

Expansive Cultural Strategy in the Periphery of Europe

Example of Tenerife Arts Space and Castelo Branco Cultural Centre

Maria Mikaelyan

Department of Architecture and Urban Studies (DASU)

Polytechnic University of Milan

Milan, Italy

E-mail: maria.mikaelyan@polimi.it

Abstract—The following paper will focus on the way in which European local authorities have dealt with cultural policies, urban regeneration, place branding, and community-building in the last two decades. Following the museological model of multifunctional art centre and adopting it within a peripheral urban context, local authorities aim to carry out a wide range of sociocultural, economic, and urban reforms. The research question is how this model is being applied in the European peripheral context, and what are the results of such cultural interventions. The methodological framework of the research is based on a detailed analysis of two multipurpose contemporary art centres – Tenerife Arts Space and Castelo Branco Cultural Centre – in a variety of aspects, such as architectural project, conceptual programme, key methods of interior design, impact on the local community and existing urban landscape.

Keywords—contemporary architecture; urban regeneration; multifunctional art centre; European periphery; cultural policies

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most challenging and complex cultural strategies of the last decades is creation of contemporary art museums and multifunctional art centres, capable of catalyzing a wide range of economical, sociocultural and urban reforms (see, for instance, [1], [2], [3]). The postmodern paradigm has generated a new model of a public cultural institution as a multidisciplinary system, which operates across different realms of professional practice, implicating architecture, exhibition design, urban planning, curation and communication, education and entertainment. Through the establishment of these institutions state policies aim to shape the development of cultural identities¹ and to set the framework for specific types of cultural consumption.

¹ The term ‘cultural identity’ is used by the author in accordance with the definition given by Stuart Hall in his publication ‘Who Needs ‘Identity?’’: “I use ‘identity’ to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to ‘interpellate’, speak to us or hail us into places as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be ‘spoken’. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” [1, p. 5-6].

This model has undergone a number of important changes during the last two decades, especially in the years following the 2007 – 2008 global financial crisis, when local cultural policies, particularly in the peripheral areas of Europe, have had to face new economic and sociocultural realities, and to become responsive to new needs of local communities. Today’s post-crisis European museums and cultural centres aim to embody “[...] a broad sense of mission, an expansive identity to communicate, a variety of programs and experiences, and a large, diverse audience to serve” [5, p. 23]. Finally, featuring today a remarkable synthesis of all forms of artistic and cultural activities, museums and centres of contemporary art are destined to become bridgeheads for innovation and experimentation in the cultural realm. According to Manuel Castels, “[...] they should play the same role in the field of cultural innovation as hospitals are currently playing in medical research” [6, p. 7].

To fulfill these objectives, European cultural institutions frequently apply the strategy of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (also known as ‘Beaubourg’) designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers: the strategy of a cultural forum, a high-tech hub of cultural activities [7], [8], [9]. Inaugurated in 1977, the Pompidou Centre established a new paradigm, based on multipronged communication, multiplicity of functions, intense interaction with the urban context, and a high degree of public involvement. Beaubourg’s architectural innovation lies in the new conception of relationships between architecture and interior design, in mobility and flexibility of its exhibition spaces, and in the predisposition of the architectural organism for a continual development [9], [10]. The western and lateral facades were completely covered with glass, in order to render the building permeable and provide interconnection between the interior and the exterior. All structural elements were placed on the outside, in order to create an empty interior space, a free plan of every level, which allowed to arrange within its boundaries an exhibition project or a cultural activity of any kind. In her article ‘Architecture or Design? Or Design-Architecture?’ Larissa A. Zhadova states: “Both the building and its system of equipment and

furnishing are based on the principle of a mechanical construction kit, which can be multiply varied” [11, p. 21].

Thus, throughout subsequent decades, the museum-catalyst 2 model of Beaubourg has spread its influence worldwide. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is still dominant in the museological realm [13, p. 20], expanding over regional context, and producing substantial results (see, for instance, [3], [14]). As two case studies of the following research, Tenerife Arts Space (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain; 2003 – 2008; Herzog & de Meuron Architekten) and Castelo Branco Cultural Centre (Castelo Branco, Portugal; 2007 – 2013; Mateo Arquitectura) were chosen, in order to analyse two prominent contemporary art institutions of the European peripheral regions. Both of them, in the author’s view, illustrate how the expansive cultural strategy of Beaubourg has been applied within regional context over the pre-crisis and crisis periods, and show tangible results of its application.

