



VOICES

MAGAZINE FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

may 2026



There was a time when paper had weight. Ink stayed. It marked your hands, your day. Now it slips past us, screen lit, endless, forgettable.

In Macedonia, print is not dying loudly. It is thinning out, quietly. Fewer pages, fewer kiosks, fewer reasons to hold something real. We scroll instead. We consume faster than we can feel. Everything is immediate, and gone just as quickly.

Paper resists that. It slows you down. It asks for attention, for time. Maybe that is why it is fading. Or maybe that is exactly why it will survive, just not the way it used to.

The future of print is small. Niche magazines. Zines. Objects made by hand, for a few, not for all. Fragile, messy, honest. Paper as intention, not industry.

The Korean film "No Other Choice" captures this decline with a quiet cynicism, watching a world built on paper dissolve, almost absurdly, into nothing. And still, something lingers. A need for texture. For permanence, however brief.

Aurélie Elisa Morra

Имаше време кога хартијата имаше тежина. Мастилото остануваше. Ги обележуваше вашите раце, вашиот ден. Сега ни се лизга, осветлено од екранот, бесконечно, заборавливо.

Во Македонија, печатените материјали не умираат гласно. Се проретчуваат тивко. Помалку страници, помалку киосци, помалку причини да држиме нешто вистинско. Наместо тоа, ние скролуваме. Консумираме побрзо отколку што можеме да почувствуваме. Сè е моментално, а исчезнува исто толку брзо.

Хартијата се спротивставува на тоа. Ве забавува. Бара внимание, време. Можеби затоа бледнее. Или можеби токму затоа ќе преживее, само не како порано.

Иднината на печатените материјали е мала. Специјализирани списанија. Зини. Производи направени рачно, за малкумина, не за сите. Кршливо, неуредно, искрено. Хартијата како намера, а не индустрија.

Корејскиот филм „Нема друг избор“ го доловува овој пад со тивок цинизам, гледајќи како еден свет изграден на хартија - се раствора, речиси апсурдно, во ништо. И сепак, нешто се задржува. Потребна за текстура. За трајност, колку и да е краткотрајна.

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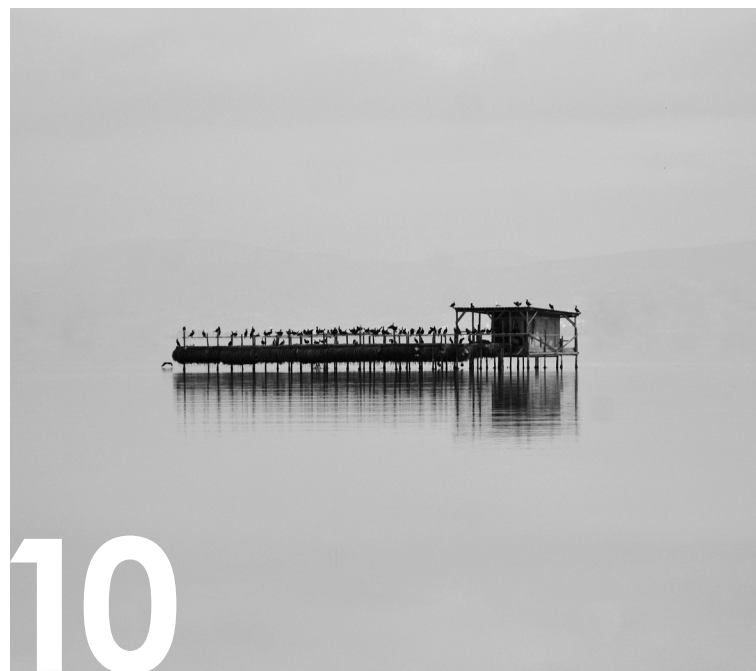
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A broad part of our communication happens unconsciously and through nonverbal cues of our body. One of the most important ones is the eye.

The eye is the most complex organ after the brain. It is a sensory organ that captures light and inverts it into visual images through electrical impulses. But the eye is not just a receiver but also a reflector of our reactions to the impulses explaining the importance for communication. Research even showed that prolonged eye contact induces positive feelings. In one study this was measured by muscle responses like the zygomatic response which is primarily driven by the zygomaticus major muscles. Those are getting automatically triggered and contract the facial muscles that lift the corners of the mouth, making us smile. In the study the zygomatic response was associated with a positive effect which was greater by seeing another person with direct eye contact compared to an averted gaze.

Therefore direct eye contact can make us happy because the brain recognizes it as signals for social inclusion and with that fulfils our intrinsic need to belong.

The sense of belonging is even recognized as an evolutionary need that impacts our emotional well-being and influences our mental health, quality of life and physical well-being positively.

Because we perceive approximately 80% of our information through our eyes such as shapes, colours or movements we also show our reaction through our eyes. Within seconds our brain processes all of those impulses and reacts with emotions instinctively without conscious intervention.

Our eyes change focus 50 times per second without us even having to think about it. That is because the muscles of the eye are controlled by the automatic nervous system just like breathing. For example blinking can show our emotional state increasing with anxiety, stress, excitement and decreasing when tired or fatigued.

Even our pupils constrict when we are tired but dilate when scared or excited because of the enhanced adrenaline level. It not just reacts depending on the amount of light but is also connected to the emotional center in the brain. Our eyes portray every emotional state unfiltered.

Therefore eye contact is the most intimate form of non verbal communication as it can foster immediate emotional connection and that is what scares most.

We are living in a world full of filters and distractions, so

SUNNY

being seen in real life without being able to mask can feel like exposure.

Holding eye contact means tolerating closeness but for some who grew up where emotional expression was discouraged or being looked at meant danger it can be a struggle. Negative life experiences like bullying or trauma often result in social anxiety disorders which are caused by a mix of different factors often of environmental, biological and genetic nature.

Those suffering from social anxiety disorders tend to shy away from eye contact to avoid attention falling onto them. Because attention feels more like scrutiny and possible judgment.

Even though it is common to believe that looking away is linked

to lying, research shows that it is more linked to anxiety, thinking hard, shame and cultural norms. For instance the culture around eye contact varies widely from western cultures seeing direct eye contact as a sign of attentiveness, honesty and confidence. Meanwhile in East Asian cultures it is often perceived as disrespectful, confrontational and overly intimate.

The loads of idioms like “love at first sight”, “out of sight out of mind” or “to see eye to eye” still show the importance of eyes for us humans.

Despite that, we tend to shy away from eye contact, surrounding it with mystery and vulnerability. Already used in the Torah and Bible as a symbol for the watching god or the “opening eyes” as a metaphor of religious enlightenment, it is till today a common symbol in literature. Shakespeare saw it as the mirror of inner struggles or moral dilemmas and in George Orwell’s 1984 they are a sign of surveillance and the loss of privacy through the big brother. The eyes can mean many things so let’s not jump to conclusions too easily.

But next time you meet somebody, take the time to try to catch a glimpse into the world of others through the windows of their soul, their eyes.

