



SEFA

Spring 2023

A FIGHT



AGAINST
TIME

70th
ANNIVERSARY



The winds blew wet around Amsterdam in May 1953. The North Sea flood had taken thousands of lives earlier that year and had again reminded the Dutch about their eternal fight with water. The tragedy permeated most conversations. Streets were thicker. The city learned to share them between the eternal cyclists and the increasing motorized presence on the road. Spring took its time that year. Coats stayed until the middle of May. Two blocks from Museumplein, a couple of inspired students held the first edition of “Rostra Economica” in their hands.

George van den Bergh, Rector Magnificus of the University of Amsterdam, signed the second page after writing what he called “some comments”. “Write in it [Rostra] as often as your heart urges you! An old truth says that it is better to be silent than to say the wrong thing. Yet, this truth might have found an exception in student magazines”.

After 70 years of history and change, we publish this edition to celebrate student journalism and time. With over 300 printed editions, we happily report that most of them have probably written a lot of “the wrong thing”, as Mr. van den Bergh wished. For over 70 years, students have been willing to learn, write, publish and craft their arguments with love and passion within the walls of our printed and online mediums. Rostra Economica has been a platform for opinions, mistakes, friendships and learning for over half a century.

Time will continue to march forward. Our institutions, fictitious entities, will only exist if our zeal continues to burn for them. With a stroke of luck and a lot of care, Rostra survived oblivion until 2023. Still, it will only continue to do so if the daring souls of the future carry it through time.

I hope they do. Here’s to another 70 years.

Juan Felipe Gaviria
Editor-in-chief

COLOPHON

Editor-in-Chief
Juan Felipe Gaviria

Financial Officer
Timofey Zhalnin

Marketing Officer
Inés Serhane

HR Officer
Stella Botta

Head Editors
Audrius Šaras - Investigative
Journalism
Abe de Ruijter - ESG
Riad Guliyev - Economics and
Finance
Konstantin van Thiel - Politics

Editors
Coco Krumsick
Ekin Köseoğlu
Elene Kiladze
Nour El Ezabi
Safae Boukarhihi
Santiago Mengual
Sanjana Majumdar
Yazan Azab

Guest Writer
Cain Hillier

Social Media Coordinator
Meda Stankevičiūtė

Sefa Supervisor
Damian Pronk

Execution
Juan Felipe Gaviria
Timofey Zhalnin
Inés Serhane
Stella Botta

Cover Design
© Eloisah Roldán

Magazine Layout
Eloisah Roldán

Reactions, letters and
applications can be sent to:
Roetersstraat 11,
1018 WB Amsterdam
rostragsefa.nl
www.rostraeconomica.nl

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Investigative Journalism

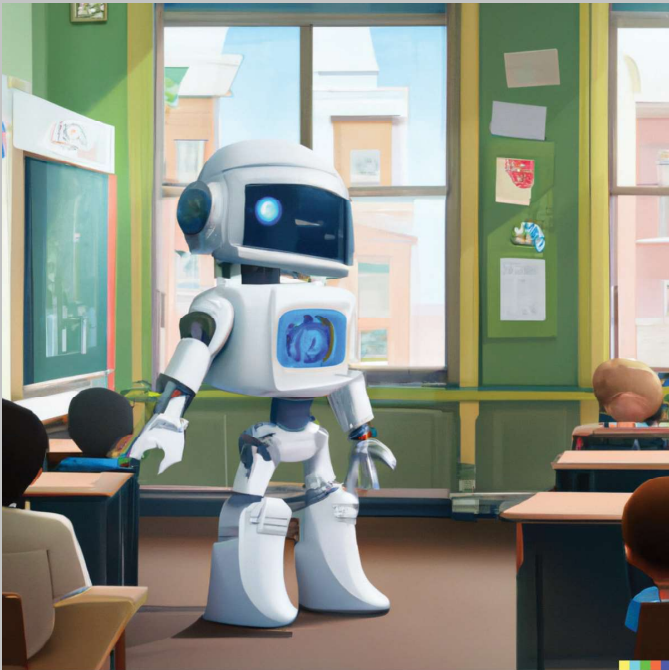
At the dawn of another technological revolution unleashed by the developments in the field of Artificial Intelligence, we at Investigative Journalism explored its possible impact on the education sector. This piece provides a deep-dive analysis of how AI is changing the way we learn, and what the consequences might be for both students and educators. By gathering extensive sources and perspectives, we aim to provide an in-depth understanding of this complex issue. We believe that uncovering the truth behind the impact of AI on education is crucial, and we are committed to bringing you the most comprehensive coverage possible. Thus, join us on this journey of discovery as we explore the role of AI in shaping the future of education.



Audrius Šaras
Head Editor for
Investigative
Journalism

Beyond the Hype

Navigating the Present and Preparing for the Future of Artificial Intelligence



Introduction

It is the year 2032. Matt wakes up to a barrage of notifications from AI-powered apps, telling him his schedule, forming a to-do list and giving personalized advice for the day. Once he reaches school, a virtual AI assistant, who has replaced most of the teachers, greets him and closely monitors his and other students' performance using its accurately computed algorithms. As lunchtime nears, Matt is suggested meals from the school's menu based on his nutritional needs and food preferences. Matt goes through the rest of the day by receiving constant feedback from his virtual AI assistant, also reminding him of his upcoming guitar lesson. During it, the AI-powered

instructor analyzes his abilities in real-time, providing updates on which skills he needs to improve. As Matt's day is ending, he uses AI-powered apps to finalize his notes and offer an overview of what he needs to learn to pass the upcoming exams. Matt finally gets to bed and wonders - "How did people live without AI?"

Whether you interpret this scenario as techno-dystopia or not, one thing is clear - AI will infiltrate every sector and industry in the upcoming ten years. One of those sectors is education, and by 2032 artificial intelligence (AI) is anticipated to contribute \$30 billion to the global education sector. AI-based systems personalize learning, provide data-driven insights, and improve teaching efficiency. From intelligent tutoring systems to chatbots, AI in education offers new opportunities to enhance the learning experience for students and improve the quality of education. Yet, what does this actually mean for the future?

While AI integration in education is transforming the way students learn and teachers teach, some setbacks and benefits exist. For one, AI integration in education poses the potential for plagiarism bias in AI-generated content. Additionally, it presents the question of whether students will become over-

ly reliant on AI tools and lose their ability to develop problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. In turn, the integration of AI technology in education could also decrease the demand for teachers, leading to potential job loss or reduced hours. Since AI systems can automate administrative tasks, such as grading and assessment, teachers may have less work to do. However, some may argue that AI integration can free up teachers to focus on more critical tasks, such as lesson planning and providing one-on-one support to students. On that hand, AI technology could personalize the learning experience for students. For instance, AI systems can analyze students' performance data and signify to teachers what learning materials need to be emphasized. This could increase student engagement, improve academic outcomes, and boost student retention rates.

In line with its commitment to responsible research and innovation, the University of Amsterdam (UvA) has recognized the potential of AI in education and is now taking steps to address AI integration in learning. Specifically, the university is developing guidelines for the responsible and ethical use of AI in assessment and aims to address questions regarding students' work and the role of teachers. While the UvA carefully considers the ethical and social implications of using AI in education, we investigated the students' opinions and sat down for an interview with Professor Daniel Mügge, who teaches the UvA's 'Politics and Artificial Intelligence' class. In this interview, we delve into the impact that AI technology could have on students and teachers, exploring Mügge's thoughts on what this could mean for education in the future. Finally, we will examine policymakers' reactions to the new wave of generative AI and the existing as well as upcoming

regulatory frameworks. Ultimately, everything boils down to one question - can educators and policymakers keep up with the rapid pace of technological advancements within the field of Artificial Intelligence?

AI through the Eyes of the Future: Unraveling the Student Perspectives

How do students feel about artificial intelligence within academia? The discussion surrounding the topic has been rapidly increasing and becoming more comprehensive due to the release of ChatGPT. The generative AI has been provoking an immediate response from students, and they are looking for ways to implement it into their daily routines. Over the course of the last month, Rostra has surveyed dozens of students and interviewed Rokas Kasperavičius, a Computer Science & Mathematics student at Roskilde University in Denmark, to gain a deeper perspective on the various opinions about AI within academia.



Rokas Kasperavičius

So far, only a slight majority of students surveyed regularly use AI in their studies, precisely 55.6% of the respondents. Thus, despite the enormous public attention to ChatGPT, not all students are putting faith in the hands of AI. Nevertheless, the students' attitudes toward AI are primarily favourable. For example, Rokas shared the belief that such technology can facilitate highly efficient education: "I feel that AI will soon start to help solve different tasks, which will be personalized for each student." Despite the generally positive attitude, many also recognize the potential downsides. Not only are students concerned about the effect on critical thinking, but Rokas also disclosed the potential of students developing a dependency on AI solving tasks for them, which could lead to a loss of confidence in their abilities. This is essential to consider, as the complex environment we are living in often offers spontaneous situations in which quick and well-measured decisions need to be made. Therefore, having a constant tutor holding your hand in AI form as you walk through the development stages of your life could pose a real threat to the upcoming generations.

Nonetheless, almost an absolute majority of the students do not think that AI will replace the need for teachers and professors, or at least not in the short term. Rokas believes that human engagement will not disappear, and both students and teachers will have to find new learning and teaching methods. Interestingly, research from Study.com, a personalized learning platform in the US, has revealed that 72% of college students believe ChatGPT should be banned in schools and universities. In compar-

ison, only 34% of all educators agree. This showcases that students still desire to rely on teachers and want to avoid creating an environment in which AI teaches them, and teachers are not scared of the possible effect ChatGPT will cause.

However, most of the students agreed that AI would soon be implemented within education, but the ethical question remained: will it be possible to find a way of implementing AI in the academic sector and at the same time come up with ways of preventing it from subverting the rigid rules of areas such as research, plagiarism, and examination? The "how" remains a topic of debate, albeit one that necessitates a quick stance. Ethics were also at the core of the discussion with Rokas. He says it is crucial to develop a "healthy AI." For instance, if AI is used to replace face-to-face lectures and interactions, this could create inequalities in education for marginalized communities or people that do not have internet access: "This includes addressing issues of bias and discrimination, protecting student privacy, and ensuring that AI is used to promote equity and fairness in education." Intriguingly, this is where students' opinions become more polarized. Indeed, while some think that the advent of AI will be beneficial in reducing the inequalities that inevitably exist within the academic field, a slim majority of students believe that AI will exacerbate the differences between more privileged students and those that are not.

These student opinions provide essential insights into how future generations think of AI. Despite the technology being immensely perplexing to all, students are exceptionally aware of its

potential benefits and drawbacks. Ultimately, it is crucial for students to keep up with such technological advancements, as they could tremendously impact the way their future will be shaped.

Professor's take: disentangling the complex effects of AI

To further contextualize AI from a different perspective, our search for anyone who could shed light on the intricate workings of AI led to an interview with Daniel Mügge. Daniel Mügge is the Professor of Politics and AI at the political science department at UvA, and his current research investigates the European governance of artificial intelligence. His expertise and knowledge in the field of Artificial Intelligence make him an invaluable asset in unravelling the complexities of this cutting-edge technology in our classrooms.

The ChatGPT hype in Universities

Professor Mügge, like many of us, is convinced that the most prominent AI-powered innovation that has entered the educational sector is ChatGPT. According to him, this shouldn't come as a surprise since it can produce short, acceptable texts relatively quickly and of sufficient quality, making it a handy tool for students and educators alike. However, the effect we see in our universities seems to be in two minds.

The first direction is one in which the university not only forbids the use of ChatGPT but is trying to invest in tools that can detect and trace AI in students' work. Some argue that any test format in which ChatGPT can easily be used, such as take-home exams and essays, should be replaced entirely. The other direction consists of those who argue that AI will be part of our future landscape and its best to utilize and outsource education to cheap AI-powered specifications when needed. So why fight against AI if it is unavoidable?

However, Mügge believes there should be a third option. "That's the one that I

find intuitively most attractive but also most difficult to wrap my head around. You could also say, well, maybe this also gives us an opening to rethink more fundamentally what it is that we're doing here together. Because I feel, and that's very personal, that at times there tends to be an excessive emphasis on testing." He goes on to explain that in the past years, there has been a school culture that emphasizes numbers. He wonders whether maybe this could be the defining moment to let go of this culture and create a space in which we learn and follow our interests rather than for the sake of filling in a spreadsheet of grades.

