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„Then we‘ll take it along, even though we wouldn‘t take it along“

On the role of spaces and things in transitions into multigenerational cohousing

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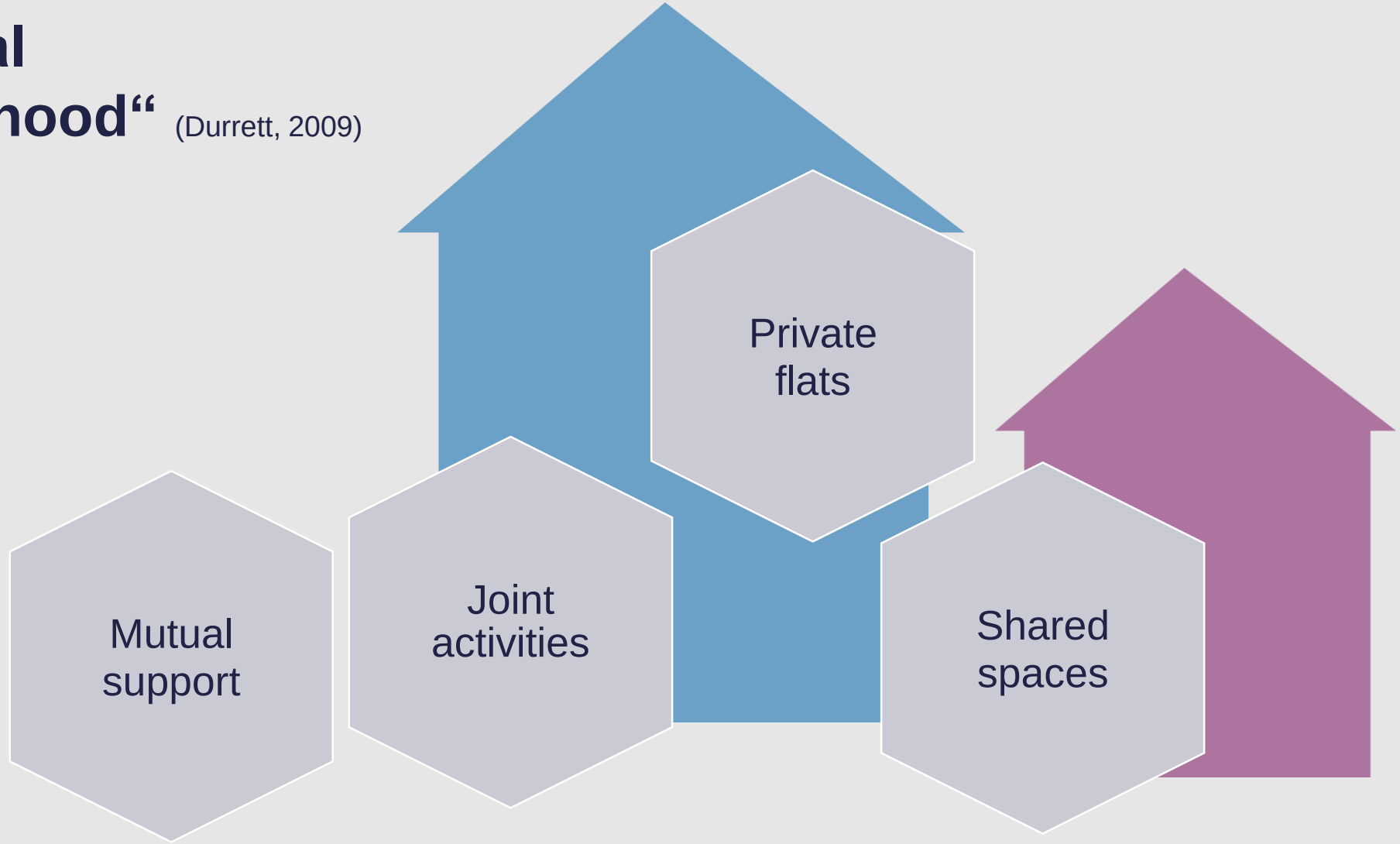
What is cohousing?

„Intentional neighbourhood“ (Durrett, 2009)



Outline

1. Overview PhD project
2. Background
3. Results: Spaces and things in relocations into cohousing
4. Conclusion

PhD project – Research questions + methods

Today: Focus on role of spaces and things

Research questions:

1) How, under which conditions and why do people decide to move into multigenerational cohousing?

