

URBAN PARKS AS CREATIVE HUBS: FOSTERING ART AND IMAGINATION

Innovation, Art and Technology: New Frontiers in Urban Spaces

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ABSTRACT

The proposal "Urban Parks as Creative Hubs: Fostering Art and Imagination" aims to transform Bucaramanga's parks into creative learning hubs through the "Creative Train" program. This project offers free workshops for children, covering art, recycled crafts, music, theatre, creative science, and technology including 3D printing and augmented reality simulators, fostering their creativity. The workshops will be held in themed train carriages, providing an educational and fun environment. All workshops will be free to ensure inclusivity for all families. Additionally, partnerships with local educators, artists, and professionals will be established to enrich the activities. This project aims to revitalize parks as cultural meeting hubs, enhancing children's quality of life and strengthening the social fabric of Bucaramanga by turning parks into vibrant, lively spaces.

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1. A Creative Person is a Problem Solver.

The cultivation of creativity in children and young people should be recognised as a global priority, with the objective of fostering a more innovative, participatory and culturally enriched society. In this context, creativity is recognised as an essential tool that transcends mere artistic skills, manifesting itself in people's ability to solve problems in an effective and original way. A creative person is, in essence, a problem solver; they are someone who, when faced with a challenge, explores a variety of perspectives before focusing on the problem. This ability enables them to find quicker and more innovative solutions, which is crucial in a world that demands adaptability and critical thinking.

Today, society faces complex challenges in multiple areas, from the environmental crisis to social and economic inequalities. Innovation is becoming a prerequisite for addressing these problems effectively. People who develop their creativity from an early age are more likely to think independently and come up with original solutions. This kind of divergent thinking helps them not only to face personal challenges, but also to contribute positively to their communities and society as a whole.

Moreover, creativity is not limited to a specific field; it manifests itself in a variety of disciplines, from science and technology to the arts and education. For example, creative scientists are able to formulate innovative hypotheses and design experiments that challenge the status quo. Likewise, artists employ their imagination to convey profound messages and provoke reflection in the public. This cross-cutting nature of creativity demonstrates that its development is fundamental to all aspects of life.

The school environment also plays a crucial role in fostering creativity. Conventional educational methodologies, which emphasise memorisation and repetition, frequently constrain students' creative expression. It is imperative that educational institutions incorporate pedagogical approaches that stimulate critical thinking and exploration. Interdisciplinary projects, problem-based learning and hands-on activities that allow students to experiment and explore their own ideas are all possible through such initiatives.

The "Creative Train" programme in Bucaramanga's urban parks is an excellent example of how to foster creativity in an accessible and fun environment. The objective of this initiative is to transform parks into hubs for artistic and cultural learning through the provision of complimentary workshops encompassing art, recycling crafts, music, theatre, creative science and technology (e.g. 3D printing and augmented reality simulators). By offering a safe and stimulating environment, the 'Creative Train' provides children and young people with the opportunity to explore their talents, work in teams and develop essential skills for their future.

The integration of recycling crafts not only fosters creativity but also cultivates environmental awareness, equipping young individuals with the capacity to recognise the value in materials often deemed as waste, thereby nurturing an innovative mindset that can be applied across diverse contexts. This approach serves not only to stimulate creativity but also to educate about sustainability and the responsible utilisation of resources.

By fostering creativity from an early age, we can nurture a generation of individuals who are better prepared to navigate the evolving global landscape. These young people will not only be innovators, but also active citizens who contribute to the social cohesion and cultural development of their communities. It is therefore essential that public policies and educational programmes are aligned with this vision, supporting the creation of spaces that promote creativity and collaboration. Over time, the impact of these initiatives will not only improve the quality of life of children but also strengthen the social and cultural fabric of our communities, creating a positive legacy for future generations.

2. From Tradition to Technology

Modern cities have undergone significant transformations. Technological advances have transformed everyday life at an unprecedented pace; that which was once the stuff of science fiction is now part of our reality. Autonomous vehicles, smartphones and virtual assistants represent a triad of innovations that have expedited the arrival of a future that was once considered a remote possibility. Nevertheless, despite inhabiting a hyper-connected world, replete with pervasive artificial intelligence and augmented reality, numerous urban spaces persist in their stagnancy. Parks, which should be the epicentres of interaction and learning, are in many cases limited to being places to just hang out. These green spaces have not been effectively leveraged to cultivate creativity and innovation.

