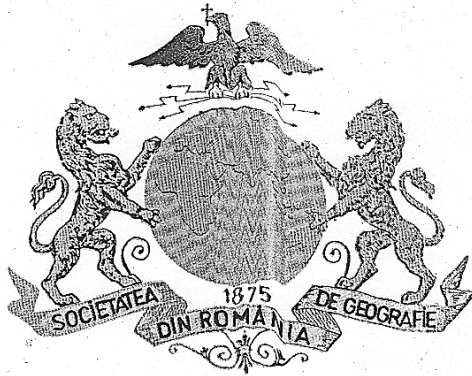


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**LOCAL DECENTRALIZATION AND EXTENDED SUB-
URBANIZATION: A GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH OF
THE METROPOLITANISATION PROCESS IN
ROMANIA**

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INTRODUCTION. The metropolitanisation process, which is usually identified as a severe development problem in the developing countries, has received attention on the part of urban geographers, sociologists and economists as well as that of planners for some decades and from different viewpoints (Souza, 2001). Metropolitanisation is closely related to the urbanization process which has had an almost exponential growth since the end of the 19th century. Antrop (2004) defined urbanization as a complex process that transforms the rural natural landscape into urban and industrial ones forming star-shaped spatial patterns controlled by the physical conditions of the site and its accessibility by transportation routes.

The second phase after urbanization is called "suburbanization" which still shows a growing population of the whole urban agglomeration, but the inner city loses population while the urban fringe zone is growing rapidly. Urbanization is increasingly affecting the whole countryside and is no longer restricted to the urban fringe zones. Morphological and functional urbanization spontaneously and simultaneously invade the traditional rural village causing profound social, economic and cultural changes. Urbanization causes a polarization of space by changing population densities, economical activities and mobility. Remote rural areas with poor accessibility become abandoned and in many cases forests expand. The countryside that is affected by urbanization becomes a complex, intensively and multifunctionally used space within a larger urban network frame.

Local decentralization is recognized as a mechanism that can foster democratization and development. From this point of view, power, resources and services may be equitably distributed to habitually neglected groups and communities in contrast to the practice which concentrates these elements in

the center. With increased involvement and participation of local/municipal units and other non-/governmental institutions including the civil society in the field of governance and decision making, it is assumed that development strategies can be more responsive to the needs of the people.

Suzuki (1998) describes the main characteristics of the decentralization process during the '70s and '80s. In the 1970s in particular several developing countries attempted to use decentralization as a means of strengthening the management of the central government. But the used process was mainly top-down and imposed by the central to the regional, local and municipal governance. Since the mid-1980s a number of countries have been experiencing major political and economic changes which have resulted in greater demand for decentralization. Many large cities and metropolitan areas now suffer unprecedented speed and scale of growth, which have left local governments unprepared. The decentralization process at the local and the municipal level is a complex process that requires, if it is to be successful, simultaneous attention to capacity building, transfer of responsibility, fiscal reform and the participation of beneficiaries.

THE METROPOLITANISATION EXPERIENCE IN THE WORLD. While the metropolitanisation process is quite new in developing countries, it has a long tradition in the most developed countries of the world. A metropolitan area is seen as a large-scale functional entity, perhaps containing several urbanized areas, discontinuously built-up and nonetheless operating as an integrated economic whole.

The American Experience. The Bureau of the Census of the United States has redefined the concept of "metropolitan" from time to time to summarize the realities of the changing population, physical size and functions of urban regions. The current metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) are comprised of a central county or counties with at least one urbanized area of at least 50,000 inhabitants, plus adjacent counties with a high degree of social and economic integration with the central county, which is measured by commuting volumes.