The methodological framework of the research is based on a detailed analysis of the architectural projects in a variety of aspects, such as their conceptual programmes, construction features, interaction with the existing urban context, key methods of the interior design. The goals of the research are to reveal how the cutting-edge tendencies of architecture and design influence the urban regeneration, place branding, community building and cultural activism, and what are their outcomes for the self-representation of cities in the peripheral regions of Europe, as well as for everyday life of their citizens.

II. TENERIFE ARTS SPACE

In 1998 the Herzog & de Meuron Architekten wins the competition for the renovation of the Plaza de España and the docks of the Muelle de Enlace in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the capital of the Canary Islands. At the same time, the studio receives from the local government administration a proposal for the construction of the exhibition hall in the area delimited by the Barranco de Santos riverbed and the General Serrador bridge. Initially the building was destined to house the collection of artworks of the local-born surrealist painter Óscar Dom ínguez. The project was later enlarged to encompass a broader concept of a polyfunctional cultural centre, elaborated by counsellors Dulce Xerach and Cristóbal de la Rosa under the supervision of the Cabildo Insular de Tenerife. Built between the 2003 and 2008, the complex of the Tenerife Arts Space (TEA Tenerife Espacio de las Artes) features the contemporary art Óscar Dom ínguez Institute, the Tenerife Photography Centre, the Island Network Library, as well as multiple offices, a 192-seat auditorium, bookshop, cafeteria and a restaurant.

An outstanding feature of the cultural centre is the exceptional compositional imagery of the architectural embodiment. The deliberately complex building resembles a ruptured quadrangular tectonic plate, long 160 m and wide

65 m, with strike-slip faults and structural deformations of its parts. Two reinforced concrete volumes, separated but still contiguous, form the system of inner courtyards and transitional spaces. The elongated triangular hollow in the middle is the main courtyard, which is also a part of the public walkway: the pedestrian path cuts diagonally through the building and proposes a scenario of passage across the main compositional axis "Fig. 1". It becomes a focal point of the ensemble and, at the same time, an intervention on the topology of the site, providing an efficient interconnection between different levels of the urban tissue—the highest one on the west side of the building, marked by the General Serrador bridge, and the lowest one, with the Barranco de Santos embankment, on its south side.

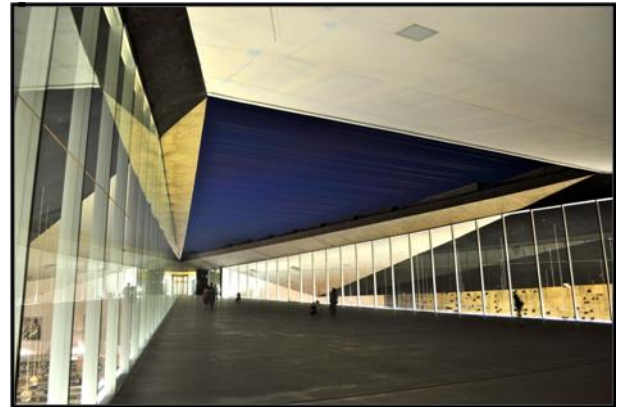


Fig. 1. Tenerife Arts Space, main courtyard (Sainz 2011).

The urban topography becomes tactile and evident: the fluid walkway slopes slightly from the bridge towards the ravine and seems to be its metaphorical affluent. The composition of the south facade with the tectonic shift of its volumes was also preconditioned by the urban landscape, in particular, by the disposition of the plantations along the Barranco embankment. In this case, the path weaving between the existing trees, becomes a strategy of a sustainable site planning.