This state of affairs underscores the imperative for a re-evaluation of the utilisation of these spaces, with a view to their transformation into authentic learning laboratories. It is imperative to impart and nurture creative competencies encompassing a spectrum from the artisanal and manufacturing domains to the sophisticated technological advancements that pervade our contemporary milieu. In a world where artificial intelligence can perform tasks that were previously exclusive to humans, the ability to think, create and innovate becomes increasingly paramount. While technology offers powerful tools for personal and professional development, there is a risk that people will become overly dependent on these technologies, neglecting fundamental skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and creativity.

It is imperative to emphasise the significance of encouraging handwork, craftsmanship and creation from an early age, as this not only cultivates practical skills but also fosters a profound appreciation for the process of creation itself. The satisfaction derived from the act of creation is unparalleled and fosters a deeper connection to the work being done. Through the act of creation, experimentation with diverse materials and techniques, children and young people are able to cultivate an innovative mindset, enabling them to approach challenges from multiple vantage points.

Furthermore, the integration of modern technology with manual work can create an educational environment that is both relevant and inspiring. A notable illustration of this integration is the instruction of young individuals in the utilisation of digital tools for the design of objects that can subsequently be physically manufactured. This approach cultivates a formidable amalgamation of competencies, thereby fostering both creativity and adaptability. This equips young people with the skills necessary to thrive in the contemporary workforce and to contribute meaningfully to the innovation-driven economy.

Consequently, there is a compelling case for the transformation of parks and other public spaces into environments conducive to education and creativity. The implementation of art, science and technology workshops within these environments has been shown to have a revitalising effect on the spaces concerned (Jones, 2023). Furthermore, such initiatives enable communities to engage actively in learning and creation (Smith, 2021). In this sense, parks can become hubs of creativity, where people can come together not only to enjoy the outdoors, but also to explore, learn and develop skills that prepare them for a future where innovation and creativity are more valuable than ever. The integration of the rustic with the technological has the potential to not only enhance the personal development of individuals but also contribute to the creation of more cohesive and resilient communities, which are better equipped to address future challenges with ingenuity and creativity.

2.1. Importance of Art and Creativity in Children's Development

Art and creativity are considered to be fundamental tools in the holistic development of children and young people. The period of childhood represents a pivotal stage in which the foundations for learning, socialisation and identity formation are established. Research has demonstrated that exposure to artistic activities from an early age has been shown to enhance cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking and communication skills. These skills are of paramount importance in a world that increasingly values innovation and adaptability.

The arts have been shown to stimulate the mind and encourage emotional and social expression. Through artistic creation, children are able to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe and constructive manner. This fosters the development of empathy, self-confidence and a more profound understanding of their environment. The capacity to articulate emotions through artistic expression fosters the establishment of profound connections with others, a fundamental aspect of the development of healthy relationships and social integration. Consequently, creativity is not merely an artistic skill, but rather an indispensable component of children's emotional and social development.

The "Creative Train" programme has been meticulously designed to provide a stimulating environment where children can explore their imagination through different artistic disciplines. The programme incorporates painting, drama, music and arts and crafts workshops, providing a platform for self-expression and the acquisition of new skills, as well as opportunities for collaborative learning and interaction. In a painting workshop, for instance, children not only experiment with colours and shapes, but also learn to work in a team, to listen to their peers' ideas and to express their own creative visions.

It is therefore argued that creativity can act as a catalyst for both personal and social transformation. Participation in the 'Creative Train' programme fosters innovation and problem-solving skills, equipping children with the tools to navigate and solve challenges in diverse ways. In a world where technology and artificial intelligence are redefining the work and social landscape, cultivating a creative mind becomes increasingly relevant. It is therefore vital to encourage creativity in children, as this will ensure that they become adults who can not only adapt to change but also drive it. Their ability to perceive opportunities in circumstances that others may perceive as insurmountable is a fundamental skill set for navigating the challenges of the future.

