From a holistic approach of public policy to co-governance

Luminiţa-Gabriela POPESCU
National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest
luminitapopescu@snspa.ro

Abstract. *In the context of the current paper, the holistic approach means the extrapolation of the concept of citizen towards the level of co-participant in public policy process.*
The paper is focused on the transformation of public policies in the holistic perspective, as well as on the creation of conditions favourable to such approach.
It means to emphasise issues linked, on the one hand, to how prepared the political representatives and public authorities are to accept both the direct involvement of citizens in decision-making and sharing of accountability in public policy process, and, on the other hand, the direct citizens' involvement. In other words, the paper attempts to identify possible responses to key matters for the holistic approach: On the one hand, are the members of community aware of the importance of commitment? Are they truly motivated to take part in such a structure? On the other hand, how are prepared the political representatives and public authorities to accept co-operation with different categories of stakeholders?
The researches in Romania reveal that unfortunately the actual context is not favourable to the holistic approach. The current conditions are just at minimal level, the policies will be further made behind closed doors and the citizens' consultation will be mainly formal.

Keywords: the holistic approach; the public participation; citizen-centric vision the public trust; the co-governance.

JEL Classification: H11.
REL Classification: 13C.

Introduction

The pragmatic perspective of solving several complaints expressed increasingly by the European states' citizens emphasises the need of profound transformations, able to rebuild the citizens' trust in the main democratic institutions on national and European level. The response to those turbulences means to formulate a new vision concerning the role and importance of government actors in governance, thus implying new paradigms of thought and behaviour. Building such a new vision is based on assuming strategic approaches focused on strengthening the governing actors' efforts towards renouncing at the traditional rigid hierarchies that are generating corruption in favour of innovative, flexible structures, where the citizen will play an active role. More authorised voices both in academia and at the level of international bodies, EU, OECD support the replacement of the traditional model of public *policies formulated behind closed doors* and acceptance of new, innovative models, situating the citizen in the centre of policymakers' considerations, not just as target, but also as agent. The aim is to develop policies and to design services that respond to individuals' needs services relevant to their circumstances. This core transformation in public policy approach involves the government's active support for building the problem-solving capacity and encouraging citizens' participation in civil society organisations.

1. Toward a holistic approach

The new holistic approach is characterized by an integrative vision provided by transforming the citizen into co-participant to public policies. The new view of policy reflects that belief that the outcomes policy makers want to achieve often cut across different areas.

To achieve their goals, they must share expertise and information and work together to solve problems. This implies a new emphasis on horizontal collaboration between departments, levels of government and the private sectors and citizens.

Thus, in view of the holistic approach, the accountability of citizens' security should belong mainly to the community. According to this approach, for example, the authorities are not able to solve the problems of the vulnerable groups just by allocating various support forms, in general financial ones. The vulnerability of those persons represents the outcome of a mix of factors (education level, health problems, cultural attitudes), and the policies developed should take into consideration all those factors. The community active involvement in this type of polices represents a winning strategy.

A good policy in the field of health means a vision centered at least on maintaining and of course on improving the population health status. We are speaking about a proactive approach, opposite to the reactive approach, characterising the traditional approaches of the public policies focused on treating the diseases and prescribing compensated prescriptions.

Although, at first sight, the prevention of a disease seams easier than its treatment, in reality, the problems are more complicated. Maintaining the health status means sport, healthy food, positive thinking, clean environment, entertainment and so on.

All those factors should be taken into consideration in health policy-making, which is possible only by transferring a share of this policy responsibility towards community and citizens.

The holistic approach means *governmental agreements,* established among various groups of citizens in society, thus reflecting the shift from traditional hierarchical relations between a governance center and a governed system towards new, more complex relations, and a variety of *interdependent centres.*

2. Networks as innovative forms

The transformation of the traditional hierarchy into a network structure leads to the creation of some common places in view to express the problems and look for solutions, thus expressing a variety of ideas. In these "genuine battle fields" a sufficient number of actors are involved, each one representing different objectives, visions and interests. The degree of attendance and action methods of every actor participant in the network is different. Thus, compared to the unitary organizations or the classical hierarchies, these structures are characterized by flexibility.

