define the event.

EYOF isn't just for athletes or organizers, it's a celebration for the public, too. In Skopje, Kumanovo, and Osijek, locals and visitors alike will have access to competitions, cultural programs, educational activities, and a unique vibe in the country for free. Families, young people, and fans will get to experience the Olympic spirit up close, to cheer for their favorite teams, and to feel the thrill of being part of a major European event. And as often happens when a country hosts a major event, home athletes may shine even brighter, boosted by the energy of the crowd.

Whether you're a lifelong sports fan or simply curious, attending EYOF means supporting the next generation, experiencing the excitement of international competition up close, and feeling the pride of being part of a historic moment for Macedonia.

See you in Skopje.

Camille Baudouin

Sources:
skopje2025.sporteurope.org
eurolympic.org: European Youth Olympic Festival – a blend of sport, culture and education
european-games.org: EYOF





Macedonia, a biodiversity hotspot

Interview with Ivana Markoska

Barren mountain slopes, fields of flowers, green forests and wide lakes - Macedonia's nature is stunning and has an impeccable diversity and richness of biodiversity.

To learn more about this incredible ecosystem I had the chance to do an interview with Ivana Markoska,

in which she shared a bit of her knowledge about Macedonian nature including flora, fauna and fungi, especially in the national parks. So let's explore it together!

Can you briefly introduce yourself and your work as well as personal relation to biodiversity and nature in general?

Hi there!

My name is Ivana Markoska. I work as a graphic designer, illustrator and lecturer; and I am also a graduated Forestry Engineer, specialising in Landscape Architecture. Though my professional work is mostly focused on art and design; I've remained in close proximity to nature with volunteer field work - planting trees, nature walking, phenological observations; as well as through raising awareness for ecological subjects and including diverse plants, mushrooms etc. in my illustrative work.

Can you give us a short overview over the different biodiversity and ecosystems in the different regions of Macedonia?

Our country has a rich variety of ecosystems due to its diverse terrain, geography and climate. It is estimated that this tiny country is a home to 16,000 wild species. It includes mountainous forests, Mediterranean shrublands, freshwater lakes (which contain completely different microfloral and microfaunal ecosystems within themselves), rivers and river valleys, and highland pastures. This diversity supports many endemic and rare species,

making the country a biodiversity "hotspot" in Europe.

Let's focus on one national park now and dive deeper into it. The Galicica national park is beautifully located between the two biggest natural lakes of Macedonia and has an incredible amount of unique flora and fauna. Can you give us an overview over the flora, fauna and fungi in Galicica and their ecosystem and show us what is specifically unique about Galicica regarding the plant and fungi world?

To start with the flora - Galicica is very interesting because it has a unique mix of plant species. Certain parts of this mountain and entire national park are home to plants that flourish in sub-Mediterranean, warm, and dry climates, while others are dominated by species that thrive in extremely cold conditions. It is a home of 600 different plant species, some of which are endemic specifically to that region; for example,

the floral shrubs - *Centaurea galicicae*, *Dianthus galicicae*, *Festuca galicicae*, *Laserpitium ochridanum*; the succulent *Sempervivum galicum*; etc. There are also findings of the Macedonian Pine (*Pinus peuce*) - even though this tree is the symbol of the national park Pelister; it can also be found on the higher parts of Galicica.

An interesting mushroom to note is the *Geastrum fornicatum*, which is actually native to the United States and is strangely also found in this area. There are also many edible, and even hallucinogenic mushrooms!

In the fauna world, the most notable animals specific to the Balkans that can be found in Galicica are: the Balkan lynx, the Balkan snow vole, the Balkan mole and many others.

How is the state of the national parks and nature in general in Macedonia and especially the one of Galicica? How are humans affecting biodiversity?

Even though the nature in Macedonia is incredibly rich and diverse, there are many human-brought threats to its survival. Mostly illegal trafficking of endangered species, habitat degradation and climate change. For example, at the moment there is an active petition circulating online about saving the Macedonian grayling butterfly (*Pseudochazara cingovskii*); a rare butterfly, endemic to the Pletvar area in Macedonia. This butterfly is extremely endangered because of the illegal international trade between collectors, but also because of marble quarrying, directly destroying its habitat.

When it comes to Galicica specifically, I would say that the summer wildfires pose the biggest threat to the ecosystems. In 2024, on Galicica, almost during the entire month of August there were severe wildfires that extended for around 6500 hectares of land. A huge

portion of endemic plants to Galicica were burned, and many animal species lost their natural habitat. The local government believes that these wildfires were caused by human neglect and accidents.

Why is biodiversity important for a healthy ecosystem, what is being done to protect it and what would be needed in the future?

Everything in nature is circular. Biodiversity is important because it keeps nature healthy, balanced, functional and resilient. Different species all help in their own ways: pollinators help plants reproduce, plants feed many living species, predators control pest populations, decomposers recycle nutrients etc. When there are lots of different living things, nature is stronger and can better withstand problems like diseases, natural disasters and climate change. In Macedonia, there is more research done in the last few years, and there are active efforts for more places to become national parks. For example, Shar Planina was established as a national park in 2021, and this means that this is an area of very strict protection of natural resources. Still, there should be more funding into research and monitoring, more government involvement as well as heavier fines for human disruptors.

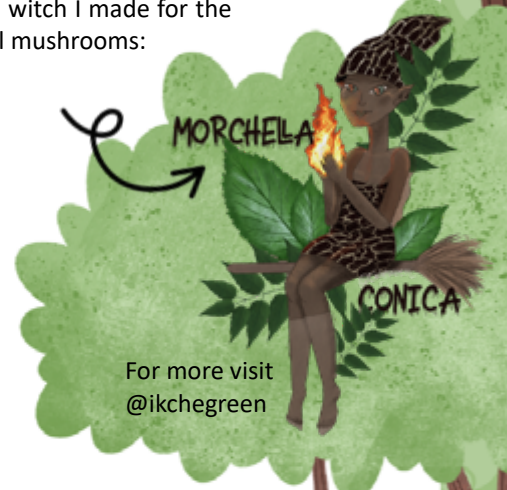
Lastly, do you have one or a few favourite plants or fungi that we can look out for while exploring the nature of Macedonia and what are their characteristics?

Though it's very hard to pick just one, I would like to add onto my previous comments about human disruptors of ecosystems. So, I would mention a mushroom that is very often the reason for people starting fires - namely, *Morchella Conica*, the morel mushroom.

Morels are extremely delicious mushrooms and they are known to be very expensive. Another curious fact about them is that they are the first fungi to appear in an area after a forest fire, because they thrive in the heated soil and the fire has cleared out competing life forms feeding from the soils' nutrients.

This is where human greed comes to play. Unfortunately, greedy people who want to sell the morels, often start forest fires in places where morels have previously been seen. They know that the fire will bring perfect conditions for the dormant mycelium to create fruiting bodies. They basically burn entire ecosystems for financial gain.

Last October I made an illustrative series of witches, where I represented different fungi and plants found in Macedonia through a witch. This is the witch I made for the morel mushrooms:



Are you already intrigued to go out in nature and experience it first-hand? Me too. Now after learning about it even more than before. So many different species, all with their own purpose resulting in one or many incredible (eco-) systems. So let's keep in mind to protect biodiversity and nature in any way to preserve this amazing nature. Finally, I would like to thank Ivana Markoska for this amazing interview.

Maïke Seuffert



Drama first, LOVE LATER

A group of conventionally attractive people arrives at the tropical island. The girls let out the obligatory pterodactyl squeak and proceed to compliment one another. Don't get too excited about the 'girls power' vibe, though... in just a few days they will most likely talk trash behind each other's backs. Next scene, the guys. You start to wonder if the participants' selection process consisted of a quick trip to a local gym and grabbing some random people. In a minute, they'll say something about the instant connection and having 'similar values' despite exchanging a total of three sentences with whoever they coupled up with... more or less enthusiastically. Here you are, a quick recipe for your new dating reality show to binge-watch on a Sunday evening. Do I sound like a hater yet? Actually, I'm not. I'm taking the popcorn and watching with you. And you *will* hear me talking about it for at least the whole month... sorry.

Some people love it, some people hate it. Reality TV started somewhere in the '90s with the idea of showing unscripted, real-life situations featuring ordinary people instead of actors. Through the years we got almost every possible subgenre: competition, survival, makeovers, cooking, crime and punishment, paranormal activity, and finally, the one we'll focus on today – dating shows.

The structure of these is usually more or less similar – take a group of people to a nice location, make them create couples that can change throughout the program, put them in challenges, and eliminate someone every few episodes. The most basic example following this scheme would be *Love Island*. Then there are slightly different variations, like *Too Hot To Handle* where contestants lose the prize money if they engage in any intimate behaviour, *Temptation Island* where already existing couples are separated and surrounded by (ridiculously flirty) singles in order to 'test their relationship', or *MILF Manor* where... actually, it's better to not talk about this one. Some of the series take more of the documentary format, like *90 Day Fiancé* following the struggles of couples usually consisting of a US citizen and a foreign partner, or *Love After Lockup* documenting the challenges faced by couples after one partner's time in prison. And finally, the show worth mentioning that gained crazy popularity recently is *Love Is Blind* – a 'social experiment' in which singles talk while not being able to see each other. The idea is to find out if they can find love based on emotional connections alone, without the influence of physical attraction.

The list of issues related to this type of shows is definitely longer than most relationships in them. The most discussed 'accusation' is that they are fake, with staged moments, scripted dramas and deceptive editing. In fact, even if participants' behaviour is genuine, it's extremely easy to change

the narrative with a few simple tricks, like adding the moment of silence (with music conveniently playing over the scene) to make the situation look more awkward... or the contestant more stupid. Obviously, the more controversy, the bigger attention the show will draw, which results in questionable casting choices. It never stops to amaze me how *90 Day Fiancé* manages to find more toxic people every single time... Another issue is painfully obvious objectification of participants, often visible in oversexualized shots. To be honest, sometimes I purposely chose something different to watch during lunch, so my flatmates wouldn't get the impression I'm watching adult movies from the unfortunate glimpses they could catch on my screen. And lastly, can we really talk about 'falling in love' on a program lasting four to six weeks? Of course, there are some exceptions – as I'm writing this, the winners of 2023 edition of *Love Island* has just got engaged – but let's be honest, most of the contestants are not there for love. It's for fame, social media following and brand deals, sometimes even for promoting their music careers.

So... why do people love watching dating reality TV anyway? The simplest answer would be: it's like any other mindless entertainment. Just something easy to watch to put on while eating or as a background noise. You don't have to think too much, and can escape the reality for a little bit. It's kind of McDonald's for the mind – maybe not the most beneficial for you, but who doesn't like some chicken nuggets and fries you might regret later once in a while?

Another huge thing drawing people to reality shows is... the drama, obviously. It might be a little toxic trait of mine, but while I like to keep my own life drama-free, I'm all ears the second I hear about other people's messiness. In that sense, reality TV is safe – you get all the gossip, and no risk of being involved in all of it. It's also feeding into people's tendency to peek into neighbours' windows with no guilt involved; after all, these kinds of shows are literally the invitation to watch and judge strangers' lives.

The comment I've seen several times is 'this show makes me feel better, because

at least my life isn't *that* chaotic'. Maybe another reason why people watch reality TV is feeling a bit superior. *I'd never do it. Why is he so awkward? Oh my, what she said was so stupid.* It's very easy to forget the contestants are real people with their own lives, not fictional characters existing for our own entertainment. Unfortunately, the shows' tone – often with narrators openly making fun of the participants – encourage this kind of thinking even more.