The Impact of Automation on Job Redundancy

An important question that naturally comes up with the discussion of AI is whether humans would prove to be obsolete in the future in a professional sense of manner. Simplistically, no - not every possible profession in the world could be replaced by AI. Humans are built to feel emotions such as empathy, love, sadness, and happiness, things that AI could only be taught (it's in the name: Artificial); but, we live in a complex society, and not everything is what it seems to be. As teachers spend years studying the intricacies of their field of interest, many can't help but feel concerned about the possibility of machines replacing human educators.

However, Dr. Mügge offered a more nuanced perspective on the matter, stating that automation does not necessarily equate to the complete removal of human teachers. "I do see downside scenarios, so for example, that people will feel very discouraged. What's the point of learning stuff when you never get to use it anyway? Because all you have to do is just click a button. What's the point then?"

Despite acknowledging these concerns, Dr. Mügge believes that automation could

ultimately lead us to confront more profound questions about what it means to be human. “Maybe we’re just fast-forwarded to a question that we were going to face sooner or later anyway, so yes, I do see downside scenarios, but maybe it would take weight off our shoulders if we could do that a lot quicker, then maybe have more time on our hands to do stuff that is even more meaningful.”

We pressed further on this point, questioning whether automation would only be more encouraged because it serves to increase efficiency in our already capitalistic society. Dr. Mügge acknowledged this possibility but argued that there is still hope for a more positive outcome. “If we were able to use the capacity of the people who then don’t work in that sector anymore to do other things in and with society that we really care about, I would still think that that could also be good news.”

While the prospect of automation may seem daunting, Dr Mügge’s insights offer a glimmer of hope that we can adapt and evolve alongside these technological advancements. As he aptly put it, “Maybe we’re not being made redundant, but maybe we’re being pushed towards something that we always knew we would have to face.”



Daniel Mügge

Exploring the Intersection of Mental Health, Privacy and AI

Dr. Mügge provided another intriguing perspective on the role that AI could have in the education industry to improve students’ mental well-being. He highlights the potential for AI to detect patterns in student behaviour that could indicate mental health issues, allowing for early intervention and support. For example, Canvas could be used to collect data on how frequently students log in, how long they spend on assignments and other metrics that could be analyzed to identify at-risk students.

While discussing mental health, Dr. Mügge touches upon how AI could be specialized to each student’s strengths and weaknesses, providing personalized recommendations to improve their learning outcomes. For example, an AI-powered study advisor could monitor a student’s performance in real-time and provide feedback and resources to help them overcome difficulties. He emphasized that this kind of personalized support could be delivered at scale, across an entire education program, rather than just on an individual course basis.

When asked about the ethics of collecting and using student data in this way, Dr. Mügge acknowledged that there are valid concerns around privacy. However, he also notes that people have different ideas about what constitutes an acceptable level of privacy, and as long as we continue to have conversations about transparency, there is hope. Ultimately, he argues, the benefits of using AI to support student well-being and learning outcomes could outweigh the potential risks as long as privacy concerns are taken seriously, and most importantly, everyone is given the freedom of choice when it comes to these tools.

AI will be a part of our future whether we like it or not. The key, according to Dr. Mügge, is to make the best of it. To that end, he emphasized the importance of getting AI smart, both individually and as a society. He urges students, educators, and parents to stay informed and engage with AI critically rather than ignoring it altogether. For students considering their future career paths, Dr. Mügge advised looking for jobs and fields that involve a social or creative dimension. Combining these skills with a good education, Dr. Mügge believes, will help individuals thrive in a future that includes AI. As Dr. Mügge put it, “As long as you’re thinking about jobs and career paths that involve social and creative skills, combined with a good education, there’s no reason to panic.”

Navigating the Unknown: Ethics in AI Development and Deployment

Considering AI’s scalability and its inevitable immense effect on our society, regulations are an absolute necessity before things get out of hand. While some propose that AI cannot be regulated due to its complexity or because it might harm upcoming innovations, there have been plenty of examples of how an AI mishap had a terrible impact on many people. For instance, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 A-Level exams were cancelled in England for high schoolers, and an algorithm was devised to evaluate their final grade. 40% of the students received a grade that was lower than the predicted grade of the teacher, which led to “heart-breaking feedback from school leaders about grades being pulled down in a way that they feel to be utterly unfair and unfathomable”. For such exact reasons, AI tools need to be evaluated on an individual basis and given special attention when devising a regulatory framework.

The European Union is currently the most advanced lawmaking body, as they have produced and passed several important proposals. In 2020, they published a white paper, “On Artificial Intelligence—A European Approach to Excellence and Trust”; in 2021, they passed a law called the “EU AI Act”. The EU AI Act works by classifying AI technology into three categories - unacceptable risk, high risk and minimal or no risk. AI technologies, such as China’s social credit system, are deemed an unacceptable risk and therefore banned within the European Union. Using an AI resume-checking system is treated as high-risk but nonetheless acceptable under specific legal requirements. However, in the US, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), an agency of the Department of Commerce, has recently launched an AI Risk Management Framework (AI RMF). AI RMF is devised in a way that would enable organizations and institutions to track possible risks within their AI technologies. At its core, the framework is divided into four parts: govern, map, measure, and manage. This framework could prove particularly useful, and as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Don Grave, notes: “The AI RMF comes not a moment too soon”.

With the ongoing flood of new generative AI tools, regulation is urgent to ensure that organizations can bring trustworthy AI to consumers. For example, it did not take long after ChatGPT rolled out for institutions to take notice and place it on high alert. Specifically, regarding education, New York City public schools have banned ChatGPT on all devices due to concerns over the negative impacts on learning and the possibility for students to cheat. This had a domino effect, as other education departments in the US placed similar restrictions, preventing the use of the

popular chatbot within school walls. However, an outright ban is unlikely to work, and it will not prohibit students from using it for educational purposes, which is a sentiment that Dr. Mügge also shared. Thus, in the education context, it is critical to identify and examine possible risks of AI and form a concrete regulatory framework that can be adhered to.



South Park Season 26 Episode 4

Fighting against time

In the following years, AI will completely reshape the technological landscape. It has the potential to revolutionize the way we approach

education and change the way the system is constructed. Both students and Dr. Mügge view the upcoming future in a positive light, yet they are aware of the possible pitfalls of such technologies. They recognize that AI is not a panacea, and it will not be a substitute for human teachers. The most effective educational systems will be those that balance the strengths of AI with the expertise and creativity of educators. However, to arrive at those systems, it needs to be ensured that informed decisions and investments in research and development that prioritizes ethical considerations and human-centered approaches are made. Thus, it remains to be seen whether students, educators, and policymakers will beat the fight against time with the rapid development of AI, but allocating resources to harness its potential for the betterment of all is key. Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, we will look back just like Matt and wonder how we ever managed without AI.

Coco Krumsick

Third year (final-year) Political Science student at the University of Amsterdam, specializing in Public Policy and Governance. Currently working as a copy-editor/editor for the Investigative Journalism team at rostra Economica.

Audrius Šaras

I am a third-year Communication Science student with an open mind and desire to tackle complex issues. If I am not writing or working, you will likely find me running, as that is something I thoroughly enjoy!

Stella Botta

I am a student in English Language and Culture. I am passionate about journalistic writing and delving into relevant issues that can be explored, and because of this, I am excited about the new investigative column in Rostra.

Safae Boukarhihi

Why did the Political Science student cross the road? To get to the other side of the debate, of course! Whether it's politics, history, or current events, I love exploring the nuances of different viewpoints and finding the humor in life's complexities :)

Sanjana Majumdar

I am a third-year Economics and Business Economics student with an active interest in journalism. I spend most of my time procrastinating by either rewatching my favourite TV series or binge-drinking coffee!

Inés Serhane

Third-year political science student, curious about how we can creatively report pertinent issues. Also very passionate about every second of every Wes Anderson movie ;).

Economics & Finance

We - as human beings - all have a common foe that we are always trying to overcome. This foe is called time and, in a sense, we are its prisoners. Time is relentless, it never stops or slows down and eventually we run out of it. It shapes our lives, our choices, and our hopes. It grants us opportunities and challenges, but it also imposes limits. These limitations also force and direct our attention towards the most urgent matters that can be left in the background of our busy - and often mundane - daily lives.

In this Printed Edition, you will come across our column's high-quality articles touching upon a plethora of topics that we think deserve much-needed attention. You will learn why companies fight to spend \$7 million on a 30-second time slot; about colossal economic costs of earthquakes in Türkiye; why Western sanctions strategy towards Russia must become more resilient; and a call to rethink the social and economic costs of global demographic crisis.

On behalf of all Rostra Editors in the Economics and Finance column, we hope that our articles in this printed edition will present you, our dear reader, with unique insights and amplify your interest in the realms of economics and finance.



Riad Guliyev
Head Editor for
Economics & Finance



Image: Adapted from Pexels/Matti Karstedt, Cottonbro Studio, Max Avans

Western Sanctions Against Russia Don't Work

This is how to make them more effective

Introduction

After a year of death and destruction, the need to decimate Russia's military capabilities is still as strong as it was a year ago when Putin and his enablers decided to turn Russian imperialist fantasies into a war-crime-ridden reality. A year on, the war is far from over, the Kremlin far from toppled, and Ukrainian sovereignty far from being restored.

Fortunately, Western military support for Ukraine has remained strong and has actually intensified during the last year. However, this ever-increasing hawkishness in weapon deliveries is not

being matched equally by ever-increasing hawkishness in terms of sanctions. On the contrary, the overwhelming majority of EU sanctions imposed on Russia have been in place since the early days of the full-scale war. Admittedly, this is primarily explained by the, supposedly, all-encompassing character of the initial sanction packages. However, as shown by Russia's continued ability to annihilate Ukrainian cities and lives, these ten EU sanction packages have clearly failed to accomplish their desired goal: crippling the Russian war machine.

In this light, the World Economic Outlook 2023, released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in January, paints a disturbing picture. Namely, the IMF predicts that the United Kingdom's economy will contract, while Russia's economy is forecasted to expand again.

Cynically, one could conclude that leaving the EU has been a more robust set of sanctions for the UK than the Western sanctions have been for Russia. Of course, the reality is not that straightforward. But the fact that the Russian economy – under what

President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen has called “the strongest sanctions ever” – will outgrow Britain is undoubtedly a worrying sign. It, once again, shows that the demagogic Brexit fable has genuinely been an economic disaster. But most importantly, Russian economic resilience shows that Western efforts to halt the Russian war machine need to be rethought, recalibrated, and reinforced.

Russian economic resilience

First, it needs to be explained why the Russian economy as a whole has seemingly remained unscathed. This is mainly for two reasons: Russian domestic sanction mitigation and the ability to profit from the international geo-political and economic circumstances. Domestically, the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) imposed some of the strictest capital controls ever since the USSR dissolved. From February 28 to the end of March 2022, all transactions, except on foreign currencies, were put to a halt on the Moscow Stock Exchange (MOEX), translating into a complete freeze on domestic securities for Russian and foreign traders. After this, more restrictions and a severe tightening of monetary policy were imposed. During this

time, the CBR bought time to develop new policies while maintaining order, providing a perception of control of the situation and restoring trust in the financial system. The CBR proceeded to flood the MOEX with its own foreign currency assets while buying up rubles in an attempt to bring the exchange rate down. Against all odds, the CBR succeeded in bringing exchange rates down, and the risk of panic selling, subsequently, got mitigated.

Moreover, in late February 2022, the CBR raised the key interest rate to 20%, the highest rate ever in the Russian Federation, which effectively froze all lending to banks, and from banks to consumers. In March, the CBR announced capital controls, forbidding banks from authorising outbound transactions (primarily through SWIFT) in foreign currency for over \$5000 per person per month, later, this figure was gradually increased. Banks also imposed strict outbound capital controls, which stayed in place for the majority of 2022. Restrictions on cash are still in place. Later, Putin would order businesses (including banks) to pay outstanding debt to foreign debtors exclusively in rubles. As a result of the CBR’s aggressive monetary policies, the Kremlin has

largely stayed afloat financially. Most of the Russian population still has rubles in their wallets, which they happily use to buy bread at the store and pay taxes to the Kremlin, which uses them to fund the Russian military.