We shape our world through public policy. The public policy is made not only by politicians, but also by thousands of civil servants, the tens of thousands of women and men who address petition to parliaments and ministers, who join interest groups, comment through media or represent unions, corporations and community movements. All of them have a stake in public policy. The entire community is affected by public policy (Bridgman, David, 2004, p. 1).

Such participation is influenced in multiple ways and at various levels, from informal local and community settings, through incorporated entities, NGOs and core bodies, to key institutions such as legislatures, courts and the public services.

Networks have emerged due to the interdependent orientation in public and private organization. An increasing number of organizations can no longer be structured like "medieval kingdoms, walled off and protected from hostile forces" (Powell, 1990, p. 298)

Lipnack and Stamps (1994, p. 3) conclude that "the network is emerging as the signature from organization in the information age, just as bureaucracy stamped the industrial age, hierarchy controlled the agricultural era, and the small group roamed in the nomadic era". In the past decade of the last century, the network structure was also promoted at the level of governing systems as an opportunity to involve "the voice of community" but also other entities participating in the process of public policy-making, as Francis Fukuyama stated (2004).

Networks approaches can legitimate difficult choices by involving the citizens who are affected. Governments find it increasingly difficult to develop and to implement "top-down" controversial policy choices.

In the public's mind, there is a simple but powerful connection between government's willingness to involve citizens directly in decisions and their willingness to accept that a difficult decision is necessary.

Networks approaches can support to legitimize such decisions precisely because they involve citizens in choice-making.

In addition, a strategy in view to achieve many goals requires the citizens to be involved in implementation. For example, a wellness strategy may require that community members change their diet or exercise regularly. Involving citizens to participate through community-based approaches encourages them to take personal responsibility for success. It gives them a direct stake in the project and thereby puts pressure on them to change their own habits in ways that could make a key contribution to overall effectiveness.

The model of the network structure is completely different from the bureaucratic-democratic organization in which the power source is unique, the principles of hierarchy of functions and different authority levels imply a methodical system of domination and subordination and a strict supervision from the superiors.

The development of an efficient system of communication between the groups that compose the network leads to a potential gain for the governing act, expressed not necessarily in "to do more", but rather in the ability to master the challenges of a complex and dynamic environment.

The informational flow between the elements of the network is vital for the effectiveness of the strategic directions, and the informational systems are considered the main assets of the network. The electronic communication and

reduction of the costs for the remote communication make possible the quick dialogue within the network, in every direction and the facility of sending messages from every location to all members of the network. Thus, the premises of the interaction between all the actors of the network are created. This opportunity comes closer to reality due to the entities of the network triggering firmly towards autonomy.

3. Public participation

There is a strong link between this new approach and the existence of levels of participation.

Public participation represents the deliberative process by which interested or affected citizens, civil society organisations, and government actors are involved in policy-making before a political decision is taken. By deliberation we mean a process of thoughtful discussion based on giving and taking reasons for choices Public participation in this meaning is intended to complement conventional modes of policy-making in which elected representatives take decisions based in part on their perception of their constituents' preferences. It can be argued that public participation matters most in those decisions in which there are strongly opposed interests, but social harmony or the commitment of resources requires a collective response. For other decisions, political participation can be limited to voting for representatives, influencing public opinion and protesting.

Public participation as an addition to representative processes may provide an antidote to national political elites or technocrats. It can counter the over weighted influence of powerful lobbies. It may also offer an effective way to overcome a citizen's sense of futility and powerlessness in the face of these larger forces (European Institute for Public Participation in Europe: an International perspective, 2009, http://www.participationinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/ 2009/06/pp_in_e_report_03_06.pdf).

Participation is the highest order of public engagement. In public participation information is exchanged between the sponsors of participation processes and the participants. The term participation etymologically and conceptually refers to "being part of" and "taking part in" and carries an active component within it.

Consultation and participation share the goals of improving the quality of decisions through bottom-up flows and creating "opportunities to shape public policy" (Lukensmeyer, 2006, p. 9). Instrumental arguments for public partici- pation are geared towards making use of citizens' wisdom and knowledge. This contributes to better regulation and factually higher quality decisions.

It might even – as a consequence – use fewer resources as implementation is likely to meet less resistance (European Institute for Public Participation in Europe: an International perspective, 2009, http://www.participationinstitute.org/wpcontent/uploads/2009/06/pp_in_e_report_03_06.pdf).