Talking about the role of the cultural centre in the urbanistic situation of the Tenerife’s capital, Herzog & de Meuron define the TEA as “a place of intersection for the landscape of the contemporary city, the old city with its skyline along the Barranco and the archaic topography of the Barranco itself” [15, p. 40]. The architectural context of the site is formed by such historical monuments and ensembles as La Recova market square, Church of La Concepcion and Museum of Nature and Man situated in the Old Civil Hospital, a significant example of the mid-18th century neoclassicism. “From the very beginning of the design process we operated with courtyards, also because we wanted to connect the new centre typologically with its existing neighbour building, the Antiguo Hospital Civil [...]” [15, p. 40], stated the architects. Thus, all infrastructural and geomorphological elements of the area – the embankment, the bridge, the museum, the market, etc. – are closely interconnected by the TEA’s architectural and landscape composition. “In Santa Cruz, the building itself tends to form

² The term ‘museum-catalyst’ refers to the publication ‘The museum as civic catalyst’ of Kurt W. Forster: “Ever since the Beaubourg opened in 1977, not only do museum buildings need to stand the test as adequate repositories of art, but they are also expected to act as catalytic agents of urban transformation” [12, p. 63].

a landscape in the sense that it is inserted into its site and reinforces it”, declares Jacque Herzog [16, p. 40].

One of the core points of the Herzog & de Meuron’s design strategy is the interpretation of the architectural skin by means of the ornamental imagery [17]. Continuous concrete facades of the TEA building are irregularly perforated, in order to create a pseudorandom pattern of pixels – universal symbols of the digital age multimedia communication. The pattern is a computer-processed interpretation of the low-resolution image of the sea, which is part of the ‘Jpegs’ series of a German photographer Thomas Ruff. Transforming concrete wall in a permeable structure, perforated pixels become a solid filter for the light influx and provide nuances of natural lighting in the interior. The architectural interpretation of the surface was determined, on one hand, by the location of the cultural centre in close proximity to the seafront and, on other hand, by the recurring motif of water in the Óscar Domínguez works. In his article ‘Dionysus in Basel’, Luis Fernández-Galiano emphasises the role of the Herzog & de Meuron’s attitude towards the architectonic body, claiming that “[...] there is a happy, violent affirmation of the materiality that directly translates into the rough, sensual voluptuousness of their work” [18, p. 15].

Another key point of the project’s conceptual framework is the idea of combining spaces for different activities and integrating them into the city. This concept is evidently represented in the design of the inner triangular plaza, conceived, according to Herzog & de Meuron, as “an open air cinema performing films and videos” [15, p. 40]. At the same time, it is an intermediary, transitional space that provides “the spatial interplay between inside and outside” [15, p. 40]. This is a core aspect of the postmodern polyvalence: all elements of the architectonic composition have multiple, often contrasting qualities, providing the dual system of their interpretation. The plaza with its anthropocentric scale transmits the sense of commensurability and belonging; cornices of irregular shape create a semi-covered space, emphasising its in-between nature. It becomes a metaphorical ‘hortus conclusus’³, an urban space of a more intimate character, in contrast to the impersonal public area of the Plaza de España. Stefano Casciani sees the cultural centre as an endeavour to embody “the mirage of a Garden of Delights”: “The wild beasts (read: demons) that would like to destroy the equilibrium that reigns between the peaceful beings of divine creation do not live here. A border or a small wall might be erected, but just to mark where this state of grace begins and ends” [20, p. 85].

The interior structure of 20 600 m² evolves on four floors and can be accessed from different sides and urban levels. TEA provides a wide range of community services, such as education, recreation, preservation, public catering. At the same time, the interior design of every space corresponds to the general conceptual scheme of the project.

³. A Latin term meaning literally “enclosed garden”, symbolically linked in Medieval and Renaissance literature and art to the Virgin Mary. The direct biblical reference can be found in the Song of Solomon 4:12: “Garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse [...]” [19, p. 42].

The centre of the interior composition is the reading room of the Alejandro Cioranescu Island Library, situated under the inner plaza and which the plaza “literally cuts through” [15, p. 40]. An outstanding *mise-en-scène* of its interior design can be seen through the continuous glass curtains, drawing visitors that pass through the plaza inside. The spatial expression is achieved by multiple intersections of planes that have different visual and tactile qualities – glass, plain or perforated concrete, parquet. The interior is dominated by the glass curtains – the main source of natural illumination and a membrane providing intense communication between the inner and the outer space. The complex geometry of overlapping levels and converging surfaces create a multi-perspectival space that expands dynamically in all directions.

