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FROM SPACES OF PLANNING TO PLACES OF RESISTANCE

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The aim of this paper is to study the exercise of political and economical power and its relationship to civil society and urban space. Behind the research problem lies the rapid and new kind of changes of post-industrial cities. The globalization of the economy has driven cities into vigorous competition in which images are used as tools in politics in order to attract foreign capital. In Helsinki this can be seen in the development strategy which emphasizes the city's position as the gateway between East and West.

The sharpening of competition and the changing political climate have also affected urban planning. The old planning ideal has partly been replaced by public-private partnership and 'fast-track' planning practices which reduce democratic control in favour of development corporations. The economical growth tendency in city and regional policy and the marketing of cities have also conflict-laden consequences in the civil society. In this light it is interesting to see how street-level interests of resistance are articulated, how they often become institutionalized and sometimes get turned against themselves.

However, different groups in the civil society cannot be rendered as totally powerless or passive. Their ways of resistance include various strategies of physical and symbolical occupation of urban space which aim at making power visible and bringing out alternative viewpoints - turning spaces of planning into meaningful places of resistance. In Helsinki these conflicts have recently materialized in the unbuilt heart of the city whose future use is under dispute.

Key words: New Planning Practices, Contested Urban Space, Landscapes of Power, Helsinki

Introduction

Cities are in the focus of new kind of global geoeconomics and geopolitics. At the same time new kinds of ways of life are constantly being created in them. Competition between cities – or between city regions – and competition of the cities between different interests in society form one basic line of tension in the social struggle. We, as geographers and social scientists, can no longer approach cities as neutral social space (KEARNS and PHILO 1993; LEVER 1993). Instead, we have to see cities as places where different social interests and cultural structures of meaning collide.

Decision-makers and citizens are compelled into new forms of strategic thinking and societal debate. Some initial forms of this can also be seen in Helsinki – on the one hand in the idea of Helsinki as the gateway between East and West, and on the other in the increased activism of different citizens groups.

Behind these transformations lies the rapid and qualitatively new kind of change in the post-industrial cities. Partly this reflects the broader development in the society which has brought many of the traditional structures of the society in question. New forms of participation have arisen beside the traditional party and trade-union politics as different groups have found their own voices. The globalization of the economy

has driven cities into vigorous competition in which images are used as tools in politics in order to attract foreign capital and to boost local economy (BOYLE and HUGHES 1991; CROOK et al. 1992).

The meaning of this economical, political and cultural change for urban planning is not yet totally clear. However, it is quite clear that the old planning ideal has been discarded and new planning practices have emerged. The sharpening of competition and the changing political climate have also affected urban planning. The old planning ideal has partly been replaced by public-private partnership and 'fast-track' planning practices which reduce democratic control in favour of urban development corporations. The ideology of equality which was one of the corner-stones of the welfare-state has given way to markets and consumption. Markets, however, cannot take care of social justice. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the new (postmodern) planning practices in their business-oriented and piecemeal approach will solve social problems in the city (FAINSTEN 1994).

However, different groups in the civil society cannot be rendered as totally powerless or passive. Their ways of resistance include various strategies of physical and symbolical occupation of urban space which aim at making power visible and bringing out alternative viewpoints – turning spaces of planning into meaningful places of resistance. Skilful use of media and the use of symbolics and rhetoric characterise the different citizens groups as they have learnt to use the same methods as the governmental institutions. Symbolics and rhetoric have gained new momentum as the struggle over urban space has more and more become the struggle over meanings and definitions (KEITH and ROGERS 1991). The cultural change has brought forward a spectrum of views which have challenged the legitimacy of the ruling cultural and political urban opinion and brought new sides to the discussion about cities. Thus, it is possible to say that space and place have become politicized. From the point of view of urban geography – or should we say geographies – this new situation means a partial move from the interpretation of visual marks of the human activity in cities towards the interpretation of invisible – or hardly visible – meanings and symbols (see JACKSON 1989).