Nelli Winzer

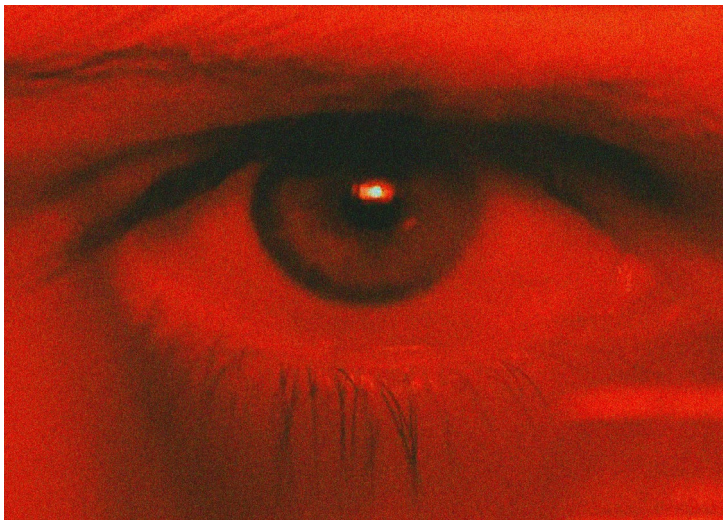
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Social anxiety disorder (social phobia) | Symptoms and causes - Mayo Clinic



RAYS

Eyes are the window into one's soul
One polished fresh - some dirty and old
Scatched from cold moments and sunny rays
- but only reflected by broken glass

Some eyes seeing more than others can fathom
Holding memories deep

The eye contact once soft now hard as steel
Boring into others soft like clay

Destroying imagination through realization
No place to no more delay

Tired eyes screaming to be saved

But everybody too scared to hold the gaze

Make Money While You Sleep

In a capitalistic society, all wealth slowly but surely trickles to the top 1%. This is not a mistake or mere luck. It is the result of a specially programmed system. It all started with one of the richest people in the world, John D. Rockefeller, and his father who went by the nickname “Devil Bill”. He placed immense pressure on his son. He showed him that the world is a “bad, bad place” and that to survive, he should be too.

“I cheat my boys every chance I get. I want to make them sharp!” he famously said. The most legendary story of Devil Bill’s parenting involves a physical trust lesson. He would tell his young sons to jump from a chair or a high porch into his arms. Just as they were about to land, he would step back and let them crash to the floor. “Remember, never trust anyone” he would tell them. Devil Bill would dress

in the finest suits, rent the best hotel rooms, and call himself by a fake name “Dr. Levingston.” He taught his sons that perception is reality. If you look like a million dollars, people will give you their last cent.

The story of the Rockefellers is important because they spent their fortunes creating a school system perfect for their needs. They made sure to create the “perfect worker” one who listens to commands, doesn’t think for themselves, and will never be competition. That is why we don’t learn anything about money in school, even though school exists to help us get a job, and a job exists to make money. If you learn about finances, you become direct competition to the elites. However, if you don’t, you remain the perfect employee. You work or die.

Moreover, with the growth of the U.S. government and massive corporate lobbying, President Nixon took the U.S. dollar off the gold standard in 1971. The world followed. Nowadays, money is printed on a staggering scale. All of this money goes first to corporations and banks. They can spend it before inflation hits, destroying the purchasing power of currencies, causing real wages to drop and melting people's cash savings. However, the rich don't hold cash, they buy by nature inflation proof investments that actually increase in value as inflation rises. Furthermore, banks, governments, and the wealthy hold a lot of debt, and inflation is actually beneficial to them. They need to pay back much less than they borrowed.

A further increase in the wealth gap happened in 1980. President Reagan persuaded the American public that if they lowered taxes on the rich, more money would be left for everyday people. Because wealthy people would share their money with them. However they never did. From then on, the wealthy paid approximately 80% less in taxes than before. That started the greatest era of inequality for Western countries in modern history. With less money to the government, the poor were left helpless. Which we can observe in the homelessness, addiction and no free health care in the USA.

Currently, the most successful investors worldwide are not even from the field of finance or economics. Surprisingly or not, they are politicians using insider information to trade on the financial markets. For instance Nancy Pelosi has made so much money trading stocks using insider information that it would take her roughly 700 years to earn that amount from her high paying political salary alone. Luckily, we don't live in the medieval ages, and information is widely available. Super investors like Warren Buffett or Ray Dalio share their knowledge for free. You can read a book or watch a YouTube video. Being rich is not evil, they want you to believe it is so that you will never try to compete with them. Fight back, educate yourself, and take ownership of your life and your money. Make money work for you. The capitalistic system can benefit everyone, even the poorest person. You need to learn how it works. Of course, the system is flawed, but we are here to make a change and not to follow Devil Bill's vision for your slave life.

Piotr Mucha

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Interview with Ivan Sterjovski

What is your position and contribution to SOS Children's Village?

I am the Project Manager for "Youth Empowerment Enabling Prospects 2" (YEEP) for Macedonia. The project aims to empower youth at social risk and facilitate their access to the labor market. We achieve this through life skills and employability training, career counseling, psychosocial support, and financial aid for vocational courses. We also connect youth with employers for internships and employment, and provide mini-grants for those at social risk to start their own small businesses.

What are the main goals of SOS Children's Village?

SOS Children's Village Macedonia is an organization dedicated to ensuring that every child grows up with love, respect, and a sense of security. We help children and young people recognize and express their individual abilities, interests, and talents. We ensure they gain the education and skills necessary to have the bright future they deserve.

Who is the target of your mission?

Our primary target group is children growing up without parents or parental care. However, the expertise we have built over the past 25 years has allowed us to reach additional groups in need. We counsel families facing challenges and promote the model of positive parenting. We also support specific groups of young people facing various hurdles. For instance, our project includes and supports youth with intellectual and physical disabilities, single parents, victims of domestic violence, youth from migrant backgrounds, those with speech and hearing impairments, and the visually impaired. We also support young people who have made mistakes in life and have criminal records, because, like everyone else, they deserve full support for a fresh start as conscientious citizens.

Do you see the result/impact of your work?

This is one of those rare projects where results become visible just a few months after the youth join our activities, and that makes me exceptionally happy. There are numerous examples of young people who faced existential insecurity but, after joining our project, found their first job and began walking firmly toward their career goals.

What is the one thing that you learned from working here?

That's an unfair question! I've learned so many things here; how can I choose just one? (laughs) Okay, let me try. Here is something very important I've learned: when given the opportunity, young people and individuals with disabilities are actually workers with above-average productivity. Probably because the chance to show their potential isn't handed to them on a silver platter, they value it more. So, when companies say they want to hire people with disabilities to be "socially responsible," I proudly correct them. They should hire them because they recognize their potential and because these individuals will improve the company's productivity and business results.

What is the most challenging thing about your work?