According to the European Institute for Public Participation (EIPP), there are three main requirements for successful public participation:

- A clearly defined constitutional framework for public participation. Only through an explicit, shared understanding between politicians and citizens can confidence be developed and public participation realise its democratising potential;
- A systematic approach to public participation methods to help organisers of public participation processes choose the most suitable and effective methods;
- Rigorous and challenging evaluation of public participation in practice to develop a culture of learning about participation and advance the systematisation of participatory methods (European Institute for Public Participation in Europe: an International perspective, 2009, p. 4. http://www.participationinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/pp_in_e_report_03_06.pdf).

Citizens may be well or poorly disposed to engage depending on many things— the urgency of their own concerns, the relevance of the matter being addressed, the nature of their previous engagements with government (if any) and their 'habits of heart and mind'.

The kind of engagement usually envisaged between civil servants and citizens typically requires from citizens a somewhat demanding set of attributes. Ideally, if reasoned and respectful public dialogue is to be ensured, citizen as participants should be well-informed contributors—independently minded but showing the self-command and restraint that facilitates the contributions of others. They require the courage to articulate and defend their views (and change them where justified), the civility to listen to and consider contrary views, and the reasoning ability to weigh evidence and assess claims. They should possess the capacity to defer immediate needs or personal preferences in the interests of longer term benefits or outcomes or the public good.

Gradually, even though once the network centre held supremacy, it can no longer totally control the entities of the network. In these circumstances, governance has a larger meaning being all the network actors' political effort to cooperate, unlike the traditional model in which governance is considered the main character. This fact points out the debate on the position of the central administration and the other actors of the network.

Similar to organizations, the political systems in network can be seen as mixed structures of vertical and horizontal interdependence (Popescu, 2007).

The expansion of the role of other actors participating in the network does not imply the reduction of the role of the administration, but the development of some supplementary decision-making forms as a reply to the increase in complexity and interdependence. In this context, the meaning of the concept of political decision receives extremely complex dimensions. The decision-making process follows a model of communication, accession, coordination, negotiation, compromise, exchange, delegation and leaves the decision-making to the groups involved. As a result, these governmental processes are more vague, abstract and complicated; and somehow less efficient than in the case of the traditional hierarchical governance (Popescu, 2011).

An advantage of the network system is that it can be used to direct attention towards a larger interdependent structure. Instead of assuming that influences manifest through direct and visible interactions (such as personal relationships, relations between the representatives of the institutional interests), the approach through the network structure facilitates the examination of the way an enlarged structure has effects on the individual characters' behaviour, the contents of the decisions and the efforts to implement the public policies.

The functions of the governance network differ from those of other types of network. In the networks created by companies, the dominant functions are the transactional and co-operational ones. The processes of the network policy-making support the processes of exchange and cooperation at the operational level. In these cases, the emphasis on the horizontal interdependence is stronger than in the administrative vision.

Pragmatically, the achievement of such a structure implies overcoming a variety of challenges.

From this perspective, the efforts of those responsible in Romania are minimal. Romania has adopted two relevant laws in this respect, i.e. Law No. 544/2001 on the free access to information of public interest, and Law No. 52/2003 on the decision transparency in Public Administration. And, even in these circumstances, not all civil servants have enough information about the existence of these laws and their contents.

I present the analysis of a research survey based on a questionnaire addressed to 296 officials who agreed to respond, in 2010, officials from 67 municipalities situated in the south of the country.

Q1. Have you heard about the Law No. 544/2001 on the free access to information of public interest?

