



Circle U.
European University Alliance

Activity report

Academic year 2023-2024

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Joint Seminar in Oslo

FOREWORD



With Circle U., we are at the forefront of European higher education. Our nine universities recognize both the need and the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the transformation that will shape the years and decades ahead. Together, we are not only developing joint programmes and innovative formats for co-teaching and co-learning within our Circle U. Open Campus, but we are also striving to implement automatic recognition throughout our alliance, paving the way for joint European degrees.

Circle U. embodies the idea and ideals of Europe – not just the European Union, but also encompassing our members in Norway, Serbia and the United Kingdom. By joining forces, we strengthen our collective ability to drive the research and innovation necessary to ensure a prosperous, sustainable and democratic future. As part of this commitment, our developing global strategy will focus on productive exchanges between the global North and South, fostering connections within higher education and research communities around the world.

The first months of our current work phase "Circle U. 2030" have been an energetic and promising start – and I am excited to see the progress we will build on this solid foundation.

Julia von Blumenthal

President of Circle U.

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin



Circle U. has taken important steps forward since the alliance started out as a pilot project. The good ideas launched in the pilot phase – the academic chairs programme, the distinct knowledge hubs identified, and the need for aligning structures and decision-making processes – are still key foundations for the alliance. Based on previous successes such as the Circle U. summer schools, our seed-funding scheme, and novel educational designs, we are now looking forward to exciting times ahead for Circle U!

The new phase of Circle U. has further strengthened our capacity as an alliance. We have decided to launch a new knowledge hub on Artificial Intelligence, we have prioritized six educational formats we want to emphasize as an alliance in the years to come, we have agreed upon the criteria for how to collaborate on developing educational offers, and we have a clear vision for how our Open Campus should be developed in the years to come. In other words, Circle U. is ready to scale up our offerings - adding value to all partners within the alliance, but not least adding value to the European Higher Education Area.



