

10 Presenting coworking spaces and chrono-urbanism as a policy package for sustainable mobility in post-pandemic Malta

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Introduction

This chapter proposes a policy package that includes coworking spaces (CSs) combined with chrono-urbanism – the concept in which people access urban services and amenities mostly by walking or cycling in an urban area within a given time (Moreno et al., 2021) – in the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, with a special focus on Malta. Malta is an archipelago comprising three islands: Malta, Gozo, and Comino. Its total land area is 316 km². The archipelago consists of six districts and 68 local councils. The population density of Malta is one of the highest in the EU (1867 persons/km²) (National Statistics Office, 2019). The population of Malta had grown stable by 2010, but as of 2013, it started to increase with immigrants and expats working mostly in the technological, financial, and building industries, reaching half a million. With respect to mobility in Malta, cars are favoured over alternate forms of transportation, namely due to a car-oriented culture and infrastructure investments that prioritize them.

For this chapter, CSs are defined as membership-based workspaces in which diverse groups of entrepreneurs and other non-traditional workers work together in shared, communal spaces (Howell & Bingham, 2019). The concept of CSs in Malta is relatively new, starting around 2015 and based on a bottom-up free-market approach with grassroots initiatives (Capdevila, 2017) from local and foreign entrepreneurs.

Accessibility to CSs and their geographic proximity highly influence mobility patterns (Mariotti & Akhavan, 2020). There are two important approaches to choosing the right strategic location for a CS. From an entrepreneurial point of view, the CS needs to be located in a high catchment area to maintain and receive a large number of customers, whereas from a mobility perspective, accessibility to the CS is key. The aim of this chapter is to explore how coworking spaces and chrono-urbanism can be part of a policy package that can be used to encourage sustainable mobility in a car-dependent society, Malta. It adopts a mixed methods approach that includes quantitative analysis from an online questionnaire, analysis of narratives from semi-structured interviews, and reviews and evaluations of mobility-related policies.

This chapter proceeds with the background to the case study, Malta, together with literature on how the pandemic has influenced work and what is being done to rebound in the post-pandemic period. This description is followed by the research methods, detailing how the research was conducted. The analysis is divided into three parts: travel behaviour before and during the partial lockdown, narratives from local councils, and policy review and evaluation. The discussion ties the findings in with the existing literature and is followed by the conclusion.

Background

The population in Malta is mostly clustered into two districts, the Northern Harbour and Southern Harbour. These districts also host the major employment locations in Malta, including the capital city, Valletta. The CSs are mainly located in the Northern Harbour, the Southern Harbour, and the Northern District (Figure 10.1).

The first case of COVID-19 in Malta was confirmed on 7 March 2020 (Baldacchino, 2020). The partial lockdown started on 12 March 2020, with schools and shops shut down and all non-essential public gatherings cancelled. Some workers were urged to shift to online operations and delivery services (Baldacchino, 2020) and 88% of employees engaged in teleworking (Malta Business Bureau, 2021).