Besides the Central Bank’s success in capital controls and keeping money within Russia, the international commodity market, combined with Russia’s good ties with many commodity-consuming countries, has been extremely favourable to Russia in 2022. Fossil fuels reached historically high prices in 2022, mainly as a consequence of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Paradoxically, it is Russia that is profiting the most from these ballooning prices; except for the collective West, countries around the world, from Brazil to India and from South Africa to China, were happily consuming Russian oil during the post-pandemic boom last year. Together, the domestic policies of the CBR and international oil mercantilists have kept the Russian economy afloat. However, it is essential to note that the goal of Western sanctions is not, per se, to ruin the Russian economy. Rather, it is to bring the Russian war machine to a halt. Reaching this goal requires better-tar-

geted sanctions, aiming at specific sectors that are pivotal in sustaining Russia's military. In this light, our focus should not be on IMF reports but rather on high-end supply chains, chiefly those of semiconductors. These semiconductors are the lifeline of Russia's military, and Western countries should, therefore, recalibrate their approach to preventing these chips from entering Russia.

The Electronic Lifeline

Last week, in a posh neighbourhood in Gorssel, the Netherlands, Dmitry K. got arrested by the Dutch authorities on charges of sanction evasion. Through third-country intermediaries - such as Türkiye and Kazakhstan - Dmitry K. has been able to sell semiconductors, drones, and other high-end technologies to Russia, all of which fall under the EU's sanction regime. The arrest of Dmitry K. could be interpreted as a sign of a well-function system of sanction implementation and enforcement. Still, despite clear signals that sanction evasion is widespread, his arrest is the first of its kind in the Netherlands. The United Nations Comtrade Database - which tracks the levels of trade between countries in different sectors - shows that Dutch trade with Russia-friendly countries has increased dramatical-

ly in the past year. Trade in communication equipment between the Netherlands and these countries - such as Serbia, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan - has risen from 21 million to 27 million euros per month. Likewise, trade in computer components has increased by 30% and trade in chemical catalysts has multiplied a staggering five times. All of these are vital inputs for the Russian military-industrial complex.

Investigative journalism by Nieuwsuur and NOS recently revealed that semiconductors - arguably the most vital complex military components - from big Dutch firms NXP and Nexperia have been discovered in Russian howitzers, cruise missiles and attack helicopters. NXP chips have also been found in the war-crime-facilitating Iranian kamikaze drones. Unfortunately, these Dutch cases are mere emblems of a broader trend. The London-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has shown that the Russian government has set up an advanced system - consisting of third-country transshipment hubs, false end-user certificates, and clandestine Russian special service networks - to procure Western microelectronics. Through this myriad web, Russia has acquired advanced elec-

tronic components from Switzerland, Japan, the US and many other Western states. These inputs have been critical for sustaining Russian military capabilities.

Pulling the Plug

The situation is not all doom and gloom, however. The widespread discovery of Western microelectronics in Russian military systems highlights that the viability of Russian fighting capabilities is critically dependent on Western equipment. In principle, the West has enormous leverage to cut Russia's military lifeline; in reality, this leverage has not been utilised adequately. Nevertheless, recent developments show that the West is moving forward. The U.S. Treasury Department recently announced a new sanction regime targeting third-country individuals and entities engaged in the Russian sanction evasion network. Kees Haasnoot, a lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Amsterdam, perceives this to be an effective sanctioning approach, noting that "attempting to control the flow of high-tech products seems a more fruitful direction to take than sanctioning individuals that have little influence on the Russian regime". In this light, the recently implemented tenth

EU sanction package gives reason for optimism as it further restricts advanced technology exports and clamps down on Iran's Revolutionary Guard, the first third-country entity on the EU's sanction list. Moreover, the European Commission is organising the Sanctions Coordinators Forum with the aim of "strengthening enforcement efforts". While the intent is laudable, this remains a vague promise. Rather, the European Commission should take a more proactive stance by relentlessly sanctioning third-country facilitators; without this, Western advanced microelectronics will continue to end up in Russian weapon systems. A positive development in this light is Türkiye's recent decision to halt the transit of sanctioned goods to Russia as a result of increasing

pressure from the EU and the US.

Furthermore, successful implementation depends on the willingness and capabilities of individual Member States. A report by Morrison Foerster, an international law firm, shows that sanction enforcement has varied widely between EU countries. A more integrated, centrally-guided approach could realise more effective sanction enforcement.

Danger Ahead

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has been a disaster in many ways. Politically and militarily, Russia's conduct has mostly been a series of blunders, miscalculations, and humiliations. However, as Lao-Tzu, a Chinese philosopher from the 5th century BCE, wisely said, "there is no greater danger than

underestimating your opponent". Due to its rich history of stealing, spying, and other malicious and clandestine activities, Russia has been able to construct a sophisticated sanction evasion infrastructure. This infrastructure, which relies on third-country entities to resell semiconductors to Russia, is sustaining Russia's military capabilities. By persistently sanctioning every entity involved in this war-facilitating web, the EU can do much more to cut this lifeline. However, we have seen that Russia's battlefield mishaps have led to hubris in Western countries and capitals, causing complacency with sanction packages. Reality could not be more different: now is the time to double down. Now is the time to pull the plug on the Russian war machine.



Abe de Ruijter

A third-year PPLE student who is passionate about reading, travel and sports. As a writer, I concern myself with international relations, political economy, and security issues.



Timofey Zhالنin

A second-year Economics and Business Economics student at the UvA interested in macroeconomics and finance with a passion for discussion. He is currently the Financial Officer at Rostra Economica.

Beyond Spectacle and Sales: What really draws Companies to the Super Bowl

The hidden agenda behind the fabled ad interlude

For the sake of establishing a solid foundation for performance in a highly competitive marketplace, companies' marketing efforts involve creating engaging commercials that reach wide and large audiences. To achieve this objective, there's an unparalleled opportunity that does not escape the keen eyes of marketers: in the realm of advertising, a handful of media events have such a broad and captive audience as the Super Bowl, US's most-watched broadcast every year. Today, only companies willing to pay 7 million dollars can secure a 30-second window on the Super Bowl.



Image: Foundry

Other ways of reaching out to an audience of over 100 million are usually not half as costly. Eugene Jackson (2016) collected a series of financial reports from numerous companies and found that for the same cost as one Super Bowl commercial, companies could run 100-200 influencer campaigns, 250 million Facebook video views, or 800 million banner ads, that is to say, companies could show six banner ads in the same day to every single American adult aged under fifty years.

Despite the availability of better cost-effective alternatives to reach large audiences, the ad interlude of the Super Bowl still has a vital cultural significance, and the ads themselves are given much value, attention, and anticipation, even before and after the game. So, what is it about the Super Bowl that really draws firms and consumers to invest their time, budget, and attention into its commercial spots?

Beyond Spectacle: Brand Humanization

Adam Smith defined capital as that portion of a man's resources that he expects to generate revenue over time. And just as companies invest money in machinery, equipment, and other factors of production, a Super Bowl ad is also a capital investment: it's a durable good of social interest where time is the currency of relationships. Marketers use it as an opportunity to allocate various strategies in building trust, loyalty, advocacy, and identity to reap the rewards for years to come.

Successful brands recognize that in the fact that the Super Bowl only takes place once a year, there's a limited window of opportunity, with limited advertisement slots and strict time limits. In the fleeting nature of the event, the clock is ticking, and the pace of their marketing strategy is just as important as the content itself; companies are forced to create captivating ads that make the most out of every second. To this end, companies use many strategies.

Super Bowl ads are not your typical commercial. They are known for their storytelling capabilities, as these stories are meant to draw viewers in with captivating plotlines. The Super Bowl offers firms the opportunity to tell their brand story in a compelling way to show consumers what they stand for and what they care about, aiming to create and maintain a long-term emotional bond with the consumer; beyond a one-time purchase. It's similar to a first date: you aim to build a deeper connection with your partner rather than just talk about yourself. Emotional connections are usually created by aligning brand and consumer values and creating a sense of shared identity. Ads that resonate with viewers and speak to their beliefs and experiences make them develop a value perception of the brand.

Amazon's 'Saving Sawyer', according to many polls, was the most-liked ad in this year's Super Bowl, and it serves as a prime example of how brands can foster emotional connections by tapping into the memories and emotions that their customers have experienced. It showcases the challenges pandemic pets –adopted to cope with the loneliness of Covid-19 lockdowns– face being home alone for the first time, as people return to working and learning outside their homes.

This ad suggests that, ultimately, creating emotional connections requires a company to approach its mar-

keting efforts by being aware of the needs and struggles that people experience in a timely manner. Brands must find a balance between developing an ad that is relevant for that moment in time but also one that is timeless by evoking the right emotions.

Beyond Sales: Brand-Consumer Relationship

The reason why firms are willing to pay such a heavy price tag is that Super Bowl ads don't have the sole intent of promoting a product or capturing consumers' fleeting attention. Brands invest in these ads with the primary purpose of creating a lasting relationship with their consumers. But why is cultivating strong relationships with consumers so important?

In today's competitive marketplace, a company's long-term sustainability is about more than just making a profit. Beyond immediate gains, cultivating strong relationships with consumers and building social capital through Super Bowl ads is a strategic choice that recognizes the time-sensitive nature of securing permanence in the market.

Failure to invest in brand-consumer relationships is a costly gamble against time, and the consequences of neglecting such a vital component of a company's success can be becoming irrelevant or being replaced by competitors when consumer behaviour changes.

Take Circuit City: a prominent retail company in the US for nearly six decades, filed for bankruptcy in 2008. The firm's lack of attention and timely reaction to the progress in market dynamics led to the loss of consumer loyalty. Strategy consultant Peter Cohan (2010) analysed the business practices of Circuit City and found that the company was slow to supply its customers with the latest appliances, failed to promote products from popular vendors like Apple, and had an underdeveloped online presence just as e-commerce platforms were beginning to surge in popularity.

The hundreds of thousands of customer complaints on Circuit City's website in the months preceding its bankruptcy highlight the time-sensitive nature of brand-consumer relationships. Meanwhile, Best Buy, a younger and smaller company, emerged as a major competitor by offering a superior retail experience and establishing a loyal customer base in past years. In 2011, Best Buy broadcasted its first Super Bowl commercial.

When companies leverage the currency of time to create lasting memories and positive associations with consumers, they establish themselves as more than just a product: they remain relevant in the heart of consumers and are better positioned to navigate the ups and downs of market competition, technological progress, and the business cycle.



Santiago Mengual

First-year Economics and Business Economics student at the University of Amsterdam. His writing interests focus on exploring the intersection of philosophy, finance, and policy.

Türkiye : A Crumbling Country



The expected unexpected disaster and its effect on the Turkish economy

Photo by Aksel Anıl via Pexels



You're staying at a friend's; he's asleep, and you're working late. At 4:17 in the morning, a little tremor hits; you run to the couch and crouch. The shaking becomes stronger, the building rotates, and the columns crack. As the ground falls beneath you, the ceiling drops to your head. Within seconds, you are under rubble. You do not know when or if you are getting out; you are coughing blood; there is no cell service; you scream until your lungs are

filled with dust, and your voice cannot reach outside. A day later, you become one of the lucky few that get rescued thanks to the cooperative efforts of civilians and the barely organized rescue agency the government finally bothered to commission. According to a survivor, this is how the earthquake occurred on the 6th of February.

On February 6th, Kahramanmaraş, a city in eastern Türkiye, shook with a 7.7

magnitude earthquake. It extended far beyond the city, affecting northern Syria and inner Türkiye. Ten cities were significantly affected, of which three were almost completely destroyed. Several aftershocks ranging between magnitude 5 and 8 followed, creating unimaginable destruction. Failing to abide by regulations despite knowing that these cities are in the earthquake zone led to significant casualties, reaching 45 thousand in official numbers, but possibly over four times that according to the governor appointed to coordinate efforts. History, memories, and livelihoods are all gone, and although this is ultimately a tragedy that we cannot desensitize ourselves to, realistically, there will be economic consequences. This article aims to look at how the earthquakes will affect Türkiye economically, but this in no way means that we should look at the lost lives as numbers on paper as most of the West has these past days.

Direct Costs

Considering the economic consequences of this horrendous catastrophe, we should first look at rebuilding and repairing costs for the demolished buildings. Though the official measurements are in Turkish lira, this article will accept 1 USD = 18.9 TRY and continue expressing costs in U.S. Dollars. According to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change, while 384,545 houses require demolishing, are demolished, or are heavily damaged, 133,575 units are moderately damaged and need fixing. Nonetheless, these numbers were published before the aftershocks, meaning increased costs. Based on the Ministry’s announcements for 2023, economists predict 600 thousand houses will be constructed, costing 450 dollars per meter-squared on average, and 200 thousand will need repairing, costing 160 dollars per me-

ter-squared. Clearing the rubble of the collapsed buildings is assumed to cost 95 dollars per meter-squared and the infrastructure maintenance and construction for the repaired and newly-built housing will likely cost 106 dollars per meter-squared for about 800 thousand residences. The average house is assumed to be 100 meter-squared. Table 1 shows the total construction costs.