A micropolitan statistical area is a similar but smaller version of the metropolitan concept. It is based on a central city county with a least one urban cluster of between 10,000 and 50,000 people plus outlying counties with considerable social and economic integration (Fellmann et al., 2005) (Fig.1)

According to Mieszkowski and Mills (1993) in the United States, 69 percent of the population lived in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in 1970, 75 percent in 1980 and 77 percent in 1990. But while a greater proportion of the population is living in the urban areas broadly defined, a smaller proportion is

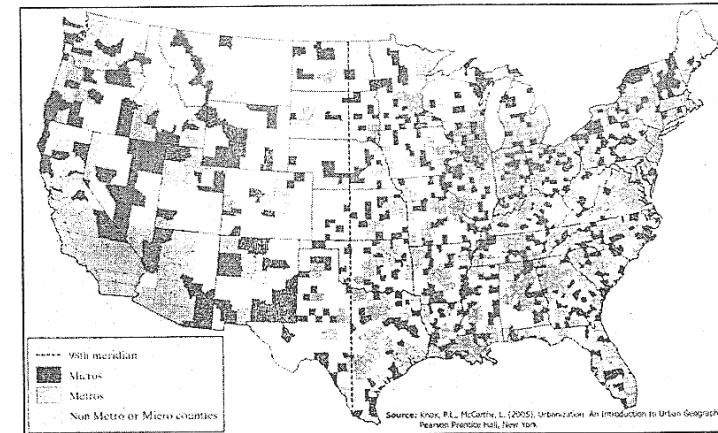


Fig.1 - Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas in the Continental United States

living and working in the central cities. The United States is approaching the time when only about one third of the residents within an MSA will live in the central cities and only about 40 percent of MSA-jobs will be located there.

Mieszkowski and Mills (1993) discussed two classes of theories of the suburbanization in the US. The first, favoured by urban theorists and transportation experts, might be called a natural evolution theory. When employment is concentrated at the centre of a city, around a port or railhead, residential development takes place from the inside out. To minimize commuting costs for work trips to the Central Business District (CBD), a central area is developed first, and as land in the central city becomes filled up, development moves to open tracts of land in the suburbs.

The tendency of the middle class to live in the suburbs has been reinforced by transportation innovations and travel time considerations. During the mid 19th century, when the cost of moving goods and people within cities was high and urban areas were dense and spatially small, high income groups were located at the centre, while low income groups walked to work.

The decentralization of residential activity was followed by employment decentralization made possible in part by the adoption of truck transport for

goods. Firms followed the population to the suburbs both to provide services to suburban residents and to take advantage of lower suburban wages and land costs. This process was self-reinforcing: as large employers became suburbanized, their employees followed them (Mieszkowski, Mills, 1993).

In contrast, a second class of explanations for suburbanization stresses fiscal and social problems of central cities: high taxes, low quality public schools and other government services, racial tensions, crime, congestion and low environmental quality. These problems lead affluent central city residents to migrate to the suburbs, which lead to a further deterioration of the quality of life and the fiscal situation of central areas, which induces further out-migration (Mieszkowski, Mills, 1993).

The two theories have a number of interactions and interrelations so that consequently, it is difficult to distinguish between them empirically. For example, income differences among households is a primary explanatory variable for both the natural evolution and "flight from blight" explanations of suburbanization. The "flight from blight" theory implies that important externalities are involved between income groups: positive externalities from the affluent to the poor and negative externalities running the other way (Mieszkowski, Mills, 1993).

The European Experience. There are some 120 metropolitan regions and areas in the wider Europe of the EU and the accession countries. These are larger urban areas with populations of 500,000 or more and they contain 60% or some 280 million of the 470 million people in the wider Europe. This is a measure of the importance of metropolitan competitiveness and wellbeing as well as the economic prosperity and social cohesion of Europe (Fig.2).

METREX is a network of practitioners in some 40 of Europe's metropolitan regions and areas who are involved in formulating and implementing spatial planning and development strategies, policies, programs and projects at the metropolitan level. METREX was founded in 1996 at the Metropolitan Regions Conference in Glasgow and with the support of the European Commission to provide a means of promoting effective metropolitan governance to manage change at the metropolitan level and respond to European issues.

METREX promoted the Porto Convocation in 1999 on the initiative of the Área Metropolitana do Porto and with the support of the European Commission, which resulted in 40 signatories to the Metropolitan Magna Carta and its related Practice Benchmark. These provide the foundation for METREX activities and initiatives. It is recognized that metropolitan spatial planning will not be effective unless the necessary competencies, capabilities and



Fig.2 - The mainly regions and metropolitan areas with more than 500,000 inhabitants in Europe

processes are in place. Competence means having the authority to adopt, implement and safeguard a metropolitan spatial strategy. Capability means having the knowledge and understanding to take informed decisions. Process means having the means to regularly monitor review and update the strategy. These are the fundamentals of effective metropolitan spatial planning.