You don't have to judge to have fun, though. Sometimes you can simply just observe. Dating programs are kind of social simulations that are interesting from a psychological side, too. Especially from an introvert point of view, seeing the behaviour of a bunch of confident people willingly put in front of cameras is fascinating, to say the least. It all depends on how much you believe in the authenticity of the show, but some of the reactions have to be real, allowing the viewers to see how people connect, flirt, lie, and deal with conflicts in different ways.

Something that is always fascinating to me is the casting choices the producers make. I've already mentioned it in the context of choosing the 'villains' on purpose. It's not only for the drama in general, but also because watching a show with only likeable, reasonably thinking individuals would be just boring. Picking sides and grouping people in our heads is natural. You need someone to root for – and someone to root against. With this simple recipe, reality shows keep the viewers emotionally invested.

And finally, the participants of reality shows are not famous actors or celebrities, but people that feel easier to reach. The fact that they are not playing a role means that you can still follow their story after the show ends – social media deepens the attachment and makes the drama feel ongoing.

The constant updates and reactions extend the experience from the screen to real life. If I'm not watching, I'm

probably deep into some YouTube commentary rabbit hole. It's actually how I got into this whole topic in the first place – through creators breaking down each episode with sarcasm, jokes, and occasional psychological insight. Somehow, watching the watchers makes the whole thing even more addictive. So if you want to give this genre a try, either grab a friend to comment with, or find a youtuber that'll make you feel like you're with one – that's the best way.

Anyway, it's time for me to go now. The new season of *Love Island* has just started... and it won't watch itself.

Anna Wojdziak



GREEN TRAVEL...

OR HOW TO CONSIDER THE JOURNEY AS WELL AS THE DESTINATION

From Rennes (France) to Skopje (Macedonia), I decided to opt for green travel. More than 2500 kilometers travelled by trains and buses. Five countries crossed into Europe. Foreign mountains, plains, cities discovered. New people and new cultures met. Culinary specialities tasted...

Sounds interesting? So you're on the right place, we're gonna talk about it.

On my way to go to Skopje, a stop in Ljubljana, and its famous Dragon Bridge (the protectors of the city).



As technology and infrastructure improve, the world seems to be getting smaller. The ability to travel the world is becoming accessible to more and more people as the cost of getting to another country is getting cheaper. But the travel industry is the second-fastest growing industry in the world. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, 8-10% of global CO2 emissions are caused by the travel and tourism sector, with the majority of these emissions being created by the travel to the destination, especially because of our choice of the means of transport, plane. As global climate change becomes a real issue and travel continues to grow, our awareness of what green travel is and how to travel in an environmentally friendly way also needs to increase. We need to change the way we travel sustainable travel options is expected to continue to grow.

There is already an increased demand for sustainable travel options.

72% of travelers are concerned about the environmental impact of their travel

Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report

As more people become aware of the impact of tourism on the environment, the demand for sustainable travel options is expected to continue to grow. So, what are these options?



Green travel is about choosing ways to travel that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. The more significant way to minimize the impact of travelling is to care about the transport portion, which is often responsible for at least 70% of the carbon emissions of a trip. Two possibilities. Either reduce the distance travelled by choosing a closer destination from where you live. Or, if you really want to go far, choose low-emissions means of transport such as train, bus, car-pooling but also bike or feet. Avoiding planes is the strongest way to protect the climate.

Green travel is about changing our way of travelling, so it can be connected to many terms like sustainable travel, ecotourism or conscious travel, but all of them follow the same narrative: minimizing the impact on the local environment and communities.

Green travel is about enriching travel experiences. Sustainable travel offers a chance to go beyond surface-level exploration. It invites us to immerse ourselves in local communities, engage in cultural exchanges, and create lasting memories. By embracing sustainable practices, we unlock authentic and transformative travel experiences that leave a positive impact on both, visitors and residents.

All of these ideas deal with the concept of **slow travel**. It's more like a mindset where you have to give time back to time. Choosing a slower mode of transportation allows you to enjoy the landscapes along the way, discover new places and cities, and perhaps even stop somewhere you hadn't planned to visit. You might be pleasantly surprised by what you find. There's no need to rush, going too fast means you risk missing out on some truly beautiful experiences.

Choosing alternative ways to travel often comes with its challenges. Most of the time, it's more expensive than flying. But, maybe it's time we should stop thinking only in terms of speed and cost, and start asking what the journey itself can offer us.

49% of travelers said sustainable travel options are too expensive.

Booking.com's 2023 Sustainable Travel Report

Finding an itinerary can be frustrating: there's no single platform, so you have to check tickets one by one, match connections, and piece everything together yourself. It takes time. But maybe that's the point - slowing down, exploring differently, and letting the journey become part of the destination.

Our relationship with time is often shaped by urgency, always trying to do more in less time. But what if we shifted that perspective? What if taking more time meant living more fully? By slowing down, we create space to notice, to connect, to appreciate. Whether it's in how we travel, eat, or spend our days, choosing to take our time can be a powerful way to reconnect with what really matters.

Green travel is maybe more than just environmental considerations. It includes a total change of perspectives. It's about learning to travel differently. Change our relationship with time and accept that it is long to travel. This is how the journey becomes a real part of travel.

Youna Léauté-Guillet

Sources:

Greenpeace - Qu'es que le tourisme responsable ?

GSTC - What is Sustainable Tourism?

National Geographic - How to travel better: a beginner's guide to sustainable travel

Fairbnb - Sustainable Tourism: A Guide for Travellers

Worldpackers - What is green travel and how can you travel sustainably?

BENEATH BIG BROTHER'S RELENTLESS GAZE: UNRAVELING A DYSTOPIAN REALITY

REVIEW ON GEORGE ORWELL'S NOVEL 1984

1984 is not just a classic or a “good” book that the high school literature teacher propagates with all her pathos. Treating it as such would diminish its values and cloak it with a certain cynical mediocrity.

“War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength” is the refrain accompanying the reader throughout this book. At first glance, this might seem like the product of a delirious mind, but in fact, it seeks to communicate something crucial to the audience.

Reading this dystopian fiction, far from commercial or lightweight, transforms you. Like the 30 days of a butterfly's life cycle, the 300 pages of 1984 “metamorphose” and “illuminate” your psyche deeply, imperceptibly, and in an atypical manner.

“If you want an image of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face... forever,” are the words with which O'Brien, one of the book's characters, paraphrases the future.

At the time of its publication in 1949, when it depicted the year 1984, the book was seen as a provocative work shrouded in a dark, ominous veil. The public was legitimized to perceive it as a kind of Nostradamus-like prediction in a world then “threatened” by the claws of totalitarian regimes. The author illustrates a dark, apocalyptic, and far-from-promising future throughout the narrative.

The globe in the Orwellian year “1984” is divided into three massive totalitarian states: Oceania, East Asia, and Eurasia. These states are in endless wars and alliances with each other, which seem to lead nowhere and bring no benefit or advantage.

In the ideas of the 19th-century Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile, we can discern the secret reason for these seemingly “idiotic” wars. He stated that war is necessary to consolidate the state's unity. It doesn't matter if it ends in victory or defeat; it might even be better to end in loss. The feeling of humiliation from foreigners and shared shame would strengthen national unity.

This notion is precisely the logical motive that throws the fictional Oceania, Eurasia, and East Asia into successive battles. There must be an enemy, someone, or something to target and become united in opposition. If it doesn't exist, then let's invent it, this is the spirit that keeps these totalitarian states alive and solid.

The narration in this text is done with very few characters. Winston, Julia, and O'Brien are the three central characters who play almost the entire drama. Some secondary characters with miniature roles also help in setting the tone of event development and conflict.

Orwell, in this novel, has painted, albeit with a poor palette and few colors, the entire nature of humanity at its core. Line after line, the readers gradually discover themselves and are “forced” to think, even to abstract about existence.

The main character of this work is Winston, an entirely ordinary man, 39 years old, living in the center of Oceania, in London. He is a secondary party member, an employee of the bureaucratic apparatus of the Ministry of Truth, but secretly opposes the regime. His job is to “rewrite history” according to the interests of the party led by the state leader “Big Brother”.

“Who controls the past, controls the future, who controls the present, controls the past,” O'Brien, a high-ranking party official, confidently reasons during a conversation with Winston. This statement brings to mind the famous saying that history is written by the winners, and consequently, it becomes relative and unbelievable.

Modifying the past by making citizens remember only the past recreated by the government's administrative structures becomes the engine of forgetting and proper functioning of this dictatorial state. Citizens cannot remember or believe in the existence of a past for which there is no trace that it ever existed.

Saint Augustine noted that if you forget partially, you remain aware of the lapse, but if you forget entirely, it appears as though nothing was ever forgotten. This captures the deceptive mechanism of selective memory in the regime of the book.

The novel clearly shows how every citizen of 1984's Oceania (except for the proletarians who were considered worthless) is constantly under audiovisual surveillance through monitors (a type of televisions placed everywhere). Are we not still part of a technological matrix that increasingly tends to resemble the surveillance regime of "Big Brother"?!...

The "Reality Show" of world fame, where some individuals are shut in a house monitored 24 hours a day with cameras, was precisely conceived from this novel. This reality show today is known by the name of the observer and supreme dictator of Oceania, "Big Brother". The growing voyeurism of 21st-century society has led to this reality show being widely watched and favored by large audiences.

A book like this constitutes a treatise of humanism that dissects the individual down to the subconscious. Not just a mirror of extreme totalitarian dictatorship, but much more. It would be a separate offense to name it simply fiction or literature.

Our character cannot be called a "hero", as main characters are usually labeled. In him, more than a hero, one clearly identifies a human, as amorphous, unclear, and lost as each of us is in our inner self. Until the last pages of the book, he is stripped naked, remaining only with the wrinkled and blackened skin of sin, immorality, and animal instinct. The ugliness of humanity is dissected down to the bone, after being stripped by the pincers of violence from every particle of humanity.

"We'll meet in a place without darkness," were the words that had been told to Winston in a dream. A dream that remained such forever and never became a reality.

Winston lives in everyday monotony and works for a cause he does not support. He rebels against authority, yet feels utterly powerless. He falls in love with Julia with the innocence of youth, only to be betrayed by O'Brien. Ultimately, he succumbs to despair,

returning to his vices and his dirty glass of gin, as hope fades from his eyes. Can you see echoes of life in this relentless portrayal of reality?

Julia, Winston's lover, during a post-orgasmic moment of lucidity, communicates to him how she sees the oppressive structure under which they are living. *"When people make love, they spend energy, after the act they are happy and don't want to know about anything. The Party cannot tolerate this feeling. It wants the human to be filled with energy all the time. All these parades up and down, cheering and flag-waving, are unconsumed sex. If a person is happy within themselves, why should they get excited about Big Brother, Three-Year Plans, Two Minutes of Hate, or all of its damned rot?"*

Critics argue that the work elaborates on a warped and absurd form of totalitarianism. The world has endured the brutal consequences of far-right regimes like Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, as well as far-left regimes, from Bolshevism in the Soviet Union to other forms of authoritarian socialism across Eastern Europe, including the former Yugoslav states (like North Macedonia) and Albania, and now seeks to move forward by learning from that painful legacy, not reliving it.