At this question, 85% responded Yes, 9% responded No, 3% did not know (NS) and 3% did not respond (NR).
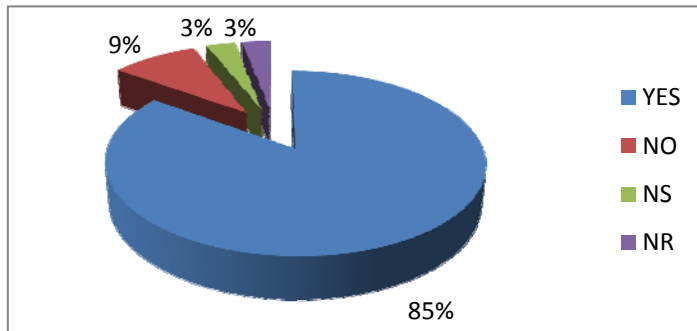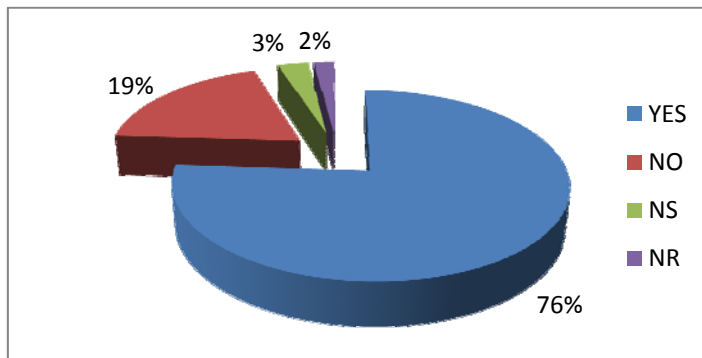

Source: the author.

Figure 1. *Survey on Law No. 544/2001 on the free access to information of public interest*

Q2. Have you heard about the Law No. 52/2003 on the Decision transparency in Public Administration?

At this question, 76% responded Yes, 19% responded No, 3% did not know (NS) and 2% did not respond (NR).

Source: the author.

**Figure 2.** *Survey on Law No. 52/2003 on the decision transparency in Public Administration*

Only 76% respondents have heard about Law No. 52/2003 on the decision transparency in Public Administration. Law No. 544/2001 is more known by the civil servants as 85% are aware of this law.

In conclusion, despite the net benefits of a holistic approach, the efforts of the authorities in Romania are at least so far minimal.

From the view of the citizens' interest to be involved in the public policy process, the answer is also unsatisfactory.

The empirical analysis also signals the presence of another negative factor: weak participation of citizens within initiatives or projects that have as goal the general interest of the community. In this sense, I present relevant figures, according to the information from the Agency for governmental strategies (2007).

For the first survey the respondents had to answer if they have been involved in contribution voluntarily with labour or money to solving of local problems, during the last year
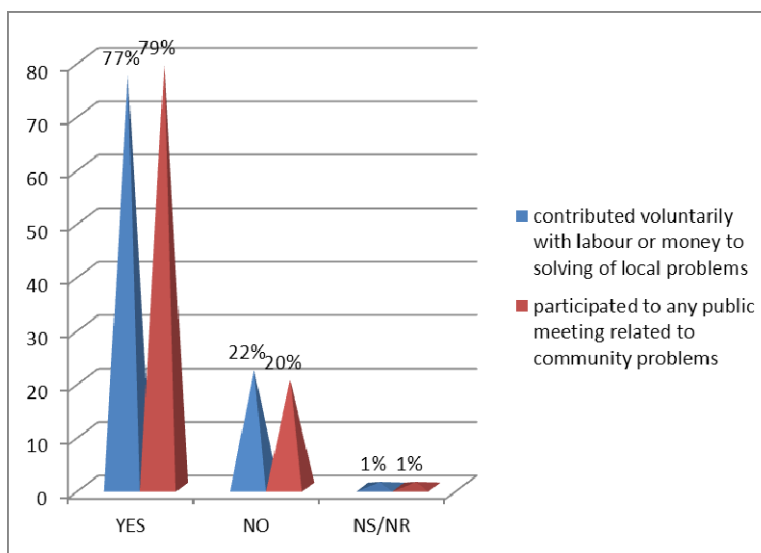
Source: author based on the information from the Agency for governmental strategies (2007).

Figure 3. *Survey on participation in public meetings to address community problems*

In the second survey, the respondents had to answer if they had performed any action in order to influence decisions, laws or policies that affect them or their community.
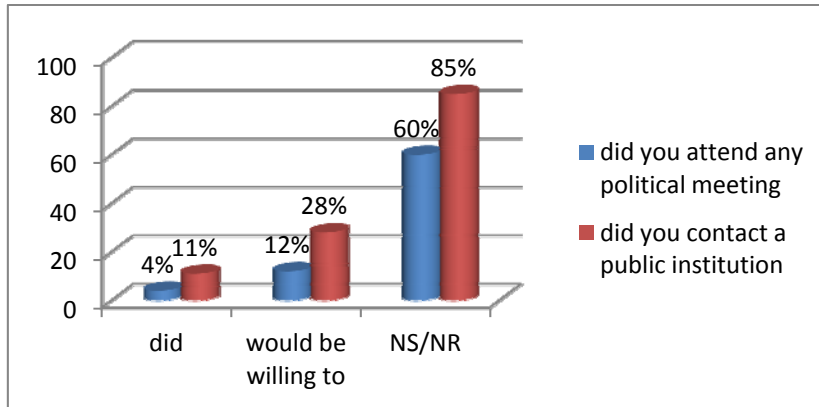
Source: author based on the information from the Agency for governmental strategies (2007).