Contradictory Interests in Urban Space

In my research I approach cities as socially constructed places of meaning and power (see LEFEBVRE 1974/1991). This viewpoint emphasizes the problematical nature of space as socially produced element which plays a part in the structuration of society. It also takes into account the usually hidden aspect of exercise of power which is associated with urban space – and space on the whole (SOJA 1989; HOLLEVOET 1992; KEITH and PILE 1993)¹. Cities can be seen as arenas of symbolical power in which dominant political, economical and cultural groups strive to

"(...) establish [their] own experience of the world, [their] own taken-for-granted assumptions, as the objective and valid culture of all people. Power is

expressed and sustained in the reproduction of culture. This is most successful when least apparent, when the cultural assumptions appear simply as common sense " (COSGROVE 1989: 124).

Creating landscapes can be seen as one part of this establishment of values. Different subcultures, on their part, attempt to challenge these values through their own spatial and cultural manifestations. These also include finding some landscape expression, even if only in a fantasy landscape. (COSGROVE 1989: 125; KNOPP and KUJAWA 1993). However, "reading" landscapes as such is not the point, rather it is to reveal the struggles and contradictions which lie behind the production and reproduction of urban space.

I am looking at those means in which grass-root level and marginal groups challenge the exercise of power of the dominant groups and try to make it visible through occupation of space. This kind of physical or symbolical occupation – even if only for short-term – can attach space with set of new meanings. Thus, the apparently neutral and universal space of planning can be turned into a politicized place of resistance. The struggle over urban space includes establishing set of one's own meanings and on the other hand excluding competing sets of meanings. In this context the new internationalization strategies, image politics and marketing of cities are also significant as they can be seen as one form of establishing sets of meanings to urban space. They also contribute to the change of urban environment and can thus be seen as a potential source of conflict.

Understanding the contradictions and tensions contained in the production of urban space requires also the study and interpretation of official planning documents. These documents should not be considered as neutral expressions of "universal truth" but as texts which have an author and which aim at realizing their author's objectives. Critical interpretation of these texts makes possible to render the structures of meaning they contain. Textual analysis emphasises the meaning of language and the position of author or speaker. It also questions our cultural norms that are taken for granted.

Theoretically and methodologically my work relates to recent discussions in urban geography and planning theory where the reappraisal of concepts such as culture and space has been essential (e.g. JACKSON 1989; BIRD et al. 1993; DUNCAN 1993; KEITH and PILE 1993). These discussions – to which the discussion about postmodern is for its part connected – have brought new viewpoints to geographical inquiry. Interpretations of spatiality and power connected with gender, race, sexuality etc. have indicated that holding to one and only universal viewpoint can no longer be justifiable. Methodologically this has led to strengthening of qualitative approaches and complementary use of different methods.

Realization of different emancipatory aspirations in the city can be regarded as a positive interpretation of these new viewpoints. On the other hand, the widening horizon also gives space to more sensitive interpretations of the negative aspects of the city. Concepts such as the geography of fear and the architecture of control shed

light on the darker sides of the urban question. (e.g. KNOPP 1987, 1992; DAVIS 1990; VALENTINE 1992, 1993; PEAKE 1993).

Discussion about the role of economy in development and developing of cities has been parallel to and intertwined with the discussion of culture and space. Globalizing economy with fast moving capital has placed cities into an unparalleled competition situation (HARVEY 1985, 1989; LASH and URRY 1987). Culture as an economical factor has grown more important as cities have realized its meaning in the tightening competition. Cities are building big cultural institutions such as opera houses and art museums and aspire to the status of Cultural Capital in order to stimulate their economies. Intertwining of economy and (high) culture has brought culture and consumption closer and for its part defined what is generally considered as culture.

Strategies that cities use for luring in capital together with new kind of planning practices have put pressures especially on declining inner-city areas, waterfronts and "industrial wastelands". However, these areas are often used by marginal groups for dwelling or to other purposes. In these cases planning conflicts may emerge in forms of squatting, conservation disputes etc. Contradictions between developers and conservationists may produce a set of different views of the history of an area which are used to achieve the goals of their proposers. History – like culture – can be sold (JACOBS 1992; KEARNS and PHILO 1993).