Furthermore, the cultivation of creativity and artistic expression is conducive to the promotion of inclusivity and diversity. The facilitation of art workshops, which often attract children from diverse backgrounds and contexts, fosters an atmosphere of acceptance and collaboration. This is of particular importance in a multicultural society, where the celebration and respect of diversity is paramount. Through collaborative creation, children learn to value differences and build bridges between their diverse experiences.

Furthermore, arts education plays a crucial role in the formation of practical skills. For instance, arts and crafts workshops not only impart artistic techniques but also cultivate fine motor skills, which are vital for a range of academic and daily activities. The acquisition of skills such as the use of tools, the mixing of colours, and the creation of structures fosters curiosity and a desire to experiment, which in turn translates into a more positive approach to learning in general.

In conclusion, it is imperative to underscore the fundamental role of art and creativity in children's holistic development. Programmes such as the "Creative Train" not only provide children with a space to explore and express their ideas but also cultivate skills that will be essential throughout their lives. Investing in the artistic and creative development of children is, therefore, a strategy that fosters a more innovative, inclusive and culturally enriched society. It is imperative to acknowledge that every brushstroke, every musical note, and every stage performance contributes to shaping individuals who not only dream but also have the tools to make those dreams a reality.

2.2. The City of Parks

Bucaramanga, located in the heart of Santander, Colombia, is known by the appellations "Ciudad Bonita" and the "City of Parks". The etymology is attributed to the aesthetic appeal of its urban landscape, which is juxtaposed with the allure of its natural surroundings. The city has more than 220 parks and green spaces, which contribute to an environment of tranquility and recreation. Chicamocha Park, renowned for its breathtaking vistas of the canyon, and the vibrant Parque de los Niños (Children's Park), which offers a plethora of activities for children, serve as prime examples of this commitment to environmental sustainability and recreational opportunities. These green spaces serve a dual purpose, not only beautifying the city but also functioning as communal gathering places where families can convene, engage in physical activity, participate in cultural activities and enjoy open-air events. The mild climate and diverse flora combine to create an environment that is conducive to leisurely strolls and relaxation. The parks are characterised by an atmosphere of joy and vitality, reflecting the welcoming and friendly spirit of the city's inhabitants. This reputation has led to Bucaramanga being recognised as an ideal place to live and enjoy.

2.3. Urban Parks as Creative Hubs

The transformation of parks and other public spaces into environments conducive to education and creativity is imperative for the holistic development of the community. In Bucaramanga, recognised as the "City of Parks", this phenomenon is particularly evident. With a plethora of green spaces numbering over 220, the city boasts a vast potential that, however, does not always translate into activities that foster the cultural and creative development of its citizens. A significant proportion of these parks are underutilised, serving merely as passageways or resting areas, without leveraging their potential to function as vibrant hubs of learning and collaboration.

This situation gives rise to the urgent need for a transformation of these spaces, with the objective of establishing them as epicentres of creative and educational activity. The proposal "Urban parks as creative hubs: promoting art and imagination" aims to address this gap by transforming parks into

dynamic and accessible learning hubs for children and young people, offering free workshops on art, science, technology and other subjects to stimulate creativity.

The implementation of these workshops in the parks will not only revitalise these spaces but also allow communities to become actively involved in their own learning and creative processes. The provision of diverse activities, integrating both rustic and technological elements, is poised to enhance personal development. The range of activities on offer is diverse, including craft workshops utilising recycled materials, 3D printing classes, and augmented reality simulators. These provide participants with opportunities to explore and experiment with various forms of art and technology. This multifaceted approach is poised to not only satiate curiosity but also to equip young individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in a future that is increasingly characterised by innovation and creativity.

The "Creative Train" proposal is predicated on the notion that such initiatives will foster a sense of community. The proposal emphasises the importance of communal engagement in outdoor spaces, where individuals not only experience the enjoyment of nature but also have the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge, thereby contributing to the strengthening of social bonds. These community activities provide a space for creativity and promote social cohesion and inclusion, ensuring that all families, irrespective of their economic situation, have access to opportunities for learning and personal growth.

In a world where artificial intelligence and technology are constantly evolving, it is crucial that individuals develop creative and critical skills. Rather than allowing technology to supplant thinking skills, it is essential to teach young people to use it as a tool to enhance their creativity. Education in these spaces must go beyond mere knowledge acquisition; it must foster critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to adapt to new challenges.