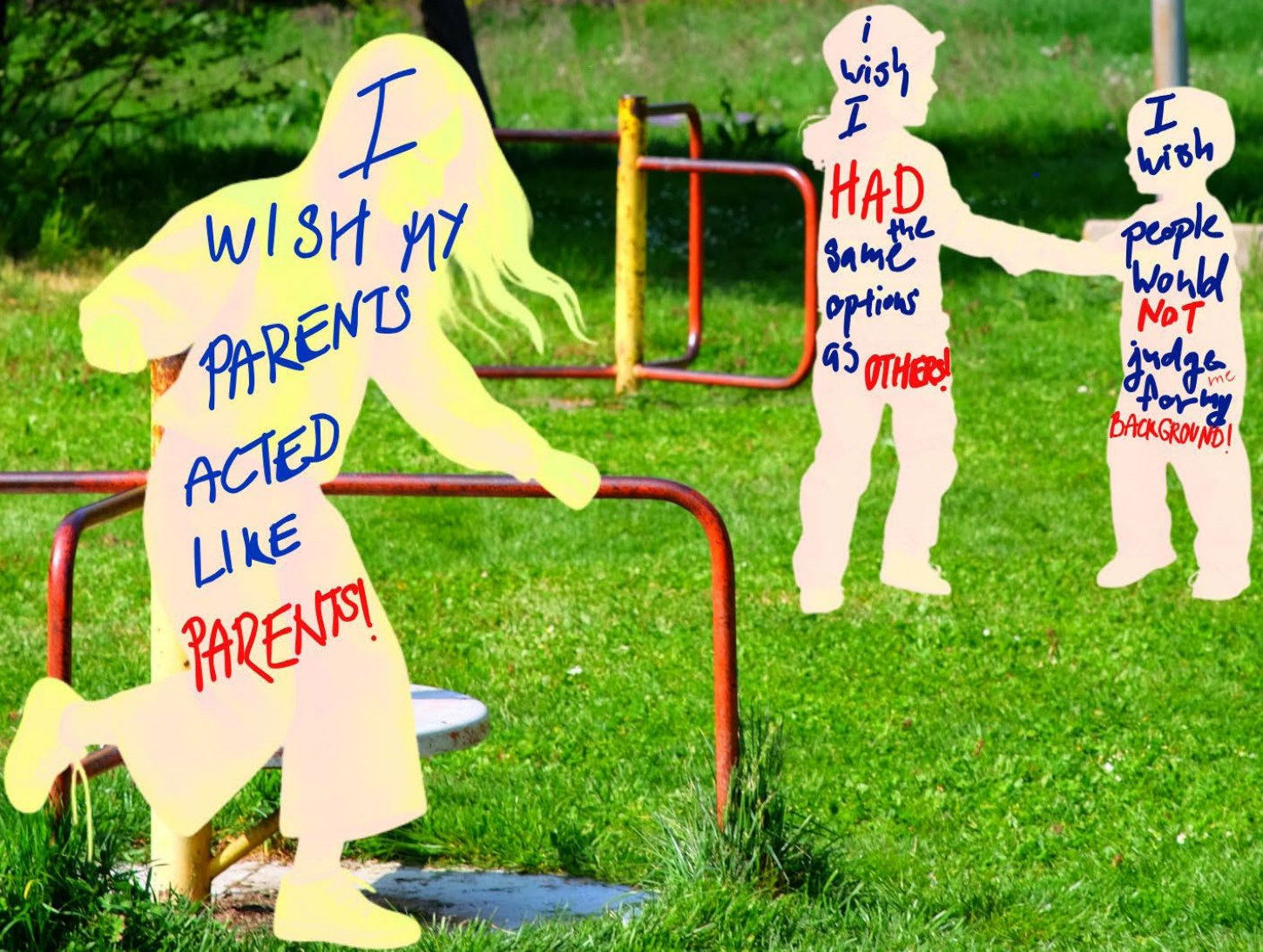
Ugh, the administrative aspects of project management! (laughs) Jokes aside, I know they exist to ensure transparency and accountability, but sometimes, after spending hours writing reports or managing documents according to our many procedures, I get a bit frustrated. I feel that at that time, I could be doing more essential work in the field, helping even more people in need. It is also difficult for me to accept that in the 21st century, we as a society still haven't built a system that provides adequate support for all vulnerable categories, an environment where everyone can realize their personal and professional potential, and feel like a valued member of the community.

How can we, as ordinary citizens, contribute to your mission?

In many ways, actually. First, by acting as active and conscious citizens who don't just complain about problems but actively work to overcome them. For example, by volunteering to support those at social risk. Also, we are an organization largely funded by donations. Many individuals and companies who have seen our work firsthand have become dedicated donors. On the SOS Children's Village website, there is an option for monthly donations. Sometimes the amount is symbolic, the price of two coffees, but it makes a real change in the lives of children and youth without parental care. Lastly, but just as importantly, promoting our activities and mission, as you are doing with this interview, is a huge support. I sincerely thank you for that.

"Youth Empowerment Enabling Prospects 2" is a project funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ) and Children's Villages Worldwide.

Žaneta Kobiliaková



I
WISH MY
PARENTS
ACTED
LIKE
PARENTS!

i
wish
I
HAD
the
same
options
as OTHERS!

I
wish
people
would
NOT
judge
me
for my
BACKGROUND!

SILENCE

There are strong words that impose themselves, that snap, that take up space. And then there is silence. A discreet word, erased, pushed in the background, yet it contains the universe. It is not the waste between the words, not the awkward moment at the end of a sentence. It's a substance, a presence one cannot avoid, a breath. In an era where the noise, alerts and endless flows saturate the environment, silence becomes rare. We flee from it, fill it, replace it. And yet, it's essential. It's where thought is created, where emotions reflect, the foundation of speech.

It's in silence that we know if we feel at peace with ourselves. I would even say that it's in silence that we know if we are at peace with someone else. A pleasant conversation with someone is a sign but a pleasant silence with someone, it's harder, it's proof.

Silence speaks without words. It speaks through absences, hesitations, glances. In a conversation, silence says a lot: hesitation, complicity, refusal, hurt, tenderness... It can say "I'm here", it can say "I'm listening", it can say "no". Learning to listen to silence is learning to listen differently, it's learning to focus on something else than words, what is behind them.

*Sometimes, silence
is worth a thousand
words.*

Silence is a place. It could be as vast as a plain, or as intimate as a room plunged into darkness. It can be warm like a summer afternoon or icy like a winter night. In a library, silence is king, punctuated by the noise of turning pages. In nature,

silence soothes, it becomes harmony, envelops us, reminds us that we are part of something greater. But in a waiting room, silence becomes heavy, tense, preceding important news. Each place creates its own silence, a silence that belongs to it, with its own rhythms, texture, and shadows.

Musicians understand this well. It's only notes that must be played, but also silences. Without them, the melody collapses; it doesn't sound the same. Silence is not an absence of music, it's its breath. It gives the sound its relief, its depth, its emotion.

In truth, it is everywhere, but we only see it when we choose to look at it. It is what connects things together, what gives meaning to what came before and what is going to come. Some silences soothe, some hurt. Some are chosen; some are imposed. But they all say something. They are the mirror of our emotions that even words can't describe.

Silence is therefore not emptiness; it's a presence. It doesn't impose itself; it invites itself. It demands nothing but offers a lot: words take roots, emotions find their place; the mind rests.

Learning to listen to silence is learning to listen to the world.

When everything stops, when noises fade, when voices fall quiet, all that remains is silence.

Paul Goumault

Why do we love superheroes?

The first superhero appeared in a comic book called Action Comics #1, named Superman, who possessed superhuman powers, costumes, and a secret identity. He was created in 1938 by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, and published by DC Comics. A year later, new superheroes appeared: Batman in May 1939 and Namor in April 1939. This event marked the beginning of the Golden Age of comics.

Superheroes hold a very important place in our society today. We see them everywhere: in movies, TV series, comics, or video games. Characters like Spider-Man, Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman have become incredibly famous and are known worldwide. But why do people love superheroes so much?

Superheroes dress up in elaborate costumes and possess extraordinary powers. For example, Spider-Man can climb walls and shoot webs, while Superman can fly and is incredibly strong. These powers are impressive and inspire dreams. Many children, and even adults, imagine what they would do if they had these abilities. It allows them to escape from everyday life, but also to act like a superhero on a daily basis.

Superheroes aren't just strong; they're also human in their way of life. They have problems just like everyone else. Spider-Man has to manage his studies, his job, and his personal relationships. Batman, for his part, experienced a difficult event in his childhood, which explains his behavior. These hardships make the characters more realistic and allow people to identify with them.



Our favorite characters represent important values. They defend justice, help others, and protect the vulnerable. They show us that it is important to do good, even in difficult situations. Batman continues to fight crime thanks to his courage and intelligence, despite not having superhuman powers. This proves that everyone can make a difference in their own way.

Superhero stories are very engaging. They are often full of action, suspense, and emotion. The battles against villains, the moments of danger, and the plot twists captivate audiences. Modern films also make extensive use of special effects, which makes the scenes even more impressive. They bring people together. Fans love discussing the movies, the characters, and the stories. Some even dress up as their favorite heroes at events. Superheroes are therefore part of popular culture and create connections between people.

They evolve over time. In the past, they were often portrayed as perfect and flawless. Today, they are more complex. They can doubt themselves, fail, and make mistakes. This makes them more relatable and even more compelling to follow.

We highly value superheroes because they inspire our dreams with their powers, but also because they resemble humans. They convey important values such as courage, justice, and mutual support. Thanks to this, they continue to fascinate people of all ages.

