Chapter 10
Sustainable Urban Heritage vs Heritage Orthodoxy

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Abstract Against the backdrop of recent crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and various armed conflicts, this chapter highlights the unique vulnerabilities of urban heritage and how these have been exacerbated by an over-simplified construction and commodification of heritage in the official discourse. The chapter reflects on issues and contentions about the definition of urban heritage and the prevailing focus on listing sites and monumental values, highlighting the frequent contrast between community narratives and outstanding universal value. Aside from challenges to its existence, urban heritage must also find ways to mediate between environmental, social, and economic pressures that World Heritage status imposes and the over-riding principles and objectives of the SDGs and other ambitious policies.

This chapter proposes that addressing all these challenges is linked to a shift toward an inclusive human- and environment-focused definition of urban heritage, which leaves room for community statements of values, not just OUV. This chapter presents the case for recognizing urban heritage's compendium of values to consolidate its sustainability and spread and minimise the risks. In short, it is a call to move away from heritage orthodoxy and toward sustainable urban heritage.

Keywords Authenticity · Community · Continuity · Inheritance · Resource · Sustainability

10.1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has served to highlight the inherent vulnerability of historic cities to heritage orthodoxy. Whereas the 1972 World Heritage Convention did not anticipate heritage branding, commodification, or mass tourism, the simplistic, abstracted, and carefully distilled definitions of cultural heritage in the Convention

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coupled with the ongoing understatement of the compendium of values in successive editions of the UNESCO Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 1972a, 2021), effectively distances urban heritage from the communities that are its primary, secure, long-term custodians and stakeholders. There is a lack of attention to the commitment under Article 5 of the Convention (UNESCO, 1972a), expanded in the contemporaneous 1972 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection, at National Level, of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO, 1972b). Ongoing challenges include synchronisation with today's global agendas, including the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). Such discordances contribute to the widespread *reductio ad absurdum* that urban heritage is object-focused and justifies its survival primarily as a raw material for high-end urban regeneration and tourism. Vulnerabilities include displacement of communities and gentrification, aggressive *contemporary* interventions, financial downturns, and pandemics. The sustainability of urban heritage demands a far more substantive foundation. This chapter interrogates *urban heritage* as the manifestation of continuously inhabited places of everyday human as well as often closely defined cultural significance, and presents the case for the recognition of the compendium of social, cultural, economic, and environmental values beyond those recognised within mainstream heritage orthodoxy, to the objective of spreading and minimising risks and vulnerabilities and reinforcing the sustainability of urban heritage.

10.2   Context in Time

The concept for the 1972 World Heritage Convention evolved through the 1960s from a coalescence of interests. These included the commitment set out in the UNESCO constitution to the conservation and protection of the world's cultural *inheritance* (UNESCO, 1945); the foundation in 1948 of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN); and the establishment in 1965 of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). In the aftermath of the destruction of monuments and cities during the Second World War, the context in time recognised the cumulative effects of neglect and decay, alongside peacetime threats posed by rapid social and economic changes coincidental with the ascendancy of new ideas in architecture and urban planning. Together with the advent of the environmental movement, key words at the time included *protection* and *conservation*; the concept of *sustainability* was subsumed for the natural world; and the popularisation of *sustainable development* awaited the Brundtland Report (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The need for awareness and education was a key driver for the Convention.

In the intervening half century, the 1972 starting points of neglect and decay have remained, augmented by accelerating socio-economic changes. Additionally, there has been a resurgence of destructive armed conflicts, including in the Balkans

(1990s), the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (2000s and ongoing), and Ukraine. These challenges have been compounded by emergent and intensified phenomena of *urban transformations*, including: mass tourism; the commodification of heritage allied to promotion and prioritisation of its *economic* value; the gentrification of historic neighbourhoods and associated socio-economic displacements; the primacy attached to *contemporary* interventions in the built environment (ICOMOS, 1964; UNESCO, 2005 and 2011); the fashion for tall buildings allied to a disregard for their impact on land values within and adjoining historic areas; augmented by actual and projected impacts of climate change. Whereas the ramifications of these multiple challenges are variable by location and time, the UNESCO brand has focused many of these in World Heritage Sites. This all imposes severe challenges on the objectives of responsibility, reconciliation, and sustainability.