2) How do relocations into multigenerational cohousing take shape and how do movers experience those?

3) How do furnishing and (initial) housing in multigenerational cohousing take shape?

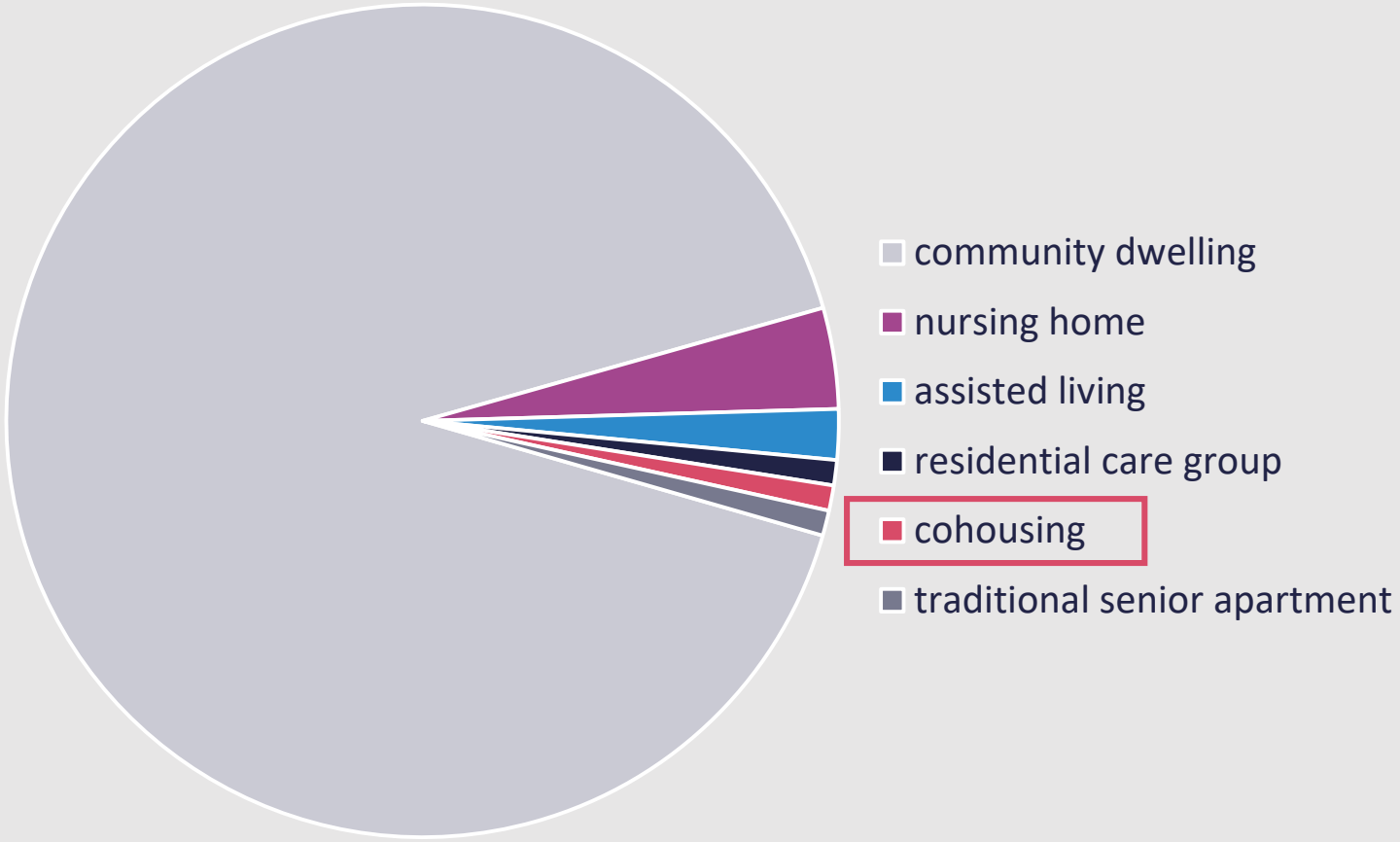
Mixed-methods study with movers on two measurement points (before + after relocation):

Structured interviews
(*n*=7; age: 49-74)

Online-Survey
(*n*=54; age: 26-70)

