NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AS A NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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Using new institutionalism as a theoretical framework means focusing on two themes: rules in organizations, and informal links. These two themes might form the theoretical ground for the explanation of the many problems in Belgrade in the 1990s, for example, of illegal building. Instead of an analysis of the rigid structures of communist institutions and inherited weaknesses, the attention will be on the new institutions or more precisely, rules and routines created in the new political system, as well as corruption being the most dominant one.

Key Words: Institutions, Informal Links, Rules, Routines, Corruption

INTRODUCTION

Due to the complex political causes of the development of Belgrade in the last decade, it is difficult to apply a single theory to understand urban politics. The aim of this work is to give a new framework that is applicable for analysis of a Belgrade’s political context and governance from the 1990s onwards.

Classic political theories like the elitism and pluralism approaches in urban politics, although useful, are not completely explanatory because they are mostly shaped and used in the Anglo-American context. This context is characterised by liberal capitalism and a pluralist democracy. Contrary to this, Yugoslavia was characterised by a command economy and a one-party system until the late 1980s. The 1990s were characterised by a very different economic and political environment that failed to develop either democratic political institutions or free market institutions. Indeed that period was a specific form of post-modern dictatorship (Prodanovic, 2000), which was different from any other in the world. The main characteristic of this system was the collapse of existing institutions, the transferring of power from institutions to private hands and massive corruption. Since corruption is a sum of fundamental economic, political and institutional causes, addressing corruption effectively means tackling these underlying causes.

Consequently, given that classical political studies do not take corruption into consideration, there is a need to apply a new approach, and new institutionalism may provide a good theoretical framework for explanation for existing problems. As stated above, since corruption is a symptom of fundamental economic, political and institutional weaknesses, it needs to be viewed within a broader governance framework. The newly created institutional framework of the post-communist era did not take an organisational form, but it was based on new rules created and old rules constrained by corrupt politicians. As a consequence of its loss of power the ‘cripple state’ was unable to control its bureaucracy, to protect property and contractual rights, or to provide institutions that support the rule of law (Prodanovic, 2000).

Old institutionalism gave a good impetus for the further research of political institutions and political life. The main concern of old institutionalists was to analyse the nature of governing institutions that were capable of structure the behaviour of individuals towards better ends and collective purposes (Peters, 1999). The most famous school of old institutionalists was the school of the Progressive Movement in the United States, which consider political science as the study of the State and an exercise in formal-legal analysis, and that constituted the basis of political science research for much of the late nineteenth and first half of twentieth centuries (Peters, 1999).

OLD INSTITUTIONALISM

In order to understand new institutionalism it is necessary to explain the old institutionalism upon which the newer version is built which reflects some features and characteristics of the older approach in understanding politics. However, there are significant variations from the older institutionalism.

Old institutionalists developed an important body of literature that was the foundation for development of new institutionalism as well as for the other schools of thought that emerged in parallel. Although it has been much criticised for its descriptive richness and methodology that was mainly based on observations and descriptions (Peters, 1999), old institutionalism gave a good impetus for the further research of political institutions and political life.
Peters characterises old institutionalism as “normative, structuralist, historicist, legalist, and holistic” (Peters, 1998:11). Legalism emerges from its concern with law and the central role of the law in governing. According to old institutionalists law constitutes both the framework of the public sector itself and a major way in which government can affect the behaviour of its citizens. Therefore, to be concerned with political institutions was and is to be concerned with law. Structuralism is the second dominant assumption of old institutionalism. The assumption that structures determine behaviour was the main point of the critique by behaviourists later because they consider that structuralism does not leave room for the impact of individuals. Holism represents the comparative nature of old institutionalists. They had a strategy of comparing the whole systems, rather than to examine individual institutions such as legislatures. The main critique of this approach is that it tended towards generalisation and consequently, made theory construction more difficult. Historicism is another feature of old institutionalism. Old institutionalists were concerned with how contemporary political systems were embedded in their historical development as well as in their socio-economic and cultural present. For them, individual behaviour, especially of political elite, was a function of their collective history and of their understanding of the meaning of their politics as influenced by history (Peters, 1999). However, for the contemporary, more individualistic approaches, the deep-rooted conception of history is not that relevant (Bates, 1998). Finally, the older institutionalists tended to have a strong normative component in their analysis. They often affiliated their descriptive statements about politics with a concern for ‘good government’ (Peters, 1999), which was consequently criticized as “not scientific” (Sorling, 1962).