Those who anathematize the work are afraid of the desire to repeat history or the "worship" of this dark doctrine that might be reignited in some readers. In fact, knowing history or even confronting perverse ideologies and studying them well does not increase the risk of their spread but educates the generation towards protection and keeping them as far away as possible.

"To die hating, that was freedom," was what Winston understood from confronting the repression and oppression of dictatorship. The draconian tortures of "Big Brother" did not target his flesh or bones but his mind. Death could be "granted" only after the duality of spirit-mind had been completely assimilated and unconditionally surrendered to the

party's methodology. An individual in this oppressive apparatus cannot be free, must not feel, and cannot even think.

Orwell also examines how the newly constructed language acts as a tool for extreme control. Its impoverished structure renders any critical thought against the ruling class what 'Big Brother' terms 'thoughtcrime' nearly unthinkable.

"The book amazed him, or more precisely, gave him confidence. In fact, it didn't tell him anything new, but this was part of its allure. The book said what he could have said himself if he had been able to organize his scattered thoughts. The book was the product of a mind similar to his, but much more powerful, more systematic, and less fearful. The best books, he thought, are the books that tell you what you already know," Winston concluded while reading Goldstein's book, the main enemy of "Big Brother". Orwell portrays Winston not as a traditional hero but as a thoughtful, rational, modest, and unpretentious man who observes his world with remarkable clarity. His conclusion about the book of the Party's number one enemy fits perfectly, like a key to a lock, mirroring the feelings experienced by the reader of '1984'.

In the end, as '1984' lays bare the harsh truths of total control and conformity, ask yourself: can you imagine a future where freedom endures against all odds?

Jona Cenameri





Killing Annabel Lee

I'm floating in a sea
of sadness and despair
remembering my Annabel Lee
and the moment
she sunk into this deep, deep sea

Salty tears and salty waves
chill my bones
like a cold embrace
because here I float
but there she lies
on heavy sand
while angels cry
- they screamed out with me
as she forever closed her eyes

Now I find myself
left with an aching heart
we both remember
how the world
tore us apart

See the castle over there?
the castle by the sea?
it's where we dreamt to live
dreamt to be
together and alone in the castle
far up there, by the sea
where I dreamt of holding her forever
holding my beautiful Annabel Lee

And indeed, we did
alone at the sea, we lived
danced and laughed and kissed
but soon we heard the trumpets
and the kinsmen, they arrived
and I, fearful as ever, closed my eyes
as they set foot on our land
still feel the feeling
of Annabel letting go of my hand

When I was scared
she marched into battle
I drew her beauty
while she drew red blood
was sitting in our castle
when she was taken
by the flood

My beautiful
and loving
careful and forgiving
Annabel Lee
wish I could tell you
that I always ever wanted you
to be entirely free

Didn't want to rob you
not you, my Annabel Lee
wish I could have seen
what I didn't want to believe:
that you were lonely
together and alone with me
in our stone-brick castle
there, by the sea

Floating now
in this deep, deep sea
I feel closer to her than ever
as salt drowns my breath, I shiver
and cry, cause I just now realized
that she would still be
if I had only freed her of me
as I sink, I confess:
the flood chilled
but I killed Annabel Lee.

Luzie Ada Welker



The Juggler and the Road Learning to Catch Life in Mid-Air

"It started with music."

I was working on the sunlit terrace of the VCS office in Skopje, letting the morning settle into my skin, when I heard it; deep, rhythmic, electronic pulses weaving through the heat. Techno. Unexpected, magnetic. I looked up, and there he was: a young man, moving to the beat, clubs dancing through the air like extensions of his body, catching light and spinning it back into the sky.

I smiled and walked over. "Nice music", I said. He smiled too, shy but confident. "Thanks."

And just like that, I met Isaac Cantor.

He's 22, from Colombia, and for the past few months he's been in Macedonia. Not just visiting, but juggling. Literally. Clubs, balls, energy, purpose. He travels the world with nothing more than his art, his courage, and a bag full of tools that help him rewrite the rules of work, freedom, and what it means to live. We became friends. One conversation turned into many. His story unfolded like a performance: each sentence a motion, each anecdote a catch; fluid, real, raw.

The Spark: Learning to See the World Upside Down

I asked him, "What inspired you to start juggling?"

"There's a big juggling culture in South America," he told me. "I first saw it during a protest in 2018. People were collaborating with the march, playing music, juggling, uniting art with activism".

He was 15 then. He bought his first juggling tools shortly after and began to teach himself at home, in the streets of Colombia. But the spark had been there longer.

"I learned about it when I was 10 years old," he said, "but the real journey began after that protest. Since then, it's been my way of exploring the world."

By 18, he was juggling abroad. Since then, he's performed in 13 countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, England, Scotland, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, and Belgium.

He's not just visiting these places, he's living them, one street corner, one traffic light at a time.

Juggling is a Way of Life

In Isaac's world, juggling is more than an art. It's a rhythm, a ritual, a philosophy.

"What's the most difficult part?", I asked.

"Dissociation", he said. "You have to separate parts of your body, your thoughts, stay focused, even while moving. Especially, when you combine it with other things like hula hoop or monocycling. It's a full-body discipline, and also mental. You have to stay present. Every second."

Sometimes he works at festivals or private parties, where he choreographs full routines. But most days, he juggles at traffic lights.

"I have to improvise with what I know. Sometimes I plan short sequences, but mostly it's about energy; what I feel that day, what I want to express. **Juggling is both art and survival**".

He can juggle five balls and four clubs. His favorite technique? "Contact juggling", he said, eyes lighting up. "It's so smooth, like the ball becomes part of your body."

But juggling, for him, is not just about tricks. It's about presence. Expression. Connection.

The Street as Stage and Teacher

"Isn't it dangerous?", I asked.

He shrugged. "Not really, unless you work with fire. That can be serious. I've been lucky. No accidents. But juggling teaches you respect for your body, your tools, your environment."

The street can be a stage. But it can also be a battlefield.

"Do you ever get in trouble with the police?"

"So many times," he laughed. "Each country is different. Sometimes they don't want you performing because there's an event, or a politician passing. Other times it's just laws. But here

in Macedonia, they're relaxed. One time, a policeman even gave me a tip."

People's reactions vary too. "Some smile, ask questions, give money. Some just look at me like I'm trash. They say things like, 'Get a real job.' That hurts. But I try to remember: not everyone understands what we do, or why." Yet there is beauty in the street. "I've met amazing people", he said. "Other circus artists, travelers. We share tips, learn from each other. Sometimes we work together. Some of my best friendships began with a juggling trick." He doesn't give formal lessons, but if someone wants to learn, he's happy to show them. "It's all about exchange."

A Nomadic Economy

"Can you make a living like this?", I asked him. "You live day by day", he explained. "Sometimes you make a lot, sometimes nothing. It teaches you to flow. To adapt. I'm my own boss, so I decide when and where to work."

But the unpredictability isn't easy. "Weather is a big challenge", he said. "If it rains, I can't work. If it's too hot, I can't work. But sometimes I have to because I need the money. So, I juggle through storms, through pain, through exhaustion." And yet, he keeps going. Not just because he has to but because he wants to.

The Deeper Lessons: Growth, Grit, and Grace

I asked him what juggling had taught him beyond the stage. He paused. Then, with a quiet voice, he said: "I learned to be constant. To keep practicing even when I was frustrated. I learned to adapt to countries, languages, situations, and people. I had to become responsible for myself. Juggling helped me grow, not just as an artist, but as a person.

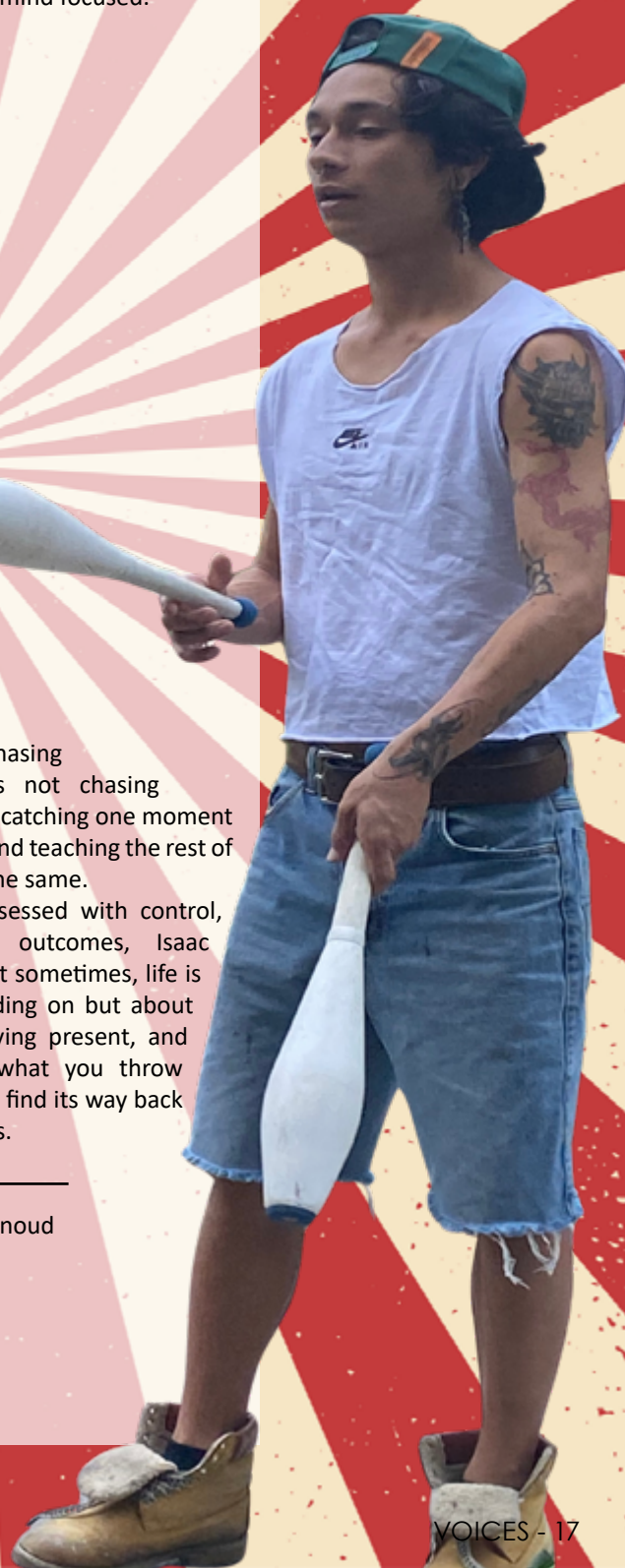
In how I communicate. How I feel. How I stay grounded." "I'm living the life I want", he said. "And I'm the one deciding."

Catching Life in Motion

Watching Isaac juggle is like watching someone rewrite the laws of time. Everything slows down. For a moment, the noise of the world fades and you see something pure. A body in motion. A mind focused.

A soul dancing with gravity. He's not chasing applause. He's not chasing fame. He's just catching one moment after another and teaching the rest of us how to do the same. In a world obsessed with control, stability, and outcomes, Isaac reminds us that sometimes, life is not about holding on but about letting go, staying present, and trusting that what you throw into the air will find its way back into your hands.