Direct Cost of the Earthquakes	Million USD
Rubble-Lifting and Excavations	7,619
House Construction	26,984
House Reparation	3,175
Infrastructure	8,466
Total	46,244

Table 1: Direct Cost of the Earthquakes in Million USD

Furthermore, the government announced all affected families will receive 529 dollars each while all families of deceased people will receive 5291. All displaced families will receive 265 dollars monthly for 11 months as rent aid. Table 2 displays the total cost of government aid.

	Number of Families	Aid Amount (USD)	Million USD
Affected Family Aid	600,000	529	317.5
Rent Aid	600,000	2910	1,746.0
Deceased-Persons Aid	45,000	5291	238.1
Total			2,301.6

Table 2: Direct Cost of Aid to Affected Persons in Million USD

While the direct costs amount to around 48.7 billion dollars, with donations and the Turkish Natural Catastrophe Insurance Pool, the financing required to cover direct costs reduces to 45.7 billion.

Production

Of the 808 billion USD 2022 GDP, the ten cities make up 9.3% (75 billion dollars), while the three significantly affected cities make up 2.6% (21 billion). The three cities are expected to experience a loss of production between 50 and 60%, and the rest will

likely experience 15 to 20% loss, meaning a GDP loss between 19 and 23 billion dollars. Taking the average of the range, we can assume the loss of GDP will amount to 21 billion dollars.

Exports

The three demolished cities constitute 2.2% of the country's exports, and the remaining seven generate 6.3%. With export losses in the three cities ranging between 50 and 60% and the seven cities around 10%, there will be approximately 7 billion dollars lost on exports. While this value is factored into the GDP, it is still important to highlight this loss since it will create pressure on the exchange rate and current account. The production loss also has employment implications.

Employment

Affected cities employ about 4.6 million people. The three heavily-damaged cities employ around one million, and the remaining seven employ 3.6 million. While government employees will expectedly remain in their jobs, economists anticipate most unemployment will occur in the private sector, especially in the services industry. The expectations are that, due to many losses of life and employment venues being destroyed, 300

thousand will be left unemployed, increasing the unemployment rate to over 11% from the current 10.3%, meaning nearly 4 million unemployed individuals. As fewer people are employed, tax collection will become problematic.

Taxes

In 2022, affected cities accounted for 7.1% of taxes, and the three most affected cities comprised 3.2% of taxes. This year, it is expected that 2.9 billion USD of taxes will be lost in the three cities, and the other seven cities will experience a loss of around 35%, meaning around a hundred million dollars. In total, the government budget will suffer a loss of 3 billion USD.

Inflation

Notably, the earthquakes have also significantly affected inflation projections. In January 2023, TurkStat announced the yearly inflation as 57.68%. Globally, economists expected that we would see disinflation throughout 2023 due to the base effect. On the other hand, government expenditure due to general elections, minimum wage increases, the new regulation reducing retirement ages for certain groups of workers and its effect on consumer spending, mark-ups on various service prices, and tax

exemptions were anticipated to diminish disinflation substantially. Before, noteworthy economists expected a yearly inflation rate of 40% by the end of 2023. Unfortunately, the predicted spending increase predicted will inevitably increase inflation. Moreover, the 21-billion-dollar production decline will certainly increase cost-push inflation. The yearly expected inflation rate is thus revised as 50%.

Growth

Finally, economists predict a decrease in the economic growth rate. Prior to the earthquakes, Türkiye's GDP was forecasted to exceed 900 billion dollars in 2023. While the data used for this article suggests there will be about a 2.3% loss in the GDP, a more optimistic report by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development suggests the loss of GDP will account for 1% of total production due to the expected reconstruction spending. Finally, Türkiye's economic growth rate will likely contract from 3% to 2.8%, although this is still an optimistic estimate as some economists predict a rate of 1.2%. Nevertheless, IMF Executive Director Mahmoud Mohieldin stated that the effect of the recent earthquakes on the Turkish GDP would not be as severe as

ish GDP would not be as severe as in the earthquakes of 1999. Still, this statement does not alleviate the grim conditions.

Conclusion

Not taking precautions for the sake of profits cost Türkiye more than 1% of domestic production. More importantly, disregarding scientific facts and government regulations led to a death toll between 45 and 225 thousand. Now, the government sees the answer to all these problems as directly building housing, disregarding expert opinions once again. Instead of taking precautions against the imminent threat of a similar magnitude earthquake near Istanbul, the most populated city in Türkiye with unofficial statistics suggesting a population above 20 million, the government is pursuing profits once again. President Erdoğan is doing everything in his power to maintain his corrupt empire, and his lust for power could lead to another human tragedy that many will grieve and the majority of the West will, once again, ignore. My only wish is that this mistake teaches the government a lesson and I do not have to endure the loss of family, friends, and the most beautiful city on the face of the Earth.

Ekin Köseoğlu

"Good artists copy, great artists steal." - Copying others can make you good - respectable, even - but to be great, you must internalize the ideas of the greats, and make them your own, so one day you can construct your own great idea. My journey, starting in Istanbul, led me here. I'm a first-year PPLE student at the UvA believing I can eventually change things.



The Demographic Shake-Up

A Reality Check For The Economy

Image: Pixabay



A crowd emerged from the darkened Debussy theatre with their eyes still stinging from the harsh light of the screen. They had come to Cannes expecting to be dazzled by cinematic art, but instead, they had been assaulted by a brutal vision of reali-

ty. They staggered along the boulevard, trying to shake off the nightmare they had witnessed. Chiye Hayakawa had crafted a movie that pierced their hearts like a knife. Plan 75, a bleak tale of a near-future Japan where the elderly are encouraged free

euthanasia, had left them shaken and numb. They could not escape the feeling that they had glimpsed a terrible truth hidden in their daily lives. As the movie takes you through the main characters' storylines, you are left with nothing but an un-

canny impression that something is morally wrong. Streets filled with government-sponsored tents and billboard ads, encourage citizens to join the campaign. Disturbing news reports scapegoat the bizarre push by the government but address the country's national culture, born from the 'history of sacrifice' from the Second World War.

A couple of months ago, a suggestion à la Plan 75 was made by Yusuke Narita, a Yale economist who proposed "mass suicide by the senior citizens" to solve Japan's demographic crisis. While Yusuke stated his comment was taken out of its context (it indeed was), the way it was done is nonetheless disturbing. In a matter of days, his Twitter account following jumped to over half a million, with the majority being alienated youth who believe their economic progress has been hampered by the elderly in power. Beyond this burgeoning sinister façade lies an eerie economic

acumen that our society views the elder more as a burden than a benefit. It highlights a poly-crisis of sorts, a word that has become trendy in 2022 in light of war, inflation, and food shortage. This one, however, has increments of social misinformation and indifference written all over it.

Labour Supply and Dependency Rates

The demographic crisis - like the one in Japan - is not country-specific either. By the mid-century, the global population will reach a median age of 36 (up from 31 today). The continent most affected by this crisis is Europe, where for the past 150 years, life expectancy has risen linearly by 12 months every five years. This changing age structure of the population has been a persistent and increasing drag on labour force participation across advanced economies since the mid-90s. Coupled with low fertility rates, it is a near-perfect mix for low labour supply as more people transition into retirement. It puts downward pressure on the aggregate labour supply because,

inevitably, older employees retire - all the while - fewer people can produce the same goods and services at the same productivity levels, making a country appear poorer from a GDP growth perspective.

As human lifespan increases, economists need to realign how we think about labour, pensions, and the economy as a whole. But economics - as a discipline - has been slow to catch up with this reality. Empirical studies suggest that GDP growth falls as much as labour force and population growth do, a seemingly troublesome scenario for much of the advanced economies. But an older population does not have to be a drag on growth as it is commonly implied. Individual well-being depends not on aggregate but on per capita development. In Europe, pension eligibility incentivises people to stay in the workforce longer by working part-time. Standard growth models predict that slower population growth also leads to rising output and wages per worker. In the long run, it might lower interest rates as capital becomes less scarce.

The primary variable is whether we can boost productivity enough to offset the demographic challenge. As society ages, we will have more retirees and fewer workers. That means each worker will have to support more dependents. How can we avoid a decline in living standards? By making each worker more productive. But that's easier said than done. Imagine a society where some people are too young or old to work. The kids and the elders consume more than they produce, and the working-age adults must pay for their consumption. As society ages, fewer workers and more elders will demand a lot of consumption. The only silver lining is that fewer kids will also require less consumption. But that may not last if the fertility rate rises again. Then, the working-age population will face even more pressure from both sides of the age spectrum.

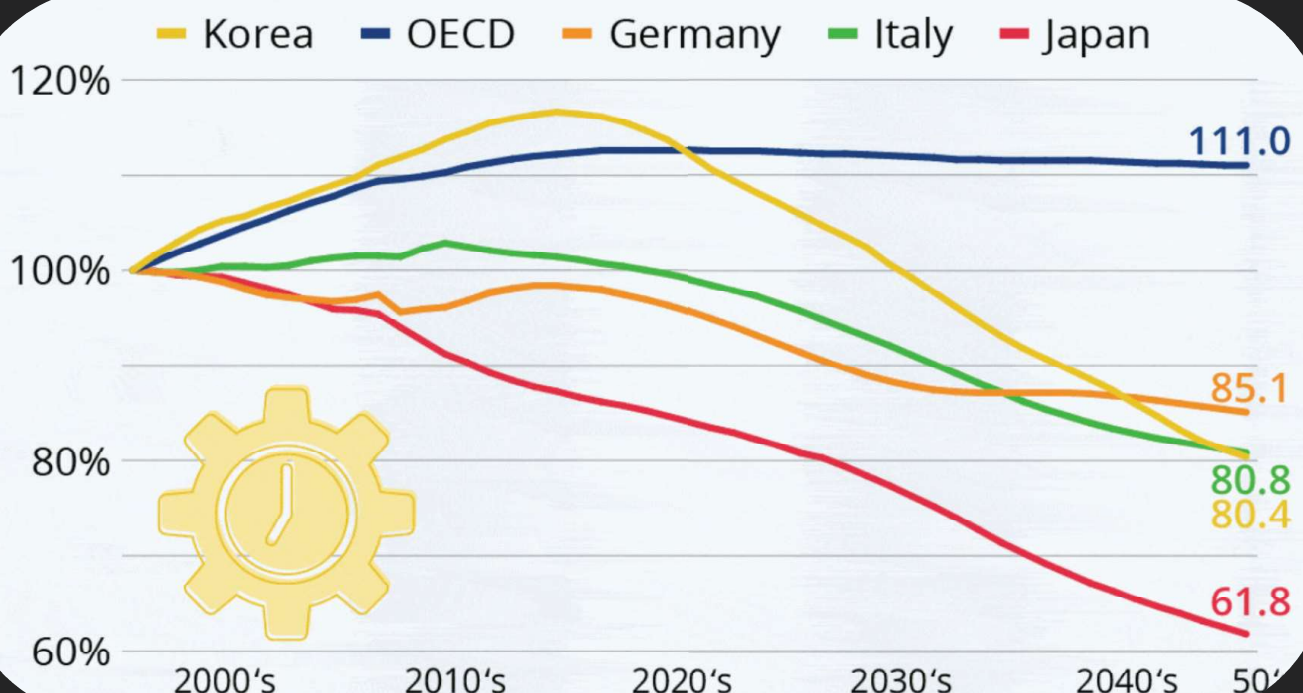
Assets, Savings, and Investments

According to McKinsey, baby boomers control about 70 per cent of investable household assets in the United

States. This influences how their households save and participate in the labour force. If the saving rate remains unchanged while fewer people enter the workforce, then each worker would have more capital available. This would increase productivity and wages and lower interest rates. The elderly would save more than they spend and accumulate more assets than younger generations. Longer life spans and lower fertility rates would raise saving rates further, strengthening private savings. But in some scenarios, according to IMF, capital per worker may not increase. If population ageing forces governments to borrow more to pay benefits, funds for private capital investment may be crowded out. Another possibility is that those with money to invest will seek higher returns in foreign capital markets where the population is younger, and rates of return may be higher. In this case, domestic workers will not benefit through rising wages and higher productivity, although returns on foreign investments would still raise national income.

Projected change in working age population
in selected OECD countries (2000=100%)

Source: OECD, WEF



As populations age and grow more slowly, GDP and national income growth will undoubtedly slow down - but the effect on individuals may differ. A greying population would mean a reliance on benevolence. But it also means more capital per worker, which can boost productivity and wages, mainly if governments don't borrow too much and crowd out private investment. The extent of this problem will depend on the severity of the population, but for now, we need to confront how this silent crisis is portrayed in our society. We must face it because it is inevitable - or how economists like to put it - hard to avoid.