The concept of subsidiarity means that metropolitan areas are now the level at which wider European spatial planning objectives can be realized most effectively. Without effective metropolitan governance the populations of metropolitan areas are unable to influence some of the key issues affecting their future and its sustainability.

The main approaches in European metropolitanization process are: A sustainable approach to European metropolitan strategies will involve compact urban forms and mixed use as well as public transport orientated development focussed on city and town centres. A polycentric approach of this kind within metropolitan areas will require effective metropolitan governance. A

sustainable approach to improving the quality of urban life also requires integrated social, economic, environmental and spatial action at the metropolitan level.

THE ROMANIAN URBAN SYSTEM. The Romanian territorial reorganization from 1968 created 39 counties and reinforced the position of the new county capitals (residence). The competition among Romania's cities was an unfair one, the county capitals having a clear advantage over the other urban centers (small and medium size), especially those cities that retained this function until 1984 (Caracal, Câmpulung, Rădăuți, Dorohoi, Roman, Blaj etc.).

The delimitation between urban and rural has become a difficult task involving a lot of uncertainty and it is very unlikely that land zoning borders remain a stable delineation. The differences between villages and urban places do not differ in population size and morphology alone, but also in a different concentration of multiple activities, people and cultures in one place. Indicators of urbanization such as the proportion of the population living in urban places, and the application of general evolution models should be used with extreme caution. The world's urban population was only about 3% of the global population in the 1800s, but increased to nearly 30% in 1950, and reached 50% in 2000. It has been projected that by 2025, 60% of the world population will live in urban areas, with dozens of megacities that will be crowded with 20 million or more people (Zhang et al., 2003).

Romania's urban network is comprised mostly of small and medium sized cities under 100,000 inhabitants representing 9/10 of the total number of cities, and more than half of the number of those under 20,000 inhabitants. Simultaneously with the numerical and territorial expansion of the urban network the large cities over 100,000 inhabitants are having an increasing role. Between 1966 and 2002 their number has doubled and the population has increased, half of those cities now have between 200,000 and 400,000 inhabitants, while Bucharest has over 2 million (Fig.3). Today there are 41 counties and the country's capital Bucharest.

There are four ranks of cities within Romania's urban systems: (Erdeli, Cucu, 2005; Parlamentul României, 2001) (Fig.5).

Rank "0" represented by the capital Bucharest. It has a national and European geo-strategical position due to its position at the crossroads between major national and European communication axes.

Rank "1" comprises 11 county capitals (Iași, Constanța, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Galați, Brăila, Oradea, Bacău) with a population over 200,000. Their

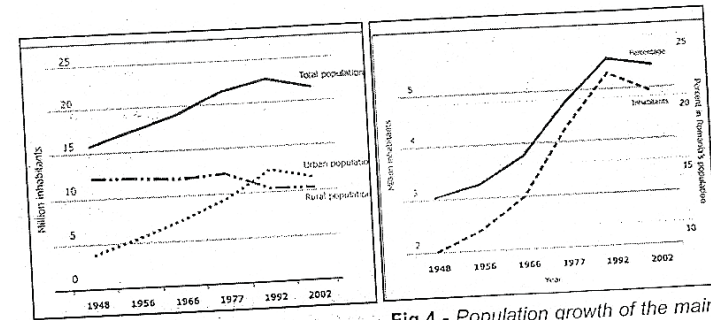


Fig.3 - Romanian population numbers
Fig.4 - Population growth of the main 12 Romanian cities (Rank 0 and Rank 1)

geographic position is that of a "nodal centre" or "growth pole" with a powerful influence in their territory (Fig.4). Their sphere of influence is between 60-100km with direct access to major roads, railroads and airports both national and international.

Rank "2" is comprised of county capitals and cities with a population between 50,000 and 200,000 inhabitants and their sphere of influence extends up to 60-80 km. These cities have a diverse economical foundation and their demographic size has a secondary role.

Rank "3" unites the towns and cities with a population between 5,000 and 30,000 inhabitants. Their major function is that of "local attraction" with a range of 10-20 km. These cities have secondary (manufacturing and constructions) and tertiary functions (social services and trading) as well as primary functions (mining industry, agriculture, fishing industry, forestry). Many of these cities are health resorts.