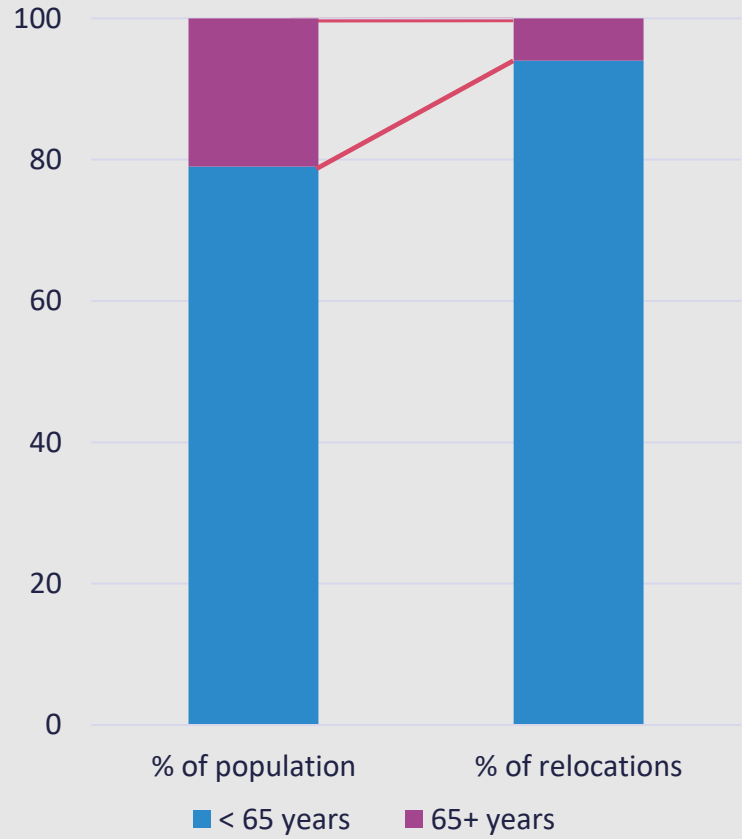
Housing and relocation among 65+

Types of housing in old age (65+) in Germany



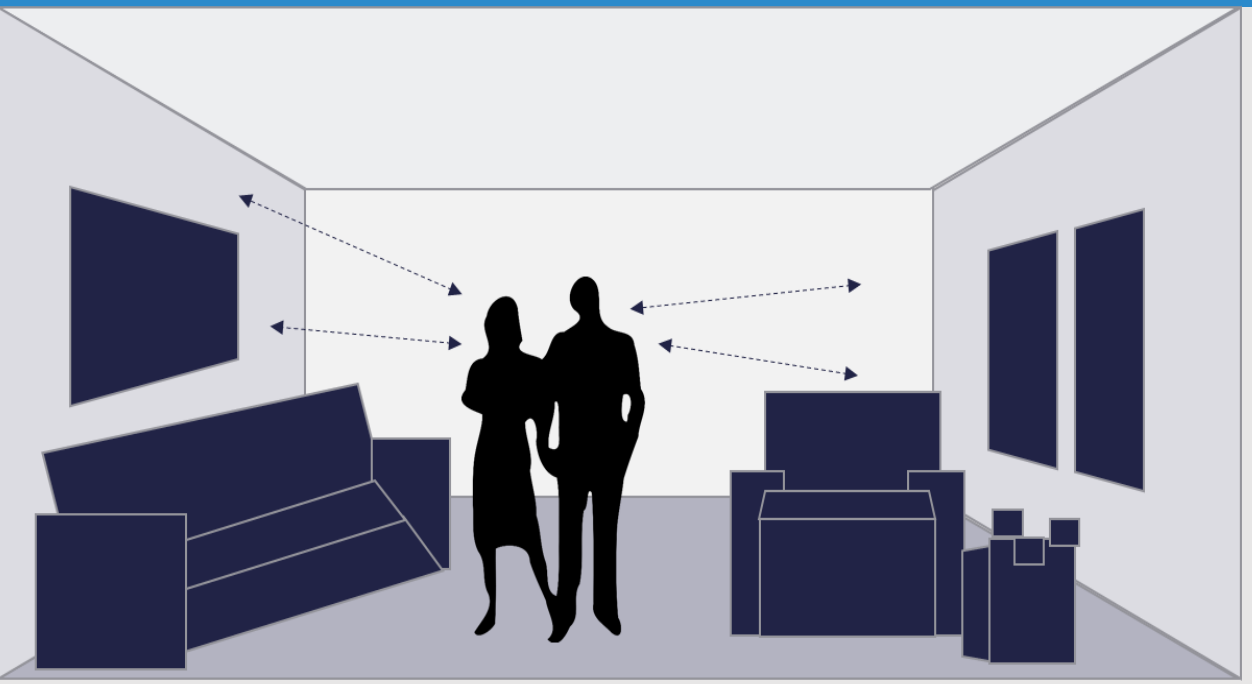
Source: BMVBS 2011

Relocation frequencies in Germany



Source: Datenreport 2016 Wohnen, Statistisches Bundesamt, own figure

Theoretical background



- Housing and relocation as dynamic transaction between people and housing environments: spatial, social, psychological (Flade, 1987; Oswald, 1996; Wahl et al., 2012; Wiseman, 1980)
- Spaces and things show diverse affordances that influence behaviour (Barker, 1987; Gibson, 1982; Lewin, 1936)
- Residents‘ biographies and parts of the housing environment are meaningfully linked (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Rowles & Watkins, 2003; Rubinstein, 1989)

- Relocations shift attention to spaces and things