Adrien Gravereaux

Why do you

The intensity, stress, and crowd of daily life often drive individuals to seek ways to escape these pressures. This search sometimes leads to choosing a calm and solitary lifestyle, while at other times it may result in turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms. Such choices can gradually develop into habits and eventually evolve into addictions.

Addiction disorders are mental conditions that negatively affect an individual's social, familial, and professional life, reducing overall functionality. They are generally classified into two main categories: substance-related addictions and behavioral addictions. Addictions such as alcohol, smoking, drugs, and gambling pose serious threats to both physical and psychological health.

It would be insufficient to explain the causes of addiction solely as a means of escaping stress. Factors such as imitation, social environment, the desire for acceptance, and lack of attention also play a significant role in this process. In this context, smoking stands out as one of the most common forms of addiction.

Smoking habits are often developed during childhood and adolescence under the influence of social, psychological, and genetic factors. Observing family members who smoke can arouse curiosity in children and lead them to perceive smoking as a symbol of adulthood. Similarly, among young people, starting to smoke in order to avoid social exclusion or to feel a sense of belonging is quite common. During university years, intense stress and academic pressure are also key factors that contribute to smoking.

Over time, smoking leads to both physical and psychological dependence. It is estimated that approximately 1.3 billion people worldwide smoke. According to data from the World

smoke?

Health Organization (WHO), millions of people die every year due to tobacco-related diseases. In addition, passive smoking remains a significant public health issue.

The harms of smoking are not limited to health alone; its economic and environmental impacts should not be overlooked. On an individual level, problems such as bad breath, deterioration of dental health, loss of taste, and a general decline in quality of life are commonly observed.

As the author of this article, I would like to state that I personally experience smoking addiction. Over time, smoking begins to feel like a daily necessity; when not smoking, feelings of restlessness, stress, and discomfort may arise. However, this does not mean that smoking is a real need. On the contrary, it is merely an illusion created by addiction. It is clear that smoking is not an effective way to cope with stress; rather, it deepens the problem.

Smoking and similar addictions are harmful habits that consume an individual's health, time, and financial resources. Therefore, it is of great importance for us to avoid such habits and take conscious steps to overcome existing addictions.

Mehmet Yücedağ

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French Touch

8:35 AM - Morning in Skopje doesn't start, it leaks in.

Soft light spilling over cracked sidewalks, brushing the side of a small church on the corner like it's half-remembering something sacred. *Orthodox prayers, not loudly, just enough to remind you that time is real and you're already late.* The air still carries that early spring hesitation, warm, but not committed. People move slowly, like they're negotiating with the day.

I walk the same route. Same faces, same dog, same man smoking like it's a ritual instead of a habit. Casino, Church, Supermarket, Bus Station.

Everything feels suspended, like a frame stretched just a second too long. Like a scene that forgot to cut. Then I press play.

Playground Love slips in, no announcement, no urgency. A bassline like a pulse under the skin, a voice drifting somewhere between memory and dream.

And suddenly the street isn't just a street.

It's a shot.

A mood.

A moment that knows it's being watched.

This is what the French Touch did. Not exploded, no, it seeped.

Back in the 90s, while the world pushed louder, faster, harder, a few French producers slowed things down. Filtered disco, stretched funk, loops that breathed instead of shouted. Daft Punk, Air, they weren't just making tracks, they were bending time. **Making repetition feel alive.**

It wasn't about the drop. It was about the drift.

They took the past, 70s grooves, analog warmth, and ran it through machines that didn't quite clean it up. Left the dust on. Left space. Always space. Enough for you to fall into it.

And it traveled.

Quietly.

Clubs first, sure. Then everywhere else. Into pop, into film, into the background of everyday life. You hear it now in places that don't even know its name. Coffee shops, ads, playlists designed to make you feel something without asking what.

A kind of sonic ghost.

What's strange is hearing it here, in Skopje, far from Paris, far from the mythology. But maybe that's the point. It works better in the in-between places. Where things aren't polished. Where reality has edges.

Because the music smooths nothing, it reframes. The cracked pavement becomes texture. The routine becomes rhythm. The walk to work becomes narrative. Not important, not dramatic, just cinematic in a low, lingering way.

The French Touch understood something simple: life isn't made of peaks.

It's made of loops.

And loops can be beautiful, if you let them breathe.

Because they missed it.

Of course, it got absorbed. Everything does.

The sound became formula, the filters became presets, the groove became product. You can hear bad imitations everywhere, clean, efficient, empty.

They missed the restraint. The patience. The idea that not everything needs to happen at once.

So I keep walking.

Church behind me now, sun a little higher, the city waking up whether it wants to or not. The track keeps playing, unbothered, unchanged. And for a few minutes, that's enough. Not escape. Not transformation. Just a shift. Just the sense that even here, even now, something ordinary can feel like it matters.

Aurélie Elisa Morra

SKOPJE IN LAYERS

As an interior architecture student, I experience new cities through observation, noticing how people use spaces, how atmospheres form, and how everyday life shapes design.

In Skopje, one of the first things that stood out was the café and bar culture. It reminded me of Türkiye's meyhane tradition, places not just for eating and drinking, but for slowing down and connecting.

The atmosphere through lighting, layout, and openness becomes part of how people unwind and spend time together.

As I moved beyond the center, the city unfolded in layers. Streets shaped by different communities each carried their own rhythm. Materials, colors, and spatial transitions kept shifting, turning every walk into a new composition. It made me realize how identity lives in space, not as a fixed style but as something constantly evolving.

Skopje's character is also shaped by its history of reconstruction after the 1963 earthquake. The presence of modernist and brutalist architecture gives the city a raw yet expressive quality, feeling both unfinished and intentional at the same time. This becomes clearer through its key buildings.

The Museum of Contemporary Art reflects openness and collective rebuilding, while the former railway station, now the Museum of the City of Skopje, holds memory in a physical way with its clock frozen at 5:17.

Alongside the fortress and the monumental structures by the river, these layers show how the city moves between past and present.

Then there are quieter moments within the city itself. Places like Matka canyon or Mount Vodno shift the pace, offering a sense of calm and a different spatial scale overlooking Skopje.

From above, the city reads as a composition of layers, where natural and built environments exist in constant dialogue.

Skopje, to me, feels like a balance of contrasts, raw yet calm, layered yet fluid, a city you don't just see but slowly experience.

Berna Demirci





HUMMUS OF THE BALKANS

Take some bell peppers, eggplant, a little salt and pepper, or even add a tomato as well - mix it all together - and you have the perfect example of the traditional cuisine and national pride of the various Balkan states, also known as “ajvar”.

This red paste made from various vegetables, also called the “hummus of the Balkans,” is currently really trending. People in this region still often make it themselves at home, and supermarkets here can’t really be called supermarkets if they don’t carry at least a small selection of ajvar.

However, the spread is also becoming increasingly popular in other parts of Europe, such as the UK and Germany. Denmark and Sweden have even added the word to their dictionaries. Understandably so, as it’s more versatile than almost anything else. Whether as a spread, an addition to pasta or stews, or even on its own, ajvar always works. And is even vegan!

But we wouldn’t be talking about a traditional Balkan dish here if not at least two countries were claiming it for its origin. For Macedonians, it’s naturally Macedonian; for Serbs from Serbia, and for Croats, it’s Croatian. And, of course, everyone is right.

When the popular singer Dua Lipa, originally from Kosovo, described ajvar as Albanian in 2020, a massive online debate erupted between the countries over the paste’s origins. There have even been lawsuits between companies from different countries over the spread.

But back to the actual facts about this famous spread: the word ajvar comes from the Turkish “havjar,” which means caviar. Some kafanas in the 19th century probably sold it as “red pepper caviar” due to the high prices of oil and pepper, and helped the paste to its famous name today. However, the exact country where it was first made is unknown.