Cassandre Journoud





RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Everything is social relationships. If you think about that statement, there is something utterly true about it. We are humans that depend on social connections so much that the relationships we have with other people can actually become a matter of life or death – not only in a Romeo and Juliet kind of way but also, and foremost, in the sense of serious, study-proved health impact. Since the very beginning of human kind our strength and resilience came from our ability to connect between one another – or to put it differently, from our sociability – and our intelligence built on the base of it. Up to this day, social relationships are the prime reasons for the ways we think, behave and simply live. Whether it is the democratic notion that the power lies with the collective of the people or the logic behind Friday and Saturday night life that fun and happiness are equal to being together, it all comes down to the simple truth that relationships matter – they matter tremendously for the individual just as well as for the community.

The significance of social relationships may appear very self-explanatory and apparent. Still, in academic research,

the whole, interdisciplinary and multi-layered understanding of social relationships as not only the basis but the key factor of everything concerning any kind of human action or interaction found long over-due attention only in the rather recent theory of “social capital”. Breaking it down, the concept of social capital encapsulates the notion that there is positive output coming from social contexts. Simply said, being social and engaging in interpersonal relationships has broadly diversified benefits. On the level of the individual, social relationships are needed to satisfy basic human needs like validation and care just as well as they help to build a sense of belonging and identity. Given this utmost importance of relationships for human beings, it becomes very plausible how we live in such deep interdependence with each other that we cannot escape even if we wanted. Precisely for this reason, social capital is also relevant for the broader, social well-being. The relationships we entertain between one another inevitably ripple out into the larger fabric of social relations also known as society. Social well-being is influenced by the connections and interactions we have as individuals

and parts of society with each other in form of the trust we have in the institutions building the societal frame, the participatory potential of social structures and our civic orientation or reciprocal responsibility – or shortly, every aspect of our common life together. Consequently, maximizing social capital is key, especially when considering the recent social trends of loneliness, distrust, and fragmentation.

In the past few centuries, the overall sentiment of a growing social and societal distance proved to be prevalent by a variety of interdisciplinary research. Not only the increasing feeling of social isolation and distrust in fellow human beings as well as institutions of public life was detected, but also a considerable aversion of and helplessness regarding friction. Simultaneously, the continuous advance of screens and social media and the parallel on-going omission of so-called “third spaces” has been detected. Considering the forms of social capital, not only the connections but the wider implications, and inclinations of these recent trends of social relationships become apparent. In a nutshell, the increase of time we

spent engaged on our screens within our “bubbles” and concerned with very superficial connections and the decrease of time we spent at places outside of home and work, lead to less relationships fulfilling the criteria of social capital in terms of their nature and the shared norms of interaction underscoring them.

In order for social relationships to have the positive outputs attributed to social capital, they need to be built on the basis of a supportive social structure and within a large social network as well as qualifying as strong and positively perceived relations between people from diverse backgrounds. Even though it may seem as if we are as connected as never before in this age of digitalization and globalization, in fact, the opposite is true. Undoubtedly, it is easier than ever to reach out to one another but the connections we form on social media more often than not serve merely the illusion of being large networks for lacking the reliability essential to them. Instead, these new or broadened relationships undermine the benefits coming from social capital as they underlie short-lived trends and are regulated by algorithms set on profit maximisation rather than the greater good of social and societal well-being. Overall, relationships became less strong, diverse, and positive under the influence of social media. This development contributes to a two-laned downward spiral. On the one hand, there is the loop of distrust and polarization coming from the inability to sit with people having dissimilar or opposing ideas because there is

less exposure to the differences and a dangerous shift of focus to the same. On the other hand, there is the circle of growing individualism leading to social isolation and eventually loneliness.

Of course, it is a grossly negligent generalization to blame the state of social disunity all on social media and that is not the intention. It is just an example showcasing the dynamics of social life together leading to negative outputs that hurt the overall well-being of society and the social space. As a result, a look towards the functions of social capital is needed to shift the negative output to a positive one.

There are three functions generally credited to social capital – it can take on the forms of bonding, bridging, or linking. While the first, bonding, happens between individuals and groups that are alike, the last two, bridging and linking, take place between people and groups that differ in some aspect or another. It is indisputable that all three social functions are equally valuable, but the key is for all of them to be balanced.

Coming back to the trends discussed earlier, it becomes inevitable that there is an evident leaning of social capital towards bonding. That is to say, benefits from social interactions are sought in relationships with people from similar backgrounds, experiences, and opinions. With this tendency towards bonding, the problem arises that one function of social capital cannot neither provide the positive effects of the three of them together nor bring about the benefits peculiar to the other two.

In consequence, there is a desperate need for rethinking social relations and interactions towards more bridging and linking to compensate for the abundance of bonding.

Forcibly, for the sake of the societal and social well-being, we need to find ways to bridge the differences between us of whatever sort they may be to not only find the common ground facilitating and benefiting our life together but also to regain the ability to sit with and get involved with the other as well as one another. Only when achieving this state of balancing the functions of social capital, can we foster and nurture a lasting life together that benefits everyone.

This leaves nothing to be said except for that it is time for all of us to go out there, confront the limited perspective offered to us, and build some relationships that go beyond bonding so that we can bridge the crates we created around us in order to find the broader links between us. After all, we should not ever strive to be lonely islands but the water around them for the simplest of all reasons: Relationships matter.

Sophia Abegg

Sources:

Join or Die with Robert Putnam – What Now? with Trevor Noah, Podcast episode from January 2025
What is social capital? – Tristan Claridge, Institute for Social Capital – Social capital research, 2014

CAPPADOCIA

THE MOST FABULOUS FACE OF NATURE

Wouldn't it be great if I told you to imagine a place with lots of hot air balloons, a wonderful atmosphere with fairy chimneys and horses running around in the valley? There is a region in Türkiye that includes all of these, called Cappadocia. The Cappadocia Region, which is a region that Türkiye attaches importance to, is the geographical area consisting of the provinces of Nevşehir, Aksaray, Kayseri, Niğde and Kırşehir and has natural beauties that attract many tourists for a years. These beauties present a lot of activities and a unique landscape experience for people who visited this region. According to the narrations, in the wars between the Roman Empire and the Persians, those second were victorious and took over the Cappadocia region, taking the very strong and beautiful horses bred in this region as booty. Because of these horses, the region in question was called "Katpa Tuka", which means "Land of Beautiful Horses". Cappadocia, with its natural beauties has also attracted the attention of UNESCO. For this reason, the Göreme Open Air Museum and the Rock Churches in Cappadocia were added to the World Heritage List in 1985.

How was Cappadocia formed?

Cappadocia is a unique geographical region formed over millions of years through volcanic activity and natural erosion processes. Around 60 million years ago, tectonic movements began shaping the Anatolian Plateau as the Taurus Mountains rose. During this time, major volcanoes in the region, such as Mount Erciyes, Mount Hasan, and Mount Göllü, became active and erupted, spewing large amounts of lava and volcanic ash known as "tuff". Over time, these materials accumulated and formed a soft, easily erodible landscape.

However, the magical and surreal appearance of today's Cappadocia

was not shaped by only volcanic activity. For hundreds of thousands of years, natural forces like wind, rain, snow and flooding gradually eroded the soft tuff layers. This erosion carved out valleys, hollows, rocky formations and the famous "fairy chimneys". In many cases, harder layers of basalt remained on top of the softer tuff, forming protective caps that helped shape the fairy chimneys.

Because the tuff rock is soft and easy to carve, people have taken advantage of this natural feature for thousands of years. They carved homes, churches, monasteries, and even entire underground cities into the rocks. As a result, Cappadocia is not only known for its stunning natural beauty but also for its rich historical and cultural heritage.

Adventure of the Hot Air Balloons and Mysterious Underground Caves

Cappadocia contains the feeling of unique landscape and the smell of the history of civilizations. Hot air balloons, which work with fire heat, offer the opportunity to watch all the valleys from the range of tree-height levels to several thousand feet. You can usually experience this in the early morning hours or you can take a drink and sit in the viewing areas when the lots of balloons fly together. You can have fun with your friends by riding a balloon and spending a romantic moment with your darling. As an advice, it is one of the best places to arrange marriage proposals in the world. About the underground caves, it occurred because of protection first. Because there were many attacks in the past of Cappadocia's history from the old civilizations. Nowadays, it has become a great place to visit. If you are there, you can exactly feel and smell the history of the ancient civilizations that lived there and see the writings written on the rocks with their own alphabet at that time.

So what else should we do here?

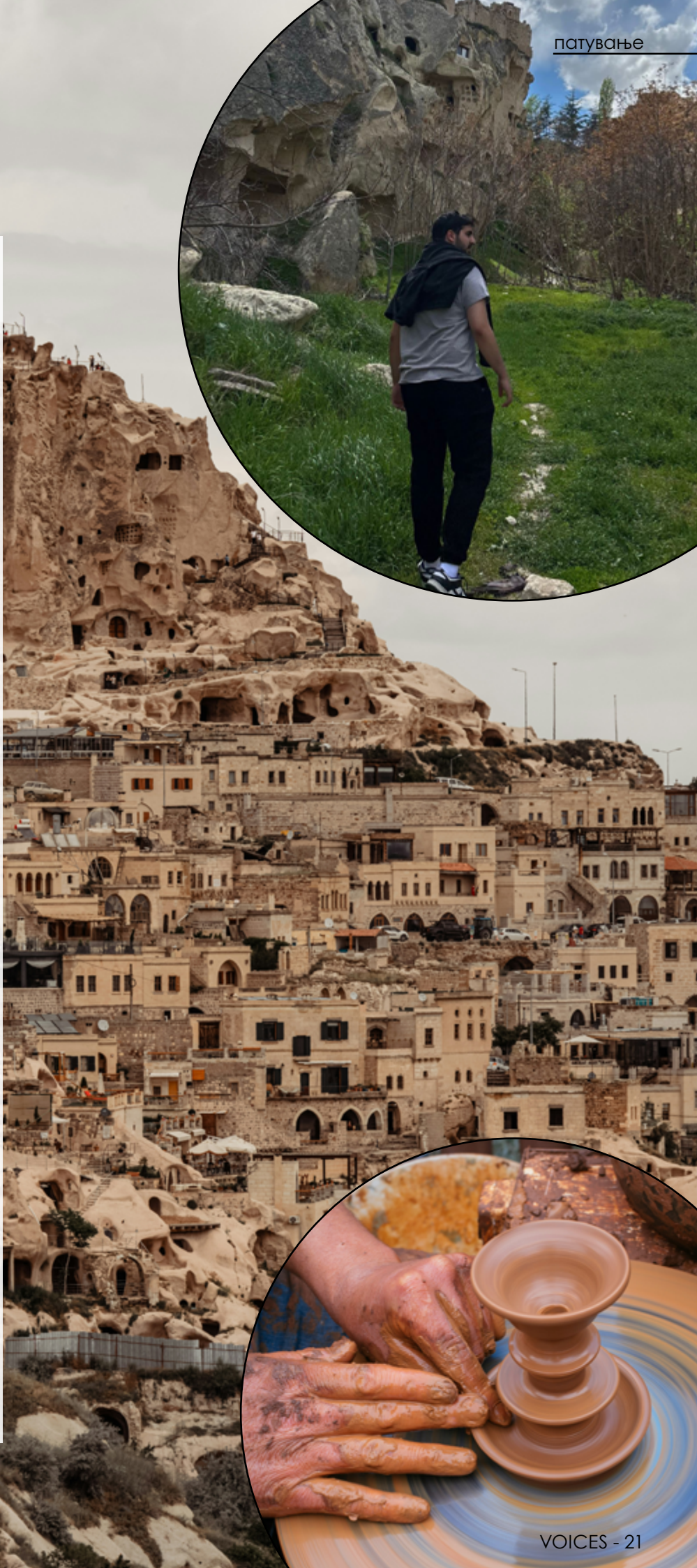
This region is the leader in pottery making. Especially in Avanos, you can learn pottery making in workshops, design one for yourself and take it to your country. In this way, you will have added a significant development to your collection. Then, you can watch the sunset in the Kızılçukur Valley. I say sunset especially because the color the sun gives to the rocks as it sets will make you happy. And I recommend you not only watch the valleys, but also take an ATV or horse tour in them. Devrent Valley is another place to visit for tourists when they step into Cappadocia. It attracts everyone's attention with its camel-like shape. The Göreme Open Air Museum area, where monastic life was kept alive from the 4th century AD to the 13th century, contains dining halls, churches and sitting areas remaining from those years and is one of the places that people should visit.