10.3 The World Heritage Convention and Heritage Orthodoxy

10.3.1 *Urban Heritage, Authenticity, and Integrity*

Interpreted from the definitions under Article 1 of the 1972 Convention, urban heritage is categorised under *groups of buildings* and focused on the *tangible* (UNESCO, 1972a). This presents challenges in the context of the key word *authenticity*, as is made clear in successive editions of the UNESCO Operational Guidelines from January 1987 through July 2019: "historic towns which are still inhabited and which, by their very nature, have developed and will continue to develop under the influence of socio-economic and cultural change, a situation that renders the assessment of their *authenticity* [this author's emphasis] more difficult and any conservation policy more problematical" (UNESCO, 2019, Annex 3, 14 (ii)). This, notwithstanding the 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994), which expanded the understanding of *authenticity* beyond materials and substance to include form and design, use and function, traditions, techniques and management systems, location and setting, and spirit and feeling (summarised at UNESCO, 2021, paras 79–86). The key word *integrity* also presents challenges. Defined in the Operational Guidelines as "a measure of the wholeness and intactness of the … cultural heritage and its attributes", with the stipulation that "relationships and dynamic functions present in cultural landscapes, historic towns or other living properties essential to their distinctive character should also be maintained" (UNESCO, 2021, paras 87–89), the context is constrained by reference to *outstanding universal value* and *significance*, concepts which are challenged by the dynamics of inhabited towns. The premise of heritage orthodoxy is that *authenticity*, *integrity*, and *distinctive character* (the essence of *identity*) are determined by physical attributes. Further, whereas "transmission to future generations" features in the

1972 Convention (UNESCO, 1972a, Article 4), there is dissonance between the 2011 UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* (UNESCO, 2011) and the 2011 ICOMOS *Valletta Principles* (ICOMOS, 2011). The former insists on *layering*, an ambiguous concept, not least in re-iterating the insistence in the 2005 Vienna Memorandum on interventions being *contemporary* (UNESCO, 2005, Article 21); the latter insists on *continuity*, more closely allied to transmission.

10.3.2   Urban Heritage and Orthodoxy

Focus on *monumental values* expressed in materials and substance has roots in European heritage orthodoxy. In Anglo-centric philosophy, it is signalled in the 1877 Manifesto of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (1877). At the global level, it underscores interpretations of the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), ICOMOS's founding doctrinal text, envisaged as conditioning *universal* parameters for protection and conservation, and largely unchallenged in mainstream orthodoxy until the Nara Document (ICOMOS, 1994). Exceptions include successive editions of the Burra Charter, 1979 onwards (ICOMOS-Australia, 2013). Whereas the 2003 UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 2003) counter-balanced the 1972 Convention, the text of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation is limited in its understandings of *urban heritage* and *values*, *conservation* and *authenticity*, anticipates circumscribed definitions and categories of *tangible* and *intangible* heritage as selected objects and manifestations, and derives from normative approaches (UNESCO, 2011).

Notwithstanding some doctrinal loosening, for example, the 2005 Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005) and the 2014 ICOMOS Florence Declaration (ICOMOS, 2014) together with early implementations of the Historic Urban Landscape approach beyond Europe – in Cuenca, Ecuador; Ballarat, Australia; and trials of "HUL Quick Scan" in Indonesia – core philosophy, training, and practice prioritise specialists as the instigators of the heritage discourse, positioning citizens and communities as adherents to narratives constructed by others.

The mainstream European-derived approach is manifest in the definition formulated in the context of India: "[Urban Heritage] Refers to the built legacy of the city's history and includes protected and unprotected monuments, individual and groups of buildings of archaeological, architectural, historic and cultural significance, public spaces including landscapes, parks and gardens, street layout defining identifiable neighbourhoods or precincts, which together identify the visual, spatial and cultural character of the city" (National Institute of Urban Affairs, 2015, p.68). Parallel expression infuses the manifesto of the President of the ICOMOS International Committee on Historic Cities, Towns and Villages (CIVVIH) (Echter, 2020).