Wherever it actually originated, the tradition of making it is similar in many countries. In the fall, large quantities of the necessary vegetables are gathered, after the peppers are roasted and peeled in a lengthy process before finally being processed. This is often an occasion for the whole family to gather and carry out this process together.

Nowadays, there are even entire “Ajvar tours” in the Balkans, restaurants across Europe that specifically promote the paste, and it can be purchased in many supermarkets around the world.

One thing is definitely certain: ajvar has earned its reputation as “caviar of the Balkans”, and is a star of the Balkan cuisine.

Lea Schwegmann

Sources:
Balkan Kitchen. (2020, December 16). Ajvar.

The Invisible Crisis of the 21st Century

Imagine waking up every morning in a place you've always known, where the air smells familiar, the streets move to a steady rhythm, and the landscape gives you a sense of safety and belonging. Your life unfolds quietly: work, home, time with loved ones, small plans for the future. Everything feels stable, almost unchanging. Then one day, something begins to shift, at first subtly, then unmistakably. The river that once sustained life overflows and carries homes away, or it disappears entirely, leaving the land cracked and barren. Storms, droughts, wildfires, or rising sea levels stop being distant news stories and become your reality, forcing you to make a choice: stay and risk everything, or leave and become one of millions of climate refugees.

What happens when home becomes uninhabitable not because of war or persecution, but because of the climate itself?

Climate change is no longer an abstract future scenario but an increasingly visible driver of human migration. Droughts, floods, rising sea levels, and environmental degradation are forcing entire communities to leave places where life has become unsustainable. This is how the phenomenon commonly referred to as climate refugees emerges.

Despite its growing scale, for instance the World Bank's Groundswell report that estimated that climate change could force 216 million across six world regions to migrate within their own countries by 2050, the international legal framework has not kept pace with this reality. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee "is a person who has a claim of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or rules in force outside his or her country of origin and is unable or unwilling to derive from this fear the protection of this country".

What does it mean in practice?

Simply under current regulations, people displaced by climate-related disasters are not formally recognized as refugees, leaving them in a legal grey zone with limited access to protection and support. As a result, governments and institutions are facing an increasingly urgent question of how to respond to climate-induced migration that is already reshaping population movements around the world. The importance of this issue becomes even clearer when viewed through the lens of recent history. The world has already witnessed how large-scale migration can challenge political systems, strain resources, and deepen social divisions, as seen during the European migrant crisis. Early warnings about rising instability and migration pressures had been voiced years before, including by leaders such as Angela Merkel, yet coordinated action came too late or proved insufficient. The result was not only a humanitarian emergency but also lasting political consequences across

Europe. Climate-induced migration has the potential to unfold on an even larger scale, making it not just an environmental concern, but a critical global challenge that demands proactive and cooperative solutions before it escalates beyond control.

In the end, climate refugees are not a distant possibility but a growing reality that challenges the way we understand responsibility, borders, and human rights in the 21st century. As environmental changes continue to accelerate, the gap between existing legal frameworks and lived human experiences will only widen. Ignoring this issue risks repeating past mistakes on a far greater scale, while addressing it requires not only policy innovation but also a shift in perspective - recognizing that behind every statistic is a person forced to leave not by choice, but by necessity.

Karolina Tulik

Sources:
 THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS OF 12 AUGUST 1949
 worldbank.org: Climate Change Could Force 216 Million People to Migrate Within Their Own Countries by 2050
 S. Mundy Race for Tomorrow: A Journey Through the Front Lines of the Climate Fight



Трка без старт: кога почнува 'доцнењето'?

Притисокот на генерацијата што расте меѓу очекувања, споредби и брзина без пауза

Колку вреди еден живот — ако го мериме во години, а не во длабочина?

Постои нешто тивко, но постојано, што нè следи додека растеме. Не е гласно како критика, ниту топло како поддршка. Тоа е чувство. Чувство дека времето нè гледа. Дека општеството нè набљудува како експеримент во тек — ќе успееме ли, ќе „станеме“ ли нешто, ќе оправдаме ли нечија вера... или нечиј сомнеж.

Ние сме генерација што истовремено е и надеж и разочарување во туѓите очи. За едните, ние сме потенцијал — идни лидери, креатори, промени. За другите, ние сме изгубени, расеани, „премногу во телефони, премалку во реалноста“.

И парадоксот? И двете страни очекуваат нешто од нас.

И токму тука почнува притисокот — не како удар, туку како постепено стегање. Како да си во соба што полека се намалува, а никој не ти кажал дека треба да излезеш.

Живееме во време кое не мирува. Не затоа што не може — туку затоа што не смее. Брзината денес не е избор, туку норма. Во просек, човек денес прима

повеќе информации за еден ден отколку што човек од 18-ти век примал за цел живот. Тоа не е само статистика — тоа е тежина. Тежина на туѓи животи, туѓи успеси, туѓи патишта што несвесно ги носиме со себе.

И додека се обидуваме да најдеме свој глас, веќе сме преплавени со илјадници други. Па почнуваме да се споредуваме.

На 22 години, Волфганг Амадеус Моцарт веќе имал напишано над 30 симфонии и концерти. Но она што ретко се кажува е дека тој почнал да компонира на 5 години — не како хоби, туку како резултат на интензивна, речиси експериментална едукација од страна на неговиот татко. Неговото „рано достигнување“ не било само талент — туку систем, притисок, и живот целосно посветен на една работа од најрана возраст.

На 23 години, Исак Њутн веќе ги поставувал темелите на гравитацијата — но тоа било во период кога универзитетите биле затворени поради чума, и тој поминал години во изолација. Неговите најголеми идеи не се родиле во брзина — туку во тишина.

Винсент Ван Гог не продал речиси ни една слика за време на својот живот. Денес неговите дела вредат милиони, но неговото време не го препознало. Што значи тоа? Дека времето не е секогаш праведен судија.

А Чарлс Дарвин ја градел својата теорија повеќе од 20 години пред да ја објави. Две децении сомнеж, истражување, двоумење — нешто што денес би изгледало како „предолго чекање“.

Па, што навистина гледаме кога ги гледаме овие приказни?





Не само генијалност.
Туку контекст.

Ритам.

И најважното — различни патишта што никогаш не биле направени по ист шаблон.

И тука се крие една мисла што сите ја знаеме, ама ретко ја сфаќаме сериозно: нема правила.

Не постои универзален редослед по кој треба да се случува животот. Нема точен момент кога „треба“ да успееш, ниту формула што гарантира дека нешто ќе вреди само ако се случи рано. Секој од овие луѓе не следел правило — тие го пишувале своето. И можеби токму затоа нивните приказни денес ни изгледаат како исклучок.

А можеби не се исклучок.

Можеби се доказ дека правилото никогаш не постоело.

Ние, пак, живееме како да постои.

Како да има невидлив распоред: до оваа возраст — тоа, до следната — нешто повеќе, и ако задоцниш — си промашил.

Но кој го напишал тој распоред?

Историјата? Не — таа е хаотична, непредвидлива. Општеството? Можеби — но тоа се менува побрзо отколку што ние можеме да го следиме.

Или... ние самите, обидувајќи се да внесеме ред таму каде што природно го нема?

Можеби вистинскиот проблем не е притисокот од времето — туку нашата потреба да го контролираме. Да го претвориме во нешто мерливо, споредливо, „правилно“.

А животот никогаш не бил тоа.

И тука доаѓа најсуптилниот притисок — оној што не го забележуваме. Не е во тоа што треба да направиме нешто.

Туку во тоа што мислиме дека мора да го направиме веднаш.

Како да постои некаков невидлив договор:

ако не си „нешто“ до одредена возраст — си задоцнил.

Но можеби најискрената вистина е оваа:

времето не доцни.

Ние само се споредуваме со туѓи часовници.