The influence areas covers about 2/3 of the national territory which means that 1/3 of the country is outside of any of the urban polarization zones. These are cities situated in sparsely populated areas (mountainous and isolated areas).

If we refer to the total number of cities in Romania, the urban network is underdeveloped. There are 313 cities while the optimal number for a country the size of Romania is approximately 400-450. During the communist regime the relation between major cities and their influence zones had been influenced by the socialist industrialisation, nationalisation of the agriculture and by the way the urban functions had been organised. The industrialisation has

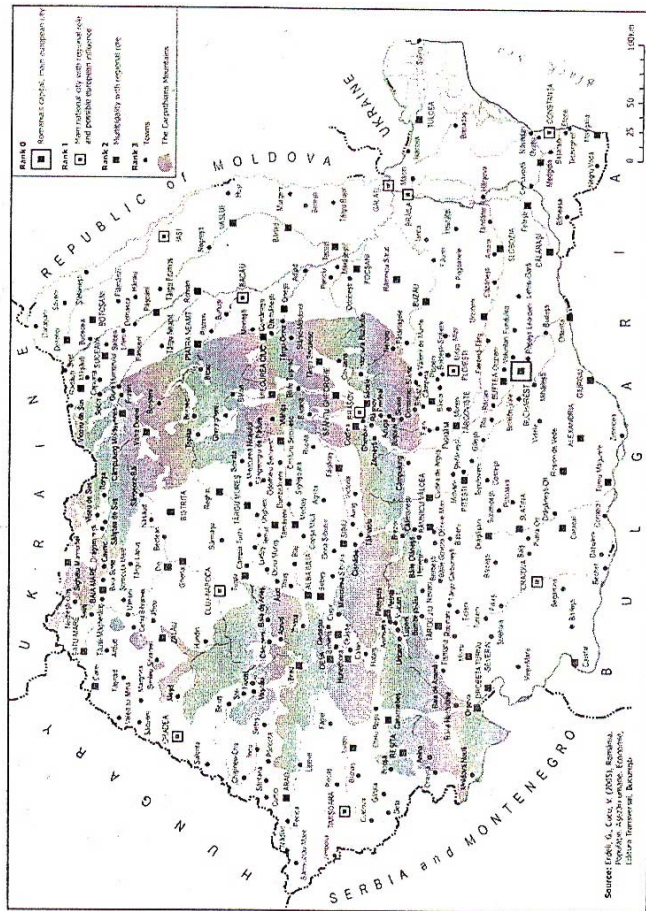


Fig.5 - Functional hierarchy of the Romanian urban system

attracted workforce from rural areas to the cities. After 1989 while the industry was reorganised the relation between cities and their influence zones changed: The industrial capacity was reduced greatly which reduced the number of commuters to a third of what it was in 1989 (Dumitrescu, Dogaru, 2004).

METROPOLITAN AREAS IN ROMANIA. Geographers define the metropolis as "any big city but especially for the urban centres which play the role of regional or national capital from the economic, cultural, administrative etc. point of view; a higher level in urban hierarchy with a population of more than one million inhabitants" (Erdeli et al., 1999).

In Romanian legislation two laws deal with metropolitan areas: Law no. 351 of July 6th 2001 regarding the National Territory Management Plan, Section IV - Settlements, defines the metropolitan area as "the zone realized through association, by voluntary partnership between the main urban centres (the capital city of Romania and the first-rank municipalities) and adjoining the urban and rural settlements situated at distances up to 30 kilometres, that established cooperation relations at different levels". According to this definition 12 cities in Romania tried to develop a metropolitan area: Bucharest, Iași, Constanța, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Galați, Craiova, Brașov, Ploiești, Brăila, Oradea, and Bacău. Voluntary association is seen to contribute to the complementarities between these settlements and stakeholders who are involved in local development. Law no. 350 of 2001 regarding the Planning Territory and Urbanism defines metropolitan territory as "an area located near big urban agglomeration, delineate by studies, in which structure appear influence relationships in the branch of communication, economy, social, cultural and public infrastructure. In general, limit of metropolitan territory is extended more that administrative limit of localities and can be extended outside of county border in which is situated".