Anyway, regional cuisine is important!


Testi kebab is a traditional dish prepared in a closed pot, containing meat and vegetables. It is cooked over a flame and when it is ready, the pot is broken and served. It is as enjoyable to watch as it is to taste. It is served like a theater play and the first choice of tourists in terms of cuisine. Also, the Cappadocia region, which has made significant progress in winemaking since the early 1980s, is one of the oldest wine production centers in Central Anatolia.

Now you have all the important information and are ready for a unique experience!

Efe Özyalçın



A Retrospective on Beauty Influencer Culture



“Hiii guys! Welcome back to VOICES: it’s Chloe here, bringing you all the latest tips, tricks, and trends in the beauty sphere! Today, we’re diving into beauty influencer culture, the appeal for it and the toxic dynamics of that sphere and trust me, you don’t want to miss this tea. So grab your favourite drink, get comfy, and let’s reflect together! Now, let’s get into it!”

More seriously for those of you that never watched beauty youtubers I’m sure that such an intro gave you some flashbacks, you may even feel some nostalgia just as I do when I think about my “beauty guru” phase. I don’t exactly remember when this phase started and how I discovered those who were going to become my favourite beauty youtubers, however, I can tell you that the peak of my phase was the summer of 2018. Indeed, a Youtube series about Jeffree Star was about to come out and I just couldn’t wait to

watch it. I still remember watching it, and waiting patiently each week for the new episode to come out. Now, if you are familiar with the Youtube beauty sphere you must have heard of Jeffree Star, or James Charles, for example, and I can bet that you didn’t hear about them only in positive ways. Though at the time I was quite oblivious to all the dramas, I mean I knew about them in some ways, especially due to the apology videos that would be posted after each scandal. Still, I would make do with the information provided in the videos and move on with my life, without even trying to find out more about the reasons that led to the creation of these apology videos. At the same time, I also never was one of those hardcore fans that would defend my favourite influencers at any cost.

Some of you might wonder what could attract someone to watch such content, especially hearing about all the controversies existing in this sphere of YouTube. Well, I think it would be

safe to say that for many the appeal obviously comes from the lifestyle displayed by such youtubers in their videos. That is extravagant houses, an abundance of luxury products, clothes from the most expensive brands, perfect bodies and faces. Another element that might have attracted people, just like my 15 years old self, is the makeup style. In my case, I was experimenting with my makeup style with very colourful and bold makeup looks, and I felt like what I liked was not represented enough by the French beauty influencers that were popular at that time. For non-Americans, I think watching these videos gave a sense of the American dream, many products used to seem inaccessible, especially if you were a teenager. Furthermore, I feel like most beauty gurus proclaimed themselves as self-made, as people that went from having nothing to suddenly having everything that one could ever dream of owning, which can give the impression to the viewer that in some hypothetical future they could live the same life as their favourite influencers.

However, as I already mentioned, behind this polished, perfect and shiny vision that we are sold as the audience can be found unspoken controversies, personal scandals and toxic dynamics. Apart from the unrealistic standards that they present us as being perfectly normal, there are also much more problematic elements that are kept well hidden, most notably racist pasts. The miracle solution to all these issues once they start to become known to the public: apology videos. I'm sure everyone has seen such a video once in their lives, generally they have the same recognisable characteristics. Neutral background, no makeup/ natural makeup, a hoodie and most importantly fake crying. All these elements combined make the perfect apology video, some look so fake and out of touch that they have become viral, as sources of comedy.

I know that I explained that I would watch those videos without paying much attention to the reasons behind the apology videos, which probably is the case for a lot of people. However, no amount of apology videos can indefinitely save one's career, particularly in cases where

the apologies are just PR (public relations) moves. So, it is natural for the audience to eventually lose trust and therefore interest in those who once were their favourite influencer. In the past few years I feel like the hype for beauty influencers has drastically decreased since the peak of the 2017-2018 era. One of the causes that probably started this decrease is the series of dramas among the YouTube beauty community commonly referred to as "dramageddon". In case you aren't familiar with it, let me quickly introduce it to you. To put it simply, "dramageddon" is a series of dramas that took place around 2018 - 2020 involving several popular beauty influencers of the time. I encourage you to do your own research about it in case you're interested, as it would be quite complex to explain every detail of each drama. It was also during this time that I started to lose my trust and interest in these beauty gurus. Finally the rose-coloured glasses began to fade and I could see the cracks in the curated appearances and personalities that I became acquainted with.

Since then the way I consume beauty/ makeup content has changed. Indeed, both the amount of makeup content I consume and the amount of beauty gurus I follow have drastically reduced. While I still hear or check once in a while what is going on in their lives and in which new controversies they put themselves into, those who used to be my icons just don't hold the same appeal to me anymore.

Chloe Gaschy

Sources:
 r/BeautyGuruChatter Wiki: Dramageddon Timeline
 Apology video - Wikipedia
 What happened to the beauty gurus of early YouTube? - Your ATTN Please
 The Downfall of the YouTube Beauty Community - The Courier Online
 The American Dream: Understanding the Charismatic Capitalism of the Beauty Industry - Federica Ferradino M North
 American Studies Radboud University Nijmegen

MAKE MUSIC

NOT WAR

HOW

50
STRANGERS



BECAME
A FAMILY



THROUGH
MUSIC



Last April, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in an Erasmus+ project called "Make Music Not War 4" in Bremen, Germany. The project was organised by NaturKultur in Garlstadt, a peaceful and inspiring location surrounded by nature, the perfect setting for creativity, collaboration, and connection.

MAKE MUSIC NOT WAR

This unique initiative brought together 50 young people from seven countries, including Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, Turkey, Greece, and even Guadeloupe. All of us were united by a shared passion for music and a desire to promote peace through creativity and collaboration.

The core idea behind the project was to demonstrate how music can bridge differences and build unity across cultures. Throughout our stay, we took part in a variety of engaging workshops, including sessions on creative writing, identifying and solving societal problems, and group collaboration. These workshops encouraged us to think more deeply, express ourselves more openly, and work more effectively as a team.

We were also divided into three bands: one focusing on pop music, one on traditional/experimental music, and one on rock. I was part of the traditional/experimental group, and it was one of the most creatively fulfilling experiences I've ever had. Each group wrote their own lyrics, composed music, practised, and eventually recorded their peace songs in a professional studio.

In addition to the musicians, there was a dedicated media team: a

group of talented participants responsible for managing social media, promoting the project, and capturing behind-the-scenes moments. They took incredible photos and videos, shared daily updates, and helped shape the visual identity of our journey.

After recording the songs in the professional studio, we filmed music videos for each song — an exciting and unforgettable experience. Together with the guidance of our main mentors, the media team also came up with the creative concepts for the music videos, working closely with each band to bring our songs to life on screen. We brainstormed storylines, chose outfits and locations, and acted out scenes that visually represented the messages behind our songs. It was amazing to see our work evolve from sound to story.

And then, there were the late-night jamming sessions. After long days of creating and collaborating, we would gather in the common area with guitars, drums, keyboards, and sometimes just our voices. These spontaneous sessions were filled with every genre imaginable, in every language you could think of. From traditional folk to R&B, rock, pop, Balkan sounds, rap, and more, everyone contributed something unique. It didn't matter where you were from; in those moments, we were all just musicians, vibing together under the stars. These jam nights were some of my favourite memories of the entire project.

As a grand finale to our musical journey, we had the chance to perform in two unforgettable

concerts. The first was a street concert in Bremen, where we played songs from all over the world and spread our message of peace to passersby. The second concert took place in a vibrant night bar in Bremen, where all three bands hit the stage and performed both our peace songs and cover songs from all over the world. Sharing our music with a live audience after days of hard work was electric. The energy, the unity, and the applause made it feel like all our efforts had come full circle.

Working with people from so many different cultures was eye-opening. Despite our different languages and traditions, we quickly found common ground through music. We learned to listen, to adapt, and to respect each other's perspectives — all while having a lot of fun.

One of the most unforgettable moments happened in the studio on one of our final days. We were recording the last verse of our song, and our lead singer delivered it with so much emotion that I was moved to tears. In that moment, I realised how deeply connected we had all become. Music had turned strangers into friends and created bonds that felt timeless.

This project wasn't just about making music; it was about growth, empathy, and shared humanity. I returned home with a new perspective on collaboration, creativity, and cultural exchange. I feel so lucky to have been part of something so meaningful.

If you ever get the chance to join an Erasmus+ project, do it! The memories, the people, and the emotions will stay with you forever.

Anastasija Ilievska

This project wasn't just about making music, it was about growth, empathy, and shared humanity.

Nën Syrin e Pamëshirshëm të Vëlla të Madh: Zbërthimi i Një Realiteti Distopik

Recension Mbi romanin 1984 të George Orwell

1984 -tra nuk është thjesht një klasik apo një libër “i mirë”, leximin e të cilit ta propagandon gjithë pathos mësuesja e letërsisë në gjimnaz. Do ishim duke ja zbehur vlerat dhe duke e veshur me një farë mediokriteti cinik nëse do ta trajtonim si të tillë.

“Lufta është paqe. Liria është skllavëri. Injoranca është forcë”, është refreni që e shoqëron lexuesin gjatë gjithë veprës. Shprehje kjo që në pamje të parë të duket produkt i ndonjë mendje delirante, por në fakt kërkon t’i komunikoj diçka me rëndësi audiencës.

Leximi i këtij fiksjon distopik, aspak komercial a limonatë, të transformon. Si 30 ditët e ciklit të jetës së një fluturë, 300 faqet e 1984-trës të “metamorfojnë” e “iluminojnë” thellësisht psikikën, pa e vënë re e në një mënyrë atipike.

“Nëse doni një imazh të së ardhmes, përfytyroni një çizme ngjeshur në fytyrën e dikujt, ...përjetësisht”, janë fjalët me të cilat e perifrazon të ardhmen O’Brajan i njëri nga personazhet e veprës.

Dikur përfaqësonte një libër ndjellakeq e me një vello të errët lebetie, pasi u botua në 1949-tën dhe fliste për vitin 1984-tër. Publiku ishte i legjitimuar ta perceptonte si një farë parashikimi prej nostradamusi, në botën e atëherëshme të “rrezikuar” nga kthetrat e komunizmit. Autori iluston një të ardhme të errët, apokaliptike e aspak premtuese përgjatë rrëfimit.

Globi në vitin oruellian “1984-tër” ndahet në tre shtete masive totalitare të cilat janë Oqeania, Azia Lindore dhe Euroazia. Këto shtete janë në luftra dhe aleanca të pambarimta me njëri tjetrin, që duket se nuk i çojnë askund e nuk sjellin kurrfarë dobie a përfitimi.