На крајот, можеби не сме притиснати од времето во кое живееме. Можеби сме притиснати од идејата дека треба да го победиме.

А времето никогаш не било непријател. Тоа е само простор во кој нешто може — или не мора — да се случи.

И можеби најголемата храброст денес не е да постигнеш нешто рано.

Туку да си дозволиш да не брзаш.

Да не станеш „нешто“ затоа што треба —

туку да стануваш затоа што чувствуваш дека е време.

Полека.

Несовршено.

Но свое.

Во свет што постојано трча — изборот да одиш со свој чекор е тивка револуција.

Анастасија Ѓорѓиевска

Slipped Away...

Before me, you appear
As if in a dream

A fleeting little dream
Whose ending is unknown

Sleep betrayed me,
The dream left unfinished

The alarm woke me,
My joy shattered

Ah, poor dream of mine,
Once again, you slipped away...

Jona Cenameri

Më Ike...

Përballë meje, shfaqesh
Si mes ëndërrimesh

Ëndërrza rrufjane
Që fundi si dihet

Gjumi më tradhtoi
Ëndrra mbet në gjysmë

Më zgjoi alarmi
Gëzimi mu thye

Ahhh moj ëndërr zeza
Sërishtmi më ike...

Jona Cenameri

STONE BRIDGE

Walking Through Skopje's Layers



As an architect interested in cultural heritage and urban identity, the way I try to understand a city often follows certain steps. While volunteering in Skopje, I used the same approach to get to know the city. The first step is to experience the city on foot: observing how streets connect, where public spaces are concentrated, and where people gather. The second step is to follow the historical layers of the city: understanding how architectural traces from different periods exist side by side and relate to each other. The final step is to observe how people interact with spaces in their daily lives, because the true meaning of a building or public area often appears in how people use it.

During my observations following these steps, I noticed that some spaces act as strong thresholds, connecting different layers of the city. These thresholds can be a square, a street, or a point that links two different urban areas.

The clearest impression I gained from my walks in the city is that Skopje is more than just its buildings. It is a layered city where different periods, cultures, and architectural styles coexist. These layers appear in a square, a narrow street, or even on a bridge.

At this point, the Stone Bridge over the Vardar River stands out as one of the spaces that best shows the city's layered structure. With a history of around six centuries, this bridge is not just a means of connecting two banks; it also forms an important spatial axis that makes Skopje's historical development readable. On one side are the narrow streets and traditional buildings of the historic bazaar, while on the other side are modern squares and new urban layouts. The bridge provides a physical

transition between these two urban characters, while also symbolically connecting the past with the present.

Even a short time spent on the bridge shows that it is more than just an architectural structure. At different times of the day, different activities can be observed: tourists taking photos, people pausing for a short conversation, or moments of quiet reflection by the river. People use the bridge not only as a passage but also as a temporary public stop. This transforms the bridge's role in the city from a simple infrastructure element into a social meeting and encounter space.

The architectural simplicity of the Stone Bridge supports this strong urban role. Its stone arches and rhythmic openings create a balanced design that harmonizes with both the river view and the surrounding urban fabric. Therefore, the bridge is not only a historical structure but also an important architectural reference for understanding Skopje's urban identity.

Understanding a city often requires observing not only its buildings but also how these buildings fit into people's lives and public life. My walks and observations in Skopje showed that the city's identity is shaped not only by its architectural forms but also by the social meanings of its spaces. The Stone Bridge is one of the strongest examples of this relationship, serving as a threshold that brings together the past and present, different urban layers, and people. In this way, the bridge continues to exist not only as a historic structure but also as a living public space that carries Skopje's collective memory and urban identity.

Nazar Erginyavuz



Моја верзија на една биографија

Често пати сум се прашувал што треба да имам направено за да можам да си напишам и објавам своја биографија. Колку и какви дела треба да имам постигнато за да бидат тие доволно важни за објавување? Мислам дека мерилата за различни возрасти се различни.

Она што би сакал да го издвојам и да го споделам со другите е дел од мојата приказна.

Роден сум на дваесет и третиот ден од месец септември, 2012 година, на почетокот на есента, после долго и измачувачки топло скопско лето. Првите фотографии од мене покажуваат здраво, екстра бело бебе со румени образи. Според кажувањата на мајка ми и останатите, сум бил мирно и мило бебе кое дури и не знаело да плаче.

Придавката „мирно“ се заменила со „палаво“ околу деветиот месец од мојот живот. Тоа е времето кога мистериозно сум исчезнал со

лазење на вториот кат од куќата, додека баба ми ми ја подготвувала кашичката. Мене сето ова ми е смешно на раскажување, но мислам дека на баба не ѝ било воопшто.

Своето предучилишно детство го памтам како едноставно и полно со игри и палавости. Мојот главен интерес секогаш биле коцките, од Лего па до најевтините, потоа автомобилите и сите видови оружја на витези.

Со мајка ми правевме мечеви и штитови од картон. Беше забавно. Сакав приказни и уживав да ги слушам. Сакав и цртани. Ги сакам и сега, ама тогаш на цена беа Нинџа желките. Тоа беше пресудно.

Станав член на карате клуб на свои 5 години, кога уште се мислев која од рацете ми е десна и дали тоа важи на ист начин и за нозете. Тренирам цели 8 години. Тоа е мојот најголем успех надвор од училишните рамки.

Сега сум до црн појас, имам бројни награди и медали. Сум бил шампион и вицешампион на републичко ниво. Сега малку одмарам од сето тоа, за да видам што понатаму.

Во однос на другите искуства, можам да кажам дека втора љубов ми е пливањето. Најдобро во море, секако.

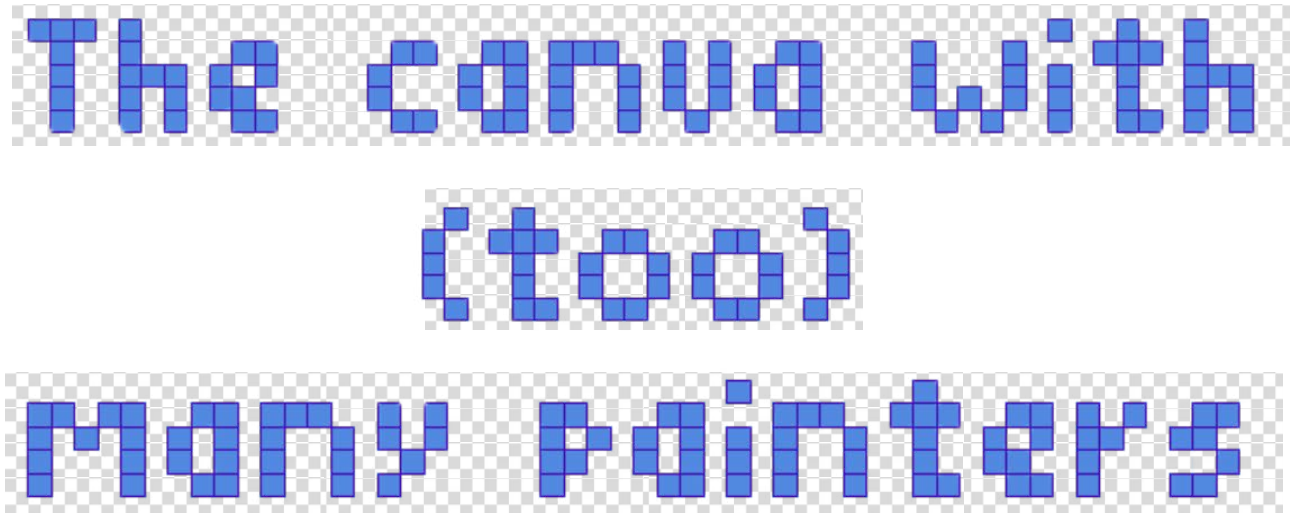
Од првото одделение сум одличен на училиште и често пофален за различни предмети. Можеби сега треба да кажам дека сум посебен. Сум, како што е посебно секое суштество на планетата.