Bjørn Stensaker

Chairman of the Management Board

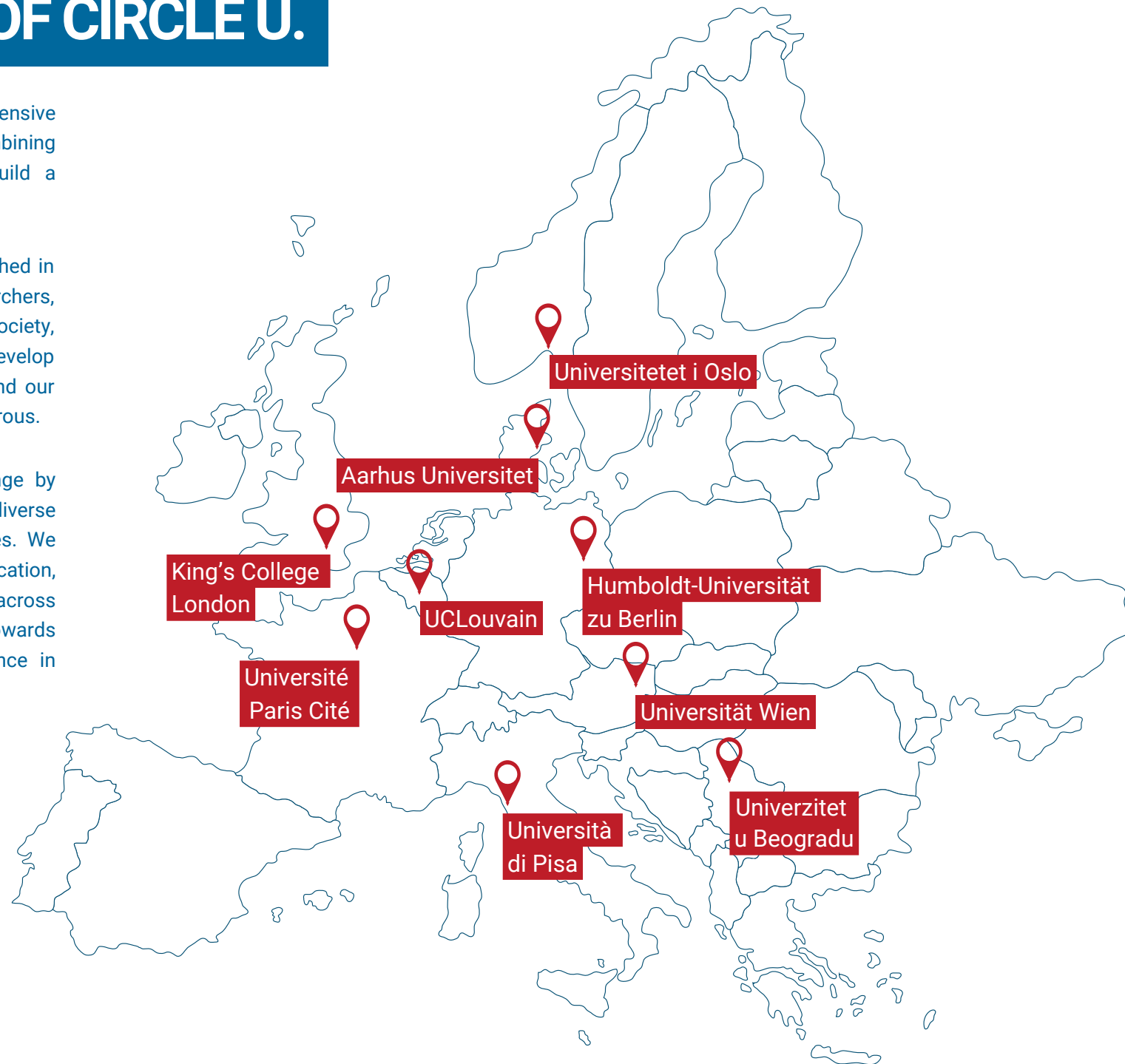
Universitetet i Oslo

PRESENTATION OF CIRCLE U.

Circle U. is an alliance of nine research-intensive European universities that are committed to combining their expertise and common interests to build a European University.

The mission of the alliance – which was launched in 2020 – is to empower students, researchers, academics, staff and partners from civil society, businesses and the public sector to jointly develop competencies and solutions to keep Europe and our planet healthy, peaceful, democratic and prosperous.

Circle U. aims to act as a catalyst for change by providing high-quality, inclusive, shared and diverse international teaching and learning experiences. We are committed to using our expertise in education, research and innovation to facilitate dialogues across disciplines, sectors and cultures, working towards long-term solutions that will make a difference in addressing major societal challenges.



Circle U. in numbers



475K
Students



9
Universities



1
Circle U. Office
in Brussels



45
Associated
Partners



1
Open Campus



72
Academic
Chairs



8
Knowledge Hubs
and Platforms



38
Seed Funded
Projects



1
Women Founder
Network

Timeline

9
2023

Education Second Forum of the European Universities Alliances

10
2023

Policy European Universities as Actors in Multilingualism

Education Public Lecture Series: The Politics of Global Health

Policy Workshop: Global Health in European Universities

Strategy Creating now the University of Tomorrow

Strategy General Assembly

11
2023

Research Introduction to Public Engagement

Research Global Horizons: An Insider's Guide to International Academic Mobility

Dissemination Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research for Sustainable Development

Strategy Cross-Alliances Forum 2023

12
2023

Dissemination The Vienna Circle Exhibition at UPCité

01
2024

Education / Research Circle U. Meet & Greet with European Partners

Policy Circle U. Meet & Greet with European Partners

02
2024

- Strategy Launch of CU.til and CU.mil
- Education Training Programme for Practitioners on Climate Change

03
2024

- Strategy Circle U. Joint Seminar in Oslo
- Education What does it take to compete in the Olympic Games?

04
2024

- Research One Health or Many Health? A Multidisciplinary, Multicultural Approach to Global Health
- Education Circle U.lympics: Performance, Pressure and Politics
- Education Interactive roundtable: Are social media a step-up or an obstacle for democracy?
- Policy European University Alliances: Drives of Change and Innovation in Higher Education

05
2024

- Capacity building Erasmus+ Staff Training Days: library services and archives
- Dissemination Towards the Future of European Research and Innovation in Higher Education
- Strategy General Assembly

06
2024

- Education The European Parliament Elections: Are you ready for the (perhaps) most important election ever?
- Capacity building International Staff Week: Short term mobility
- Education Manuscript workshop: Democratic Regressions
- Strategy Circle U. Seed Funding Info Session

07
2024

- Education Summer School: Rethinking Global Health
- Education Summer School: Empowering Climate Action

08
2024

- Education Summer School: Democratic Governance and the Politics of Poverty
- Education Open Conversation: The Politics of Poverty and Hope
- Education Summer School: Language in Education Research



Summer School students
Credits: Philipp Plum, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2023-2024

Sandpits

Hosted by UCLouvain, September 11th-12th | November 2nd-3rd.