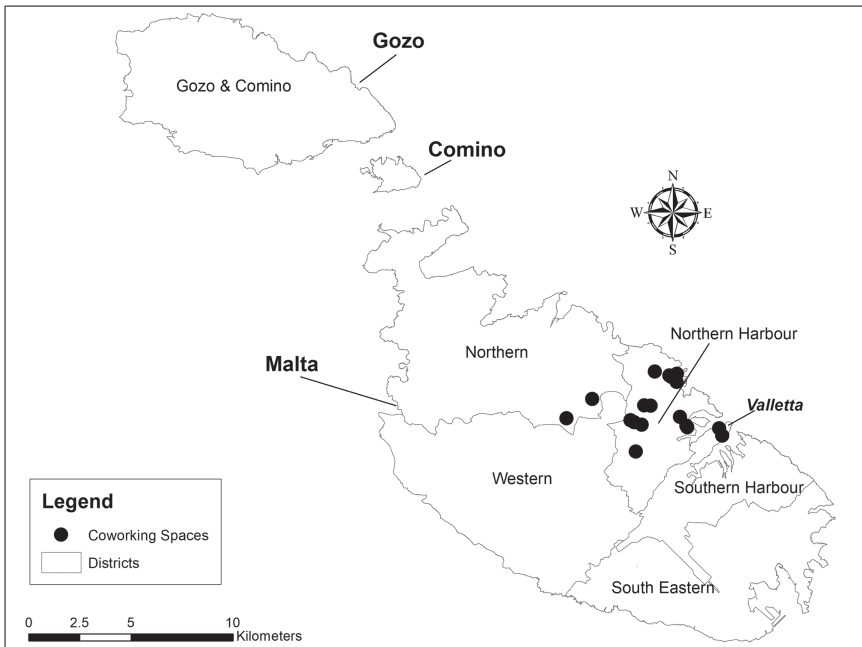


Figure 10.1 Map of Malta showing the districts and the locations of the CSs.

Source: Authors, 2021.

This practice became the norm worldwide (Shibayama et al., 2021). As a result of the restrictions, the traffic volume dropped and public spaces became deserted (Baldacchino, 2020). Following the lockdown, the government introduced a series of measures in June 2020 to revive the economy. For instance, Controlled Vehicular Access (CVA) fees to enter the capital city, Valletta, were waived (Farrugia, 2020).

The pandemic has impacted the principles of CSs, which involve engendering a sense of community amongst workers who use such premises (Manzini Ceinar & Mariotti, 2021). For example, CSs have provided online social services to their communities to support them while working remotely (Manzini Ceinar & Mariotti, 2021).

This outbreak is one of the most disruptive events of the twenty-first century. It has changed not only workflow dynamics but also travel behaviour and transport modes (Beck & Hensher, 2020). Due to social distancing, public transport has had to follow strict health guidelines. Accordingly, the number of passengers using public transport has declined, with some becoming active commuters by either walking or biking, and others preferring their personal cars to travel (Eisenmann et al., 2021).

For cities to rebound after the pandemic, several researchers and activists have proposed the timed-city concept (Moreno et al., 2021). This is a simple concept originally advocated in the early 1960s in which the streets are given back to the people (Jacobs, 1961) rather than used solely for motorized transport. In 2016, the idea became formalized as a time concept known as ‘chrono-urbanism’ (Moreno et al., 2021) in which people can reach their destinations in 15, 20, or 30 minutes by engaging in sustainable mobility, including active travel. This concept has been implemented in big cities such as Barcelona (Gearey, 2019) and Melbourne (Victoria State Government, 2019) and is also being considered for implementation in other cities such as Paris, Milan, Madrid, Edinburgh, and Seattle.

Research methodology

This chapter suggests policy packages that combine quick wins such as CSs and chrono-urbanism to achieve sustainable mobility. We applied a mixed-methods approach combining primary and secondary data. The primary data involved questionnaires distributed online during the partial lockdown (20 March to 20 April 2020). We obtained 973 valid responses, which were used to identify occupations, where people travel under normal circumstances, and how travel behaviour changed with the partial lockdown. We adopted the national classification for the type of occupation (National Statistics Office, 2021). Cluster analysis (CA) was used to identify demographic profiles in relation to occupation and travel behaviour. Participants who were unemployed or held basic employment titles (e.g. cleaners) were excluded in order to analyze participants who could potentially make use of CSs with their current employment, including students. As a result, the population sample decreased to $n = 919$.

Another primary dataset consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with seven local councils, equivalent to 10% of local councils in Malta. Due to social distancing, these interviews were carried out by telephone or communicated via

email. The local councils were anonymized using the code LC*n*. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews included opinions about the 20-minute city, whether the participants were familiar with CSs, what measures would help the 20-minute city and associated barriers and benefits, and how CSs and the timed-city concept could contribute to the community's well-being.

Secondary data primarily included a review of two national transport documents, the strategy (Transport Malta, 2016a) and the masterplan (Transport Malta, 2016b), labelled T1 and T2, respectively. Both included the ex-ante pandemic scenario and were prepared without prior knowledge about the pandemic, yet their vision is long term and goes beyond the pandemic timeline. Additionally, we reviewed legislation targeting alternative mobility during the pandemic, namely A.L. 86.2021 (Government of Malta, 2021b), Standards and Guidance for Transport Service Providers and for Passengers using Transport Services (Government of Malta, 2021a), and Taxi and Cab Owners and Drivers (Government of Malta, 2020), labelled L1, L2, and L3, respectively. The aim of all this legislation was specifically to control and reduce the spread of infection.