Tek idetë e filozofit italian të shekullit të XIX-të Xhovani Xhentile mund ta shquajmë arsyen e fshehtë të këtyre luftrave në pamje të parë “idiotike”. Ai është shprehur se duhet një luftë për ta konsoliduar përkatësinë e shtetit. Nuk ka rëndësi mbyllet me fitore a disfatë, madje do të qe më mirë të përfundonte me humbje. Me ndjenjën e poshtërimit nga të huajt dhe turpit të përbashkët do të forcohej uniteti kombëtar.

Ky nocion është pikërisht edhe motivi i logjikshëm që hedh shtetet fiksjonale, Oqeaninë, Euroazinë dhe Azinë Lindore në luftime të njëpasnjëshme. Duhet një armik, dikush a diçka të cilën ta shinjestrojmë e të bëhemi tokë e njësh në kundërvënje. Nëse nuk ekziston atëherë le ta shpikim, është fryma që i mban gjallë dhe solide këto shtete totalitare.

Narracioni në këtë tekst bëhet me fare pak personazhe. Uinston i, Xhulia dhe O’Brajan i janë tre personazhet qendrore, që luajnë pothuajse të gjithë dramën. Në ndihmë të rrëfimit na vijnë edhe disa personazhe dytësore me role në miniatyrë të cilët ndihmojnë në vendosjen e tonusit të zhvillimit të ngjarjes dhe konfliktit.

Orelli në këtë roman, ka pikturuar ndonjë me një paletë të varfër e me pak ngjyra gjithë natyrën e njeriut në bërthamë të njerëzimit. Rresht pas rreshti lexuesi zbulon pak nga pak veten, dhe “detyrohet” të mendojë, madje edhe të abstragojë rreth ekzistencës.

Personazhi kryesor i kësaj vepre është Uinston i, një burrë fare i zakonit, 39-të vjeçar, banues në qendër e Oqeanisë, në Londër. Ai është një anëtar dytësor partie, punonjës i aparatit burokratik të Ministrisë së të Vërtetës, por fshehtëzi është kundër regjimit. Detyra e tij është të “rishkruaj historinë” sipas interesave të partisë me në krye liderin-shtet “Big Brother-in”.

“Kush kontrollon të shkuarën, kontrollon të ardhmen, kush kontrollon të tashmen, kontrollon të shkuarën”, arsyeton bindjeplot O’Brajan i, një funksionar i lartë partie gjatë një bisede me Uinstonin. Ky pohim të rikthen edhe njëherë në mendje thënien e famshme se historinë e shkruajnë fituesit, për rrjedhojë ajo relativizohet dhe bëhet e pabesueshme.

Modifikimi i së shkuarës duke i bërë qytetarët të mbajn mend vetëm të shkuarën e rikrijuar nga strukturat administrative të qeverisë, bëhet motori i harresës dhe i mirëfunksionimit të këtij shteti diktatorial. Qytetarët s’mund të kujtojnë a të besojnë në ekzistencën e një të shkuare për të cilën s’ka asnjë gjurmë se ka ekzistuar ndonjëherë.

Perceptimi i Shën Agustinit se kur harron pak edhe mund të kujtohesht se ke harruar por kur harron tërësisht, të duket se nuk ke harruar asgjë është kryekëput rezultatja e këtij mekanizmi mashtrues harres-kujtese që përdor regjimi në libër.

Në roman tregohet qartë sesi çdo qytetar i Oqeanisë së 1984-trës (përveç proletarëve që gjykoreshin si të pavlerë) është gjatë gjithë kohës në përgjim audioviziv përmes monitorëve (tip televizorësh të vendosur kudo). A nuk jemi edhe sot e kësaj dite pjesë e një matriksi teknologjik që tenton çdo ditë e më shumë t'i përngjasojë përgjim-regjimit të "Big Brother-it"?!...

"Reality Show" me famë botërore, ku disa individ mbyllen në një shtëpi të monitoruar 24-tër orë në 24-tër me kamera, është ideuar pikërisht nga ky roman. Ky realiti në ditët e sotme njihet me emrin e vëzhguesit dhe diktatorit suprem të Oqeanisë "Big Brother". Vojerizmi në rritje i njeriut të shekullit të XXI-të e ka bërë këtë shfaqje televizive shumë të ndjekur dhe të preferuar nga audienca masive.

Një vepër si kjo përbën një traktat humanizmi që e zbërthen individin deri në nënvetdije. Jo thjesht një pasqyrë e diktaturës totalitare, por shumë më tepër. Delikt më vete do të ishte ta emëroje si thjesht fiksjon, apo letërsi.

Personazhi ynë s'mund të quhet "hero", siç etiketohen rëndom personazhet kryesore. Te ai më shumë se heroi, identifikohet qartazi njeriu, ashtu amorf, i paqartë e i përhumur siç është në brendësinë e vet secili prej nesh. Deri në faqet e fundit të librit ai zhvishet lakuriq, duke mbetur vetëm me lëkurën e rrudhur dhe të nxirë të mëkatit, të pamoralit dhe instiktit kafshëror. Shëmnia e njeriut zbërthehet deri në kockë, pas rrjepjes me pincat e dhunës së çdo grimce humaniteti.

"Do të takohemi në një vend pa errësirë", ishin fjalët që i patën thënë në një ëndërr Uinstonit. Ëndërr kjo që mbeti e tillë përjetësisht, e su bë kurrë realitet.

Uinstoni jeton në një monotoni të rëndomtë, punon për një kauz që se mbështet, rebelohet ndaj pushtetit por ndjehet i pafuqishëm për të bërë asgjë. Ai dashurohet me Xhulian si të ishte djalos, tradhëtohet nga O'Brajani, dhe në fund i kthehet gotës së ndyrë me xhin dhe veseve, pa kurrfarë shprese për të ardhmen që e sheh me dy sy të fikur në pritje të fundit. A mund të shohësh jehona të jetës në këtë paraqitje të pamëshirshme të realitetit?

Xhulia, dashnorja e Uinstonit gjatë një momenti luçiditeti pas orgazmik, i komunikon atij si e sheh ajo strukturën shtypëse nën të cilën po jetojnë. "Kur bëjnë dashuri njerëzit harxhojnë energji, pas aktit lumturohen dhe nuk duan t'ia dinë për asgjë. Partia nuk e duron dot këtë ndjenjë. Ajo do që njeriu të jetë i mbushur me energji gjithë kohës. Tërë këto parakalime poshtë e lart, brohoritjet dhe valëvitjet e flamujve janë seks i pa konsumuar. Në qoftë se njeriu është i lumtur brenda vetes pse duhet të eksitohet për Vellain e Madh, Planet Tre-Vjeçare, Dy Minutat e Urrejtjes apo gjithë kalbëzimin e saj të mallkuar?"

Argumentat kundër kësaj vepe qendrojnë në faktin se ajo përhap, përpilon, detajon dhe shtjellon ideologjinë e një totalitarizmi të sëmurë dhe absurd. Bota ka përjetuar pasojat brutale të regjimeve ekstremiste të dhathta si nazizmi në Gjermani dhe fashizmi në Itali, ashtu si edhe të regjimeve ekstremiste të majta, nga bolshevizmi në Bashkimin Sovjetik deri te format e tjera të socializmit autoritar në Europën Lindore, përfshirë shtetet ish-jugosllave (si Maqedonia e Veriut) dhe Shqipërinë, dhe tani synon të ecë përpara duke mësuar nga ajo trashëgimi e dhimbshme, jo duke e përjetuar sërish.

Ata që e anatemojnë veprën i tremben dëshirës për përsëritje të historisë, apo "adhurimit" për këtë doktrinë të errët që mund t'i ngjallet ndonjë lexuesi. Njohja e historisë apo edhe përballja me ideologji të mbrapshta dhe mirë studimi i tyre në fakt nuk jua shton rrezikun e përhapjes, por edukon brezin drejt mbrojtjes dhe mbajtjes sa më larg të tyre.

"Të vdesësh duke i urreyer, kjo ishte liri", ishte ajo që kuptoi Uinstoni nga përballja me represionin dhe shtypjen e diktatoriatit. Torturat drakoniane të "Big Brother-it" nuk synonin as mishin a as kockat e tij, por mendjen. Vdekja mund "t'i dhurohej" vetëm pasi dualiteti shpirt-mendje t'i ishte asimiluar tërësisht e dorëzuar pa kushte ndaj metodologjisë së partisë. Një individ në këtë aparat shtrëngues s'mund të jetë i lirë, s'duhet të ndiejë e aq më pak të mendojë.

Gjuha e re është një element tjetër sforcimi ekstremist, që Oruelli trajton në vepër. Ajo do të krijohej e tillë që të ishte aq e varfër sa mendimi kundër klasës sunduese apo siç etiketohet nga idhtarët e "Big Brother-it" "krimendimi" të ishte plotësisht i pamundur.

"Libri e mahniste, ose më saktë: i jepte siguri. Në fakt, ai nuk i thoshte ndonjë gjë të re, por kjo qe pjesë e joshjes. Libri thoshte ato çfarë mund t'i kishte thënë edhe ai, në qoftë se do të kishte qenë në gjendje t'i sistemonte mendimet e veta të hapërdara. Libri ishte prodhimi i një mendjeje të ngjashme me të, por shumë më të fuqishme, më sistematike dhe më pak frikacake. Librat më të mirë, mendoj, janë librat që të thonë atë që e ke ditur", konkludoi Uinstoni gjatë leximit të librit të Goldshteinit, armikut kryesor të "Big Brother-it". Personazhi Uinstonit ndërtuar nga Oruelli aspak heroik por mendimtar, racional, modest e thjeshtarak si pakkush, s'mund të kishte gjykuar më kthjellët se kaq. Deduksioni që ai bën me veten e tij rreth librit të armikut numër një të partis-shtet ka një përshtatshmëri si çelësi me bravën me ndjesinë që lexuesi i vet romanit 1984-tër provon.

Në fund, ndërsa '1984-tra' zbërthen të vërtetat e ashpra të kontrollit total dhe nënshtrimit, pyet veten: a mund të imagjinosh një të ardhme ku liria mbetet e pathyeshme përballë çdo sfide?

Jona Cenameri



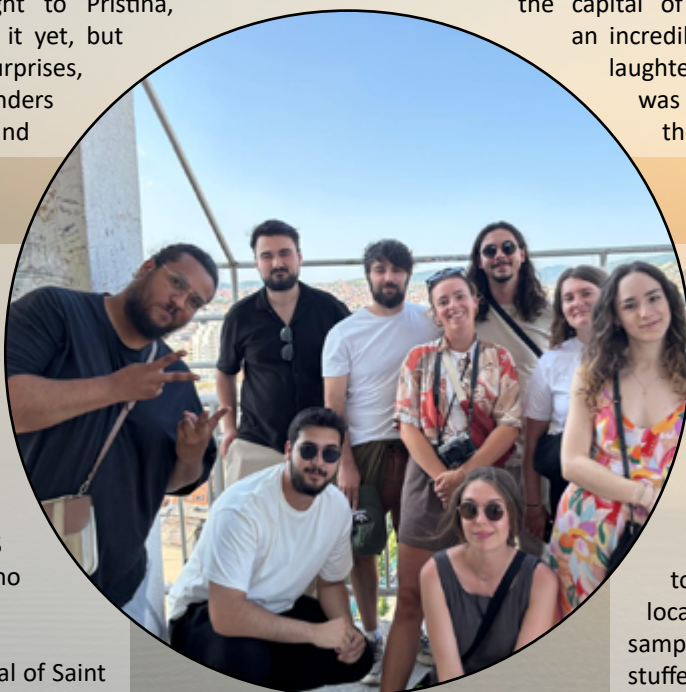
4 COUNTRIES FRIENDS UNIQUE DAYS

On the first weekend of June, joined by a Caribbean friend and three Turks, we decided to make the most of a few free days and explore a small corner of the Balkans. What began as a casual plan quickly turned into an unforgettable road trip across borders, landscapes, and cultures. With our bags packed and car rented, we hit the road and drove straight to Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. We didn't know it yet, but an incredible adventure full of surprises, laughter, and cultural wonders was waiting just around the corner.