10.3.3   World Heritage, the World's Heritage, and the Operational Guidelines

November 2022 sees the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972a). Whereas the Preamble to the Convention addresses "assuring the conservation and protection of the world's heritage" *as well as* those "parts of the cultural and natural heritage [that] are of outstanding interest", the intervening decades-long focus on the World Heritage List has overshadowed States Parties' over-arching commitment to the collectivity of the cultural and natural heritage in their territories, as itemised under Article 5 and signalled in Article 12 of the Convention, and expanded upon in the parallel 1972 UNESCO Recommendation (UNESCO, 1972b), a largely overlooked document in the UNESCO archive that is intended to underpin the 1972 Convention.

Focus on the List has assisted the disproportionate promotion of a highly selected group of heritage properties to the prejudice of the advancement of comprehensive global heritage conservation and sustainable management and contributed to the increasing politicisation of outcomes at successive sessions of the World Heritage Committee.

The UNESCO *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, which have gone through over a score of revisions since the first edition in June 1977, are regularly updated; most recently, in July 2021. Consistently, they focus on the processes for inscription, the monitoring and periodic reporting of properties in the List, and celebration of the brand (UNESCO, 2021). In their selective approach to the provisions and commitments in the Convention, from inclusive to exclusive, they are effectively mistitled.

10.4   Urban Heritage

10.4.1   The Heritage Construct and Outstanding Universal Value

Today's *heritage construct* emerged around the turn of the third and fourth quarters of the twentieth century. Previously, *heritage* was *inheritance* and understood holistically; it was not split into *cultural* and *natural*, *tangible* and *intangible*, nor subject to maximal value judgements and what Marc Askew has described as UNESCO's "fetishism for making lists" (Askew, 2010, p. 32).

Importantly, processes of inclusion into lists of heritage are simultaneously processes of exclusion, of people as well as places. In today's interdisciplinary field of heritage studies, heritage is understood "as a social and political construct", in which "heritage results from a selection process, often government-initiated and supported by official regulation" (Labadi & Logan, 2016: foreword). Selection processes are top-down, not bottom-up, and the protection of heritage is generally

assumed to be atypical and exceptional, largely determined by specialists, and expensive. As Laurajane Smith argues, the dominant *authorised heritage discourse* "constitutes the idea of heritage in such a way as to exclude certain actors and interests from actively engaging with heritage", framing audiences as passive recipients of the authorised meaning of heritage and creating significant barriers to "the social and cultural roles that it may play" (Smith, 2006).

Mainstream concepts of heritage confer value based on the perspective of an educated elite. This can exclude both long-established as well as incoming communities within historic cities. Narratives constructed to evidence *outstanding universal value* constitute carefully edited intensifications of the authorised heritage discourse. "We connect people to their heritage" headlines the mission statement of Edinburgh World Heritage Trust (Edinburgh World Heritage, n.d.). Urban populations are not homogenous. Such statements imply that the manifold constituent communities are not connected to *their* heritage: multiple heritages are not recognised; non-adherents to the discourse are excluded; only one narrative is legitimised.

Discordance between the UNESCO narrative of *outstanding universal value* and a host community is well-illustrated in the case of Paramaribo, the capital of Suriname, a country that gained its independence in 1975 (Fig. 10.1). The Historic Inner City of Paramaribo was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 2002, highlighting its Dutch colonial and Christian heritage (UNESCO, n.d.). The complexity of the ethnic, religious, social, and cultural diversity of the historical as well as present-day communities in Paramaribo is not reflected in the UNESCO synthesis; this ignores, for example, the main synagogue and the assemblage of Modernist buildings from the 1950s and 1960s (Strik & Lambert, 2018).