Areas for art exhibitions, situated on the ground floor (galleries for temporary exhibitions and the Centre of Photography) and on the first floor of the building (galleries for the permanent exhibition of the Óscar Domínguez collection), are connected by the spiral staircase. The interior design concept is based on a restrained plasticism and high functionalism close to the aesthetic of the white cube. The only spatial expression of the upper-level galleries is achieved by the combination of artificial lightning and natural indirect light streaming from multiple skylight wells and penetrating through the perforated pixels. Another interior design strategy is the differentiation of light intensity: the illumination of the galleries is more intense compared to that of the adjacent circulation areas.

The approach of Herzog & de Meuron to the articulation of architectural form share features with the organic architecture⁴. The TEA’s project detects multiple characteristics of the surrounding context and converts them into a permeable and responsive architectural structure, “a civic site for interaction between people of all generations” [20, p. 85], a functional objectification of the urban dramaturgy.

III. CASTELO BRANCO CULTURAL CENTRE

In May 2000, the municipality of Castelo Branco, in Centro Region, Portugal, was included, together with other 27 Portuguese cities, in the Component 1 of the POLIS5

⁴. In his article ‘In the Cause of Architecture: Second Paper’, Frank Lloyd Wright gives the definition of the organic architecture: “By organic architecture I mean an architecture that develops from within outward in harmony with the conditions of its being, as distinguished from one that is applied from without” [21, p. 406]. Later, in the article ‘Broadacre City: A New Community Plan’, he declares: “In an organic architecture the ground itself predetermines all features; the climate modifies them; available means limit them; function shapes them” [22, p. 348].

⁵. The POLIS programme was approved by the Resolution of the Portuguese Council of Ministers no. 26/2000, on May 15, 2000. The core stated objective of the programme was “to improve the quality of life in the cities through urban and environmental interventions, and thereby increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of urban centres that play a relevant role in the structuration of the national urban system” [23]. The Component 1 of the POLIS programme was going to involve “18 cities within the launching programme and 10 cities selected by competition” [24, p. 260]. The cities within the list of the launching programme were: Albufeira, Aveiro, Beja, Bragança, Cacém, Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Costa da

programme on the requalification and valorisation of the urban environment. At the local level, the programme was curated by the Castelo Branco Town Council. According to Maria R. Partidário and Francisco N. Correia, one of the core advantages of the POLIS programme was the correlation between interventions and various realms of urban reality, and an extensive involvement of the local community: “It appears that the spatial and urban structural dimensions, as much as its ecological, social, cultural and aesthetics dimensions, call for other priority actions, more related to urban regeneration and urban governance interventions at the territorial and urban structure levels, relating the social, economic, physical, ecological, institutional and political dimensions in urban areas. [...] Citizens and other key stakeholders representatives such as business, residents and environment groups, among others, are the key actors in that Local Commission, which is kept informed on the development of the projects, even though final decision rests with the municipality” [26, p. 412, p. 421].

The biggest project realized in Castelo Branco under the POLIS programme is the requalification of the Largo da Devesa – the central square in the city’s old town. The second phase of the project, which started in 2007 and ended in 2013, included the construction of the polyfunctional cultural centre on the northeast edge of the plaza. Both phases were conceived by Josep Lluís Mateo in collaboration with Carlos Reis Figueiredo.

The urban landscape of Castelo Branco is determined by the location of the old town on the eastern slope of the hill dominated by the medieval castle. The rectangular plaza of 60 000 m² has an elevation difference of 3,2 m, sloping towards its centre and following the natural topography of the area. The inefficient use of the public space and the lack of maintenance rendered the Largo da Devesa square obsolete and reduced drastically its functionality.

According to Figueiredo, “Mateo quickly grasped the importance of the urban operation, the imperious need for a change of scale of public space, the creation of quality facilities [...]” [27, p. 26]. The requalification project covered a wide range of objectives: construction of the underground car park, pedestrianisation of the plaza and its extension over the adjoining Cadetes de Toledo street, arrangement of commercial and leisure facilities under multifunctional pergolas, rearrangement of green plantings, construction of paved and stepped ramps, installation of outdoor seats movable along metal tracks. The street furniture is seen by Mateo as an important component in his community-oriented planning strategy: “[At night] the place disappears as a tectonic presence and comes to life as a virtual space [...]. It is as though the disappearance of the architecture as a shiny, polished, finished object allows the town’s residents to appropriate it for themselves, collaborating enthusiastically in its destruction” [27, p. 29].