In around 30 years, the world will look and feel different. Our global society must not be oblivious to the signs of change. Plan 75 is an absurdity that is sluggishly marching towards reality. But it is also a movie about the delicate moments that sprinkle life and give it meaning - like splurging on sushi at a posh restaurant in Downtown Tokyo. I believe with Plan 75, Hayakawa wanted to remind us of our humanity, our need for a stronger sense of belonging, and to stop reducing people to a number on a spreadsheet. In 30 years, if life is still measured by numbers, our society will become deaf to the stories that matter.

Riad Guliyev

An Economics and Business Economics student, currently serving as a Head Editor of the Economics and Finance Column at Rostra Economica. Interested in Economics, Finance, Politics, and International Relations. Passionate about sports, travelling, and the stories that matter.



Environment, Social & Governance

“There is no greater agony than carrying an untold story inside you”

When Maya Angelou, an American memoirist, poet and civil rights activist, uttered these words some 50-odd years ago, she not only captured the hearts and minds of millions of Americans, but she also captured the spirit of the Rostra Economica ESG column. The ESG column is the place where untold stories find their way into the world.

While the ESG column covers a wide array of issues - ranging from culture wars to emerging technologies and terrorism - there is a shared essence at the basis of all these articles, namely a human-centred approach to journalism. In our race against time, the ESG column thereby highlights what really makes the clock tick: us, as individuals, and how we shape society and the world.

When you flick through the upcoming pages, you will find yourself perplexed about the philosophical significance of moshpits, conflicted about your work-life balance, and self-aware about the societal punishment women face when they age. Subsequently, you'll read up on the material building blocks of the future, after which only the bedazzling spectre of nuclear annihilation is left for you.

I sincerely hope that the upcoming pages will fill you with joy, knowledge, and, most of all, a desire to keep exploring the untold stories around you.

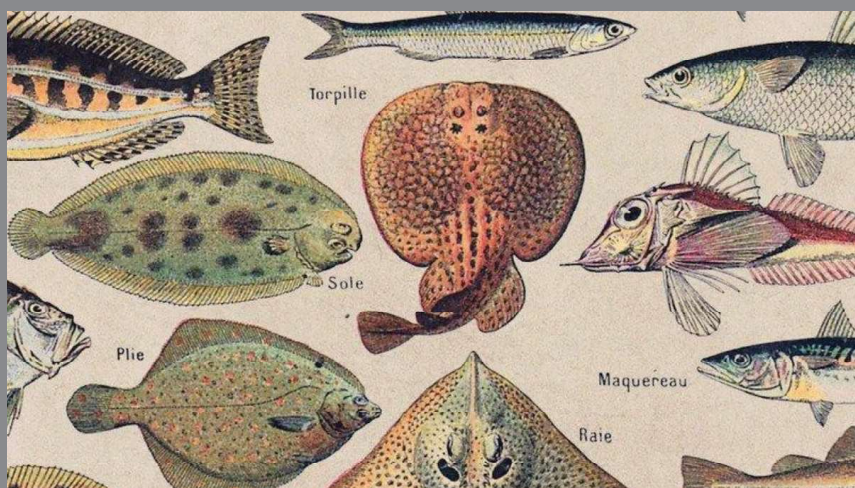


Abe de Ruijter
Head Editor for ESG

German Rap, Fishing and the Perils of Freedom

On the western corner of Germany a summer rap festival took hold of Freiburg to no one's -except the attendees'- regard. To most fans of the genre, it was a typical affair. Four different stages were spread through the venue to allow for a grander guest list on the short three days that the weekend allows. There was a section parked for a good selection of tented restaurants to serve everything from the most typical schnitzel and pretzel to the -in

my opinion- tastier, imported cuisines that have enriched the German palate for the past 50 or so years. At the same space where the tables were laid out, some amenities that served as some weird sort of flyer filler, at least to your editor, an element of surprise but not dynamism was added to the whole affair. Firstly, a bent, crooked and rather sad beer pong table served a maximum of five, not very enthusiastic games throughout the weekend. Next to it, there was a small, not more than 10-meter-long basketball court with the standard



Source: Adolphe Millot

A german rap festival has a lot to say about the consequences of our individuality

water weighted hoop that allowed for dunks to any attendees taller than 185 cm with a semi-athletic build. And as a last amenity, and maybe with the functional purpose of holding any had-too-much-beer fans, there was a weird, speed-dating layout of beach chairs that were mostly empty throughout the weekend. They only seemed to fill up around 8 or 9 PM when the beer and the jumping around had amassed a crowd for the food.

The German way of celebrating the hard beat, slapping and fast lyrics

of the simpleton songs is admittedly self-conscious and fun-at least for a while. There is an obsession that drives an impressive degree of communal organization to make fast excuses for mosh pits. It's a contrasting mix. First, it's the extreme restraint as the song builds up to the commanding drop, coupled with the surrender of the entire sub-portion of attendees to the construction of a, very geometrically satisfying, circle of emptiness. It can be a scary experience at first when you consider the mix of sweaty armpits, uncomfortable shoulder rubs,

sneaky hip pushing and continuous singing for the noisiest, most devoted fans (to both the mosh pit and the songs). It is they that form the barrier protecting their geometrical space until the circle of life -or maybe of the beat- can put an adequate end to it. For a first, maybe three or four times, the drop, and the unrelenting jump into nothing as a collective is fascinating and admittedly fun. But, maybe to your editor who didn't grow up as this being the way to celebrate music, partying, or weekends, after the fifth or sixth time that the sweaty, fanatical men started to form the circle, it got a bit dull and, if anything, painful.

This innocuous festival, filled with hedonism for some selected and unique individuals when you consider the entirety of the human population, did give some weird insight into the depth of what enjoyment is. The week-

end, for some, seemed to be a pertinent affair that maybe included scratching days off calendars, mentions on every walk to get lunch, and sending texts to the friend that now stood next to them as they jumped into the explosion of bodies on each of those select four counts. For others, the festival might have been an impulsive yes to a caring proposal that a friend made. A spontaneous matter. Something that represents, if anything, uncertainty. To the rest of the 8 billion of us that will never experience this -from what I've read- obscure festival, the day's enjoyment and fulfillment probably did not come from BHZ's famous single "Bier". I'll attach the chorus in the following footnote.¹

The surprising diversity in the enjoyment linked this whole affair to the world of liberties. So I beg the question, is there a connection between that place, that weekend, among those beats and the mil-

lennia-old struggle to institutionalise individual liberties?²

It was only natural that as social hierarchies rose, there would be an imposition on people's actions. It is the easiest way to achieve goals and avoid messy humans disturbing the newly found order of society. As the pendulum rose that way, it gained momentum to return for the wish of people, among organized society, to demand liberties despite accepting its social contract. As those liberties were won, the possible effects of someone's choice for pleasure³ weren't greatly considered. There is, as the wise limiters of the past might have warned, a cost to allowing humans to become individuals: dissociating society for a cohesive entity will also lead to collateral. Maybe the most frustrating part of it all is that it is basically impossible to choose what the collateral should be.

¹ All my friends already stink of beer
in the studio in the morning, I'm quite deformed
102 and BHZ, I think you've got the point
Too much hoes again, only cocaine can help

² I think this question about the role of the word "connection" is interesting here. The use of connection has been strongly restricted to linear, simple relationships. Think: punch connects to black eye. Yet, in this case without the advent of the institutionalization of individual liberties then the maybe more precise causations for the festival (a climate that allows for the correct economic incentives, spread of the culture among the youth, etc.) would've sprung. So it's hard to dismiss the connection and that is why, even if somewhat absurd at the start, there might be a valuable use to this case study as an excuse to explore the possible damaging effects of creating a prosperous environment for individual pleasures.

An example might help. Fishing was, for many centuries, a necessity. Yet, sometime around the 1660s, when the printed press allowed stories to spread, it became clear (and published) that some people enjoyed the fishing and not the eating of the fish itself. Communities of leisure fishers⁴ started to form in all countries, and to their happiness, they continued to fish with no real regard for the effects of their actions on fish populations and ecosystems. It took the United States until 1939 to institutionalize people's enjoyment to patiently get a fish out of the water when they founded the International Game Fish Association (IGFA) to regulate the "game".

Some probably consider sport fishing absurd. A heinous, selfish, inconsiderate action that they will condemn while grabbing a polluting car to go see a couple of people kick around a ball. There is no such thing as coherence or absolute objectivity in the world of pleasures. There are no saints in this sphere of existence.

Yet, it seems that only recently, as scientific knowledge begins to understand the possibly damaging effects of certain freedoms, have certain societies allowed a cutback on their individual liberties, like with the foundation of the IGFA, or the clear regulations on the organisation of festivals.

We will probably never be able to get rid of German rap festivals. And that's okay if your editor doesn't have to go to another one. It is a -mainly- harmless event that harnesses a lot of joy for its fanatics. Yet, the questions become hard as time begins to elucidate the consequences of our extended use of certain kinds of leisure. At what thresholds should activities become regulated? Prohibited? Do societal values play a part in this, even if it's an activity that doesn't harm anything? Are environmental damage and human protection the only valid excuse? The reality is that these decisions are probably made already inside most of us. Yet, that possibility has proved to evoke some of the weirdest (mosh pits) habits to elicit happiness inside us.



Juan Felipe Gaviria

Third-year PPLE student.

Admirer of journalism,

Latin America and all those
spirited enough to write.

Frequent Rostra reader.

³ I use the words pleasure, enjoyment, and happiness pretty much synonymously here. It might be necessary to highlight that their purpose is not to be a stand-in for what Aristotle or Plato mentioned when discussing "the good life". Here it's used to highlight more futile pleasures. Hobbies and routines that are an essential part of one's identity, and perhaps time, without carrying (at least explicitly) a considerable amount of ethical and moral consideration.

⁴ The history of sport fishing is long and complex and it can be traced back to the English civil war. It suffers from great contextual differences from country to country and there's -due to the natural inclination of men to go fish and the widespread culture around it- no real single narrative to understand its story. For the purpose of this article, despite the riveting topic of the history of sport fishing, I will abstain from going too deep and too accurately into the topic and steal the point it lets me make.

Ionized Annihilation

When the Nuclear Doomsday Clock Strikes Midnight

The survivors of a nuclear
war will envy the dead
-Nikita Khrushchev

If anything can go wrong, it will - this is the essence of Murphy's Law, a fundamental principle that seems to hold true in both the smallest and greatest aspects of our lives. On September 26th, 1983 Murphy's law nearly came true. In the USSR, Lt. Col. Stanislav Petrov stood frozen in contemplation next to the newly installed Soviet early warning system. One word flashed in red on the display, "Zapusk"— Launch. Soviet radars detected five American nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles headed directly towards Moscow, and it was Petrov's solemn military duty to inform Soviet high command of this strike, and their policy was clear, M.A.D, mutually assured destruction. His hand trembled as he thought of the gravity of the situation, his gut told him it was a mistake, but the clock behind him taunted him with each tick, each a second

closer to the possibility of seeing everything he loved and knew turned into radioactive dust. He came to a singular conclusion, a conclusion that if wrong would mean total vaporization. It must have been a mistake, he could feel it in his gut and so he refused to inform high command and waited nervously, yet armageddon never came. The radars had failed, they mistakenly identified light reflections off high-altitude clouds as nuclear missiles. The warning system had been mistaken, but Petrov had succeeded in saving hundreds of millions of lives. This is one example of dozens of nuclear mishaps and close calls. We fail to understand that we are imperfect creatures of constant error. In an age of renewed conflict and nuclear posturing, we must reassess the true utility and magnitude of these weapons of mass destruction.

Currently, nine countries possess nuclear weapons, leading to a sum of 12,700 warheads globally, some being 3,000 times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It would only take 100 modern warheads to destroy the earth, and ultimately, only one catastrophic mistake. The following is an estimation of what would have happened on that fateful day in 1983 if Lt. Col. Petrov had believed the warning system.