Day One: Discovering Pristina from Above

Our journey started smoothly with a short 1.5–2 hour drive on a modern highway. When we arrived in Pristina, we met some volunteer friends from the VCS (Volunteers Centre Skopje) who joined us for the day.

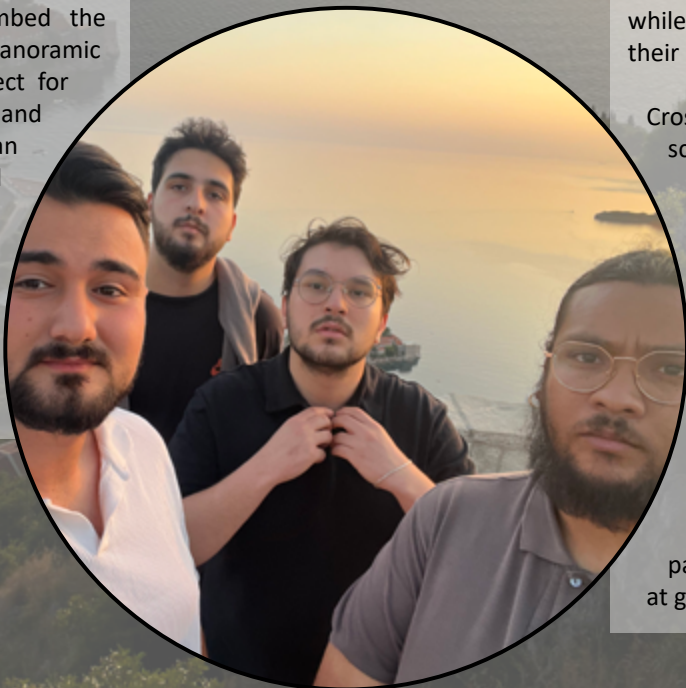
Our first stop was the Cathedral of Saint Mother Teresa, one of the city's iconic modern landmarks. We climbed the bell tower, which offers a panoramic view of the entire city, perfect for capturing breathtaking photos and getting a true sense of the urban layout. Afterward, we enjoyed a delicious meal at a local restaurant, said goodbye to our friends heading back to Skopje, and spent the evening strolling along a vibrant city street, chatting in the local atmosphere.



Day Two: Albania's Hidden Charms and Montenegro's Mountain Roads

Early Sunday morning, we set off toward Montenegro. Our journey took us through Lezhë and Shkodër in northern Albania, two cities not often visited by tourists, but filled with charm and local flavor. We took short breaks to sample traditional Albanian dishes like stuffed peppers (dolma), sarmas, and slow-cooked stews. These small towns, while modest in fame, impressed us with their natural beauty and authenticity.

Crossing into Montenegro, the scenery changed. Towering green mountains, narrow one-lane roads through forested hills, and long tunnels welcomed us. Though the winding mountain roads required concentration, the views were more than rewarding. Before reaching Budva, we noticed a small church perched on a hill—St. Sava Church—and decided to detour for sunset. The climb was steep and rugged, but the panoramic view of the Adriatic coast at golden hour was unforgettable.



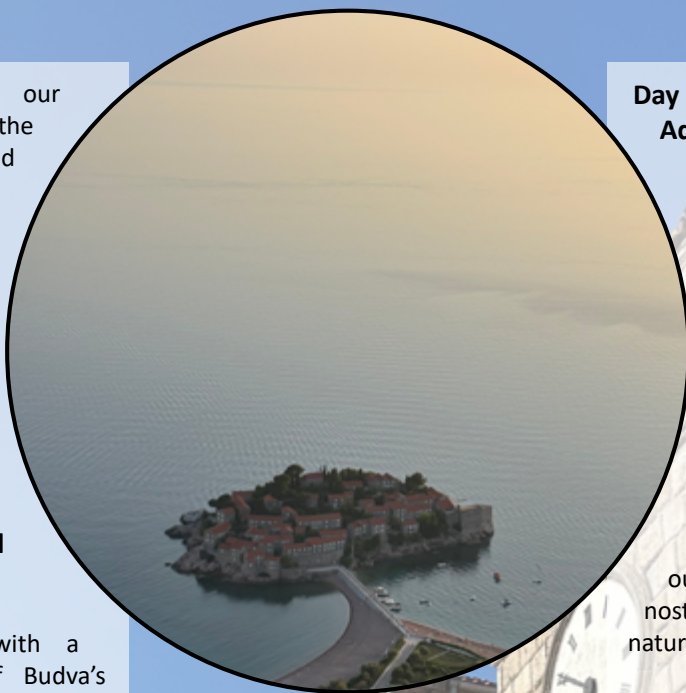
Afterward, we settled into our accommodation in Budva. In the evening, we explored the famed Old Town (Stari Grad), with its stone alleys, historical churches, cozy cafés, and boutique shops. The town was lively, full of energy and visitors from all over—especially many fellow Turkish tourists. We ended the night sitting by the sea, talking under the stars.

Day Three: Swimming and Sipping Coffee in Kotor

Monday morning began with a refreshing swim at one of Budva's picturesque beaches. The crystal-clear water, cool breeze, and the silhouette of the city from the sea created a peaceful start to the day. After drying off and packing up, we hit the road toward Kotor, one of Montenegro's most famous and photogenic towns.

Located on a stunning fjord-like bay and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kotor enchanted us with its preserved medieval architecture. The Old Town here feels like stepping into a different era, tight stone passageways, hidden squares, old cathedrals, and Venetian influences on every corner. We took a coffee break at a quiet local café and let ourselves get lost in the rhythm of the city.

Compared to Budva's youthful and energetic vibe, Kotor had a more tranquil, unique atmosphere. Where Budva felt like a seaside city, Kotor was a living museum.



Day Four: One Last Look at the Adriatic

On our final evening in Budva, we packed our bags and went for one last seaside sit-down. The breeze, the waves, and our conversations reminded us of how much we had seen and shared in just a few days.

As we drove back to Macedonia the next morning, there was a strange blend of emotions, relieved and happy to return to our volunteer office in Skopje, yet nostalgic to leave behind Montenegro's nature, history, and hospitality.

What This Trip Left Behind

This wasn't just a road trip, it was a reminder of how much can be packed into four days when the road is open and the friends are right. Every border crossing brought a new language, every town its own rhythm, every meal a story. In just four days, we tasted the Balkans in all their complexity and beauty: lively cities, sleepy villages, mountain passes, coastal sunsets.

But most importantly, we came back a little different. More connected to the world, to each other, and to ourselves. The Balkans gave us more than memories, it gave us a new way of seeing.

Furkan Ögüt

Different traditions, one goal

Christian faith, especially in Catholic and Orthodox traditions, is based on doctrines and rituals that are important for helping people grow in faith. Alongside the official rituals, there are also many meaningful traditions that celebrate faith in deep and symbolic ways. When we look closely at some of these customs, we may discover that they have pagan origins. However, the Church adopted them to make it easier for people to come closer to Christ. These traditions often depend on the region, and we can still see today that Western and Eastern Churches have different ways of expressing their faith.

All around the world, remembering ancestors is an important part of life, and this is true in Christianity as well. In the Catholic faith, the day that is dedicated to remembrance for the deceased is the second of November day after the All Saints' Day. From the pagan time, people believed that in the night from first to second November the border between the worlds of living and dead is thinner so souls are able to move to our world to ask for prayer to get to heaven. On this night, in some churches, there is still a tradition of preparing an altar for the "requiem" Mass. According to this tradition, some priests from purgatory may even celebrate Mass. Even though this is not possible from the Catholic point of view, the practice reminds many faithful how important it is to pray for the souls in purgatory.

Funerals and burials are usually for people, but in the Western Christian tradition, there is an old custom called the burial of the word "hallelujah" nine weeks before Easter. "Hallelujah" is a Hebrew word meaning "praise the Lord," and it symbolizes joy in the liturgy. That is why this ceremony happens after the first vespers before Septuagesima Sunday, marking the start of Lent. A piece of parchment or a small plate with the word "hallelujah" written on it is placed in a small coffin. With hymns and antiphons, it is buried in the churchyard. The purpose of this ceremony is quite deep, it teaches the faithful that Lent is a time for reflection, silence, and fasting, and the symbolic funeral shows the importance of this time.

When Lent ends, the Church celebrates the three most important days: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. These are honored in both Eastern and Western traditions.

In Eastern Christianity, Good Friday includes a symbolic funeral of Christ. During the liturgy, the "plaschanitsa", a cloth representing Christ after being taken from the cross, is carried in a procession around the church three times. In Macedonian tradition, priests hold the cloth outside the church, and the faithful pass underneath it, a sign of good fortune and fertility for the coming year. The "plaschanitsa" is then placed on a catafalque, symbolizing Christ's tomb, where it remains until the midnight liturgy that celebrates the Resurrection.

In Polish and some German Roman Catholic traditions, after the Good Friday liturgy, the Monstrance with the Holy Body of Christ is solemnly placed in a symbolic grave, usually located at a side altar. The design of the grave depends on the church, parish, or region, but it is usually modest, featuring a statue of Christ and a central place for the Monstrance, so that the faithful can come to adore it. The main difference between Eastern and Polish tradition is that in Eastern Churches, people do not pray in front of the exposed "plaschanitsa", while Roman Catholics in Poland and parts of Germany visit different churches to reflect and pray.

Forty days after Easter, Christians celebrate the Ascension of Jesus Christ. This is an important and solemn feast throughout Christianity. In the Polish Roman Catholic tradition, during the time leading up to this celebration, the figure of Christ and the lit Paschal candle are placed near the altar. When the Gospel reading from Apostle Mark is completed, the priest extinguishes the candle, as this part of the Gospel tells of Jesus ascending to Heaven. After the liturgy, the figure is taken to the sacristy. In Bavaria, there is also a tradition of raising the figure of Jesus to the church roof to show that He

has truly ascended into Heaven.

Some traditions are connected to the seasons and to flowers. On Pentecost Sunday in Rome, red rose petals are dropped from the oculus in the Pantheon to symbolize the tongues of fire (Holy Spirit) descending on the Apostles. In Poland, the village of Zimna Wódka ("Cold Vodka") is known for making carpets of flowers for the Corpus Christi procession. Priests carrying the Holy Sacrament walk only on these flower carpets. Many people wear traditional clothing during the procession to publicly express their connection to the faith.

Christian faith cannot be separated from the local traditions. Since pagan times, the Holy Church adopted many feast or rituals to help Christianize them. This is because people love celebrating things that they know, and they also create new celebrations over time. It is interesting how people from different regions express their faith in different ways, but all with the same goal — to come closer to God.