Old institutionalism was focused upon formal rules and organizations rather than informal conventions, and upon official structures of government rather than broader institutional constraints on governance (in public, private, and civil spheres). It has been criticised for its descriptive method and disdain for theory. New institutionalism has emerged from old and from vulgar institutionalisms that were a ‘sad

and misleading caricature of institutionalism today’ (Lownes, 2001). However, the development of new institutionalism was preceded by Behaviourist and Rational Choice theories.

**BEHAVIOURISTS AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORISTS**

These preceding approaches were the most influential at the development of new institutionalism. Although different from one another in some respects, they share some common features including a concern with theory and methodology, anti-normative bias, assumptions of individualism and imputism (Peters, 1999). The focus of inquiry of individual behaviourism is often individual, whether as a voter, as a holder of opinions, or as a member of the political elite. For rational choice analysis the assumptions of individual utility maximization tends to drive the whole approach. According to behaviourists, social collectivities such as political parties, interest groups and legislatures do not make decisions but people within those collectivities do. “What matters is not what people are supposed to do, but what they actually do” (Goodin, 1996: 13).

The institutionalists’ answer on those theories is that the “same people would make different choices depending upon the nature of the institution within which they are operating at the time” (Peters, 1999: 14).

Old institutionalism concentrates on the formal institutions of government and the Constitutions which produce those structures. The behavioural revolution in political science concentrates completely on the reverse process and analyses the inputs from society into the political system (Easton, 1953). Although institutionalism excluded many interesting and important features of political mass behaviour, the behavioural revolution went to the other extreme and denied the importance of formal institutions in determining the outputs of government. “It was the behaviour, not the performance of government that was the principal concern” (Peters, 1999: 14). Furthermore, only the economy and society was considered to influence politics and political institutions. Institutionalism, both old and new, argues that causation goes in both directions and that institutions shape social and economic life.

Rational choice theory does admit that institutions do possess some influence over participants because institutional rules establish the parameters for individual behaviour (Buchanan and Tullock, in Peters, 1999:15) but still deny their significance in shaping the preferences of the participants (Peters, 1999). The perfect generality of their applicability has been greatly exaggerated (Goodin, 1996). “The behaviourists’ focus usefully serves to fix attention upon agency, upon individuals and groupings of individuals whose behaviour it is. But those individuals are shaped by, and in their collective enterprises act, thorough structures and organisations and institutions. What people want to do, and what they can do, depends importantly upon what organizational technology is available or can be made readily available to them for giving effect to their individual and collective volitions” (Goodin, 1996:13). Another critique from Goodin is related to organizational technology and governance explanation. “Governance is nothing less than the steering of society by officials in control of what are organisationally the ‘commanding heights’ of society” (Goodin, 1996:13). However there are limits to the sorts of commands that might effectively issued from those commanding heights, and managers of the states face various constraints, both in what others will let them do and in what others will help them to do. Therefore they are constrained both in their ‘relative autonomy’ and in ‘their power to command’. Behaviourists were insufficiently sensitive to those constraints, and consequently the state has returned as a key focus in order to complement their theories (Goodin, 1996).

The initial advocates of the new institutionalism, James March and Johan Olsen, who named the movement in 1984, reasserted some of the features of the old institutionalism, and they also argued that behavioural and rational choice analyses were characterized by: Contextualism, Reductionism, Utilitarianism, Functionalism, and Instrumentalism (March and Olsen, 1984).

Contextualism means that instead of the central role that was given to the State, political science depends upon society (March and Olsen, 1984). Reductionism refers to the tendency of both behavioural and rational choice analysis to reduce collective behaviour...
to individual behaviour. Utilitarianism represents the tendency to value decisions for what they produce for the individual, rather than as representing some intrinsic value of their own and it is more linked to rational choice than to behavioural theory (March and Olsen, 1984). Functionalism represents a critique of the way in which the behavioural and rational choice approaches had dealt with history. Institution- nalists tend to assume much less functionality in history than behaviourists and rational choice theorists. And finally, March and Olsen argued that contemporary political science was characterized by instrumentalism, or the domination of outcomes over process, identity, and other important socio-political values (1984). In other words, they criticized contemporary theorists in that they analyzed political life as simply something done it through the public sector rather than as a complex interaction of symbols, values, and even the emotive aspects of the political process (March and Olsen, 1984).