A Forecast of Decimation

The air is suddenly filled with the ominous rings of sirens. TVs, radios and phones are all tuned in to the same reporting. You have 30 minutes to get underground. Nuclear warheads roar overhead at 3000km per hour, painting the horizon with hues of crimson and orange while evoking a sense of dread and despair in the hearts of all who beheld it. Detonation. In an instant the

uranium atoms in the war-head are split into smaller particles, releasing enormous amounts of energy. The blinding light of a nuclear explosion illuminates the surroundings like a thousand suns, drowning the world in pure white, while the immense heat incinerates everything in its path, leaving behind only a ghostly imprint of objects that once stood in its wake. As the mushroom clouds all over the globe bellow deeper into the atmosphere, 360 million people are vaporized and incinerated instantly. As the radiation and firestorms metastasize, vast amounts of smoke and soot smother the ozone layer, plunging the earth into a perpetual nuclear winter. The lack of sunlight coupled with ra-

dioactive damage to crops and soil destroys ecosystems, leading to famines estimated to starve over 5 billion people. The only unirradiated crops are found deep within the underground seed bank in Svalbard, housing 2.5 billion seeds. Pockets of humanity are all that survive, many found in underground bunkers like the Cheyenne Mountain Complex built inside a Colorado mountain, housing bureaucrats of a government that once was.

The myth of nuclear deterrence as peace

It's purported that nuclear weapons are instruments of peace and that humanity is too rational to engage in mutually assured destruction. Humanity has wielded this catastroph-

ic power for 80 short years, where we have come to the brink of extinction dozens of times both through error and hostility. Nine governments have the alarming ability to bring life itself to its knees through one impatient order. It is time for humanity to reject the false security promised by nuclear weapons and embrace alternative methods of conflict avoidance. The stakes are too high to leave the fate of our planet in the hands of a select few. As the late Carl Sagan once said, "The nuclear arms race is like two sworn enemies standing waist-deep in gasoline, one with three matches, the other with five." The choice to put out the matches is ours, and the cost could not be higher.



Image: Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group
Nuclear Shadow - the incinerated remains of a Hiroshima victim

Yazan Azab

Jordanian-Czech national studying his final year of Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics at the University of Amsterdam. His inspirations for his articles spring from philosophy, current events, neo-colonialism, international law and human rights justice.



The Race For a New , Clean Industrial Revolution



Is Green Steel the Future?

The steel industry has long been a cornerstone of the global economy, providing essential materials for countless products and infrastructure projects. Yet, steel production is also one of the largest sources of carbon emissions, contributing to climate change and environmental issues. In recent years, there has been growing interest in developing green steel technologies that produce steel with lower carbon emissions and a smaller environmental footprint. The steel industry is stepping up with innovative solutions as the world races to reduce carbon emissions and fight climate change. Could green steel pave the way for a new era of steel production that is low-carbon, energy-efficient, and environmentally friendly?

What is Green Steel?

Green steel, also known as sustainable steel, refers to steel that is produced using processes that emit lower levels of greenhouse gasses and have a smaller

environmental impact than traditional steel production methods. It can be achieved through a variety of methods, including using renewable energy sources, reducing energy consumption through process improvements, and using alternative raw materials that produce fewer carbon emissions. Steel production accounts for approximately 7% of global carbon emissions, making it one of the largest contributors to climate change. Additionally, traditional steel production methods use large amounts of energy and natural resources, including coal and iron ore, which lead to environmental degradation and resource depletion. By developing green steel technologies, we can reduce the carbon footprint of steel production and create a more sustainable and resilient steel industry.

What is The Speed/Feasibility of the Adoption of Green Steel?

The development of green steel technologies is still

in its early stages, but there is growing interest and investment in these methods. The challenges facing the steel industry are significant, with high capital costs, complex supply chains, and a competitive global market. However, several promising developments suggest that the adoption of green steel plants may be both feasible and rapid. For one, there is a growing trend that consumers and companies are becoming more focused on sustainability. This means meeting that demands for products can be met while ensuring that they are produced in an environmentally friendly way. Furthermore, with the advancement of technology, steel manufacturers are increasingly confronted with alternative methods of production that emit fewer greenhouse gasses. In that regard, the use of renewable energy sources is becoming a standardized practice in steel production and is creating new opportunities for innovative companies. For example,



Green Steel Plant 2020, digital photograph, Climate Adaption Platform

the use of biomass and other alternative raw materials to produce green steel could create new opportunities for farmers and other producers. It could provide farmers with an opportunity to sell their waste as a valuable resource rather than disposing of it as a byproduct since biomass is a type of organic material that is produced from agricultural waste such as crop residues, forestry waste, and animal manure. Thus, the production of green steel using biomass can create a new revenue stream for producers and open new opportunities for job creation and economic development in rural communities, where traditional job opportunities may be limited. Thus, by implementing green steel, steel manufacturers could have a positive impact on communities and workers.

Yet, there are some challenges that arise with the adoption of green steel, for instance the high cap-

ital costs of building new plants and retrofitting existing ones can be rather demanding for smaller companies. Specifically, the availability of raw materials, such as biomass, can be a challenge. Nevertheless, governments and policymakers can play a key role in supporting the adoption of green steel by reducing some of the challenges companies face. Providing incentives for companies to invest in new technologies and introducing regulations that require companies to reduce their carbon footprint is one step that is being taken to incentivize companies to switch to green steel. As such, the European Steel Association has set a goal of reducing the carbon footprint of steel production by 30% by 2030 and achieving carbon-neutral steel production by 2050.

The Future of Green Steel
Recognizing the importance of decarbonizing the steel industry, the 'H2 Green Steel'

(H2GS) company is on track to become Europe's first commercial green steel plant. H2GS was founded in 2020, aiming to build a large-scale fossil-fuel-free steel plant in northern Sweden. The company aims to produce 5 million tons of fossil-fuel-free steel by 2030, starting as early as 2025. Not only has H2GS's innovation attracted the attention of companies and governments looking to replicate their success, but it has also attracted a partnership with Mercedes-Benz, the luxury car manufacturer. The partnership is a result of Mercedes-Benz's commitment to sustainable and responsible supply chain management, as well as its goal to be completely carbon-neutral by 2039. By investing in green steel, Mercedes-Benz is not only reducing its own carbon emissions but also supporting the development of a new, sustainable industry that has the potential to benefit consumers and the planet alike.



Mercedes-Benz collaboration with H2 Green Steel 2023, digital photograph, Mercedes-Benz Group AG

Yet, what does this really mean for consumers? The partnership highlights the potential of green steel to transform the automotive industry's supply chains, leading to the development of more sustainable and innovative vehicles. Thus, consumers will be confronted with a wider selection of green steel-produced cars, which could make their lives more sustainable as it improves fuel efficiency and

reduces energy costs. Driven by the urgent need to address climate change and sustainability challenges, the development of green steel represents a significant step in the race for a new, clean industrial revolution. By reducing carbon emissions, creating new opportunities for job creation, and fostering environmental sustainability, green steel has the potential to transform the way we pro-

duce and consume goods. As more companies invest in green steel production and collaborate with sustainable partners, we can expect to see a transformation of the industrial sector towards a more sustainable and equitable future. Thus, by embracing the principles of sustainability and innovation, we can build a better world for ourselves and for generations to come.



Coco Krumsick

Third year (final-year) Political Science student at the University of Amsterdam, specializing in Public Policy and Governance. Currently working as a copy-editor/editor for the Investigative Journalism team at Rostra Economica.

Workaholicism – An Honorable Drug of Choice



Why does taking rest feel so dreadful?

“We labor at our daily work more ardently and thoughtlessly than is necessary to sustain our life because it is even more necessary not to have the leisure to stop and think. Haste is universal because everyone is in flight from himself.”

– Friedrich Nietzsche

The 21st century is associated with the hustle culture in which work almost seems like an ultimate virtue. In the morning, people wake up, gulp up their caffeinated drinks, check the inboxes of their work emails, and go to the office. They might even boast about taking no breaks and working overtime or taking no weekends off.

Even though such a working lifestyle gives working adults certain validation and satisfaction over their productivity, such working ethics could lead to burnout. Under the WHO definition, burnout is an occupational phenomenon characterized by energy depletion and the feeling of negativity that stems from exposure to prolonged work stress. The number of people who report being burnt out has been increasing over the past

years, and in 2021 it even equaled 43% of the labor force, according to the Global Workplace Report.



Image: Edgar Degas, Women ironing

Why are we burnt out? The answer to this might be that we have internalized that people are supposed to be working all the time, which gets us hooked on being busy. On top of that, we are constantly implicitly or explicitly propagated that productivity shapes our value which compels us to go on even if we have already burnt all our mental or physical

resources. Often, in such situations, taking a break feels dreadful or associated with the feeling of guilt. We rather seek solutions such as mindfulness videos, meditation applications, inbox zero, or Pomodoro techniques. The techniques which help us resist the stress allow us to go back once again to the toxic cycle of optimal productivity but this time better equipped.

The reason behind people voluntarily taking on the working stress that puts their mental and physical health at risk can be analyzed through the prism of socioeconomic and political structures. We live in a capitalistic society; the system is based on free trade, private ownership, and its vital ingredient – profit maximization. Unlike any other social structure throughout history, in capitalism, people work

less than ever, and extreme poverty is now the lowest in the world. Technological advancements and economies of scale made it possible to derive maximal output with minimal input, and the era we entered is even often referred to as a golden era of welfare.

Yet, the productivity boom has not been translated into the John Maynard Keynes prediction of the 15-hour workweek. Keynes predicted that by 2030 people would work less and would be able to enjoy leisure and self-care. Nowadays, people, on average, work 40 hours per week. This might sound counterintuitive as technology has transformed humans into much more productive labor. However, these gains have been captured by the top. According to the Economic Policy Institute research, the increase in CEO pays increased by over 900%, whilst the average pay has stagnated at around a 10% increase.

Left alone the major wealth inequalities associated with capitalism, we do not even have to go to the Marxian “alienation” but can argue that burn-outs stem from internalized capitalism. Hit by the global financial crisis, the 21st century is associated with insecure employment; the workers should demonstrate their efficiency and productivity- doing better, cheaper, and timelier. Such working ethics indeed treats humans like machines, like commodities. Either you accept this work ethos, em-

bark on the journey of meritocracy, and work your way up or you remain poor. The choice of working until burnout almost becomes a must after a number of prescriptive speeches by billionaire titans like Elon Musk or entrepreneurs like Ryan Selkis. In 2018 the famous owner of Tesla said, “no one ever changed the world 40 hours a week”. Later on, in 2020, Selkis posted a controversial tweet: “if you don’t work nights and weekends in your 20s, you’re not going to have a successful career”. In fact, boastful CEOs like Elon Musk are not necessarily the people who work the most on increasing their company’s equity or stock prices. Furthermore, an interesting article from the Harvard business review even reveals the hypocrisy of the glorified hustle culture and states that “sometimes managers can’t even tell the difference between people who are working superhuman hours and those who are just pretending to be.”

Capitalism echoes the old story of slavery, yet mental. Surprisingly, serving capitalism feels more adequate than our self-care and self-actualization. The paradox lies in that we feel like “busyness” lets us hedge against living worthlessly. Moreover, idleness and the natural act of resting are often associated with “laziness.” However, recently people have started to challenge the thoughts around this notion.

“Indeed the state of all who are preoc-

cupied is wretched, but the most wretched are those who are toiling not even at their own preoccupations but must regulate their sleep by another's, and their walk by another's pace, and obey orders in those freest of all things, loving and hating. If such people want to know how short their lives are, let them reflect how small a portion is their own".
- Seneca

People have realized that they have to slow down their self-exploiting pace. Companies are giving the push to the four-day working weeks. People ask for abolishing daylight-saving time and protest holding elections at the weekends. People are becoming more conscious about the time that belongs to them. Even the companies are aware that workers' burnout will lead to huge chunks of money being lost. By 2025 the lost number might reach 7.5 billion in New South Welsh economy if there are not enough efforts put into these matters, forecasts The Impact Economics and Policy report.

Another factor is that after some time burnt out, workers are not the most creative, productive, or efficient ones. Tom DeMarco, a software engineer from Microsoft, has noticed that the best work environments are not hurried, and there is not as much focus on time management. Workers need to be able "to sit back" to keep having creative ideas.

Yet, there are compelling examples of idleness that are not a crime, vice, or laziness. People like Archimedes or Newton. They did, in fact, discover and set grounds for the transformative physics phenomena while resting. One did it in the bathtub, the other one while resting under the tree.

It needs to be underlined that the article does not disregard people who find joy and even shape their lives around their jobs. The criticism rather lies on the mental slavery one might get into at the workplace. A recent example of a successful life where money was not necessarily the driving force, and productivity was balanced with happiness and simplicity is "El Pepe." Pepe served as the president of Uruguay from 2010-2015. He is famous for his modest lifestyle and generous donations of 90% of his monthly salary. The left-wing rebel resigned after calling his journey tiring and stayed at his farm with his three-legged dog and his only personal possession, a 1987 Volkswagen Beetle.