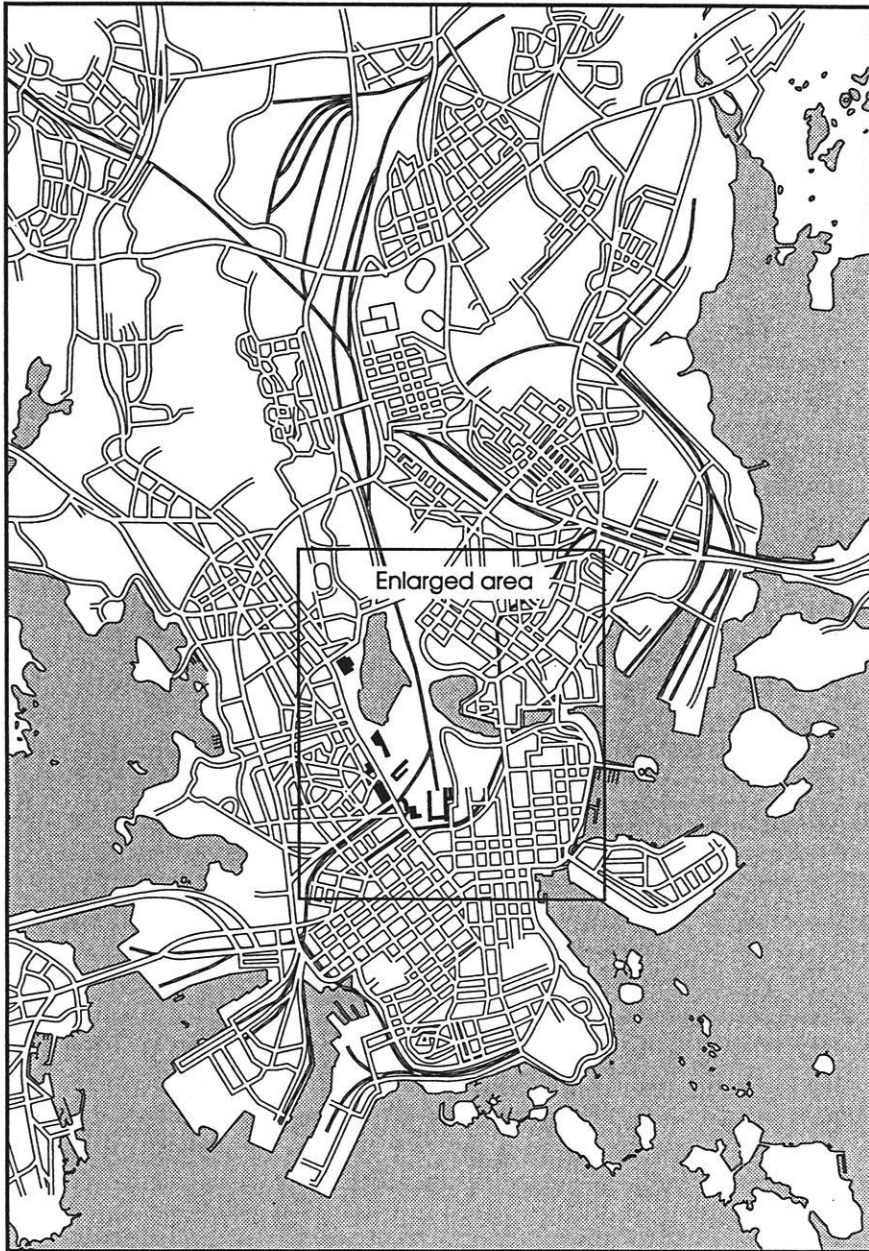
Helsinki – Conflict in the Hollow Heart

Signs of these new kinds of developments can also be found in Helsinki. Although the city does not have a real inner city area – area that is characterised by declining population and economy and derelict buildings – it has relatively large industrial areas around its core which have been freed to other purposes as the structural transformations have taken place. One thing, however, that is quite unique is the large unbuilt area in the very heart of the city (the only other example of this kind of an area which comes to mind is in Berlin) (Figure 1).

Fate of this former railway yard and its adjacent areas is the oldest unsolved planning question in Helsinki. Its location in the heart of the capital of the country has laden it with a burden of symbolical meaning which seems to be nearly impossible to overcome. It has been sarcastically called "the cemetery of all Finnish urban utopias".