On the basis of these criticism of political science of the time March and Olsen (1984) argued for the creation of new institutionalism, and they offered a replacement for the five prevailing characteristics of political science with a focus on collective action for the understanding of political life. Furthermore, the relationship between political collectivities and their socio-economic environment should be more reciprocal in order to explain complex political life.

NEW INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

The new institutionalism which emerged in the 1980s was a reaction to the dominance of under socialised accounts of social, economic and political behaviour. Both behaviourists and rational choice theorists had regarded institutions as "epiphenomenal or as the aggregation of individual actions" (Lowndes, 2001:1950). In the first case, institutions were regarded as a result of individual roles, and in the second as an accumulation of individual choices based upon utility maximising preferences (Shepsle, 1989). In political science, March and Olsen, argued "the organisation of political life makes a difference" and asserted a more autonomous role for institutions in shaping political behaviour (March and Olsen, 1984). Contrary to the descriptive and theoretical style of the earlier institutional theories, new institutionalism developed a more sophisticated definition of their subject matter, operating through explicit theoretical frameworks.

"The new institutionalists concern themselves with informal conventions as well as formal rules and structures, they pay attention to the way in which institutions embody values and power relationships, and they study not just the impact of institutions upon behaviour, but interaction between individuals and institutions" (Lowndes, 2001:1953).

Where there is a creation of new type of institutions, new institutionalism can provide powerful tools for understanding change inside local government bureaucracies and for conceptualising "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter in Lowndes, 2001). Lowndes (2001) also distinguishes organizations from institutions and outlines regards 'weak ties' to be as important as formal constitutions.

Lowndes presented differences between new and vulgar or 'old' institutionalism in terms of movement along six analytical points:

- From a focus on organizations to a focus on rules;
- From formal to an informal conception of institutions;
- From a static to a dynamic conception of institutions;
- From sub emerged values to a value critical stance;
- From a holistic to a disaggregated conception of institutions; and
- From independence to embeddedness (Lowndes, 2001).

Political institutions should not be equated with political organizations, rather they are the sets of rules that guide and constrain actors' behaviour. Institutions provide the rule of the game, while organizations and individuals are players within that game. As Goodin states, institutions are differentiated in the sense that they embody, preserve, and impart differential power resources with respect to different individuals and groups (Goodin 1996). That means that institutions embody power relations by privileging certain courses of actions over others and by including certain actors and excluding others. "Institutional rules may produce variation and deviation as well as conformity and standardisation. They evolve in unpredictable ways as actors seek to make sense of new or ambiguous situations, ignore or even contravene existing rules, or try to adapt them to favour their own interests" (Lowndes, 2001:1960).

Due to its complexity and the wealth of literature on the subject, there is a problem with defining of new institutionalism. Therefore it is crucial to see what criteria should be used for defining whether an approach is really institutional or not. Peters attempted to define a common core that binds all approaches together. The most important element of institutionalism, according to Peters, is that institutions are a structural feature of a society and/or polity. That structure may be formal like a legislature, an agency in the public bureaucracy, or a legal framework, or may be informal like the set of shared norms or a network of interacting organisations. Another feature is the existence of stability over time. A third feature is that it must affect individual behaviour or in some way constrain the behaviour of its members. There should be some sense of shared values and meaning among the members of institutions. Those constraints may be formal or informal but they must be constraints if there is to be an institution in place (Peters, 1998).