  - Ambivalence in selection of things (Depner, 2015; Lüscher & Haller, 2016; Ekerdt, 2018)
  - Reflection of current and future self-concept (Depner, 2015; Goodwin, 1993; Habermas, 1996; Hormuth, 1990)
- Awareness for decisions without decisions being entirely conscious (Pfister et al., 2017)

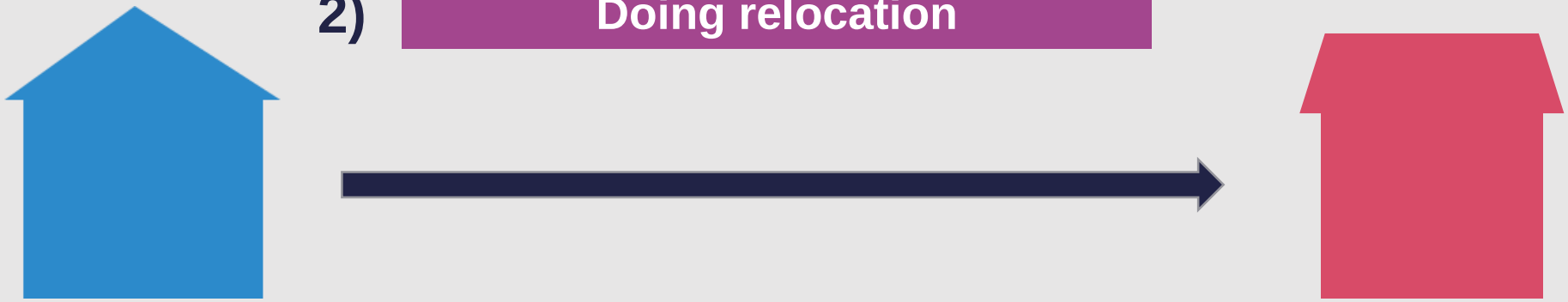
Results: Person-environment transactions in the transition into cohousing

The role of spaces and things in…

1) **Doing decision**

2) **Doing relocation**

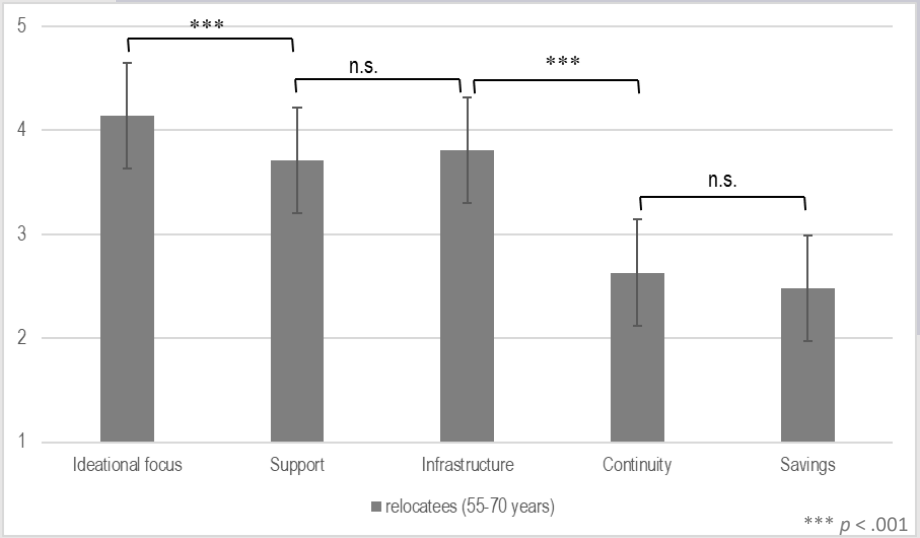
3) **Doing cohousing**



1 Doing decision

deciding about cohousing

- movers (55-70 years) rated infrastructure second most important reason for cohousing (after ideational focus)
- former housing environments become push-factors due to their spatial features
- anticipating future person-environment transactions motivates relocation decision