In this manner, Bucaramanga's parks can evolve into dynamic, vibrant spaces where creativity and education are not only present but symbiotically enhance each other. By cultivating an environment that celebrates creativity and collaboration, this project will impact the lives of children and young people, as well as contributing to the building of more cohesive and resilient communities, which will be capable of facing the challenges of the future with ingenuity and creativity. The transformation of parks into creative hubs is not merely an enhancement in the quality of life; it is an investment in the future of Bucaramanga and its citizens.

3. The Impact of the Creative Train Project in Bucaramanga's Main Parks

In an era where innovation and creativity are pivotal to social and cultural development, the importance of cultivating these skills from an early age cannot be overstated. In this context, the "Creative Train" programme in Bucaramanga, a city renowned for its natural beauty and extensive park system, presents a distinctive opportunity. This initiative aims to transform urban parks into inclusive creative hubs, offering complimentary workshops in art, science, technology and related fields for children and adolescents.

Creativity is a skill that is indispensable in today's society. Technological advances and globalisation have led to an increased demand for individuals to be able to adapt, innovate and collaborate in diverse environments. However, there is a growing body of evidence to suggest that the importance of cultivating these skills during childhood is often overlooked. The "Creative Train" programme has been developed to address this need by providing a safe and accessible space where children and young people can explore their imagination and develop their creative potential. The workshops have been designed to be both educational and enjoyable, encouraging curiosity and critical thinking.

The implementation of this programme in Bucaramanga's parks has the potential to impact multiple dimensions. Primarily, by offering free workshops, the "Creative Train" ensures that all families, irrespective of their economic situation, can participate, thus promoting inclusion and helping to remove barriers that often prevent children from different backgrounds from interacting and collaborating. The parks become spaces where children from diverse communities can come together, learn together and share their experiences, contributing to social cohesion and strengthening community ties.

Furthermore, by emphasising disciplines such as art, science and technology, the programme not only fosters creativity but also prepares young people for a future in which these skills will be of

increasing value. Science workshops, for instance, can ignite children's interest in technology and innovation, thus encouraging them to pursue careers in related domains. Similarly, art workshops provide a medium for self-expression and communication, which are vital skills in today's world.

Furthermore, the "Creative Train" has been shown to have a significant impact on the revitalisation of public spaces. Many parks in Bucaramanga, while aesthetically pleasing, often lack activities that attract the local community. By implementing this programme, they are given new life and purpose, transforming them into hubs of cultural and artistic activity. Parks are transformed from mere recreational areas to places where meaningful activities take place, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among residents.

Furthermore, the interaction between the participants and the educators/artists involved in the "Creative Train" fosters an enriching environment for all, with educators having the opportunity to share their passion and knowledge, while children benefit from the guidance and support of professionals. This exchange of ideas and experiences is invaluable and helps to build a stronger and more connected community.

It is important to note that the "Creative Train" programme has the potential to positively impact not only children and young people, but also their families and the broader community. As children participate in the programme, it is likely that their parents and family members will become involved as well, creating a network of support and participation that can extend beyond the workshops. This reinforces the idea that art and creativity are a shared heritage, accessible to all.

In conclusion, the "Creative Train" programme has the potential to transform Bucaramanga's parks into innovation hubs, learning and social cohesion. By providing a space where young people can explore their creativity, this project impacts the individual development of the participants, as well as contributing to the strengthening of the social and cultural fabric of the city. The successful implementation of this programme could represent a significant step towards a more inclusive and creative future, where every child has the opportunity to develop their potential and contribute positively to their community.

3.1. Evaluating the Impact of the Creative Train Programme on Participants' Creative and Social Development.

The initial phase of the "Creative Train" programme entails a thorough evaluation of its impact on the participants. To this end, structured surveys will be utilised to collate information regarding the perceptions of the creative activities held by children and parents. This approach will measure not only the enjoyment of the activities, but also the learning and skills acquired. The utilisation of these surveys is expected to provide a comprehensive representation of the programme's influence on the holistic development of the young people involved.