Jakub Pokuciński

Sources:

pocojescskoromoznaposcic: Płaszczanica – prawosławny Grób Pański
liturgia.pl: Pożegnanie Alleluja



What if Epicurus was right?

Before I arrived in Macedonia to work with Volunteers Centre Skopje for three months, I didn't know what to expect. I knew nothing about this country, its culture, or its pace of life. Yet, from the very first days, a striking contrast caught my eye: here, everything is "chill." Peace of mind reigns. We work, yes, but without stress. At our own pace, with a smile. A colleague even told me as soon as I arrived: "Be yourself."

And it wasn't just a slogan here, you can take a break without being judged, breathe out without guilt. We're simply here, present, alive. Nothing like France, and probably unlike other Western European countries, where schedules dictate our days, where work often comes with constant pressure, and where stress has become the norm. This cultural shock made me ask a simple question:

*what if
Epicurus
was right?*



Epicurus, the ancient Greek philosopher, founded a school called the Garden in 306 BC in Athens. What made his school unique? It was open to everyone, including women and slaves, which was revolutionary at the time. In a society where only male citizens had rights, Epicurus created a space of freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. The school taught a way of life very different from that of the great city-states: to achieve "ataraxia", meaning peace of mind, through a simple life based on friendship, knowledge, and moderate pleasure.

Too often, Epicureanism is reduced to a caricature: drinking, eating, and partying endlessly. Yet, Epicurus himself led a frugal life. According to Diogenes Laërtius, he was content with a simple glass of wine and was a vegan. Far from debauchery, his philosophy invites us to be satisfied with what we have, not to chase after every desire, but to savor the essentials. Contrary to stereotypes, being an Epicurean does not mean living in excess or indulgence. On the contrary, Epicureanism is the pursuit of... moderate pleasure. An intelligent, calm, and lasting pleasure over time. Its key principles are:

- absence of fear of the god
- absence of fear of death
- possibility of achieving happiness
- possibility of enduring pain

In Macedonia, I feel like I'm touching this ancient wisdom. We learn and we get involved, but without losing ourselves. We work, but we breathe. We are ourselves. Here, I was taught that happiness is not always found in performance, but in the present moment, in kindness, in serenity. And maybe, deep down, that's the real revolution: being happy with little. What if we didn't need more?

Narjesse Ahrrouq

ЛЕТО

НА СПОРТ, МЛАДЕШКИ ДУХ И ОБЕДИНЕТОСТ

Од 20 до 26 јули 2025, Македонија ќе биде домаќин на 18-то издание на Европски Младински Олимписки Фестивал (ЕМОФ), значаен настан кој има потенцијал да го трансформира не само главниот град, Скопје, туку и пошироката слика за она што мала земја може да го постигне на интернационална сцена. Над 4000 атлети на возраст од 14 до 18 доаѓајќи од 48 земји, ќе се натпреваруваат во 15 спортски дисциплини во три града: Скопје, Куманово, и еден занимлив факт, Осијек во Хрватска, кој ќе биде град-домаќин на гимнастичарите. Ова е еден голем и значаен момент за Македонија и за европскиот спорт.

СИТЕ ОЧИ ВПЕРЕНИ НА СПОРТОТ ВО МАКЕДОНИЈА ОВОЈ ЈУЛИ!



Основен во 1990 под водство на визијата на Жак Рож, поранешен претседател на Европскиот Олимписки Комитет, ЕМОФ постана водечки мулти-спортски настан за млади атлетичари во Европа. Првото издание на фестивалот се одржа во Брисел во 1991, речиси две децении пред да бидат востановени интернационалните Младински Олимписки Игри. Оттогаш, ЕМОФ прерасна во значајна цел за идните Олимпијци, нудејќи им искуство од прва рака на интернационален натпревар од високи размери во олимписка атмосфера.

Оваа година за прв пат ЕМОФ ќе се одржи во Македонија. За сите нас кои со години го следиме настанот, јас лично почнувајќи од 2015-та година, особено во делот со гимнастичките дисциплини, сме почестени од фактот што ќе се одржува токму во овој дел на Балканот. Тоа само по себе е доказ дека амбицијата, енергијата и визијата се поважни од големината на една земја. Македонија е подготвена да биде не само домаќин туку и да импресионира.

Да се биде домаќин на овој настан не е само логистички или спортски предизвик, туку и културен и симболички момент. Тоа е доказ на остатокот од Европа дека Македонија е динамична, млада земја полна со потенцијал.

Иако земјата досега беше домаќин на други интернационални натпревари како EuroVolley 2023, ЕМОФ 2025 ќе биде најголемиот спортски настан досега. Влогот е голем, но и можностите се уште поголеми. Наследството на ЕМОФ ќе продолжи и по завршувањето на цела една недела во јули со спортски настани. Ќе вклучи и реновирање на спортска инфраструктура, новообучени професионалци, ревитализирачка волонтерска мрежа, и најважно, генерација на млади луѓе инспирирана од олимписките вредности на почит, пријателство и извонредност. Преку можноста да биде домаќин на ваков интернационален настан, Македонија ќе им покаже на Европа и на светот колку динамична, млада и гостопримлива е оваа земја. Преку медиумската покриеност,

интернационалната покриеност и јавниот ангажман, ЕМОФ ќе биде светол патоказ за земјата и ќе отвори нови можности за партнерства, инвестиции и развој.

Влијанието што настан од ваков размер може да го има е нешто навистина моќно. Исто како што Франција виде пораст на интересот за пинг-понг по олимпискиот успех, Македонија можеби ќе доживее и оживување на младинските спортови поттикната од возбудата и успехот на ЕМОФ. Децата овде ќе имаат можност да ги видат одблизу интернационалните атлетичари, можеби и за прв пат. Ќе имаат можност да видат и да откријат спортови за кои не слушнале порано, да ги сретнат нивните спортски идоли и да сонуваат уште посмело.

Програмата на настанот е зачудувачки разновидна, прикажувајќи индивидуални и тимски спортови. Дисциплините вклучуваат атлетика, бадминтон, баскет 3 на 3, традиционална кошарка, кајак слалом, друмски и планински велосипедизам, ракомет, пливаче, стрелаштво, пинг-понг, таеквондо, одбојка и гимнастика. Овие настани се повеќе од само освојување медали. Тие се тука да послужат за раст, поврзување и страст. За многумина атлетичари, ова ќе биде нивното прво искуство на натпревар од интернационален карактер. За гледачите, пак, ова ќе биде можност да бидат сведоци на моментот на испишување историја од страна на атлетичари кои еден ден можат да постанат глобални ѕвезди.

Но, ништо од ова не би било возможно без волонтерите, околу 800, кои доаѓаат од цела Европа, сите работејќи во позадина со цел непречено одвивање на настанот. Активностите на волонтерите ќе вклучуваат пречек на делегациите, нудење поддршка на атлетичарите како и логистика што несомнено ќе ги направи да бидат тивките херои на ЕМОФ 2025. Мојам да кажам и од лично искуство дека волонтирањето на настан од ваков карактер е, просто, незаборавно. Волонтерите не се само луѓето кои ќе бидат тука за да помогнат, туку ова искуство ќе придонесе и за нивниот раст. Преку запознавањето со луѓе од различни

култури, ќе имаат можност да ги развијат сопствените вештини и да бидат дел од нешто многу поголемо од самите нив.

За волонтерите од Македонија ова е можност еднаш во животот за да ја претстават сопствената земја, за да ја споделат сопствената култура и енергија со светот, и да остават трага во историјата на македонскиот спорт. За љубителите на спортот ова е остварување на сонот: да се биде во центарот на збиднувањето каде ќе можат да ги поддржат атлетичарите и да придонесат за успешно издание на фестивалот што ги слави олимписките вредности. Духот на тимската работа и колективната енергија ќе го обележат настанот.

ЕМОФ не е само спектакл за атлетичарите или организаторите туку и за самата публика. Во Скопје, Куманово и Осијек локалните жители и посетителите ќе имаат пристап до натпреварите, културните програми и едукативните активности пропратени со исклучителна енергија на домашен терен и сето тоа бесплатно. Фамилиите, младите луѓе и фановите ќе имаат можност одблизу да го искушат олимпискиот дух и да навиваат за нивниот омилен тим како и да ја почувствуваат возбудата што се дел од исклучителен европски настан. И како што се случува кога една земја е домаќин на ваков настан, домашните атлетичари ќе блескаат уште посилено, понесени од енергијата на толпата.

Без оглед на тоа дали сте доживотен спортски фан или едноставно сте љубопитни, преку вашето присуство на ЕМОФ ќе ги поддржите следните генерации, доживувајќи ја возбудата од посетата на натпревар од интернационален карактер и гордоста да се биде дел од историски момент за Македонија.

Се гледаме во Скопје.

Ками Бодуен

Превод: Кристина Стаменова

Извори:
skopje2025.sporteurope.org
eurolympic.org: European Youth Olympic Festival
 – a blend of sport, culture and education
european-games.org: EYOF

HOW TO WRITE ARTICLES FOR VOICES



TOPIC

- Anything, except politics or hate speech
- Think of topics that would interest **our audience** (youth)
- Maybe a **current event or trend** that you could write about?

RESEARCH

- Use **credible sources** when researching your topic
- Double-check** any information you include in your article to ensure **accuracy**
- Don't plagiarize**
- Link the sources** at the end of your article

STRUCTURE

- Use **short**, attention-grabbing **headline**
- Write an **introduction** at the beginning (what, who, when, why, how)
- Include **body** and **conclusion** in your article, maintain a logical flow
- Write your **full name** at the end

WRITING

- Use **clear and concise language** that your audience will understand
- Avoid** too technical terms and **hard language** unless necessary
- Be engaging** and try to make your article interesting to read

FEW RULES

- The article should be around 500 - 1000 words
- Don't** include images or illustrations in the document
- Send possible **photos separately** (with sources and assured they're **free of copyrights**)
- Edit and revise** (clarity, grammar, and spelling error)

WHAT ELSE?

- You can write in English, Macedonian and Albanian
- You don't need to be pro, VOICES is **open for everyone!**
- Writing to the magazine is **voluntary**
- We can provide you with a **certificate** if you become a writer for VOICES magazine





Our monthly magazine has a very simple, yet powerful, mission - to be the voice of youth. And how do we do that?

We encourage young people to take an active part in today's society through journalism and designing by giving them a platform to express themselves. VOICES is produced in Skopje, Macedonia, and published online every month and four times per year as a printed edition.

Join VOICES team!

Contact us in our social media pages or write us an e-mail. What would you be interested in doing?



Writing articles

VOICES accepts articles about anything, except politics or hate speech. Brainstorm your ideas with us and write articles once, twice, or every month!



Translating articles

VOICES is published in three languages: English, Macedonian and Albanian. If you are a native speaker or fluent in these languages, join our translation team!



Featuring your work

If you are an artist, photographer, designer or other, your work can be presented in the magazine. Send us your method of art and a short bio of yourself!



www.voiceskopje.org



<https://vcs.org.mk/>

voiceskopje



vcs.skopje

voiceskopje



vcs.skopje

vcs.sending@gmail.com



vcs_contact@yahoo.com

VOICES to Hear



vcs.skopje





"Matka Canyon is one of the most breathtaking natural landmarks in the Skopje region and will serve as the venue for the canoe slalom event on the Treska River at EYOF 2025."
(EYOF Skopje 2025: Competition venues - Canoe Slalom)