An important factor in the geographical delimitation of the metropolitan area is represented by the city's influence area, defined by the law mentioned above as "surrounding territory and the settlements directly influenced by the city's evolution and the relationships developed through economy, commodities, access to social, commercial and infrastructure facilities, leisure and tourism. The size of the influence area relates to the dimension and functions of the urban centre".

Bucharest Metropolitan Area. In his book "Periurban area of Bucharest" Iordan (1973) proposes "Creation of a administrative unit - made up from the territory of the present periurban zone - subordinate towards the city of Bucharest, called periurban zone or Bucharest's Periurban Area, as an territorial organism that makes the transition between urban and rural and has

strongly connection with the city".

Bucharest City is the biggest city of the country with a population of 1,934,449 inhabitants in 2002 and an area of 238 square kilometres. Bucharest City is enclosed by 14 administrative units (former "suburban communes" which have suburban characteristics represented by infrastructure, economy, density, spatial structure and lifestyle). Some of these are placed inside of the ring road of the city and are keeping strong economical, functional and spatial relations with Bucharest City (Fig.6).

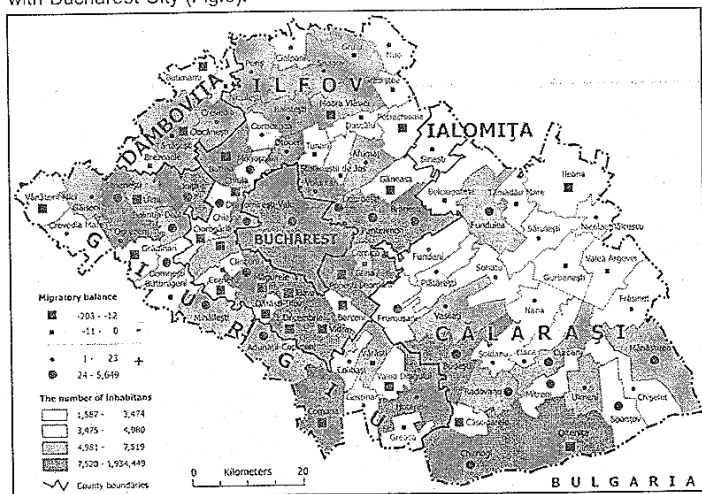


Fig.6 - Bucharest Metropolitan Area*. Population numbers and migratory balances in 2002 (*metropolitan area limits are from Plăcintescu et al., 2005)

Bucharest City holds a high level of population density, jobs and urban influence over a large area around the city, as here there is a lack of bigger cities in a territory with 200 kilometres far from Bucharest. Excluding Ploiesti, situated 60 kilometres north, the nearest biggest cities are Craiova (in the west), Constanta (in the east) and Brasov (in the north).

In the interior of a radius circle of 60 kilometres there are small cities, declared as cities in the communist time and after the 1990s. There are also some old cities, Giurgiu (in the south) and Oltenita (in the south-east) harbours along the Danube, characterised by economic activities such as urban kind, spatial shape

and urban life style.

A different situation is represented by Otopeni town, located 17km away from Bucharest, where the international Airport "Henri Coanda" is situated. The town is crossed by the National Road No 1, one of the most important roads northward and westward. It influenced the attraction power for the establishment of economic activities, especially commerce, traditional activities represented by agriculture still remain but with a decreasing role.

Otopeni town is seen as an urban point for development in the first circle situated around Bucharest, and others towns as Voluntari and Popesti-Leordeni are considered to be the next limit of Bucharest (Plăcintescu et al., 2005).

Oradea Metropolitan Area. Oradea Metropolitan Area with an overall population up to 250,000 inhabitants in 2002 is comprised of Oradea municipality and other 7 communes represented by Biharia, Bors, Cetariu, Nojorid, Osorhei, Sanmartin and Santandrei. Those communes are strongly polarized by Oradea municipality with more than 87% in the overall population. A part from that two of them (Bors and Biharia) are situated along the boundary with Hungary (Fig.7.a).