Art and creativity have been shown to play a crucial role in children's personal growth. Research has demonstrated that children who are creative are more likely to be resourceful and adaptable, which are skills that are vital for success in an ever-changing world. Creativity fosters the ability to think outside the box, and helps children deal with challenges in a more positive and effective way. The Creative Train programme is designed to build on this relationship by providing an environment where participants can explore and experiment with various forms of artistic expression, including painting, music and theatre. The programme is designed to be engaging and enjoyable for the children, and it is hoped that the variety of workshops will allow them to develop key skills for their future.

The evaluation of the programme's impact will also be based on semi-structured interviews with artists and educators involved in the workshops. These interviews are considered a vital component in comprehending the creative process in which the participants are engrossed. The educators, who play a pivotal role in facilitating learning, will be able to share their experiences and observations of the children's behaviour and progress during the activities. By gathering their perspectives, the most effective techniques and areas of improvement for future workshops can be identified.

For instance, should educators discern a notable interest in painting among a group of children, they may contemplate an expansion of that particular workshop or the incorporation of related components into other activities. The programme's success is contingent on its flexibility, and educators' feedback is a pivotal component in its continuous improvement.

In addition to assessing the development of artistic skills, it is equally important to measure the social impact that the "Creative Train" has on the participants. Creativity exerts an influence not only at the individual level, but also in the context of community-building. The collaborative nature of group work fosters the development of key competencies such as collaboration, effective communication, and respect for diverse viewpoints. These interpersonal skills are fundamental to social development, and their strengthening can lead to greater community participation and stronger bonds between families.

The "Creative Train" programme is designed to cultivate a sense of belonging and connection among its participants. By providing a space where children can interact with others from diverse backgrounds and experiences, an inclusive and diverse environment is fostered. This is particularly salient in a city such as Bucaramanga, where cultural diversity can be a valuable asset, fostering creativity and innovation.

The results of this evaluation will be vital for the sustainability and future of the programme. The collection of accurate and relevant data will enable the organisers to report back to funders and stakeholders, thereby justifying the continuation and expansion of the Creative Train. Furthermore, the evaluation will function as a resource, facilitating the identification of optimal practices and strategies that can be implemented in other communities.

In conclusion, the impact evaluation of the "Creative Train" programme is a vital component that will facilitate comprehension of the project's influence on the creative and social development of the participants. Through the integration of surveys and interviews with a focus on flexibility and adaptability, the programme has the potential to enhance the lives of the children involved, while also contributing to the strengthening of the social fabric of the community. The information gathered will be instrumental in ensuring that the "Creative Train" continuously evolves and adapts to the changing needs of the young people and their families, thus ensuring its long-term success.

3.2. Analysing how the Revitalisation of Parks with Cultural Activities Contributes to Improving Social Cohesion and Community Participation.

The revitalisation of Bucaramanga's parks through cultural activities is a key element in improving social cohesion. Parks, which are conventionally regarded as recreational spaces, have the capacity to function as vibrant hubs of interaction and learning. The provision of creative activities has been demonstrated to encourage community participation and facilitate opportunities for families to congregate and establish connections.

The "Creative Train" initiative, a programme designed to promote creativity and community engagement, will offer a diverse array of workshops encompassing arts and crafts, music, and science, thereby enriching the experience for participants. This initiative will provide children with the opportunity to explore diverse areas of interest, thereby fostering a culture of continuous learning.

The evaluation of the attendance and involvement of children and their families in activities is imperative to ascertain the impact of the programme. The analysis of this data will facilitate the identification of the most appealing and effective activities, thereby enabling the programme to be adapted according to the preferences of the community. The long-term benefits of this programme include the strengthening of community cohesion and the development of a more supportive environment, as well as the fostering of a stronger sense of community belonging.

3.3 Establish Strategic Partnerships with Local Artists and Educators to Enhance the Programme's Outreach.

In order to optimise the impact of the "Creative Train", it is imperative to establish strategic partnerships with local artists and educators. These collaborators will contribute not only their skills and knowledge but also enrich the content of the workshops. The incorporation of professionals from the disciplines of art, science and technology is pivotal in ensuring that the participants receive an education that is both of a high standard and pertinent to their needs.