According to Peters, the first of six different approaches in new institutionalism is Normative institutionalism advanced by March and Olsen in their works 1984 and 1989. The strong accent is on the norms of institutions as means of understanding how they function and how they determine individual behaviour. They put an accent on the 'logic of appropriateness' as a tool for shaping the behaviour of the members of institutions. The most different to normative institutionalism is Rational Choice Institutionalism. Instead of values and norms, those scholars argue that behaviours are functions of rules and incentives. According to them, institutions are systems of rules and inducements to behaviour in which individuals attempt to maximise their own utilities (Weingast, 1996). The third approach is Historical Institutionalism which, represents the view that choices which are made early in the history of any policy or any governmental systems. As those scholars argued policies are path
dependant and ‘once launched on that path they continue along until some sufficiently strong political force deflects them from it’ (Peters, 1998: 19). Empirical institutionalism is the closest to old institutionalist and argues that that the structure of government makes a difference in the way in which policies are processed and which choices which will be made by governments. Peters also differentiates those scholars into two groups. First, scholars who use conventional categories such as the difference between presidential and parliamentary government like Weaver and Rockman (1993) and second, those who use more analytic categories such as decision points, like Immergut (1992).

Other varieties of institutionalism, but with more connections, are International Institutionalism, of which the most clear example is international regime theory as represented by Krasner (1983) and Societal Institutionalism that describes the structuring of the relationship between state and society (Peters, 1998).

DEFINITION OF ‘INSTITUTION’

The most fundamental issue is to define what an institution is. As Peters states, the word institution is loosely used in political science to mean everything from a formal structure like a parliament to very amorphous entities like social class, with other components of the socio-political universe, such as law and markets, also being defined as being institutions. In sociology it is often used interchangeing with the term ‘organization’ (Peters, 1999).

March and Olsen have a different definition of institutions. According to them institutions should rather be understood as a collection of norms, rules and understandings, and perhaps most importantly routines (March and Olsen, 1989). They define institutions as:

"Collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations. The process involves determining of what the situation is, what role is being fulfilled, and what obligation of that role in that situation is" (March and Olsen, 1989: 21).

Furthermore, they define institutions also in terms of the characteristics that they represent and that their members demonstrate. They also define institutions by their durability and their capability to influence the behaviour of individuals for generations (March and Olsen, 1994: 99). They argue that institutions possess an inherent legitimacy that obligates their members to behave in ways that may even violate their own self interest (March and Olsen, 1994: 23).

The most important feature of the March and Olsen conceptualisation is that ‘institutions tend to have a ‘logic of appropriateness’ that influences behaviour more than a ‘logic of consequentiality’ that also might shape individual action. That is, if an institution is an effective in influencing the behaviour of its members, those members will think more about whether an action conforms to the norms of the organisation than about what the consequences will be for member themselves (Peters, 1999). The extreme example he gives is of firemen who willingly enter blazing buildings because that is the role they have accepted as a function of their job. In less extreme situation, logic of appropriateness may be manifested through activities in public institutions, like serving clients as well as possible and not engaging in corruption on the job (Heidenheimer, 1989).

In this normative conception of institutions it is the routine that appears most important. However, March and Olsen assume that institutions are not so well developed that there are chances for the development of anomalous situations and consequently there is a need for the creation of enforcement mechanisms to deal with deviant cases. But still for the most of decisions routines will be sufficient to generate appropriate performance (March and Olsen, 1994).

The major critique of March and Olsen’s work is related to making a distinction between rules and routines. March and Olsen defined routines as a stable pattern of behaviour, without the sense of it being unchangeable or dysfunctional. Routines are assumed to make the behaviour of organisation more predictable and more rational, although it is difficult to determine when predictability ends and inertia begins (Peters, 1999). Although not considering rules to be central to their research as most of the new institutionalists, March and Olsen do address rules as a part of the control of behaviour within institutions and organisations. They consider rules as constitutive and to some extent as the formalisation of the logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen, 1994). Rules serve as guides for newcomers to an organisation for example. Institutions derive a good deal of their structure of meaning, and their logic of appropriateness from the society in which they are formed (March and Olsen, 1984). Routines appear to arise naturally once people begin to interact in institutional setting (Peters, 1999).

Finally, the third question that March and Olsen have not answered according to Peters, is the difference between an institution and an organisation. He adds that it is easier to make the distinction if the adjective ‘formal’ is added in front of ‘organisation’ thus applying a very strict definition of organisations, and a loose, more culturally based, definition of institutions (Peters, 1999).