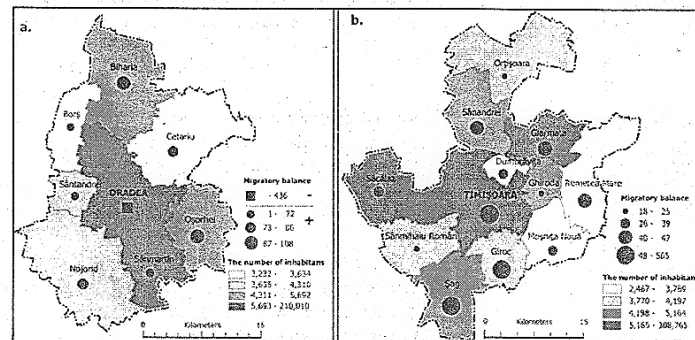


Fig.7 - a) Oradea* and b) Timisoara** Metropolitan Area. Population numbers and migratory balances in 2002 (metropolitan area limits are from *<http://zonametropolitana.oradea.ro> and ** Timis County Council, 2004)

This metropolitan area is based on spatial complementarities induced by spatial evolution of the Oradea city, major transport axes, but especially by the low level of land price in suburban area and permanent extension of the urban infrastructure in this area. The new Euroregion Bihor - Hajdu Bihar, created as

a partnership between Oradea city in Romania and Debrecen city in Hungary, has a favourable influence on the continued urbanized transboundary area on the axis Oradea- Biharkeresztes - Berettyoujfalu - Derecske - Debrecen (74 km length). In addition, there is a project for a new international airport Oradea-Debrecen, with two terminals Oradea and Debrecen, which will contribute to urbanization in this area and improvement of the communication network between those two cities and new funds across this transport axis. Roads infrastructure is represented by 16 possible roads, but in present only three are international roads while two are only occasionally used (Săgeată, 2004).

Timișoara Metropolitan Area. In 2004 Timiș County Council created a Consultative Council for Timișoara Metropolitan Area in order to establish a partnership between public administration of Timișoara City and 12 other communes, represented by Dumbrăvița, Ghiroda, Moșnița Nouă, Giroc, Sânmihaiu Român, Săcălaz, Sîndrei, Giarmata, Orășoara, Remetea Mare, Șag and Parta. It's goal was the composition of the Timișoara Metropolitan Area, which held a population around 355,000 inhabitants in 2002. The biggest human settlement is Timișoara City with 308,765 inhabitants in 2002, and the second place is taken by Săcălaz (6,176 inhabitants). Timișoara City is one of the most developed cities in Romania with lots of foreign investments especially from Italy. The economical condition has influenced the migratory balance reflected in the fact that all settlements situated in the planned area have counted a positive balance with values between 18 and 565 people (Fig. 7.b).

CONCLUZIONS. The metropolitanisation process in Romania is at its first steps. Excluding Oradea Metropolitan Area, which made progress in spatial and administrative integration in local development, the remnants of new metropolitan areas are beginning to assemble such administrative units. This is an indispensable evolution because only a metropolitan areas can contribute to the local development, but those actions must be sustained by laws to promote a real decentralization in terms of local budgets and initiatives for development. The change from one urbanization phase to suburbanization depends mainly upon changing land qualities, some of which are expressed in "hard" currency such as land price and availability of sufficient land for development. Others, as Antrop (2004) explained are more "soft" and relate to general perception and evaluation of the environment and landscape. When suburban land becomes fully built-up and traffic congestion increases, many of the initial values that attracted new people to settle here are lost.

There are others cities in Romania where suburbanization is present, as a result of migration abroad; the migrants sends money to their relatives to buy or built-up a new house, especially near cities. Some experts appreciate that

migrants send almost three billion Euro per year to Romania and this money contributes to the surviving of a large number of families mainly in the Moldavia region, where the restructuring of industrial estates increased unemployment and economic underdevelopment.

People's attraction for rural space is influenced by reaction against typically and inexpressive living in collective blocks, built-up in communist time, but tendencies to transform urban space into a rural one shouldn't be generalised; it must be in harmony with human desire for living. The areas which surround cities and towns still remain in conflict with villages and cities, natural and artificial, individual and collective, periphery and centrality. However, these areas were developed without an adequate master plan and first investments are represented by supermarkets, residential spaces being developed afterwards, which is a new trend in land use, with unique and plural family houses (Mihăilescu, 2005)

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