24 Applicants

15 Participants



Participating in Sandpit was a truly enjoyable experience. It provided a unique opportunity to meet people from various academic backgrounds, which was quite insightful and rarely happens in traditional ways of networking.

Feedback from a participant

With the Sandpits initiative, Circle U. gathered academics and Ph.D. candidates from various disciplines and countries as well as non-academic partners in residential workshops, giving them the freedom to choose the themes that speak to them to bring out new initiatives and research topics. Typically, a Sandpit implies that there is no specific theme at the start, but a professional facilitator promotes interactions among participants to help bring out initiatives and research topics, as well as identify potential threats and barriers.

Participants met for two rounds at UCLouvain in Louvain-la-Neuve. The September Sandpit round consisted of a workshop encouraging the emergence of interdisciplinary projects related to the Circle U. Knowledge Hubs (Democracy, Climate and/or Global Health).

The November Sandpit round aimed to develop and support the most promising ideas that had emerged to turn them into concrete project proposals to be submitted to external funding bodies.



Sandpit participants in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

Sustainable Change-Makers Programme

Hosted by UCLouvain, 27th September to 13th December.



- 9 Professors and coaches
- 43 Participants



For the second year in a row, UCLouvain hosted the three-day final event of the Circle U. Change-Makers Programme in December 2023, confirming the success of this initiative among students, universities and local companies. MA and doctoral students from various disciplines and universities in Europe got to work together with their coaches to discuss and come up with solutions to concrete societal sustainability challenges.

Some of the preparatory course sessions included videos with contributions from experts, companies and student entrepreneurs from the participating universities. They then gathered at UCLouvain for the final part of the activity to pitch their innovative, sustainable ideas in front of a jury. While in Louvain-la-Neuve, students spent several hours with the CEO of a Belgian company, visiting the company's facilities and finding out more about its sustainability issues directly from the people running it.



As the students taking part have different degrees of prior knowledge and expertise, finding the right balance when it comes to content and topics to be covered can be a little tricky. Also, the teaching team is very large, with a total of 10 coaches and professors for 10 student groups. This requires a great deal of effort in terms of coordinating and synthesising everyone's contribution. On the other side, this brings a wealth of complementary expertise and points of view, which is tremendously enriching for all those involved.

Amélie Jacquemin
Academic Chair
UCLouvain



Seed Funding Call 2023



65

Applications

13

Selected projects

110,000€

Total budget

The objective of the Circle U. seed funding scheme is to foster new collaborations across institutions in the Circle U. alliance. It is a mechanism that provides academics, research staff and students with opportunities to develop projects across the alliance, to strengthen our joint ecosystem and to drive bottom-up initiatives.

The Circle U. seed funding scheme supports the developmental stages of a project in its early stage. Therefore, seed funded projects fit under a wide variety of definitions.

In this activity report, we selected 3 projects according to their score, the host university and topics.



Co-creating Cultural Competency Education –Transcending multilingualism and multiculturalism

This project aims to build a cultural competency co-creation consortium across four Circle U. institutions in order to co-create an innovative online interactive module on cultural competency.

- Academic-led project
- Participating universities: King's College London, University of Pisa, University of Belgrade, Aarhus University
- Project promoter: Shuangyu Li, King's College London
- Budget awarded: 10,000 €



One Health or Many Health? A Multidisciplinary, Multicultural Approach to Global Health

This project is a unique assembly of perspectives and approaches from different academic and cultural backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of diverse methodologies in understanding and addressing global health issues.

- Student-led project
- Participating universities: University of Belgrade, University of Vienna, King's College London
- Project promoter: Aleksa Jovanović, University of Belgrade
- Budget awarded: 4,192 €



Consumption Reduction to Induce Social and Environmental Sustainability

The acceleration of climate change necessitates a reduction in consumption by Western consumers. The objective of this research is to contribute to a better understanding of the social dimension of consumption reduction.

- Academic-led project
- Participating universities: University of Vienna, Aarhus University, University of Belgrade
- Project promoter: Arnd Florack, University of Vienna
- Budget awarded: 10,000 €

Inter Circle U. Prize (ICUP)

Awards ceremony at Université Paris Cité, during the ERIA conference, "Towards the Future of European Research and Innovation in Higher Education", May 29th.