Можеби ова не е голема биографија, но е моја. Составена од мали моменти, игри, успеси и искуства што ме направиле тоа што сум денес.

А мојата приказна... сè уште се пишува.

Теодор Ѓорѓиевски





What happens when you give millions of internet users a blank canvas the size of the planet? You get the website Wplace, where millions of people are drawing their favorite characters, flags, or other kinds of art over their cities for the sole desire to be seen and the pleasure to create.

Launched in July 2025 by Brazilian developer Murilo Matsubara, Wplace is an ambitious online platform that lets users edit a pixelated world map. While the concept might sound technical, the execution is pure fun and a vibrant case study of participatory design, a process where the end-users aren't just passive consumers, but active co-creators.

Let's dive into why Wplace is so interesting. At first glance, Wplace looks like Google Maps crossed with an old-school MS Paint file. The canvas is massive, over 4 trillion pixels (4'000'000'000'000) covering the entire globe. But here is the catch: you can only place one pixel every 30 seconds, meaning it would take more than 3'800'000 years for someone to cover everything by themselves.

And here is the interest.

This limitation is the secret sauce of participatory design. You cannot just sit down and draw a masterpiece alone. If you want to build something big, for example covering the entire city of Paris with propaganda or the logo of your favorite sports team, you need help.

The mechanics force players to form alliances. This transforms the act of design from a solitary activity into a social event.

What makes Wplace a particularly good example of participatory design is how the "product" (the map) becomes a mirror of the community's values, humor, and politics.

Unlike traditional design, which is controlled by a top-down authority (like a city planner or a CEO), Wplace is organic. It is chaotic and crude, but it is also deeply authentic.

On the pop culture side, fans have covered Seoul in Squid Game art and blanketed Albuquerque with Breaking Bad monologues. Many users are also using the website for activism. The Gaza Strip features Palestinian flags and anti-war messages, while trans pride flags appeared prominently

in the UK as a counter-protest to anti-trans rhetoric. But the activists are not the scariest ones, there is a phenomenon called "voiding," where users band together to erase an area with a solid color (usually black) to start fresh or just cause trouble. It is destruction as a form of creation. Participatory design often fails because it feels like work. Crowdsourcing can feel like exploitation, and group projects can feel like a drag. Wplace avoids this by gamifying the experience.

The site features a "Droplets" economy and a leveling system. The more you draw, the more pixels you can hold, and the more colors you can unlock. There is a leaderboard tracking which countries are the most active, sparking friendly (and sometimes not-so-friendly) international rivalries. Many players have developed a fear for the Brazilian community for example.

Because the map is permanent, the design is never finished. It evolves in real-time. A user named Krista Rider started drawing a small neighborhood in Arizona; it has since grown to over 50 connected homes, built by strangers. Personally, I started drawing pokémon in the north of my home town, and thanks to the help of strangers we are now at around 400 of them while I write this.

Finally, no discussion of participatory design is complete without addressing the mess. Because everyone has a voice, not everyone uses it nicely. Wplace faces challenges with moderation, hate speech, and "griefing" (vandalizing others' art). However, even this chaos highlights the core truth of participatory design: it empowers people to express themselves, for better or worse.

Ultimately, Wplace is a joyful reminder that the internet doesn't have to be a series of algorithmic feeds. It can be a playground. It proves that when you give people a pixel and ask them to paint the world, they won't just draw, they'll build communities, wage pixel wars, and create something no single designer ever could have imagined.

It is messy, it is wild, and it is a lot of fun in the end.

Arthur Bonhoure–Tolfo



looking closely

Missing the place
became my quiet meeting in a memory,
holding a cup of chamomile tea
with honey,
and an image of an old smile.

A joy can be found
in the most unpredictable spaces.

Lukáš Sabol



Blue footprint

Anastasiĵa

Riccardo



“Brick!”, calls Anastasiĵa and we are all waiting in anticipation looking up the grassy hill. A blink of an eye later, the caramel-brown, quite small and happy bull is running downhill to meet us at the fence, his tail wagging. “He wants the treat first”, says Anastasiĵa, while Riccardo gives him a juicy green branch to eat. Then Brick is receiving affection from us.

Brick has been in the sanctuary since he was a baby and this summer he will turn 2 years old. He is quite an adult but he is smaller than bulls his age, as he stopped drinking milk at an early stage.

“His mother refused to feed him, and his previous owners were unable to care for him. He was also too young to be sent to the slaughterhouse, so they reached out to us, and we took him in.”

Brick is one of many animals taken in and cared for by Anastasija and Riccardo, two young people who in spring 2024 founded Arrexini Asula, a youth and animal sanctuary, located uphill Seulo, in Sardinia. Arrexini Asula, translated from Sardinian to English Blue Roots, refers to its home, which is one of the five blue zones in the world (blue zone is a place where the people live extraordinarily long). This youth-led organisation supports marginalised and neurodivergent young people through non-formal nature education while running an ethical, nature-friendly animal sanctuary. “Our vision is to create an eco-conscious, creative and inclusive reality where nearly everyone can find a natural outlet to support themselves and the environment.”

Anastasija comes from Latvia where she has done youth work with a focus on marginalised youth, youth with disabilities, neurodivergency and those under social services care. “Since I was a child I have loved animals (yes, I’m vegan) and have always been very curious about nature”, Anastasija says. She calls herself “structured creative” and this mix of work she finds at the moment the most fulfilling, a perfect balance between youth work and project management.

Riccardo has deep roots in Seulo. He is a youth worker, project manager and community organiser. Riccardo says that his experience in youth work started with serving as a student representative and organisational manager for the Union of Students in Cagliari, where he coordinated youth-led initiatives. This eventually brought him to the civil service in TDM 2000. He then gained international experiences in ESC volunteering, mobilities and project management. “Currently, my hyperfocus is on permaculture - I enjoy learning and experimenting as much as I can and sharing my knowledge with others”, he adds.

And you might have asked how one Latvian and one Sardinian happened to found a youth and animal sanctuary in a rural place on an island? They met at an Erasmus+ training course in Malta in 2022, keeping in touch since then, visiting each other and brainstorming. They both shared love for animals and nature. It was a moment when Riccardo, passionate about Seulo, saw it as a location to create something new in a youth work sector and Anastasija needed something new as well in her youth work and project management life. One serious talk in an Indian restaurant later they decided to do something together. And those who visited them in their blue-rooted paradise can certainly say that all the heart and passion they put in the (also bureaucratic) fight was worth it. Now as a still quite a young organisation, they keep expanding their range of activities.

“Besides the sanctuary, we coordinate a range of local initiatives and implement several EU-funded projects. We maintain a permaculture garden and do permaculture workshops. We are actively developing initiatives for neurodivergent youth. For example, we are currently managing a youth mobility project with Latvia

called “Talking Roots,” which involves young people with neurodivergence from both Sardinia and Latvia. We also run a “free shop” - Trashop, which currently operates as a Saturday free market. As part of this initiative, we organise upcycling workshops for both the local community and visitors.”

They are involved in solidarity projects, as well as small-scale partnerships, while brainstorming and working on new ideas. “At the moment, we are particularly interested in exploring nature expeditions and permaculture as themes for our future projects. Soon we will also start to offer and lead nature therapy sessions”, they say.

We are walking in the garden, Anastasija and Riccardo giving us a tour, telling stories about animals and explaining the gardening process. Dogs are roaming free around us, definitely happy to have even more hands to pet them, cats multiplying in our eyes, appearing here and there from the bushes. The sanctuary is a home for five dogs: Russell, Nala, Gilda, Pulce and Bambi; six cats: Fagiolino, Carciofa, Dalia, Iris, Saddy, Matilda; two sheep, and of course, you know the bull Brick already. At the moment of our visit, there was also Peppo the pig, a good friend of Brick.