Fig. 10.1 Paramaribo, Suriname. (*Note.* Image by Dennis Rodwell 2018)

The inner city is currently under-occupied and in poor condition, lacking the animation that characterised its historical multi-functionality. There is a shortfall of support for the heritage of the country's colonial past in political and governmental circles, filtering through to omissions in heritage education, professional and craft skills training, and interpretation material, all underscored by lack of community support. The monumentalisation of this World Heritage Site, factored into *contested heritage*, offers little intellectual access and challenges its sustainability; the spectrum of *values* is in serious need of expansion. Labadi has raised important questions concerning alignments of *outstanding universal value* with values perceived by today's communities, as well as dissonances between the identification of normative values pre-inscription and the long-term conservation and management of sites post-inscription (Labadi, 2013).

10.4.2 What Is Urban Heritage?

The unique identity of any historic city is a conjunction of people, place, and time. Just as natural heritage sites cannot survive as ecosystems without wildlife, historic cities are contingent on human functionality. An integrated approach to urban heritage is not simply a question of the restoration of buildings, ensembles, and public spaces. It subsumes an understanding of the dynamics of everyday life and timelines of socio-economic continuity in the communities that host and animate a quantum and diversity that extends far beyond prescribed definitions of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. This distinguishes it fundamentally from built heritage.

Urban heritage, comprehended generically as embracing a legion of globally diverse living historic cities and urban districts, in which citizens have and continue to conduct their daily lives in complex and dynamic relationships with a heterogeneity of physical environments, is a highly complex field that fits uneasily into heritage orthodoxy. The human factor – the synergy between the miscellany of human activities and the myriad of physical places – is missing, as is the strategic vision to position urban heritage mainstream in the geography of urban planning (Ripp & Rodwell, 2015 and 2016).

The safeguarding and transmission of urban heritage are dependent on continuity of functionality. The key words *authenticity* and *integrity* are struggling to be considered, let alone appraised, in relation to continuity in the socio-cultural life of historic cities and their neighbourhoods (Brown-Saracino, 2010). The 2011 UNESCO *Recommendation* omits to expand *authenticity* and *integrity* to embrace communities and neighbourhoods (UNESCO, 2011). Anthropologists and sociologists are not incorporated into the heritage discourse.

A major global threat to urban heritage manifests from its simplistic construction and commodification as *heritage*, coupled with the interpretation of heritage *values* in monetary terms, whether for tourism, gentrification, or other. This has prejudiced people-based interests, whether of habitation, commerce, or the broader community,

as well as visitor understandings of cities' culture and their heritage. This challenges the sustainability of historic cities, including their resilience to resist major downturns, whether financial, such as the 2007–2008 global crisis, or pandemics, Covid-19, 2020 onwards.

10.5 Changes in Values and Attitudes

The pre-millennium trajectory of heritage selectivity allied to orthodox processes of designation is interrogated by today's agendas of sustainability and climate change, which place a broader onus on the "3Rs" of sustainability: *reduce*, *recycle*, and *reuse*. The assumption that closely defined *heritage* determines identity is also called into question by statements such as "The unlisted buildings enshrine the human stories, the memories of the community. They are the real heritage. It is they that determine the sense of identity, of place, and of belonging. These are the places where the historic environment is at the heart of sustainable communities" (Goodey, 2007).

In India, the shoots of intellectual independence from the orthodox monumentalist approach to urban heritage are emerging. As a 2013 position papers states, "(an) important dimension of urban heritage in India is its living character, where the past is very much part of the present lives of the people; as an evolving cultural resource in which continuity and change are deeply embedded" (India Institute for Human Settlements, 2013, p. 2).

A longstanding champion of an inclusive approach to India's urban heritage is Professor A. G. Krishna Menon, who argues that "the nascent field of urban conservation in India offers the potential to review the dominant paradigms of urban planning and develop more context-specific and appropriate strategies for tackling the problems of Indian urbanisation" (Menon, 2017, p. 34).

For this, Menon recommends revisiting the pioneering approach demonstrated by Patrick Geddes in the reports he produced for cities in India in the period 1915–1919 (Tyrwhitt, 1947). Regarding cities as organic systems, each a unique human artefact in its equally unique local and regional environment rather than simply an example of an abstract typology, Geddes insisted on the need for comprehensive historical, geographic, biological, climatic, sociological, economic, cultural, and institutional insight and knowledge, and on nurturing the shoots of innovation and creativity rather than restraining the evolution of a city based on its roots at some historical moment in time (Geddes, 1915).