Figure 4. *Survey on attending meetings to influence public policy decision*

One of the reasons contributing to the persistence of this factor is the mistrust of citizens in political effectiveness.

The strong presence of this factor will contribute to the occurrence and consolidation of another factor with negative effects on social capital, namely authoritarianism in solving social, political and economic conflicts.

5. A next step: from partnership to co-governance

Peter Shergold has been a passionate advocate of what he calls the "participation society", with its "twin pillars of trust and engagement", and whose realization is "the holy grail of public and social innovation" (Shergold, 2009, p. 141). He insists that there are "forms of architecture governance that can enhance the development and delivery of public policy by engaging citizens in more engaging ways", resulting in "a more inclusive and civil society, strengthened by new manifestations of social capital and marked by renewed interest in diverse varieties of social innovation" (Shergold, 2009, p. 142).

"Cooperative solutions are required, not only in the form of co-operation between governments but also through co-operation between governments (centrally, regionally, locally), civil society associations and other stakeholders such as media and business" (Pollitt, Bouckaert, Loffler, 2006, p. 3).

As Pollitt and Bouckaert stated (1995, p. 11), "the blurring of roles between service providers and service consumers has been paralleled by role shifts within provider organizations".

In Figure 5 one can see the result of this deep change determined by the principles on which the holistic approach develops; from the traditional type where the citizen/consumer was "stopped at the gate of the organization" to the new one where he becomes *co-participant* throughout: *co-design, co-decision, co-produce and co-evaluation* (Pollitt, Bouckaert, Loffler, 2006).
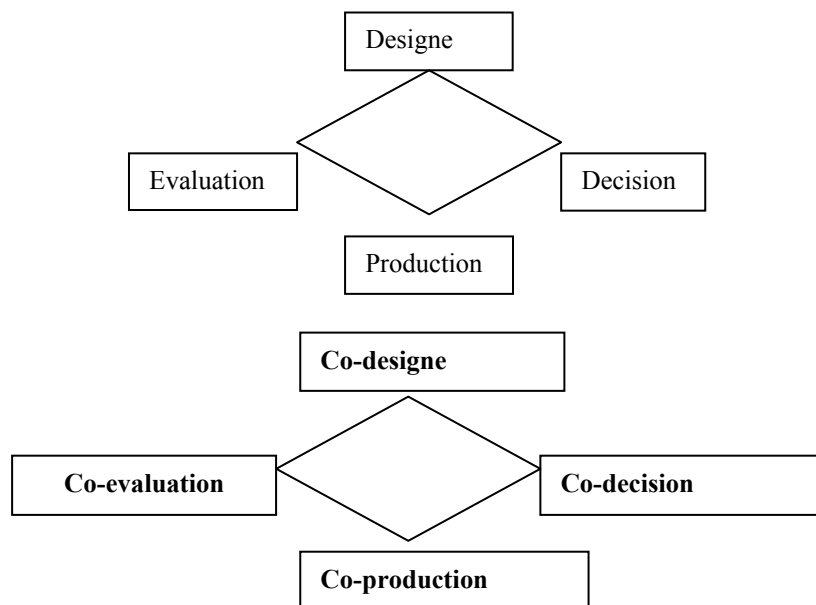
Source: (C., Pollitt, G.,.Bouckaert, E.,Loffler, Making Quality Sustainable: Co-Design, Co-Decide, Co-Produce, and Co-Evaluate, Report of The 4QC Conference, Tampere, 2006, p. 7).