The documents were analyzed using Bardach's (2012) evaluative criteria, namely: efficiency, fairness, community, process values, and problem solution. Efficiency refers to benefits that the public would enjoy with implementation of the policy. For example, if applied to alternative mobility, there would be an increase in use, which in turn provides accessibility with reduced or no pollution. Fairness refers to a policy that is just. It reflects the availability of more mobility options that contribute to reduced emissions and healthier urban lifestyles. Community regards emphasizing safety, security, and equal opportunities, for example, promoting the use of alternative modes of transport (e.g. active travel increasing the sense of safety and reducing pollution). Process value refers to stakeholder involvement, such as consulting stakeholders on alternative mobility. Problem solution refers to policies that solve the target problem to an acceptable degree; that is, increasing the use of alternative mobility.

These criteria were essentially designed to be used as guidelines to evaluate policies. By assessing policy documents with respect to these basic but fundamental criteria and searching for references of sustainable mobility (in this case transport modes alternative to cars), we were able to observe possible weaknesses (e.g. a policy that does not address fairness) in the official documents. Taking the National Transport Strategy as an example, and using the criteria 'efficiency', the analysis involved reviewing the document and searching for objectives that targeted the use of sustainable modes of transport that can increase accessibility and reduce air pollution.

Travel behaviour before and during the partial lockdown

The results of the questionnaire indicate that 78% of participants owned a vehicle. Personal cars were the main mode of transport (72%), followed by bus (16%); 7% walked, 3% used a motorbike, 2% used the ferry, and 1% used a bicycle. Before COVID-19, the participants travelled mostly to the Northern Harbour District.

Ninety-nine percent of participants stated that their lifestyle had changed with the partial lockdown. In fact, 76% of participants mostly stayed inside and teleworked. Participants with children also had to homeschool them. With regard to occupation, 37% of the population sample were students and 36% professionals, followed by clerks (16%), technicians and associate professionals (4%), legislators and senior officials (4%), and service workers and shop/market salespeople (3%).

Pearson's chi-squared (X^2) test was used to identify the relationship between occupation (the dependent variable) and the independent variables: gender, age, dependants, district of residence, work district, education district, vehicle ownership, and primary mode of transport. All these associations were statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval.

Following the tests of association, cluster analysis (CA) was performed to profile the participants in relation to their occupation (Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Cluster groups of the participants showing proportion and description of classes.

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Cluster 1</i>	<i>Cluster 2</i>	<i>Combined</i>
		705 (76.7)	214 (23.3)	919 (100)
Gender	Male	191 (71.5)	76 (28.5)	267 (100)
	Female	514 (78.8)	138 (21.2)	652 (100)
Age	18–29	387 (86.4)	61 (13.6)	448 (100)
	30–39	156 (77.2)	46 (22.8)	202 (100)
	40–49	108 (63.2)	63 (36.8)	171 (100)
	50–59	38 (50.7)	37 (49.3)	75 (100)
	60+	16 (69.6)	7 (30.4)	23 (100)
Dependants	No	462 (81.3)	106 (18.7)	568 (100)
	Children	157 (69.5)	69 (30.5)	226 (100)
	Elderly	44 (66.7)	22 (33.3)	66 (100)
	Other	9 (100.0)	0 (0)	9 (100)
	More than one	33 (66.0)	17 (34.0)	50 (100)
Occupation	Legislators and senior officials	21 (63.6)	12 (36.4)	33 (100)
	Professionals	242 (74.2)	84 (25.8)	326 (100)
	Technicians and associate professionals	24 (60)	16 (40)	40 (100)
	Clerks	97 (64.2)	54 (35.8)	151 (100)
	Service workers and shop and market sales workers	23 (76.7)	7 (23.3)	30 (100)
	Student	298 (87.9)	41 (12.1)	339 (100)
Work district	Northern Harbour	273 (70.7)	113 (29.3)	386 (100)
	Southern Harbour	81 (78.6)	22 (21.4)	103 (100)
	Western	39 (62.9)	23 (37.1)	62 (100)
	South Eastern	11 (91.7)	1 (8.3)	12 (100)
	Northern	34 (79.1)	9 (20.9)	43 (100)
	Gozo & Comino	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	11 (100)