“Peppo and the sheep arrived from a woman who was no longer able to care for them, and as a result they had experienced some neglect. When Peppo first came to us, he was severely overweight and could only walk a few steps before becoming exhausted. After a few months, however, he regained his strength, colour and became much more active, eventually returning to a healthy and energetic state for his age.”

We met Peppo running toward us, and just as Brick, expecting to get cuddles (and a treat). Healthy. Happy. Sadly, he died recently, and we believe that he lived his happiest life in sanctuary.



“The last year has actually been exceptionally difficult with the animals. We have gone through some bad accidents and circumstances in which we have lost quite a few of our animal friends - our pigs Iggy and Peppo died, we have also lost sheep”, shared Anastasija and Riccardo.

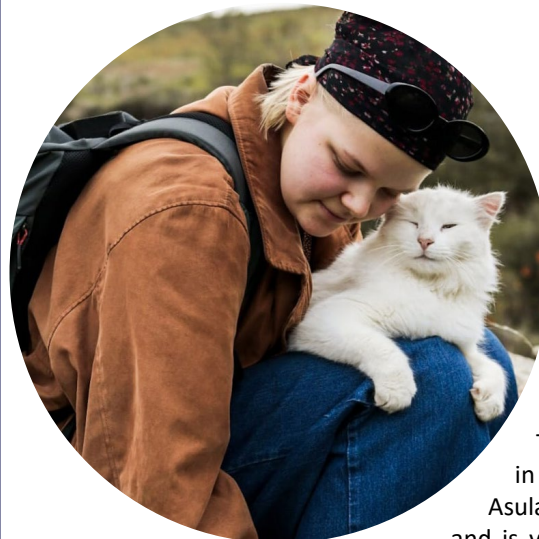
Each animal has its story. And each was offered a second chance in sanctuary.

“Every animal in our sanctuary has been rescued in one way or another. Russell, Nala, and Gilda come from a dog shelter, while Pulce was taken in from a shepherd who disposed of puppies in what could be described as an “old-school” way. Carciofa, Fagiolino, Dalia, Saddy, and Iris are kids of a cat we rescued, and Matilda came from an owner who had not been taking proper care of her.”

They love it there, they love Anastasija and Riccardo, although some of them are still untrustful towards visitors. “We are in constant collaboration with a vet and local animal keepers (who have kept animals for decades) to make sure our animal friends are happy and healthy. As the animals we take in are rescued, they often come with certain health conditions or behaviours which need specific care, for example Russell has leishmania, Nala and Matilda are very socially anxious, the sheep don’t have any natural instincts, Bambi is aggressive, Fagiolino has a severe sensitivity to the sun.”

Working with animals is rewarding as they return the love and care back, they are also heroes in all the small animal stories that happen in Arrexini Asula on a daily basis. Anastasija and Riccardo, laughing, shared some of them with us. There is a story of Russell, a dog that very anxiously attached to his new caregivers, managed to learn how to open the window, just to follow them. Also, Brick learned how to jump fences, only to come and hang out in front of the door to his owners’ house.

We are passing through the garden. Seeing all the greenery dotted here and there with red spots of ripe tomatoes. Riccardo takes one from the branch, giving it to me to try. I will eat it an hour later, when the scents of the place I visited will still be fresh in my mind. “Be careful, don’t step on rukola”, says Riccardo laughing. Rukola. Rocket. Arugula. A treasure that not everyone of us can grow in their gardens, especially we, who live in the cities.



The daytime in Arrexini Asula is seeping and is very full. It is fulfilling too. “We wake up

early to prepare food for the dogs and then go and work together with our “garden cat” Iris in our permaculture garden - to water, plant, clean up, harvest. After that our animal morning routine starts - feeding the dogs, cats and doing daily visual and health checkups.” There is time for “computer work”, rest, having visitors, and also having volunteers come by to help.

“At lunchtime we take a short rest, during which we often do a “dog zoomie session”. Quite frequently during the week we just go outside and jump around with the dogs for a little bit, as it brings joy for both - the dogs and us.”

I imagine that—a “dog zoomie session”--standing there in this green green land with blue roots, surrounded by dogs running around.

We now enter the house, located in the heart of the sanctuary. Cosy space opens up in front of us, the cats and dogs follow, settling in on the sofas. “Give yourself time” is written on the wall of the living room. And indeed the sanctuary is the place where you can give yourself time. A place where you want to stay at least for a while and come back to visit when you feel like you are losing your roots. And our roots, as humans, are certainly deep in nature.

Ewelina Chańska





Buddhism

When a religion born between 563 and 483 BCE becomes a simple scented candle in our bathrooms or a “zen” tattoo in Bali...

One may wonder: what really remains of Buddhism?

Buddhism is one of the oldest religions still widely practiced today. It appeared in India in the 5th century BCE, founded by Siddhartha Gautama, a prince of the kingdom of Kapilavastu, who is said to have left his family and his life of luxury to set out in search of truth.

After years of asceticism, he attained Enlightenment, discovering the path to understand human suffering and free oneself from it.

From then on, he taught his doctrine throughout the Ganges valley, accompanied by his community of monks, the Sangha, until his death at the age of 80. Buddhism also contains foundational religious texts. These fundamental texts, called the Tripitaka (“the three baskets”), form the basis of Buddhist doctrine: the Sutta Pitaka brings together the Buddha’s discourses, the Vinaya Pitaka compiles monastic rules, and the Abhidhamma Pitaka contains philosophical and psychological reflections. Buddhism is not a single unified block: there are many branches, such as Tibetan Buddhism, Theravada, or Mahayana, each with its own interpretations and practices.

Unfortunately, our vision of Buddhism is not very representative.

Between clichés and cultural appropriation in the West, this religion, with its great cultural richness, is often reduced to a “zen” image: soothing, spiritual, but superficial. Sacred objects become decorative items: Buddha statues in gardens, scented candles bearing his image, “karma” incense, or tattoos of Sanskrit mantras, all without understanding their meaning. This romanticization of Buddhism erases the complexity of its thought and the diversity of its practitioners. It is part of a broader phenomenon: cultural appropriation, that is, the use of elements from one culture by another, often with a form of dominance, without respect for their significance. Thus, when a sacred symbol is turned into a decorative accessory, one

moves away from history and spirituality; one would not put a crucifix “to look nice” in one’s bathroom, so why a Buddha? It is not just a “style,” it is a loss of meaning.

Moreover, this trend is strongly encouraged by marketing and commodification. This drift is not harmless: it follows a commercial logic and is also heavily influenced by the media. Buddhism has become a product to sell, a promise of “inner peace” in a world stressed or frustrated by constant external conflicts. Meditation cushions, “zen” retreats, or t-shirts such as “Be like Buddha” are marketed as if buying them were enough to achieve lasting wisdom. This phenomenon is not isolated. Other cultures have undergone similar superficial transformations in the Western imagination. The Arab-Persian world, for instance, has often been reduced to a fairy-tale setting inspired by One Thousand and One Nights: sandy palaces, flying carpets, and richly dressed women. Everything becomes a theme: a thousand-year-old culture turned into a party aesthetic. Voodoo, too, is often demonized in films and associated with evil and witchcraft. These stereotypes, although they may seem harmless, desecrate and distort living cultures.

One can appreciate without appropriating.

That is where the nuance lies. To take a genuine interest in a culture means striving to understand it, to respect its symbols and the depth of its history. It is not about closing these traditions off from the world, but about avoiding stripping them of their meaning.

Between inspiration and distortion, the line is thin and it is up to each of us to remain aware of what we consume and what we transform.

Reducing Buddhism to a trend or a consumer product means missing what it truly is: a complex philosophy, a demanding practice, and a genuine quest for meaning.

Marco Zannou

on Display



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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)

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