In the 19th century the area was still in the outskirts of the city. In the beginning of the 20th century the newly independent republic wanted to get rid of the memories of its past under foreign rule, especially the last hundred years when Finland was a part of Russian empire as an autonomous grand duchy. The old administrative centre of the city which was built under the czars and which was in its time a source of pride was now reminding the nation of foreign power. When the planning of the new parliament house began, it very soon became clear that it had to be in a different part of the city so that it would have nothing to do with the past. Its construction not

Figure 1 Central Helsinki and its Surroundings



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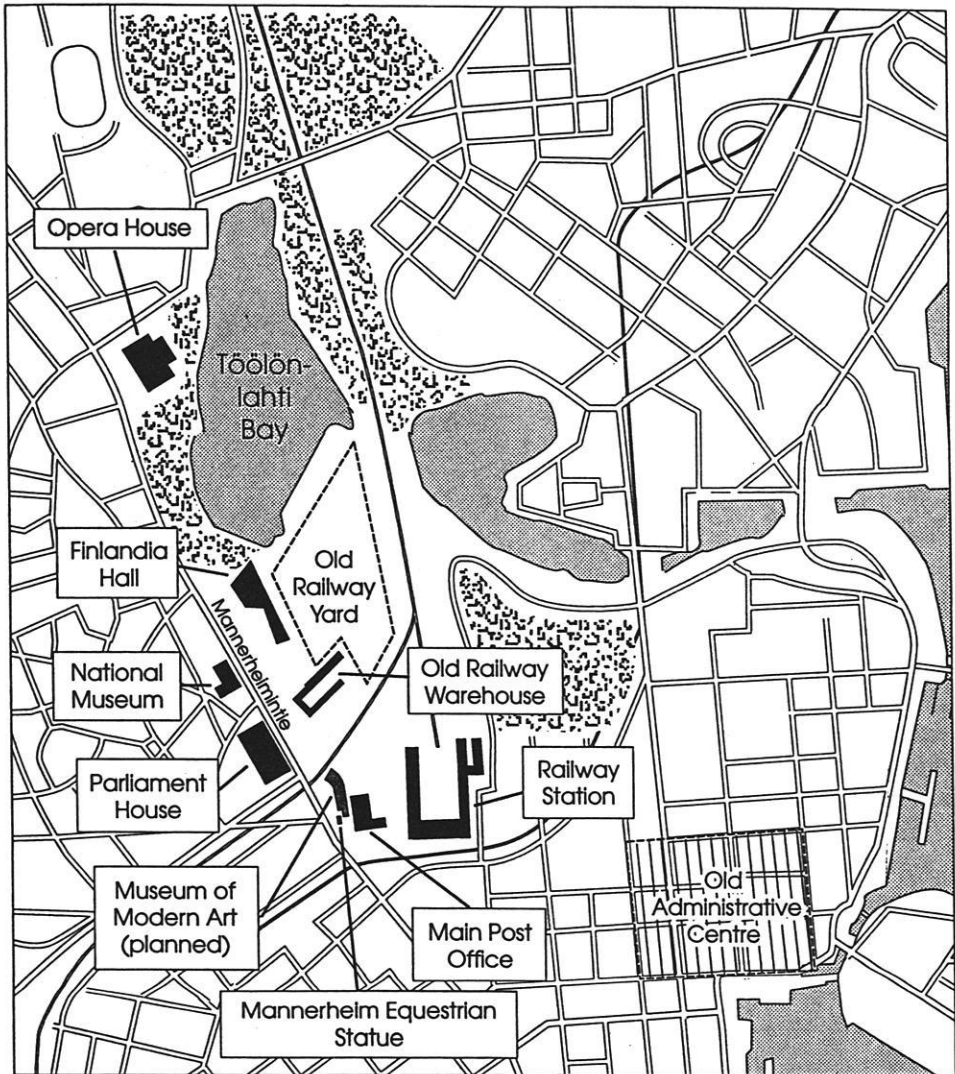
only made a break with the past but also created a new space laden with political meanings – a new landscape of power. It also completed a gradual shift which had moved the commercial centre from the old administrative centre westwards towards the new main street (Mannerheimintie) along which also the new parliament house was located. As its neighbours it already had the National museum and later on the main post office – all symbols of new times, national pride and independence. Statues of presidents, equestrian statue of field-marshal Mannerheim – a national military hero – and the Finlandia Hall as the latest addition came all to complement the monumental nature of the area.