*„The **traffic** here outside has increased, increased, increased. So to the back, in summer, I can hardly tilt the window at night, because it‘s just **too loud**. And there is little green around, especially in this area.“* (Ms. Vogel, T1)

*„And it is of course very important, that one can **imagine** to spend the **next years** here without any problem. The **elevator** is something worth considering. Or local public transport.“* (Ms. Meier, T2)

2 Doing relocation

choosing things

- material features influence decision
- material features match time perspective
- self-reflection in selecting things

*„The sideboard is pretty **massive** – maybe it‘s going to be too narrow, so that I‘ll have to part with that piece as well.“* (Ms. Vogel, T1)

*„„It is something **definitive** then and that‘s why we‘ve already bought a shelf now, with regard to this relocation, that is very **stable** and good.“* (Mr. Finke, T1)

*„What is also very difficult is – really like office stuff for example, to **say goodbye** to that. […] When you say ‚Okay, I don‘t need that anymore!‘, then that‘s a bit like also **giving up** that part of your life.“* (Ms. Meier, T1)

2 Doing relocation

taking things along

- possibility to maintain continuity in spite of change
- **but:** no guarantee of feeling at home through presence of belongings („inner vs. outer relocation“)

old and new spaces competing

- detachment to old place while establishing attachment to new place

*„In these completely **new surroundings**, being able to put the furnishing from another context together again in another collage, works out really well. Thereby I immediately feel at **home**.“*

(Ms. Meier, T2)

*„I was feeling like, ‚Once my **plants** are here, I will be here, too.‘ But it was just incredibly hard for me to settle in here. And I didn‘t fully settle in yet.“* (Ms. Vogel, T2)

2 Doing relocation

new spaces taking shape

- opportunity to draw on housing and relocation experience („internalized environments“)
- opportunity to regulate emotions through change of environment
- type of housing influences process of furnishing

*„For me, it is important to move out of this apartment so that I get distance to this relationship. […] **So** the outer environment has to become a different one and it has to be so that I **made it myself**.“*
(Ms. Meier, T1)

*„But here took priority that everything started with the cohousing project. And therefore, in the first months, there was **no time for us** to really arrive here and furnish the apartment.“*
(Mr. Finke, T2)

3 Doing cohousing

spaces shaping community / community shaping spaces

- overlap of private and communal appropriation of spaces
- socio-spatial proximity enables intergenerational contact, but also prompts age role expectations

spaces shaping habits

- socio-spatial arrangement of neighbourhood co-creates new behavior

*„Especially in those **semi-public areas** you cannot just say ‚That‘s mine, I lumber everything up with flower pots.‘ […] We said ‚What kind of plants are you gonna get?‘ We talked about it **together**, because that‘s also fun.“* (Ms. Meier, T2)

*„Previously, I used to lay down on the bed a lot to read and snooze and think. I have done that very seldom so far. Because here, **with this neighbourhood**, I always think, and that actually also happens quite often, that someone rings or knocks at the door.“* (Ms. Lang, T2)

3 Doing cohousing

sharing things

- putting ‚sorting out' into perspective
- putting ‚property' into perspective
- enabling behaviour (e.g. car sharing)
- allowing to keep things from different life stages

*„We don't throw anything out but ask ourselves ‚Can **other people use** it?' Then we take it along anyway, even though we wouldn't take it along."* (Mr. Finke, T1)

*„There were things that I didn't know about yet, if I still wanted them, so I took them with me. […] Some of those things wound up in the **guest rooms** or at my neighbours."* (Ms. Fischer, T2)

Conclusion

Doing decision

Doing relocation

Doing cohousing

1. Spaces and things contribute to peoples‘ housing decisions

2. Complex role of spaces + things in relocation process
   → change of housing environment allows for self-reflection and emotional regulation, but also asks for letting go and making tough choices
   → type of housing influences settling in

3. Spaces and things become socio-material elements that influence experience + behaviour
   → Interweaving of individual- and group-environment-transaction

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Thank you very much!

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