Expansion of the concept of *values* in heritage management remains work in progress (including Avrami et al., 2019). This reinforces the view that, in rhythm with twenty-first-century agendas, an inclusive compendium of the values that citizens attribute to urban heritage needs to be articulated and embraced, one that is cross-disciplinary, unconstrained by bureaucratic and academic silos, and encapsulated under headings that include

- *community* – all social values and relationships;
- *resource* – in multiple senses, including environmental capital/embodied energy;
- *usefulness* – including ongoing adaptation and creative reuse; and
- *cultural* – broadly defined, especially as recognised and appreciated by inhabiting communities.

This supports the thesis that there are no limits to the appreciation of *heritage* once there is respect and recognition for all sectors and age groups in any given society (Rodwell, 2015).

10.6   Urban Transformations

Change and transformation are the normative state of cities. They may not be intended, desired, or beneficial. World Heritage stands at the apex of today's commodification of *heritage* that adds value to buildings, visitor experiences, countless merchandise, and much else.

The growth of the global tourist industry has precipitated major changes in patterns of use, notably in cities in the World Heritage List. The procedures for World Heritage inscription and monitoring neither anticipate nor include provisions to oversee changes of functionality, including the supplanting of the core original function of cities as places of residence.

Venice is a prime example. A city whose early-1970s population of over 130,000 represented a balance between the number of households and the number of dwellings in the city, today counts less than 60,000 residents, mostly in peripheral areas of the city; the 22 million visitors in a year have assumed precedence (Fig. 10.2).

Whereas cruise ships are the most visible sign of this transformation, the population drop attracts scant attention from the media or from the World Heritage Committee. With a near tourist mono-culture in the city centre, the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic could not be more severe.

Heritage listings, once perceived as a burden, deflating property values and rent returns, now attract a *heritage premium*. In today's volatile financial markets, heritage properties provide investment security, fuelling gentrification and loss of community diversity (Rodwell, 2018).

A comparison of the cities of Zamość, Poland, and Sibiu, Romania, the first treated as a *monument*, inscribed as a *group of buildings* and with the policy objective of decanting the established population to the city's outskirts, the second not inscribed, and with a revitalisation programme prioritising the existing community, is informative (Rodwell, 2010).

The heritagisation of cities imposes severe penalties on their authenticity as well as their viability. *Authenticity* invoked through normative, selected cultural attributes only embraces the defining characteristics of an established city superficially. *Transformations* that sever the connections and continuity between place and

Fig. 10.2 Venice and its Lagoon was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987. (*Note.* Image by Dennis Rodwell 2015)

people can transform functioning historic cities into variants of Disneyland, sites whose resilience and viability are severely challenged in times of pandemic and associated closure to travel and tourism.

10.7   Culture, Heritage, and the Sustainable Development Goals

In the lead-in to 2015 and the definition of the SDGs, an initial aspiration was to introduce *culture* as the fourth dimension of sustainable development, complementing *environment*, *society*, and *economy* (Brundtland Commission, 1987). Comprehended holistically, *culture* is an inclusive, cross- and inter-sectoral concept that embraces all fields of human activity and endeavour, conventionally sectioned into discrete disciplines and fields, nominally the arts, humanities, and sciences, and encompassing all interests, pursuits, and occupations that employ the word *culture* (Williams, 1981 and 1988). In the event, consensus was not reached between competing claims, the opportunity to position *culture* as the common feature that binds human engagement across all 17 SDGs and 169 targets was missed, and *cultural heritage* features explicitly and implicitly only to a limited extent. As such, the potential of *culture* to impact coherently across the sustainability agenda is seriously constrained.