A Centre Planned to Death

Because of its central location – both physically and mentally – the Töölönlahti Bay area has been an object of numerous planning competitions during the last 75 years. All these competitions have sought for a comprehensive solution to the problem. The earliest plans included the filling of the Töölönlahti Bay as the planners thought of potential land values instead of water as an important part of Helsinki's character and landscape. In the later plans the bay was kept unchanged but its shores were filled with series of monumental buildings which were seen appropriate to the worth of the area. Probably the most influential of all these unrealised plans has been the plan by architect Alvar Aalto from the late 50s. Its objective was to build an area of cultural buildings into the place of the railway yard and along the shores of the bay. The only building that came into being from his plan is the Finlandia Hall (completed 1971) which faces diagonally the parliament house. The Opera house (1993) is not directly from Aalto's plan but it is faithful to its spirit (Figure 2). This spirit of monumentality has enhanced the idea of an area belonging not to the city and its citizens, but to the Republic and its subjects. It has also indirectly restricted the freedom of the later plans as Aalto had the unofficial position of the national architect.

The fact that the area is at the same time in the interest of the City and the State has led to contradictory situation in which citizens are left as onlookers when the political forces struggle over the definition of place. Cultural policy has been a strong denominator of this struggle as culture in its narrow sense has been used to overtake the place from the citizens to the nation. Traffic and business play also a part in this unresolved equation. The railway yard has been moved away from the centre but the traffic problems are far from solved. The later plans have included a combined train and bus terminus which would be situated next to the main railway station. This, and the use of the area to business purposes has been in the interest of the City although it has also shared some of the cultural-monumental views of the state. The City as the land-owner has had some advantage in the struggle although this has also had a paralysing effect on the development as time has passed. There are also other kind of views of the area which tend to be downplayed when the future of the area is discussed on the administrative level. Töölönlahti Bay with its surrounding

Figure 2 Centre of Helsinki



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parks and walkways is important for the people living in the centre. It is a very popular recreational spot and it forms an important link from the built form to the nature. The adjacent railway yard with its old warehouses could be developed as an informal cultural and recreational area with parks, lawns, galleries, studios, restaurants etc. This would mean preserving some of the existing structures and careful planning of new ones so that it would develop – and would be let to develop – into an area for different kinds of people and uses on a 24-hour basis. This would, of course, mean that both the State and the City should compromise over their conditions of the use of the area. However, this kind of retreat seems unlikely since it would mean not only giving up authority but also a loss in potential profits from the centrally situated and valuable piece of land.

Changing Economy – Changing Planning (Crash - Boom - Bang)

Finland and Helsinki experienced an exceptional economical boom in the 80s which lulled the City into delusion that the growth would go on forever. As the boom came into abrupt halt in the beginning of 90s the decision-makers were waken up to harsh reality. Declining revenues and new kind of competition between cities compelled the City into new kind of strategic thinking. As domestic capital was becoming less and less available new foreign sources had to be sought. The City adopted very quickly the idea of place-marketing as a tool for luring in foreign investments. Suitable image for the City – Helsinki as the gateway between East and West, or the City as a springboard to the East – and the most important rivals were soon found and charted. The main problem in this strategy seems to be in its uninventive adoption of exactly the same tools as any other rivalling city is using: efficient telecommunication and traffic, versatile cultural offerings and highly skilled workforce. The only original ingredient is the long experience of the trade with Russia, an experience which was acquired during the years of bilateral trade and whose value in free-trade situation is somewhat questionable.

The new planning ideals which had arrived in the end of the 80s gained new weight as the City's economy started to decline. Old comprehensive planning which during the boom-years was considered as slow and inflexible got even more unfashionable because it was also considered as expensive. In the case of Töölönlahti Bay area the failure of numerous planning competitions seemed to foster belief in new kind of methods. When even the latest competition in the mid-80s failed to get development going, piecemeal approach was seen as appropriate. Planning of the Museum of Modern Art was the first project which was detached from the whole as the City sought a way out from the stalemate situation.