Caparica, Covilhã, Guarda, Leiria, Matosinhos, Oporto, Viana do Castelo, Vila do Conde, Vila Nova de Gaia, Vila Real and Viseu [25].

Special attention was paid to the new pavement, which replicates the traditional ‘calçada portuguesa’⁶ technique. A small fountain was arranged on the site of a slight pavement depression, imitating the natural collection of rainwater. “Water, both fluid and frozen, is the metaphorical inspiration for the entire intervention”, explains the architect [28, p. 30].

Concurrently, Mateo and Figueiredo work on the project of the Castelo Branco Cultural Centre (CCCB Centro Cultural de Castelo Branco⁷), which multidisciplinary programme interfuses various forms of cultural activities – exhibition and production of visual, performing, literary, media arts, education and recreation “Fig. 2”. Situated at the intersection of Saibreiro and Cadetes de Toledo streets, on the periphery of the Largo da Devesa square, the cultural centre “[...] appeared as a continuation of our remodelling of Praça Largo da Devesa, a large public space. It sets out to complete it, then, to continue it” [29].

The main challenge for the architects was to provide maximum functionality within the limited area of 4 300 m². The compact building arranged on four levels includes several exhibition spaces, auditorium, foyer, cafeteria, dressing rooms, administrative offices, storage and an underground garage. Two concrete plinths elevate a skew multifaceted volume over the square and contain all vertical connections of the building. The irregular form of the volume is determined by the interior arrangement of the auditorium and the double-height exhibition hall. Under the cover of the suspended volume Mateo has set an ice rink, which becomes “a playful relationship with the climate and the plaza” [29]. Another particular feature of the architectural embodiment is the use of different materials for the building envelope. A combination of wooden slats, zinc panels, reinforced concrete and glass transforms massive volumetric forms into a bold architectonic assemblage. Through the presence of movable louvers on the roof and southwest facade, which provide the regulation of interior lighting, the envelope becomes a high-performance functional system.



Fig. 2. Castelo Branco Cultural Centre (Goula 2013).

Access into the cultural centre occurs through the ground level where the reception, administration offices and

⁶ Traditional Portuguese paving technique based on the use of black and white stones of limestone or basalt.

⁷ The centre is also known under the name Centro de Cultura Contemporânea de Castelo Branco (CCCCB).

exhibition spaces are situated. Scenario of passage imposes to enter from the Largo da Devesa square descending the large ramp, and afterwards to proceed to the upper floors, in order to let a visitor perceive physically the topographic context of the site. Thus, the ground level acquires characteristics of a connection link between the exterior and the interior space, a junction between the plaza and the suspended volume of the cultural centre. In the interior structure of the volume the dominant is the double-height exhibition hall. Its curved cantilevered ramp, which connects two higher levels of the building, gives a dynamic impulse to the spatial composition, transforming the exhibition hall into a multipurpose, transitional space.

Embedded into the dense urban tissue, the CCCB building assumes a core role in the spatial organisation of the area. However, Mateo respects the preexisting context, trying to rediscover and emphasise its value: the cultural centre becomes the vertical continuance of the Largo da Devesa square and, at the same time, a monumental expression of its complex multilevel structure. Years before, analysing previous projects of Mateo in his article 'A constructive vocation', Maurici Pla has already predicted the architect's attentive attitude to the urban context: "A fundamental aspect of sensibility is thus formed [...]. This will mean that each project is tantamount to the superposition or constructive aggregate of elements, rather than the imposing of formalizations that are inalterable and complete in themselves on the chosen location. Each image within a Josep Lluís Mateo project, then, has to be read as the result of an accumulation of elementary parts gradually superposed on the original preexisting forms [...]" [30, p. 13].