The dilemma facing the UNESCO World Heritage system in its attempt to align itself with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Agenda is set out in Larsen and Logan (2018), which clearly identifies the challenge of mediating between the environmental, social, and economic pressures that World Heritage status imposes on highly selected properties and the over-riding principles and objectives of the SDGs (Rodwell, 2021). The same handicap impacts the policy guidance issued by ICOMOS (2021).

10.8   The Challenge

The premise of heritage orthodoxy is selective survival according to exacting conservation standards formulated from philosophies founded on European models that were intended to have *universal* application. Two main pillars for this are the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972a) and the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), both dating from the third quarter of the twentieth century. Across the intervening decades, the bibliography and compass of charters and homologous texts have expanded dramatically (Ripp & Rodwell, 2015: appendix). At the same time, as we approach the second quarter of the twenty-first century, the global agendas of environmental protection, sustainability, and climate change have assumed centre stage. Selective survival is no longer the responsible option; the canvas has enlarged dramatically, and emphasis on human-centred approaches has accelerated. Heritage orthodoxy has yet to position itself centrally in this new global reality.

Understood as continuously inhabited places, urban heritage – the major challenge that conservation theorists and practitioners face in this twenty-first century – does not fit well into the cultural heritage definitions in the 1972 Convention, into successive editions of the Operational Guidelines or with narrow interpretations of the key words *authenticity* and *integrity*, or with heritage orthodoxy generally. Urban heritage in the World Heritage List faces intensified challenges, the principal of which are encapsulated by its *commodification* and transformations that fundamentally affect its functionality and securitisation (Rodwell, 2019).

Recognising the challenge is the essential precursor to addressing it. For this, a step-change is needed to move beyond simplified linear cause and effect models of interventions and comprehend each and every historic city as systems with multiple sub-systems, all in continuous motion. This requires close cooperation and partnerships with disciplines and interests that have not traditionally been associated with the heritage field and have often been seen as adversaries (Ripp & Rodwell, 2015 and 2016).

10.9   The Way Forward

November 2022 will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, not of the World Heritage List. The Convention was a phenomenon of its time and has served us well. To date, however, there has been only a selective activation of the Convention's provisions, and there is much in reserve. Specifically, State Parties' obligations to the *world's heritage* under the Convention's Preamble and Article 5 now need to be prioritised, in conjunction with a focus on the 1972 Recommendation (UNESCO, 1972b).

In tandem, the UNESCO Operational Guidelines – whose successive editions are long overdue a root and branch overhaul – should be re-formulated away from their unique focus on World Heritage to incorporate the many themes, agendas, and associated UNESCO Conventions, Recommendations, and other post-1972 issues and documents which are not currently integrated. Some, such as the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2011), have yet, a decade later, to be mentioned at all.

There is a complementary need to embrace an inclusive human- as well as environment-focused definition of urban heritage that recognises the spectrum of values inherent in it – summarised above as *community*, *resource*, *usefulness*, and *cultural* broadly defined.

Moving on, inclusive statements of values, not just of outstanding universal value, but ones that position people in their communities at the apex of the hierarchy of stakeholders, need to be developed further, alongside understandings of *authenticity* and *integrity* that embrace people in their communities.

10.10   Conclusion

Urban heritage constitutes the oldest and most historic parts of our cities, and heritage orthodoxy has an important ongoing role to play. At the same time, a prerequisite for the sustainability of historic cities is to secure balanced futures for them founded on continuity of their *raison d'être* as multi-varied and multifunctioning human habitats. Historic cities were not settled and constructed as *heritage*, as a raw material for high-end urban regeneration and tourism. Such is a hi-jacking of their *authenticity* and *integrity*, in contradiction of the drivers for and underlying ethos of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. The collapse of international travel and tourism for much of 2020 and continuing into 2022 has highlighted the vulnerability of relying on a single sector of the economy to justify and support another. The heritage sector suffers an abundance of risks at the best of times. The Covid-19 pandemic has served as a timely warning for the heritage sector that it must broaden its approach, spread and limit its risks and vulnerabilities, revisit the roles that urban heritage has and can continue to perform, and reinforce its sustainability. The "eggs in one basket" approach leaves it too exposed and fraught with danger.

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