It is interesting to observe how the events will develop. Will the generation of burnout start taking breaks? Will productivity anxiety be soothed by better means than mindfulness apps? Will people stop replying to the off-office hour work emails? Will people start enjoying their idle moments without feeling lazy? How will we do in our mental fights against time?



Elene Kiladze

I am a second-year Economics and Business Economics student from Batumi, Georgia. I am passionate about politics, philosophy, and cinematography. I also write poems.

Expired at Thirty

Why women are afraid of aging



Image: Rebecca Spooner

At the tender age of sixteen, I got my very first marriage proposal. Proposals of this nature are a common occurrence in the quaint little village where I was visiting my distant family. The question was posed to my grandmother – that’s just how things were done in this part of Morocco. Despite growing up surrounded by these cultural norms, I couldn’t help but scoff at the absurdity of it all. The idea of relinquishing one’s youth to marriage

seemed unthinkable. After all, at sixteen, marriage can wait; pursuing your goals simply cannot. Nevertheless, the experience left an indelible impression, most notably when my grandmother dropped a truth bomb: “No matter how accomplished or educated a woman becomes, nothing surpasses the worth of her youth.”

Sadly, her words ring true for many women around the world. Aging is an inevitable part of life, yet for women, it is often associated with fear. Ageism – discrimination based on age – affects women disproportionately. From the moment we’re born, society emphasizes youth and beauty, and as we get older, women have to cling to their youthful appearance for dear life. But where does this fear come from?

Online Age Panic

The pervasive fear of aging among women is a product of the patriarchal values that underpin our society, where women are valued chiefly for their physical appearance and not their intellectual or personal abilities. Social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram have become breeding grounds for this phenomenon, as countless accounts and influencers promote the search for the elusive, and altogether unattainable, fountain of youth. This fear of aging isn’t just limited to older women either. With a staggering 3.8 billion views, the hashtag “#antiaging” has

gained significant popularity on TikTok, while the majority of female TikTok users are between the age of 18 to 24.

The pressure on women to start a family and reach the peak of their career while they're still 'attractive', has ignited this online movement for young women to express feeling hideously old. This sentiment is widespread: self-demeaning and semi-ironic jokes of being an elderly hag surrounded by young children on the internet. There are comments everywhere praising women in their late 20s and 30s for their anti-aging secrets, as if by 30, one should expect to be expiring like milk. The self-deprecation at the root of this age panic seems like a well-intentioned attempt at relatability. Yet, as more women complain about how ancient they feel, it sounds depressing and highlights the urgency of addressing this issue.

A Spiral of Insecurity and Consumerism

The truth is that society stops valuing women after they reach a certain age. And the beauty industry knows this - they have capitalized on the fear of aging and perpetuated the myth that aging should be avoided at all costs. Endless advertisements promote the latest anti-aging creams, botox injections, and cosmetic surgeries. Women are bombarded with messages that they must maintain a youthful appearance to

be valued and attractive. This is also evident in the media, where older women are often portrayed as either nagging mothers or comical grandmothers. Fueling a culture of self-hate. Women feel ashamed of their natural aging process, leading them to spend exorbitant amounts of money on products and procedures that promise to erase any signs of aging.

While these anti-aging solutions may make individuals feel better about their appearance, they exacerbate the larger societal problem. Indeed, looking younger literally gives women a sense of empowerment by conforming to societal beauty standards that associate youth with success, allowing them to enjoy better living standards. However, regardless of whether these procedures are individually empowering, they are collectively disempowering by perpetuating unattainable standards for women. The existence of these anti-aging products suggests that one can win the fight against time with enough effort and money because the possibilities are endless. There's always a new miracle product or procedure to try, and if you don't see results, you simply need to try harder or spend more money. (If Shakira and Jlo can look like that, there is no excuse!).

It doesn't take an expert to realize that "anti-aging" is a tool of

capitalism. It is a fear-based ploy designed by a \$500 billion industry to exploit insecurities and promote the false hope that a solution can be found in beauty products, thus creating an endless cycle of consumption.

Wrinkles Are Not the Enemy

The beauty industry and its impact on women and society are complex issues that require a deeper understanding. Mainstream beauty media often needs to recognize the difference between individual and female empowerment, which is essential in comprehending the problem. Nowadays, gendered age discrimination has become normalized; it is not considered a form of prejudice by many. However, it can have the same psychological and economic impact as any other form of discrimination. While ageism affects both men and women, it disproportionately harms women. As men age, they are viewed as more competent in the workplace, while women lose their perceived productivity with every new wrinkle. While gray hair on men earns them the title of “silver fox,” it signals to women that the clock is ticking.

Safae Boukarhihi

Why did the Political Science student cross the road? To get to the other side of the debate, of course! Whether it's politics, history, or current events, I love exploring the nuances of different viewpoints and finding the humor in life's complexities :)

The unfair comparisons are endless.

It is important to note that acknowledging this difference is not meant to shame anyone but rather to be truthful about the existing systems in society. The belief that our worth is tied to our youth and beauty has been deeply rooted in our culture, and it's high time we let go of it. Dismantling a system upheld by anti-aging ideologies will require a long and difficult struggle. However, we can start by reframing the conversation and encouraging society to focus on the positive aspects of aging, such as wisdom, experience, and personal growth. Changing how we talk about aging can help shift the cultural narrative towards a more inclusive and optimistic outlook for all ages. But, most importantly, we need to embrace our own aging process and celebrate the rich experiences that come with it.

By taking on this challenge, we can hope to spare the future generation of women from the same ridiculous beauty standards they face today.

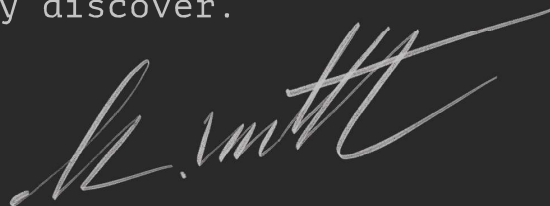


Politics

No topic equals it in disagreement, and no subject matches it in terms of the emotions it evokes. Yet we all feel the ebb and flow of the political processes around us -they are truly inescapable. Elections, policy, conflict, disputes - none of us can say that these do not affect our lives; rather, they form the basis of our actions. Nor are we immune to the effects of the social, economic, and legal factors that provide the undercurrent for the messy, tangled, beautiful labyrinth that is politics.

Our newly created column attempts to examine particularly these factors driving politics, peering behind the curtain and unveiling the complexity of events we feel intensely passionate about. We aim to provide in-depth, critical analysis in our discussion of pertinent events in the realm of politics and invite you to truly engage with our articles - both with the points you may find yourself agreeing with, as well as those that conflict with your beliefs.

We hope you enjoy the articles in this column and that you find yourself inspired by the insights you may discover.



Konstantin van Thiel
Head Editor for Politics

Solidarity in the Lowlands



Image: Pexels

How much is too much?

As the cost of living continues to rise and inflation hits an all-time high, people are speaking up. COVID-19 sent shock waves through our global economy and triggered the biggest economic crisis experienced in over a century. Pressing on people's finances. Brewing Outrage. As with the rest of the world, the Netherlands has been heavily struck by the hits of the ongoing economic turbulence experienced over the past few years. The economic hardship accompanied due to rampant inflation rates has led to an outbreak of several strikes across many different sectors as individuals and businesses have been struggling to make ends meet. People are going on strike, demanding better pay, improved working conditions and overall financial support from the government. Is the government failing to satisfy people's needs? Are workers not satisfied with what they have anymore and have higher expectations? Can more public disturbances be tolerated? Although the strikes may be controversial, they have

nonetheless been effective in raising awareness and pushing the government to take action and address the matter. This article will take you through the major strikes that have impacted the Netherlands recently due to skyrocketing prices, how the rest of the world is also struggling and the impact all this has on people's mental health.

As of last summer, it was reported that one out of three people risks facing financial struggles as the cost-of-living increases. The Central Planning Bureau in The Netherlands predicts that 7.6% of the people will be living below the poverty line by the end of 2023. The projected figures stand even higher for children where one in ten children are expected to live in poverty. "People get shocked at the supermarket checkout, to say nothing of their energy bills. We have to stop people falling through the ice." says foreign affairs minister, Wopke Hoekstra.

An increasing cost of living accompanied by a disproportionate change in

wages leaves many people angry. Many different sectors in The Netherlands have been recently affected by strikes. One of the most critical is the public transportation industry. Schiphol airport is known for being one of the busiest airports in Europe, serving millions of passengers annually. Severe strikes leading to declining services and turbulence in operations are largely due to the high numbers of temporary contracts in the industry. This was especially an issue during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 when the airport first began facing major losses. Back then, Schiphol observed a 62% decline in passenger traffic compared to the previous year, leading to a loss of 246 million. As a result, the airport decided to lay off several hundreds of its workers in hopes of recovering from such painful losses, highlighting the problem with temporary contracts and causing outrage amongst workers. As the world slowly began recovering from the pandemic and passenger numbers began to recover, there was not enough staff to help support this sudden influx of travelers. Staff

were overworked, underpaid, and still tied to unstable contracts. Trade unions urged workers to go on strike, leading to complete and utter chaos at the airport. Luggage was constantly getting lost, people were waiting in queues for hours and hours on end, and it seemed like no matter how early you went you still ran the risk of missing your flight. The situation got so bad that, at one point, the police needed to close down highway exits to the airport as lines at departure gates began stretching too far out of the airport buildings. In some instances, airport authorities were urging people not to come to the airport anymore as terminals were getting far too full. Although the airport has been working towards improving the situation, the Netherlands trade union confederation has recently reported that the airport continues to face “sky-high” staff shortages and will not be ready to face the massive influx of travellers, primarily during the summer when everyone wants to go on vacation.

Public transportation workers have faced a similar predicament. Strikes in the industry have led to major delays and cancellations of buses, trams, and trains. This issue is especially prominent in Amsterdam and Rotterdam and has caused a lot of cha-

os as many people depend on public transport for essential day-to-day activities, such as getting to work, university, or school. The Dutch trade unions announced a five-day strike, which was conducted by up to thirteen thousand workers earlier this month. This strike marked the fourth period of industrial action for regional workers since September 2022 and the second since the start of 2023. It appears that, so far, negotiations between public transport operators and trade unions have yet a long way to go before achieving some success.

Another sector that has been affected by the economic crisis is the agriculture industry. Last summer, the Dutch government announced its commitment to cut nitrogen emissions by 50% by 2030. This was due to the fact that nitrogen levels in the country were far too high and did not align with EU law. Given that these nitrogen emissions mainly stem from agriculture, the Dutch government announced its plan to buy out farmers, framing it as a measure to reduce the high nitrogen emissions. This led to many outraged farmers, blocked roads, empty supermarket shelves and hay bales set on fire in the center of The Hague. In an interview, a farmer named Geertjan Kloosterboer said that the government’s pro-

posal to cut livestock feels “so unfair.” When asked if he saw a future for his kids in farming, he responded by saying, “I don’t know if that’s what they want. When we talk about farming, it’s just stress. But I want them to have a choice, not for the government to make that choice for them.”

Just when we thought it couldn’t get worse. It did. By the end of last year, around 300 retail workers held a protest on the Dam Square near Amsterdam’s central station. This demonstrated the fury that is felt amongst individuals all over, regardless of the industry they work in. During the protest, retail workers were demanding at least 10% increases in wages by the new year in order to compensate for inflation. “Salaries in drugstores, as in the whole shopping street, are scandalously low. While the companies make huge profits that almost all go to shareholders,” trade union executive Cindy Onvlee explains. Employees working at stores such as De Bijenkorf, Etos, Trekpleister, Kruidvat, and Holland & Barret are all involved in the action.

Image: Pexels



All this turbulence comes as a result of people fighting against the cost-of-living crisis the world is currently witnessing. The Netherlands is not struggling alone, the whole world is suffering too. According to a recent report, it was found that a whopping 64% of Americans are currently living paycheck to paycheck. High inflation is eating its way through people's wallets worldwide. As people's circumstances continue to worsen, many have begun losing their sense of righteousness and morality, justifying to themselves that they are in desperate need to make ends meet. In the UK there have been rising tensions, seeing as the cost-of-living crisis has apparently triggered a wave of workplace crime. Almost 6,000 people were caught stealing from their employers in 2022, which is 5,000 more than the year before. Criminals have also been able to hack into their senior employees' emails, sending urgent payment instructions with fraudulent bank details to other staff members and external parties. Alongside the Netherlands,

the UK has also been experiencing many strike outbreaks, making it the worst the country has experienced in the past 30 years. The main industries affected are transportation, communications, and education.