Modern Art and the Revenge of Military Hero

Planning of the Museum of the Modern Art is an interesting example not only of the new planning practices but also of the local outcomes of certain processes². My initial hypothesis was that the planning of such a central area would bring up protests and petitions concerning the use of the whole area. Instead, in the beginning the discussion concentrated around the architecture of the Museum and later on it focused to the equestrian statue of field-marshal Mannerheim. In the first phase it was mainly architects who led the discussion and in the second phase veterans and elderly people who felt that their values were being disgraced. The only opposing voices expressing their worry over the area have been those belonging to a group of artists who have used the old warehouses as a cafe and a gallery for more or less spontaneous exhibitions and events. However, this relatively small group has been unable to draw wider attention.

The planning of the Museum of Modern Art started in 1991 when the City and the State signed a contract on changing land within the boundaries of Helsinki. In return for the future construction of the museum and handing over its plot to the State, the City received considerable piece of land for housing outside the city centre. A year later the City published the first plans for the Töölönlahti area which in addition to the museum contained a site for the World Trade Centre, a hotel, a spa etc. In September 1992 the planning contest for the museum was declared and it was closed in June next year with the American architect Steven Holl as the winner. Only a short time later a heated discussion started about the architecture of the winning entry. In this discussion mainly architects made themselves heard. It can be said that all the questions concerning the planning and the use of the whole area were walked over by architectural details. One reason to this failure of public discussion can be found in the strong professional status and public respect of architects in Finland.

In the beginning of 1994 the architectural debate had slackened considerably. Instead of that rose new worries concerning the equestrian statue of Mannerheim. In the previous year a group of veterans had expressed their worry about the possible moving of the statue to another place. In January 1994 the City announced that the statue would be protected on its present site. A misunderstanding that the statue had been threatened was given rise partly because of this announcement. This started a new round of debate about the museum which was now seen as a threat to national values, the life and work of Mannerheim, the sacrifices made in the war etc. Modern art was juxtaposed with all the sufferings of the nation which made it seem rather useless and misplaced. Especially elderly people and veterans reacted in a way that the City didn't expect. The long dead war hero succeeded to politicize the seemingly neutral space of planning into a place full of meaning in a way which had been impossible for other people. In May the city government accepted a proposal for city plan which left both the statue and the museum unchanged. This led to a petition by the Mannerheim Tradition Foundation which was signed by more than 20 000 people in four days. The aim of the petition was to arrange a municipal referendum over the

site of the museum. In June 1994 the referendum was rejected by the city council as unnecessary. The city council also accepted the proposed plan. Several appeals have been made from the plan which are currently in the court.

Conclusions

The outcomes of the planning process of Töölönlahti area raises few questions. First of all, why didn't citizens have more interest to the planning of the area, or if they had, why weren't these interests expressed? This is especially conspicuous as there has been significant increase in the activism of different non-party citizens groups in the Finnish society during the last ten or so years. These groups have been active in the questions of nature conservation – specially in the forest question – and to a lesser extent in housing question, only to mention a few. In the following section I try to outline few possible answers to this problem.

One reason why the planning of the area didn't activate different groups may lie in the fact that the area has never belonged to citizens. It has been mentally overtaken by the State long time ago. The long Finnish administrative tradition where citizens have been more subjects to the State than citizens of the city, and the strong constitutional rights of private property make it harder for people to protest in a case in which they don't feel as having a rightful interest. The area is also "nobody's neighbourhood" as it is a part of the city's administrative and business centre. The seemingly endless planning of the area has also given people an impression of a "frozen scene", an area which never changes. The planned construction of the museum is not really a threat to this stability as it is going to be built in the corner of the area right next to the main post office. As other projects are kept waiting, it is highly unlikely that the situation will change rapidly.

For its part this case shows interestingly that the local outcomes of more general processes in the society can be different, even totally opposite, in different places (MASSEY 1983). However, this doesn't mean that the processes and the outcomes didn't have anything to do with each other, or that this kind of research would only be collecting local "curios" with no connection to things happening on larger scale.

NOTES

1. SOJA emphasizes that "we have to be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology." (SOJA 1989: 6).
2. It has to be noted here that in spite of the growing popularity of the new planning practices, Finnish urban planning is still relatively democratic if compared for example to some British or American examples.

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