Figure 5. *The shift to co-designe, co-decision, co-production and co-evaluation*

Co-production essentially redefines the relationship between public service professionals and citizens from one of dependency to mutuality and reciprocity. On such an account, citizens are conceived as resources of value to, and collaborators in animating, the system, rather than as mere beneficiaries of it. That is, users of public services are not defined entirely by their needs, but also by what they might contribute to service effectiveness, and to other users and their communities through their own knowledge, experience, skills and capabilities.

Since then, the desire by many democratic governments to promote social inclusion, to build social capital, to encourage more personal responsibility in matters such as health and retirement income security, and to broaden governments' capacity to address so-called "wicked problems", has created a very favourable political and social climate for involving citizens in the co-production/ co-design/co-creation of public services.

According to recent studies, successful co-production of public services appears to meet people needs better, and to strengthen their personal and civic capabilities, "so [services] are more efficient, effective and sustainable. To the extent that 'public administrations are vehicles for expressing the values and preferences of citizens, communities and societies" co-production seems to be an eminently suitable concept for guiding reforms in public administration (Bourgon, pp. 390-404).

Achievement means giving up old paradigms and acceptance of the holistic approach in which services beneficiaries/users are, at the same time, co-participants in the innovation of the public service they benefit from. This holistic approach is a political problem where changes are connected to government activity and, in the end, to society. This implies that public organizations evolve:
- From a closed, self-centred service provider to an open networking organization which public trust in society through transparent process and accountability and trough democratic dialogue;
- From an internal (resources and activities) focus to external (output and outcome) focus;
- From a classical design-decision-production-evaluation cycle to an involvement of stakeholders in general, and citizen (as customers) in particular *at each and every stage*. Activity (Pollitt and, Bouckaert, 1995, p.12).

That means the development of a new type of relationship between governors and governed is necessary. In other words, policy is now seen as the negotiated outcome of many interacting policy systems, not simply the preservation of policy planners and top decision-makers. Similarly, the delivery and management of services are no longer just the preservation of professionals and managers-users and other members of the community are playing a larger role in shaping decisions and outcomes. This is a revolutionary concept in public service. Finally, it demands that politicians and professionals find new ways for the interface with service users and their communities (Bovaird, 2007, p. 846).

Because co-production entails a different division of power between public service agencies, private sector entities, civil society actors and citizens, questions of governance are especially important. New forms of accountability (which, like power, is also increasingly dispersed) are required, and must be made robust

through governance arrangements that are suited to non-hierarchical, networked collaborations.

Governance means how society makes decisions on issues of public concern, how citizens are given a voice in decision-making, and how social partners work together to create public goods. Increasingly, *government* provides the leadership, change agenda and democratic institutions, and *governance* is how the work gets done. This process is characterized by a broad dispersal of power and responsibilities in society. No one controls all the tools or possesses all the levers to address the complex issues that people really care about.

Conclusions

The adoption of a citizen-centric vision in policymaking and service design is a manifestation of the fundamental commitment to citizens' participation in governance that characterises a democratic polity. At its broadest, the commitment is reflected in efforts by activists and political theorists to promote what has been variously labelled "deliberative", "direct" or "participatory" democracy. At a more prosaic level, the commitment is reflected in the local and practical initiatives that various governments have pursued to ensure citizens' involvement in decisions that affect them

The new holistic approach through which is encouraged the participation of citizens and non-state actors to the public policy process contributes to the abandonment *of government in favour of governance.* We must note that the opening towards the community and the preoccupation for the *exploitation* of this resource is characteristic only to mature and sophisticated public institutions.

The achievement of these significant changes means the giving up of the bureaucratic model so much contested in the last decades. Firstly, the political control is inadequate and illogical; secondly, the bureaucratic structure ceased to present the universal model of technical efficiency; and thirdly, bureaucracy is increasingly more perceived as a barrier against liberties, as well as against economic efficiency.

The traditionally conflict relationship between the governors and the governed is replaced with a creative cooperation and collaboration relationship between the governance actors.

As main beneficiaries of public services, citizens must be involved along the entire public service provision process. Or this new government philosophy requires new arrangements, expressed in a new institutional design, of a nature to stimulate the citizens' involvement (Lowndes, Wilson, 2001).

The institutionalization of participative governance, by comprising even certain „pedagogical processes", generates trust, encourages the existence of a set of values unanimously shared by the community/society members and contributes to the creation of a cooperation climate at the level of the community/society.

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