12

Applicants

3

Winners

5

Universities in the evaluation panel



Through inter- and transdisciplinary research, we are trying to do what democracy has been unable to do so far: to respond effectively to the current global climate crisis.

Marius Mjaaland
ICUP winner
Universitetet i Oslo



The ICUP is awarded annually to showcase best examples of inter- and transdisciplinary research at Circle U. universities.

The three ICUP Laureates will have their inter- and transdisciplinary research projects showcased in a short promotional video to highlight their work to a broad audience. These videos will be widely shared through the communication channels of the Circle U. Alliance and its partners, offering a high visibility to these initiatives.



Winning projects

CoFutures

Dr. Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay investigates imagined future fictions as local patterns of adaptation to global changes. By studying cultural, scientific, and geographic determinants, as well as technological and societal challenges, "CoFutures" seeks to enhance our understanding of global challenges at a local level.

Pursuing interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary paths towards better climate futures

Prof. Fage-Butler's work explores trust and mistrust in climate science. Her team identified six conceptualizations of trust and examined how science communicators can gain trustworthiness.

DEMOCRISIS: Environmental Change and the Crisis of Democracy

Prof. Marius Mjaaland's project delves into the intersection of environmental change and democratic governance. He believes that interdisciplinary research can achieve what traditional democratic processes have struggled with: responding effectively to the global climate crisis.

Summer Schools

Summer Schools are one of the flagships offerings for Circle U. students. Since the beginning of the project, 14 Summer Schools have been organised.

This year, over 140 students joined the 4 Summer Schools that took place at UCLouvain, Humboldt University and University of Oslo.

- **Rethinking Global Health**
UCLouvain (July 1-5)
- **Empowering Climate Action: Policy, Communication & Agency**
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (July 22-26)
- **Democratic Governance and the Politics of Poverty**
University of Oslo (August 5-9)
- **Language in Education Research: Ecological and Mixed Methods Approaches**
UCLouvain (August 7-10)



Summer School participants in Oslo

Organised by the Knowledge Hub Global Health and led by Université Paris Cité, the Summer School “Rethinking Global Health” offered a unique environment of exchange between academics and students on a variety of topics reflecting the diversity of the challenges and opportunities of Global Health.

79% of survey respondents say they would recommend this Summer School to their peers

83% of survey respondents say that this Summer School will be useful for their future



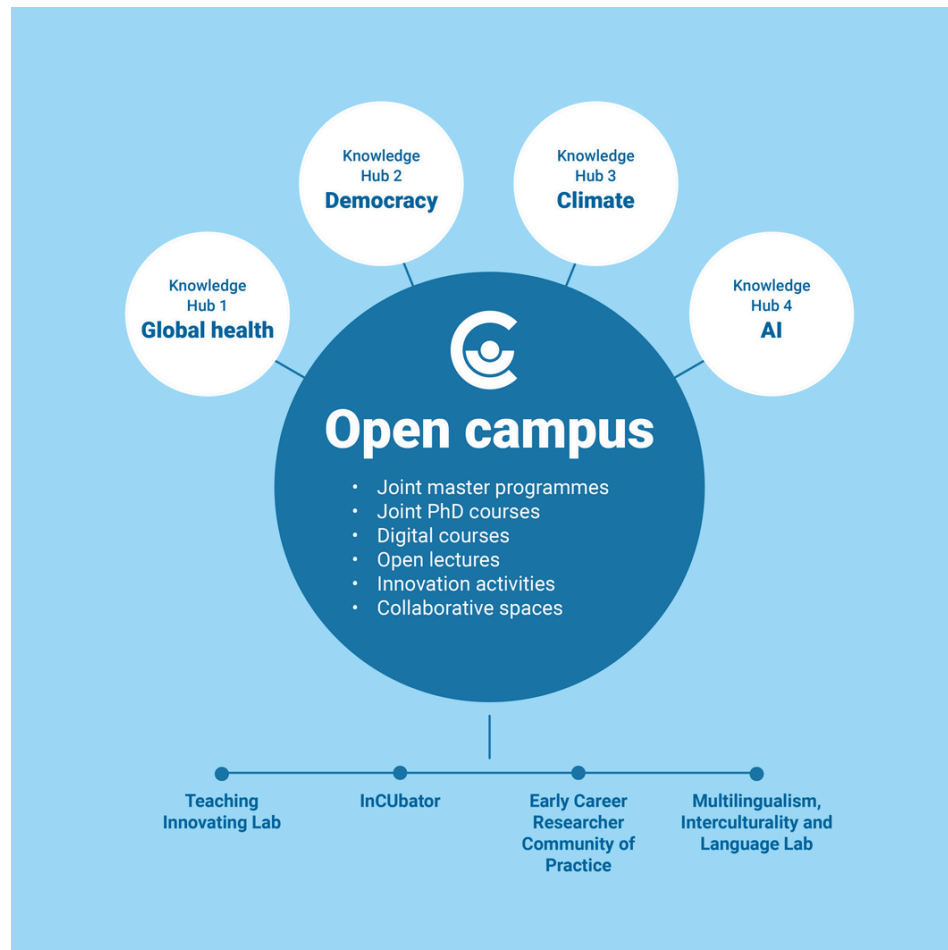
This Summer School represented a critical juncture in my academic career, offering a unique confluence of networking, learning, and collaborative opportunities that I am eager to embrace. I am confident that my background, coupled with the profound insights and experiences that the Circle U. Summer School promised, will catalyze my transition into a postdoctoral role with a robust and interdisciplinary outlook.