(Continued)

Table 10.1 (Continued)

Variables		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Combined
District travelled to mostly (e.g. for errands, work, and education)	Northern Harbour	544 (78.0)	153 (22.0)	697 (100)
	Southern Harbour	75 (76.5)	23 (23.5)	98 (100)
	Western	32 (64.0)	18 (36.0)	50 (100)
	South Eastern	12 (80.0)	3 (20.0)	15 (100)
	Northern	37 (77.1)	11 (22.9)	48 (100)
	Gozo & Comino	5 (45.5)	6 (54.5)	11 (100)
Vehicle ownership	Yes	531 (74.5)	182 (25.5)	713 (100)
	No	174 (84.5)	32 (15.5)	206 (100)
Mostly used mode of transport	Bus	128 (87.7)	18 (12.3)	146 (100)
	Bicycle	3 (37.5)	5 (62.5)	8 (100)
	Walk	47 (75.8)	15 (24.2)	62 (100)
	Car	500 (75.4)	163 (24.6)	663 (100)
	Motorbike	15 (57.7)	11 (42.3)	26 (100)
	Other	12 (85.7)	2 (14.3)	14 (100)

Source: Authors.

Note: Values in parentheses are %

Cluster 1: women engaged in alternative mobility

Cluster 1 consists of 76.7% of all participants (Table 10.1) and represents 78.8% of female participants; 86.4% of cluster 1 is between 18 and 29 years old. All have ‘other’ types of dependents, e.g. pets, and 81.3% have no dependents. Cluster 1 is characterized by students (87.8%); 76.7% are service workers and shop and market sales workers, and 74.2% are professionals. The work district and the district travelled to mostly, e.g. for errands, work, and education, was in both cases the South Eastern (91.7% and 80%, respectively). In cluster 1, the majority (84.5%) did not own a vehicle and 87.7% used the bus.

Cluster 2: male professionals who work in Gozo and Comino and cycle

Cluster 2 covers 23.3% of all participants (Table 10.1). Men dominated this cluster (28.5%), and 49.3% were between 50 and 59 years old. In contrast to cluster 1, 34% had more than one dependant and 40% were technicians and associate professionals, followed by 36.4% legislators and senior officials, and 35.8% clerks. The work district for cluster 2 was Gozo and Comino (54.4%), similar to the district that was travelled to most. Table 10.1 shows that in cluster 2, 25.5% owned a vehicle and 62.5% went by bicycle.

The CA yielded an understanding of the typical travel behaviour of the participants and established their profile before COVID-19. By exploring the views of the local councils, we studied the possibility of creating policy packages that support sustainable mobility, such as the combination of CSs with chrono-urbanism. Equally important was an evaluation of the local councils’ awareness of these two concepts.

Narratives from the local councils

Views regarding the 20-minute city

Most of local council participants agreed that the 20-minute city would be an effective concept in Malta given the short distances across each town or village.

The concept of the 20 minutes city works in Malta, since we have short distances and our localities are small.

(LC5)

LC1 pointed out that this concept would decrease traffic volume, encourage walkability or biking, and be highly beneficial for small businesses. However, LC1 also stated that its attempts to reduce traffic volume in the central area was not appreciated by all inhabitants. The general consensus is that it is hard to change the mindset of local inhabitants and businesses.

When [we] tested out a similar concept the businesses were in shock . . . It takes time in changing the mentality of the residents as well as the businesses.

(LC1)

Measures that would encourage the uptake of the 20-minute city concept

The majority of local council participants admitted that the 20-minute-city approach would be a functional alternative only with improvements to the road system, the existence of efficient alternative modes of transport, and adequate encouragement and awareness about them.

More road management, better public transport and more encouragement and awareness about cycling as in Malta we do not use much of this mode of transport.

(LC2)

LC3 emphasized the fact that when towns include active travel and bus use, they support accessibility to amenities such as schools and supermarkets. In such cases, adoption of the 20-minute concept, which is based on proximity between the origin and the destination (e.g. work, errands, leisure), would be possible since people can reach their destinations easily in shorter distances and times.