The case of Castelo Branco shows how the requalification of public spaces and construction of a cultural institution become integral parts of a large-scale urban development project. Anna Corsi, in her publication Genoa urban lab, elaborates a version of the conceptual framework that unifies an architectural project and a project of urban planning: "[...] Urban planning and architecture should not constitute two different ways of seeing and working, but must integrate their contributions on various scales, in order to define one sole product that is complex at the same time: not only seeing, but feeling the territory of the city as an organism whose components are not undifferentiated parts, but each one has a precise role that must be known and valued" [31, p. 54].

IV. CONCLUSION

The Tenerife Arts Space and the Castelo Branco Cultural Centre are emblematic for the analysis of the expansive cultural strategy and its influence on the imageries of cities in which these institutions are situated. At the same time, these multifunctional cultural centres demonstrate how the aforementioned strategy has been imported and applied within the urban context of a peripheral European city during the last decade.

Evolving the model of the Pompidou Centre, architects of the Tenerife Arts Space and the Castelo Branco Cultural Centre follow the concept of a Renzo Piano's "big urban machine" [32, p. 42]: they create cultural institutions with an

extremely multipronged programme and a great number of functions, which assumes characteristics of a public space. Institutions become a centre of gravity within both urban and cultural landscapes of the cities in which they are situated, and contribute significantly to their regeneration [33]. Integrated into the existing urban composition, with its complex topography and historical outline, their mission, according to Jean-François Chevrier, is "[...] to give a monumental quality to an urban connection, worked upon as such, without undue prominence for the monumental effect" [34, p. 11]. In the same article dedicated to the TEA, Chevrier also reflects on the role of the landscape in the visual representation of the cultural institution: "[...] the suspicion generally surrounding the vocabulary of moral values has led to the replacement of the idea of the monument by that of iconic effect. The problem is that an iconic effect may say nothing about either the situation of the building or its internal functioning. The solution is to link the programme (made visible) to the landscape (transformed)" [34, p. 9].

Boundaries between planning typologies of institutional spaces and public spaces are appreciably blurred. The use of spaces becomes multiple, which involves the public into various activities and ensures continuous interest and participation. A higher degree of accessibility and an intense interconnection between the interior and the exterior of a cultural centre, which can be seen, for example, in the concept of the TEA's triangular plaza, afford ground for the spatial and interrelational communication. According to Renato Bocchi, the interrelational aspect is essential for the contemporary paradigm: "The architecture of today is more than ever the architecture of relations rather than of objects, the architecture of relational, dynamic spaces rather than of static scenes. In this it approaches the landscape project" [35, p. 27].

Formation of new local identities in peripheral cities is closely related to the place branding. After the success of 'Bilbao effect', it was mostly performed by means of a radical and spectacular architectural gesture (see, for instance, [36]). In the first decade of the 21st century the place branding strategy has been revised: architects became more sensible to the local natural and cultural context [37]. The requalification project of the Largo da Devesa in Castelo Branco demonstrates attention to the Portuguese climate and paving traditions. The project of Herzog & de Meuron refers to the volcanic nature of Tenerife and to its tradition of low-rise building. Architects are "troubled [...]" by the island's monoculture saga, where centuries of farming have reduced it to a barren piece of pumice, its soil disintegrated after crops were abandoned [...]" [20, p. 85]. Thus, they use an existing mythology to create a new one.

In contrast to previous years, tourism sector becomes a collateral mission; the key one is the community building and the increase of citizen participation. Destined to meet the needs of different social groups, cultural centres become epicentres of sociocultural activity and encourage active citizenship [38], [39]. They become a place for cultural sharing and experiencing city life in an alternative way. In his monograph 'Sociology of architecture', Mikhail B.

Vilkovsky declares that the space of new cultural institutions “[...] incarnates the society itself, revealing characteristics of certain generations, social classes, living conditions and functional systems” [40, p. 19]. Their strategic objectives today are democratisation and universalisation of the informational content, and elaboration of effective scenarios for its communication [41], [42].

Finally, new cultural institutions in post-crisis Europe are more often the result of local cultural policies, in contrast to the predominant role of big private foundations (e.g. Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation) in the previous decades. This trend gives evidence of the qualitative changes in the financial and sociocultural realms towards the perception of museums and polyfunctional art centres as public policy instruments. These instruments become especially important in the crisis and post-crisis periods, when horizontal linkages and active citizenship are indispensable for the economic recovery.

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