Fernando
PhD student
Aarhus Universitet



Open Campus

Open Campus Insights



The Circle U. Open Campus is a virtual university campus and will be the gateway for students seeking educational opportunities within Circle U. Through this online platform, Circle U. emphasizes academic collaboration as a key focus and offers a possibility for renewal and re-orientation of courses and programmes for students. The goal is to provide our educational offerings with an international dimension by opening up to creative ways to deliver courses.

Laying the groundwork

Over the past academic year, the Open Campus team has been busy setting the foundations to create the platform. In November 2023, Eivind Engebretsen from the University of Oslo, was appointed as Dean of the Open Campus to steer its development. General policies as well as a four-step guide were drafted to support researchers and academic staff in designing international study offers.



I wanted to take this role as the Dean of the Open Campus because I taught during a Circle U. Summer School at Université Paris-Cité and I was so inspired to work with colleagues from our partner universities. Through the Open Campus researchers and

academic staff will get together to create opportunities for students. I am convinced that this international exposure will benefit us all.

Eivind Engebretsen
Dean of the Open Campus
Universitetet i Oslo





Workshop held during the National Conference "Creating Now the University of Tomorrow: Looking Back to Move Ahead with Circle U. and the Alliances"

FUTURE OUTLOOK

A year of growth

During this academic year, Circle U. closed its pilot phase and has entered in a new phase, securing additional funding from the European Commission for an total amount of 12.8 million euros over the period 2023-2027.

As discussed during the closing conference of the pilot phase, “Creating Now the University of Tomorrow: Looking Back to Move Ahead with Circle U. and the alliances.”, the new phase should be seen as a continuation, not a revolution, aiming at four main objectives:

- 1 **Scaling up** the learning, teaching and research opportunities for our students, researchers, academics and staff, as well as our external partners.
- 2 **Advancing** our joint ecosystem with the Knowledge Hubs and platforms as collaborative spaces where our communities and external partners can develop and implement new initiatives.
- 3 **Maximising** the impacts of our joint actions, initiatives and activities to respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow and shape the future of our higher education and research in Europe and beyond.
- 4 **Embedding** the transformational dynamic of the alliance in our universities to make Circle U. a reality for all members of our communities.

A joint research and innovation agenda

Funded through the Horizon Europe programme, the Circle U. ERIA project (“Empowering Research and Innovation Actions”) will come to a close in October 2024.

Over the project period, many successful activities have been developed with a strong focus on human capital development, particularly early-career researchers. The priority in the coming months will be to further develop these initiatives and consolidate a joint research and innovation agenda for Circle U., that will eventually increase our research capacities and collaborations.

Engagement in Europe and beyond

Since its inception in 2020, Circle U. has been systematically engaging with other alliances, EU institutions and other key European and global key stakeholders. Through the transformational dynamic of our cooperation, Circle U. is committed to contributing to the shaping of the future of higher education and research.

With the expansion of the Circle U. Office and its relocation in Brussels, the alliance has a unique tool to support and strengthen its engagement in Europe and beyond. In “FOREU4All”, the new community of practice that will gather all 64 alliances and other key partners, Circle U. will pursue its engagement towards cooperation. With Una Europa, the alliance will lead the actions linked to policy dialogue.

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