There have been studies conducting research on the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis on people's well-being and mental health. A recent survey conducted by the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy states that 49% of therapists say that their clients are already cutting back on activities that benefit their mental health such as going to the gym or having a sports club membership. 60% of therapists have said that clients are cutting back on therapy sessions as they can no longer afford them. Recent research has also shown that there has been a 40% increase in the number of people contacting Mind's mental health helpline about financial matters. Overall, it is evident that the economic state the world is currently facing has had a severe negative im-

pact on the population. The declining state of people's mental health can have long-lasting effects on not only them, but generations to come as well.

The cost-of-living crisis we're facing today is a tough battle being fought by everyone: individuals, companies, and governments alike. Many have to choose between paying for basic necessities like food and water or other important necessary expenses, like medical bills and education. A lot of people nowadays are trying to survive rather than live their lives normally as before. Many passions and hobbies have been put aside as people are now forced to work multiple jobs to at the very least guarantee a roof over their heads and food on their table. The financial burden and stress that individuals are constantly being put under have triggered heightened levels of anxiety and depression. Whilst the road ahead may seem difficult, there is still hope to turn this mess around and thrive, rather than have to fight to survive.

Nour El Ezabi

I am a third-year economics and business economics student who is passionate towards reading, writing and discussing hot-topics and current events happening all around the world!



Turning a Blind Eye on the Graveyard of Empires

Cracks are beginning to form in the international isolation of the Taliban-Controlled Afghanistan as the West risks being caught off guard.

Few images shocked the world as much as those of the evacuation of Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport in August of 2021; videos depicting dark figures plummeting earthwards from grey military transport planes and the lifeless, trampled bodies of men, women, and children spread throughout media channels at unparalleled speeds. As gruesome of a wakeup call as these pictures were, they acted as a catalyst for an outburst of support for Afghan civilians, their plight at the hands of war and the Taliban's brutality having already been neglected for far too long. It was during these tense days that the undertaking of one of humanity's most ambitious evacuations occurred. Prior to the final dissolution of the airbridge following horrific bombings at the airport's Abbey Gate, over



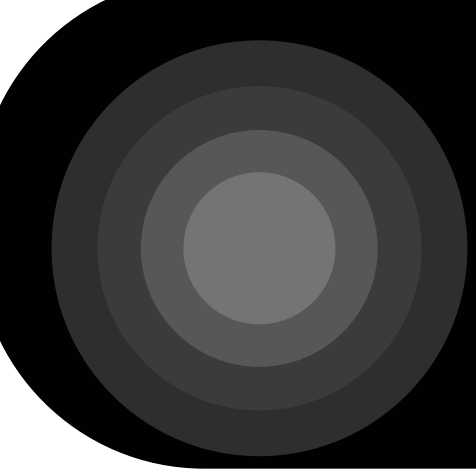
Image: Associated Press/Ebrahim Noroozi
Taliban Fighters Roam the Streets of Kabul with impunity - Now highly armed and eager to consolidate their power.

120,000 people had been flown out and scattered to various safe havens worldwide.

In the months that followed, the Taliban, now supplied with western weaponry left behind by the US and her allies and facing diminished resistance which is mainly concentrated in the Panjshir valley and the northern mountains, have consolidated their gains. They

have also reimposed their theocratic totalitarian brand of governance that had characterised their rule from 1996 to 2001.

Yet, as other crises developed, such as the tense standoff between China and Taiwan, and the explosive Russian invasion of Ukraine, the extraordinary media attention that had befallen Afghanistan dissipated. The calls for the collective West to



save from the clutches of the Taliban those Afghans who had supported various military, aid, and diplomatic work in the country had all but dried up. Rather, the media cycle, and the accompanying calls for aid, had zeroed in on fresh crises, leaving the fate of Afghanistan precariously uncertain.

All the while, the populace of Afghanistan suffers immensely as their economy nose dives under harsh Taliban rule, a major brain drain, and punishing sanctions on the still widely-unrecognised regime. Preliminary estimates by The Center for Disaster Philanthropy put the figure of people in Afghanistan who will require humanitarian assistance in the year 2023 at 28.3 million, up from 24.4 million in 2022 and 18.4 million in 2021. These figures account for about half of the population, while UNDP projections expect an inconceivable 97% of the population to be living under the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day.

As Afghanistan joined an unenviable group of humanitarian emergencies that the world forgot, including Yemen, Somalia, and Ethiopia, Western leaders stand at an impasse. High-profile attempts to alleviate the emergency have also further drawn attention to the failure of US and NATO forces to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and introduce a stable and functioning democracy - despite 20 years of presence in the country. Furthermore, any aid attempts would inevitably lead to some level of begrudging

cooperation with the enemy, the Taliban, which the majority of the world's governments refuse to even recognise as legitimate.

On the other hand, refusing to render aid while Afghans resort to boiling grass in a desperate bid to avoid starvation would invite accusations of weaponisation of famine by the US and their allies. In turn, this would weaken the image of freedom and prosperity the West wishes to project on the world stage, not to mention exasperating and prolonging the immense suffering of the Afghan people.

Nowhere is this dilemma more apparent than when considering the issue of what is to happen with the \$7 Billion that Da Afghanistan Bank, the nation's central bank, held in reserve at the US Federal Reserve at the time of the fall of Kabul and frozen ever since. Plans were drawn up to split the amount equally between a fund to be used for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, with the other half held for possible reparations payments in ongoing 9/11 lawsuits. With the latter, awarding damages and paying these out with these reserves might inadvertently lead to the recognition of the Taliban government, something the US and the West are intensely wary of. Concerning the humanitarian foundation being set up in neutral Switzerland, the question of how to deliver aid without funding the Taliban's repression remains as pertinent as ever. Especially following an

working in aid groups and NGOs, following the barring of higher education for women earlier last year, the manner in which these humanitarian funds will be allocated remains opaque. Yet, keeping these reserves out of reach of the Afghan Central bank, whose political independence is far from guaranteed, also exacerbates the humanitarian emergencies as monetary policy is stymied and fuels the nation's rampant inflation.

All the while, the West's strategic adversaries, China and Russia in particular, have made significant strides in their attempts to gain influence over the nation. Afghanistan, with its tremendous mineral wealth, including large reserves of lithium, cobalt, and copper -among many others - has drawn the eye of many. China, with its continued growth in the electric car sector in particular, has repeatedly shown great interest in Afghanistan's vast lithium supply. As such, it has continued to foster contact with the Taliban regime, even continuing operations of their embassy in the country. But China is not alone in its stance; the increasingly isolated Russia has been seen expanding its influence in Central Africa and the Middle East and likely sees Afghanistan as another key area for it to counter the influence of the collective West that Russia claims to be at war with. Similarly, Pakistan, long accused of having supported the Taliban throughout the decades of war, has encouraged the

fostering of ties to the Taliban. However, recent escalations of violence from the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan, also known as the Pakistani Taliban, have increased tensions between the states.

The reaction of western governments to this dilemma, it seems, is opportunistic paralysis. With attention diverted away from Afghanistan towards the far more intense Russian assault on Ukraine, a certainly painful admission of failure can be avoided, and the moral responsibility to alleviate the suffering of millions can be kept out of sight and out of mind. Such willful ignorance, however, can only backfire. In an era characterised by a resurgence of great power competition with China in particular, any power void left unchecked ultimately ends up being exploited by cunning strategic adversaries. Indeed, in the case of Afghanistan, the proverbial vultures are already circling above the tattered nation, with China, Pakistan, and Russia all eager to incorporate the state into their global economic and security schemes. As such, the West desperately requires a coherent strategy that alleviates the country's suffering without allowing or even funding the Taliban's despicable human rights abuses. Given the context of Afghanistan's vast rare earth deposits, coupled with the acute risk of a revival of global terrorism under Taliban rule, the West's distant stance is hardly one it can afford to keep up.



Konstantin van Thiel

Final-year student of Politics, Psychology, Law, and Economics. Originally from Germany, but brought up internationally, he has a keen interest in international affairs & economics, and the manner in which these interact.

The Foal and the Roll of Honour's Right to Annihilation



A few times a footy season, on violent nights in Glasgow, the Old Firm derby between Celtic and Rangers takes place at Parkhead stadium. It's a hotbed of sectarianism, Catholics and Protestants in wintery Stone-Island church gear, holding cheap beers that turn fingers grenadine red. The Glaswegian police ban many songs for their offensive rhymes to dead players and past crimes, but when they're cocky, the home-ground ultras will belt out rebel songs that turn their throats to razor blades, and the one that always sticks with me is the rebel's Roll of Honour.

*In those dreary H-Block cages
Ten brave young Irishmen lay
Hungering for justice, while their young
lives ebbed away
For their rights as Irish soldiers and to
free their native land
They stood beside their leader, the gal-
lant **Bobby Sands***

Arundhati Roy speaks for the right to resist annihilation, but what about the right to annihilate? In the 1981 Irish Hunger Strike, Robert Gerard "Bobby" Sands and his ten men, all paramilitary, starved themselves to death in the H-Block of Belfast's Maze Prison.

In 1976, the British Government removed the Prisoner-of-War status from the nationalist paramilitaries of Ireland, demanding that the interned wear the prescribed prison uniform and do labour in the workshops. In response, the men made **five demands**:

- the right not to wear a prison uniform;
- the right not to do prison work;
- the right of free association with other prisoners, and to organise educational and recreational pursuits;
- the right to one visit, one letter and one parcel per week;
- full restoration of remission lost through the protests.

They dressed in blankets only and tossed aside their bedsheets. But with no guns, no streets, no flares, the only theatre of protest - the only place to march - was from one side of the cell to the other. So, in a grim game of "yes, and" improv with the guards, the prisoners debased themselves further, away from mere robbers, thugs and other violent figures and back towards their honour. In the "dirty protest", prisoners couldn't leave their cells to empty their chamber pots, and so escalated to smearing their walls with poo, piss and vomit, self-shitting-immolation back towards salvation. From Pat MacGeown,

"There were times when you would vomit. There were times when you were so run down that you would lie for days and not do anything with the maggots crawling all over you."

As we can see, this form of nonviolent protest, aside from being an assault on the senses, forces an audience, as it takes all that denotes one as a standing member of society, clothes, hygiene, even the acceptance of your imprisonment, and puts it

in the proverbial chamber pot. But still, the British Government would not budge, and starvation began.

Bobby Sands started and ended first; he lasted 66 days. Through nakedness, excrement and the wasting away of ligament, tendons and marrow Bobby Sands and his men were not recognised. And so Bobby went on the ballot. On 9 April 1981, whilst confined to his prison cell, having Cole, M. (2023). Racism and the Tory party from disraeli to johnson. Routledge, gone 30 odd days without feed, Bobby Sands became the independent member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone and the youngest member of the British Houses of Parliament. He would never take his seat. Nonetheless, this neat parlour trick brought the theatre to him, and four out of five demands were met, with the fifth, the abolition of prison work, by 1983.



This election's impact on the public perception of this protest is evident. If you search the name of Bobby Sands on Google, you will not see

"Bobby Sands, Prisoner".

"Bobby Sands, smeared excrement on his prison wall" .

"Bobby Sands, died weighing 44 kilograms".

You will see "Bobby Sands, Former Member of Parliament of the United Kingdom."

In 2015, a German fan was arrested at Parkshead stadium under the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Act, a stunning title if I've ever heard one. The Roll of Honour, which he was singing, is considered offensive and maybe rightfully so for its ties to the IRA.

But whether the martyrdom of these young prisoners fills you with sectarian outrage, a listless sense of tragedy or some slash of determination, you have reacted to their theatre. Their story, however many misdemeanour offences it may incur, is carried from drunken throats and frosty breath into the vile Glaswegian night. It's taken over the city, across the Irish Sea, and back towards the lights of Belfast.

In the 2008 film *Hunger* by Steve McQueen, Michael Fassbender plays an emaciated Bobby Sands, who recounts the story of the foal.

"And he's breathing; he's alive but just about..."

So it's clear to me in an instant

And I'm down on my knees

And I take the foal's head in my hands

And I put him under the water

I knew I did the right thing by that wee foal."



Cain Hillier

Born on the edge of the world, Cain Hillier is an Australian-Singaporean gargoyle writing on cultural theory, politics and sport at <https://cain-hillier.substack.com/>

In his free time, he likes worrying and watching Tottenham Hotspur, often in tandem.

