



THE ALBANIAN TRAILBLAZER

October 2024

Punë punë natë e ditë, që të shohim pakëz dritë.



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The Albanian Trailblazer is an initiative led by the Albanian Trailblazers team. We are a nonprofit organization founded to empower Albanian students and young professionals through mentorship, workshops, and community projects.

This publication is intended to serve as a source of inspiration and a platform to celebrate the achievements and talents within the Albanian community.



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Trailblazer Uncovers the Economic Impact of Interest Rate Uncertainty on Canada

by Stivi Canka

This month's research highlight focuses on Stivi Canka's in-depth investigation into the effects of interest rate uncertainty on the Canadian economy. Stivi's study explores how fluctuations in short-term interest rates have shaped macroeconomic indicators like GDP, capital formation, and inflation over the past several decades, from 1985 to 2023. His research is particularly relevant in today's economic climate, where monetary policy uncertainty has become a defining characteristic due to major global events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his paper, Stivi used a Vector Autoregressive Model with Exogenous Variables (VAR-X) to analyze the dynamic interactions between interest rate uncertainty and key macroeconomic variables such as GDP, Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF), inflation, and short-term interest rates. He measured interest rate uncertainty using the quarterly volatility of daily returns on three-month Canadian Treasury bills (referred to as Term-Based Volatility or TBV). This proxy was chosen as a market-based measure to avoid the biases found in other commonly used uncertainty measures like surveys and keyword frequency counts.



After identifying his proxy, Stivi's then investigates how elevated levels of interest rate uncertainty negatively affect Canada's real economy. His results show that increased TBV leads to significant declines in GDP and capital investment, which means that businesses and households, facing uncertainty, delay their investment decisions, reduce consumption, and increase savings as a precaution. This creates ripple effects throughout the economy, reducing overall growth. Notably, his findings align with previous studies on the United States but uniquely focus on Canada's economic environment.

Stivi's research offers critical insights into how monetary policy uncertainty affects the broader Canadian economy. His study underscores the importance of understanding these dynamics for policymakers, particularly in the context of post-crisis economic recovery. With a comprehensive market-based approach, his findings suggest that mitigating interest rate uncertainty through more transparent monetary policy could help reduce its negative impacts on GDP and investment, fostering a more stable economic environment in Canada.

Albanian Film: A Homage to Mimicry

by Uljad Berdica

In the opening of this inaugural column, let it be made clear that the views expressed here are solely those of the author. This space is intended to spark dialogue, not to provide definitive conclusions. In a country like Albania, where sensitivities are paramount and personal conspiracy theories often hold more sway than facts, we shall begin by gradually amplifying both the rigor and assertiveness of our commentary. Over time, this column will evolve, offering sharper insights with each edition—unbound by the political affiliations or agendas of your favorite pop-politics Youtuber. So grab your currently favorite flavor of generational trauma and join me in this exciting journey of lukewarm postulates and mediocre writing.

What is up with “homegrown” Albanian cinema? It is often difficult to discern where homage ends and genuine artistic expression begins. While filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino have mastered the art of paying tribute by infusing originality into their homages, Albanian filmmakers seem to fall short of this balance. Instead, we see a tired repetition of the same formula: a handful of singers-turned-actors portraying barely distinguishable versions of the same character with different haircuts, leaving audiences with little more than recycled rom-com scripts and superficial changes. There is a distinct lack of the underlying creativity that should elevate homage into something that captures the unique experience of being Albanian. There have been solid attempts, all of them falling short of creating a meaningful movement or of being more than temporary film festival successes. It does not help that distinct movies like *A Cup of Coffee* and *New Shoes On* (Një filxhan kafe dhe këpucë të reja veshur) is overshadowed by underwhelming pieces like *Dy Gisht Mjalte* and *I love Tropoja*.

Addressing this issue is no small feat. The film industry is notoriously expensive, increasingly monopolized, and beset by chaos. Albanian millennials, meanwhile, have had little opportunity to develop an authentic cinematic voice, growing up in a country that transitioned almost overnight from rigid state propaganda to the pressures of a free-market economy. This shift has led to a culture that prizes adaptation over innovation, with Albanian stand-up comedians, for example, unabashedly copying routines from mainstream Netflix comedians. As with cinema, the problem lies in our reliance on mimicry rather than crafting something distinct and homegrown. Great art is made because of the risk of failure, not in spite of it.

A country once so isolated from the rest of the world is now eager to consume regurgitated culture, using it as a placebo to brainwash itself into having the fake comfort that it too has a film industry similar to the societies that produced the originals. When an Albanian living in Albania sits down to watch the next predictably brain-rotting movie or the derivative stand-up comedy, their enjoyment is a performative attempt even more original than the one they paid to consume. A work that is fully composed of homages and tributes belongs in a funeral home, not in the cinemas of a developing country that prides itself on survival. For a culture to keep surviving, it should eventually stop being an accident.





From the Blue Adriatic to the Red Planet: Armian Hanelli's Inspiring Journey

by **Stivi Canka**

The Trailblazer of the Month for October is Armian Hanelli. Armian, a former NASA engineer who has made massive contributions to space exploration is a shining example of Albanian ingenuity and determination on the global stage.

Hanelli's journey began in Albania, where he cultivated a passion for science and technology. At the young age of 16, he secured a scholarship to study in the United States, a pivotal moment that would shape his future. His academic pursuits led him to Virginia Tech, where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering.

Following his undergraduate studies, Armian joined the prestigious California Institute of Technology (Caltech) and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). There, he honed his skills and expertise in digital parts reliability engineering, playing a crucial role in ensuring the success of NASA's space missions.

One of Armian's most notable contributions was his involvement in the Mars 2020 mission. As a digital parts reliability engineer, he meticulously analyzed and tested electronic components to ensure their reliability and functionality in the harsh Martian environment. His dedication and expertise were instrumental in the successful landing of the Perseverance rover on Mars.

Armian's commitment to pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and innovation serves as an inspiration to aspiring engineers and scientists worldwide. Armian Hanelli's story is a testament to the power of education, perseverance, and a passion for exploration. His accomplishments at NASA not only reflect his individual brilliance but also highlight the contributions that Albanian talent can make on the global stage.

Edward Lear: A Journey Through Albania

by Serena Canka



View of Berat, with the hilltop fortress and Gorica (Beratino) Bridge, October 15, 1848

In the autumn of 1848, English poet and painter Edward Lear embarked on an unexpected journey through the remote and rugged lands of Albania. Born in Highgate, London, as the twentieth of twenty-one children, Lear was known for his Mediterranean landscapes, but it was Albania's untamed wilderness that truly ignited his artistic curiosity. Accompanied by his dragoman Giorgio, Lear's journey took him from Ohrid through Struga, Tirana, Kruja, Shkodra, Berat, Apollonia, Gjirokastra, and Permet.

Throughout his journey, Lear documented the Albania's stunning architecture, diverse customs, and vibrant cultural heritage. His 1851 publication "Journals of a Landscape Painter in Albania" offered readers one of the first detailed visual records of the region. Lear's illustrations brought Albania to life, capturing the grandeur of Gjirokastra's stone fortresses, the energy of Shkodra's bustling markets, the graceful elegance of Berat's Ottoman architecture, and the mystic beauty of the Zverneci Lagoon. His paintings were more than artistic renderings—they were a cultural time capsule.

At a time when Albania was largely a blank spot on the European map, Lear's journey was more than just a travelogue; it was an act of cultural preservation. His work remains invaluable, offering modern audiences a glimpse into the beauty, vibrance, and complexity of mid-19th century Albania—a legacy that continues to inspire curiosity and admiration today.

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