One of the strongest and most persuasive components of March and Olsen argument is the change of institutions based on their ‘garbage can’ approach to decision-making (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972). The ‘garbage can’ approach means that institutions have a repertoire of solutions as responses to problems when there is a need to adjust policies. Routinized responses are used before searching for alternatives that are further away from core values. Therefore, institutional changes that are implemented conform to the logic of appropriateness, and those institutional values have the function of limiting the range of extending policy alternatives for the institution. Institutional change is thus rarely a planned event, but rather a product of the confluence of several different activities, and opportunities for action, within the institution (Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972).

According to Peters, there are several different stimuli for change, but the new institutionalists mostly concentrate on the process of learning (1999). According to Goodin there are three basic ways in which institutions arise and change over time: as the result of accident, evolution or intentional intervention (Goodin in Lowndes, 2001). Another interesting issue is a mechanism through which the institutions shape the behaviour of individuals, and the other mechanism through which individuals are able to influence and reform institutions. Gid-
dens has argued that these relationships are ‘dual, which means there is a reciprocal causation of agent and structure’ (Giddens, 1984), implying the dynamism of this relationship.

NEW INSTITUTIONALISM IN URBAN POLITICS

In his article on urban governance, Pierre argues that nation states play an important role in shaping urban governance. In order to understand urban governance it is necessary to bring the value dimensions into analysis. Institutional theory, which highlights overarching values that give meaning and understanding to the political process, is the one theory according to Pierre, that offers analytical assistance (Pierre, 1999).

The institutional dimension of urban politics is conceptualised in a similar way as the new institutionalism developed by March and Olsen (1984, 1989), and ‘institutions’ refers to systems of values, traditions, norms, and practices that shape or constrain political behaviour (Pierre, 1999). In a similar manner to neo-institutionalists, Pierre makes a distinction between organisations and institutions, although he recognises the organisational logic of institutions and categorises their relationship as being very dynamic.

However there are some doubts about the institutional dimension in urban politics. “Although institutional theory has become a leitmotiv in much of mainstream political science, the institutional dimension of urban politics remains unclear and ambiguous” (Pierre, 1999:373). The main reason for that is the much greater constraint of institutions in urban governance. The perceptive role of institutions is fundamental to local community. Therefore, urban governance is embedded in a myriad of economic, social, political and historical factors pertaining to the exchanges between local state and local community. And finally, Pierre acknowledges the significance of the national context within which urban governance is embedded. “National politics and state traditions remain the most powerful factors in explaining various aspects of urban politics, including urban political economy, urban political conflict, and strategies of local resource mobilisation” (Gurr and King, 1987; Keating, 1993; Pickvance and Preteceille, 1991 in Pierre, 1999: 375). Therefore, nation states do effectively constrain local political choice. Subsequently, and understanding of local governance and institutional change in Belgrade needs to be seen in the context of regime change in Yugoslavia in the 1990.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE SERBIAN TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

The creation of institutions or the building of new and better social, political and economic institutions is generally considered to be the central problem that transitional societies face as they emerge from their discredited post authoritarian and post communist pasts. Institutions establish standards, both normative and cognitive, as to what is held normal, what must be expected, which rights and duties are attached to which positions, and what makes sense in the community or social domain to which the institution is answerable.

Offe (1996) argues that institutions play two major roles, perceptive and functional role. The perceptive role means that “good citizens make good institutions, and good institutions are ‘good’ to the extent they generate and cultivate good citizens or the ‘better selves’ of citizens, who at least get ‘used to’ and ‘feel at home’ in those institutions, develop a sense of loyalty, and come to adopt the cognitive expectations and moral intuitions from which the institutions themselves derive” (Offe, 1996: 200). The functional role of institutions is called ‘congruent socialisation’ which assumes that institutions will function properly. In other words it means that institutions need to accomplish the task that is set for them, or to be compatible with the supply of resources they depend upon and must hence extract from their environment (Offe, 1996). If institutions are established properly and widely supported, they ‘fly by themselves due to the invisible operation of an autopilot’ (Offe, 1996:200).

Furthermore, Offe argues that both those function are necessary as criteria for the existence and viability of institutions, internal socialisation and external effectiveness, or the consolidation of beliefs, on the one hand, and purposive rational or strategic action on the other (Offe, 1996).