One local council representative expressed that car-free zones could increase residential spaces in towns. This would consequently favour environmental conservation and support better community life. However, removing cars from the streets in central areas of towns would be challenging because of 'people's mentality' (LC7).

Barriers to the implementation of the 20-minute city concept

In the participants' view, there are a number of barriers which prevent the timed-city concept from being a suitable solution in Malta. LC4 stated that if public transport does not operate properly, the inhabitants would revert to using their personal cars, thus leading to failure of the concept (LC4).

It was also highlighted that inadequacy of the cycling network might discourage bicycle use as an alternative mode of transport.

If there are a few bicycle lanes it may be a bit dangerous to use a bicycle on the road.

(LC4)

Malta's hot summers may hinder people from making use of active transport. In addition, parents with young children prefer commuting to different destinations for extracurricular activities with their personal cars since the current transport system does not meet their expectations. Therefore, this group of people might find it very difficult to move around with this concept.

One of the barriers can be our way of living . . . especially those family [sic] with small children, they need to take them to schools, various sports nurseries, museum, private lesson and much more.

(LC5)

Expected benefits of the 20-minute city concept

If many local communities were to use this concept, there would be less pollution and less traffic, especially during rush hours, and commuting would be less stressful. This concept would encourage reduced car use and related congestion, enabling safer, walkable streets and encouraging inclusive societies.

This concept will help, because for sure there will be less pollution. Less traffic jams, more inclusive society. I think from such initiative all generations will gain, especially the elderly.

(LC5)

Plans to encourage use of alternative modes of transport

Although nearly half of participants do not have any plan to apply this approach to their towns, others have pointed out that they have attempted to encourage the use of alternative mobility by introducing bike-sharing stations, providing facilities such as bike storage, signs that estimate the walking/biking travel time to different destinations, and plans to create attractive walking trails from central areas to open

areas in nature. LC4 and LC7, however, observe that changing people's mentality still remains a long process.

Workplaces that could enhance the 20-minute city

Workplaces with parking problems would greatly benefit from this concept. These are often located in areas with high concentrations of offices and working spaces, so distributing working spaces in more localized areas would be an alternative solution.

Yes, as there are a lot of workplaces around Malta that the locality that they are situated in poses a lot of parking and traffic problems. So, putting into practice this concept will benefit them.

(LC6)

LC1 stated that this approach might make the local economy healthier, with businesses cooperating better and succeeding more.

Awareness of CSs

Although half of participants had never heard of CSs, all understood the concept: 'I think it is when a group of people work together in one common area' (LC4). The majority of participants acknowledged the benefits of this idea, particularly for government-based purposes, to boost cooperation and interaction.

The contribution of CSs to community well-being in the 20-minute city concept

The majority of participants noticed that combining the idea of CSs with the timed-city concept can greatly contribute to a community's well-being. They added that the introduction of CSs can increase local social interaction, improve mobility, and change lifestyles.

More social interaction, more networking, calmer, focused and motivated, and if their mode of transport is by walk or bicycle, they also feel healthy and fit.

(LC4)

This idea could result in social change, thus creating healthier communities. Moreover, this process helps to cultivate the coworking culture.

And coworking will share not only the spaces, but also experiences and I believe that this will help to have more flexible employers and employees.

(LC5)

After studying the local councils' awareness and views regarding CSs and chrono-urbanism, we assessed the policy documents in favour of alternative modes of transport. It is important to note that none of the policy documents referred to CSs or the timed-city concept.

Policy review and evaluation

In line with the scope of this chapter, this concise review relates specifically to land-based mobility alternatives to personal cars.

Review

The National Transport Strategy (2016a) and Transport Master Plan (2016b)

The strategy, T1, is a document with an inclusive vision and strategic goals. The strategic goal associated with the use of alternative modes of transport to the car is to 'support social development and inclusion', 'provide accessibility and mobility', and 'work towards public health'. The strategic direction has eight guiding principles, of which principle 2 ('Creating Modal Shift') is directly related to the use of modes of transport alternative to cars.

As the masterplan, T2 reflects T1 and includes more operational objectives and associated measures such as providing alternatives to cars, improving the service quality of public transport, improving seamless intermodal mobility, and developing transport hubs to encourage intermodality. The timeline for T2 and T1 is 2025 and 2050, respectively, extending well into the post-pandemic scenario.