Furthermore, such collaborations can also engender opportunities for community events, exhibitions and performances in the parks, thus increasing the visibility of the programme. The involvement of local artists has been demonstrated to foster a sense of cultural pride and to promote the region's talent. This

interaction is mutually beneficial, as it not only enhances the learning experience for the participants but also strengthens the connection between the artists and the community.

Furthermore, collaboration with educators will allow for the design of a curriculum that is aligned with the educational needs of Bucaramanga's youth. This collaborative effort ensures that the workshops are not only creative but also educational in nature, providing participants with practical skills and knowledge that they can apply in their daily lives.

3.4. Proposals for Long-Term Sustainability Strategies to Maintain the Operation and Extend the Project to Other Parks in the City.

Sustainability is a fundamental aspect for the long-term success of the 'Creative Train'. In order to ensure that the programme continues to benefit the communities of Bucaramanga, it is essential to develop clear strategies for its operation and expansion. This may include seeking funding through grants, donations and sponsorships from local businesses.

In addition, training volunteers and community members to take on roles in the implementation of the workshops can be an effective strategy. Empowering residents fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the programme, which in turn can increase participation and support.

Furthermore, expanding the 'Creative Train' to other parks in the city requires careful analysis of the needs and preferences of the communities in those areas. Such an approach will enable the programme to reach a greater number of children and young people, promoting creativity and learning throughout Bucaramanga.

4. Results Obtained and Project Feasibility

The preliminary results of the "Creative Train" are encouraging. Surveys of the 500 participants have indicated a high level of satisfaction with the activities, with learning and enjoyment being the main perceived benefits. Furthermore, attendance at the workshops has exceeded initial expectations, indicating a strong interest from the community.

The long-term viability of the project appears to be sound, particularly in light of the support from local partnerships and the identification of sustainability strategies. The collaboration with artists and educators has been identified as a key factor in the enrichment of the activities, facilitating more meaningful interaction between participants.

In conclusion, the implementation of the "Creative Train" in Bucaramanga's parks can be regarded as a valuable opportunity to stimulate creativity and learning in young people. Through the evaluation of its impact, the revitalisation of public spaces and the formation of strategic partnerships, this project has the potential to transform not only the parks, but also the community as a whole. Ensuring the sustainability of the programme is pivotal for Bucaramanga to become a role model in promoting creativity and innovation in urban spaces.

The "Creative Train" programme has proven to be a transformative effort in Bucaramanga's parks, with results that underscore the importance of investing in children's creativity and emotional development. Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that the programme has had a significant impact, evidenced by the high satisfaction rate reported by 80% of respondents, including both parents and children. This not only reflects appreciation for the workshops but also indicates that children are finding in these activities a space to express themselves and grow. The fact that 75% of the participants have positive expectations about the future of the programme is a clear indication of its relevance in their lives, in contrast to the 5% who show no interest in participating.

Interviews with educators and artists involved in the programme also reveal encouraging results. The professionals noted that the children were highly receptive to the proposed activities, which has facilitated an environment conducive to learning. Of particular note is the marked improvement in teamwork and problem-solving skills, which are essential competencies for their all-round development. This evolution is of benefit not only to the children in the context of the workshops but also provides them with valuable tools that they can apply in their daily lives.

The impact of the "Creative Train" extends beyond the individual development of the children and is also evident in the community as a whole. The programme has been successful in attracting a diverse audience, thereby strengthening social cohesion in the areas where the workshops are held. There has

been a marked improvement in interaction between families from different neighbourhoods, creating an environment where diversity is celebrated and where a greater sense of belonging is facilitated. This aspect is vital in fostering citizen participation, as by uniting around creative activities, community members build bonds that can last beyond the programme.

The preliminary outcomes of the "Creative Train" programme underscore its efficacy in fostering children's creative and emotional development, while also underscoring its role as a catalyst for social cohesion. The integration of creativity, teamwork and community interaction is presented as a potent formula for addressing social challenges and cultivating an environment of inclusion and learning. With an 80% satisfaction rate and a 75% positive outlook, the future of the programme appears to be auspicious. The programme is thus instrumental in nurturing a new generation of creative thinkers whilst concurrently contributing to the development of more cohesive and resilient communities in Bucaramanga. As we look to the future, it is imperative to maintain our support for initiatives such as the "Creative Train" that not only provide education but also inspire children and the wider community to envisage a more prosperous future.

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