March and Olsen relate to the same dualism (1989: 23), but they define institutionalised actions as backward looking which is obligatory, and forward looking or anticipatory motivational forces. The perceptive role of institutions is a ‘logic of appropriateness’ and second role is ‘logic of consequentiality’ in March and Olsen’s work (1984, 1989, 1994). However if institution fails, does the failure lead to an attitude of doctrinaire over identification on the part of actors with the rules, values, and routines embodied in the institution that fails?

1 Pierre suggests four different models of urban governance determined by the national institutions: managerial, corporate, pro growth and welfare governance models. Although very extensive in their approach and field of investigation, those models are not applicable to the Belgrade case due to the different political and economic institutional context of the cities where they have been developed and applied.
The stability of institutions comes at the cost of rigidity (Offe, 1996). Democracy as a preference aggregating machinery can only work under a framework of rights that is protected by independent courts and at least relatively immune from democratic contingencies. One key problem to the Central and Eastern European transition from communism is the lack of necessary rigidity for stability of institutions. Any regime that could enforce such rigidity has broken down, and there exists too little scope for reasoned choice, as every actor has a strong reason to believe that it cannot rely upon institutional parameters since they are the subjects of sudden change. According to Offe (1996) there are two major factors that create institutional stability. The first is the degree of freedom that institutions leave to individual behaviour and choice, and the more liberal the regime that institutions impose upon agents, the less vulnerable they will become to disloyal or attempted innovation. The other stability factor is the mechanism that institutions have in the form of rules for changing institutions (Offe, 1996). In Yugoslavia, both of the conditions necessary for institution stability had not been fulfilled. There was neither freedom of choice or mechanisms for institutional protection. In Hungary and Poland, institutional building was based on the logic of appropriateness and in Romania and Bulgaria on the logic of consequentially (Offe, 1996). However, the success of newly built institutions is likely to depend more on people’s trust, compliance, and patience in enduring the transition costs involved than in the quality of those institutions themselves.

Another characteristic of post communist societies is that instead of having a ‘downward looking’ notion of equality, they have ‘upward looking’ variant of distribution which is a product of old regime. This means that individuals that are trying to become richer have to be prevented from it because big private ownership is still considered as being negative. But there is also a reasoning that unless the state does something, people on the top are still privileged and are entitled to use every means available including illegal ones to get ahead. The tolerance for distributional inequalities and resulting privilege is extremely limited (Offe, 1996).

CONCLUSION

In the 1990s individuals and parties controlled institutions and imposed the rules of game in Yugoslavia. The political elite actively transferred power from institutions to its hands, leaving institutions as complex and massive as they were during the communist era, but lacking their former executive power. The ‘collapse’ of institutions was not only associated with planning and development but at all other levels of society. Institutions had shrunk at all levels, and the basis for democracy was not established, and weak ties were solidified. Since institutions are no long considered to be static but dynamic concepts, institutional rules have to be sustained over time. “An ongoing process of institutionalisation creates stability” (Lowdes, 2001: 1958), and this materially failed to occur in Yugoslavia. Additionally corruption became the dominant ‘logic of appropriateness’.

Due to the general manifestation of corruption new institutionalism is the approach that is most promising in relation to theorise the post socialist Serbia. Using new institutionalism as a theoretical framework means focusing on two themes: rules in organizations, and informal links. The second focus is a shift from a formal to informal conception of institutions, which means a focus on informal pressures that shaped decision making, rather than the formal structures. In particular, the elite that had an important role in defining the environment should be studied. Institutional factors are those that affect the degree of power that actors have over decision making and its outcomes and the institutional position of actors influences the definition of his/her interests, responsibilities and relationships. Additionally, it is very important to focus on disaggregated conception of institutions and how they produced deviation in society, and how individuals contravened old rules and consequently changed them and adopted them to their own interests. Moreover, corruption as an accepted rule or routine in society can be regarded as an institution. The negative logic of appropriateness can be especially applied to the case of building in Belgrade, where bribery and corruption became a shared value and norm, or ‘logic of appropriateness’.

Considering all accounting features of the newly emerged institutional framework in Belgrade in the 1990s, new institutionalism offers the most comprehensive theoretical approach for explanation of the development of abnormal political practices and institutional deviations.

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