Legislation and guidelines during the partial lockdown

L1 contained mobility between Malta and Gozo for those working or visiting family members, or for medical reasons. L2 included guidelines for face masks aboard vehicles and restrictions regarding passenger numbers. Furthermore, passengers were encouraged to pay their fares using the bus card. Air

Table 10.2 Evaluation of policy documents using five evaluative criteria as adapted from Bardach (2012).

<i>Evaluative Criteria</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>L1</i>	<i>L2</i>	<i>L3</i>
Efficiency	Addressed	Addressed	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Fairness	Addressed	Addressed	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Community	Addressed	Addressed	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Process value	Addressed	Addressed	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Problem solution	Addressed	Addressed	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.

Source: Authors.

conditioning was to remain running with the bus systems fumigated every night.

Evaluation

The following matrix (Table 10.2) applies Bardach's (2012) evaluative criteria to the documents reviewed. The evaluation includes the term 'addressed' in cases in which the specific policies directly refer to the aspects related to the criteria and the term 'N.A.' for 'not addressed' in cases in which the documents do not refer to the criteria.

As can be seen in Table 10.2, T1 and T2 addressed the criteria, but L1, L2, and L3 did not. This is because the context and aims of the legislation and guidelines were different from those of the transport strategy and masterplan.

The review and evaluation of the policy documents showed that the long-term vision to engage in sustainable mobility is available, yet it does not refer to chrono-urbanism or its integration with CSs. Furthermore, legislation that targets pandemic-related mobility issues does not emphasize the importance of sustainable mobility, instead focusing only on limiting contagion.

Discussion

Surprisingly, in a car-oriented society such as Malta, we found that prior to the pandemic, the two population clusters that emerged from this research engaged in alternative modes of transport (cluster 1, bus; cluster 2, cycling). The findings show that women used the bus more than men. Moreover, Gozo, mostly rural with a lower population than Malta, instills a sense of safety and encourages people to cycle.

The use of alternative modes of transport is, however, not yet the norm in Malta. The National Malta Transport Strategy (Transport Malta, 2016a) and Masterplan (Transport Malta, 2016b) both have a vision and targets to introduce the use of alternative mobility. These were written four years before COVID-19, so they did not envisage a pandemic scenario, but their targets of engaging in active travel can be applied in a pandemic situation as well as beyond. As expected, the legislation and guidelines during the pandemic were focused on health and safety measures, namely to reduce contagion on public transport modes such as buses and taxis; however, they do not encourage alternative and sustainable mobility, which can promote healthy lifestyles even in a pandemic. Even worse, from a transport policy perspective, the CVA was removed. In contrast, foreign cities (e.g. Berlin, Seattle, and Bogotá) used the pandemic as an opportunity to engage in sustainable mobility (Moreno et al., 2021).

The responses from local council participants were promising. As administrative units, they were in favour of chrono-urbanism and combining it with CSs. It was observed, however, that the initiative for behavioural change has to come equally from both top-down and bottom-up. That is, governments

should facilitate the timed-city concept and support CSs, and small businesses and communities should take an active role in engaging in the use of alternative and sustainable mobility and using shared spaces for working. Such a change would be beneficial for advancing societies and economies with new ideas and innovation (Capdevila, 2015).

Conclusion

In this chapter, it is evident that even in a car-dependent country such as Malta, there are people and entities that support the use of greener and healthier modes of transport. Furthermore, the vision for sustainable mobility already exists; however, the pandemic could have been used as a natural experiment to engage in more active travel.

The concept of sustainable mobility is written in Malta's national transport vision. To enhance this vision and engage in its practice, we suggest that policy packages such as the combination of CSs and chrono-urbanism be used as small quick wins during the pandemic and beyond. During the pandemic, CSs can operate following health protocols, so people who telework and feel lonely due to a lack of social interaction can enjoy the company of others during their working day and improve their mental well-being. During this time, the road infrastructure can also be improved to accommodate more active commuters (i.e. walking and cycling). In the post-pandemic era, such proposed packages may contribute to cohesive communities and better lifestyles.

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