

# CO-CROSSING BORDERS WITH/THROUGH NEIGHBOURING LANGUAGES TEACHING AND LEARNING: COLLABORATIVE PATHWAYS FOR PEOPLE, SCHOOLS, AND LANGUAGE POLICY DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN ITALY AND SLOVENIA

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„WHAT FUTURE FOR THE CONCEPT OF BORDERLESS EUROPE?“

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# Why this paper, why here today

- Border studies are dominated by the discourses of sociologists, lawyers, administrators, historians at most, but very little by humanistic and educational studies
- Language discourse does not dominate among the priorities of the Euroregions
- Increasing need for interconnections, interdisciplinary work, visions beyond technicalities
- but also and equally for technical, political, governance solutions that support the actions of communities and citizens
- need to contribute to effective, communicative and human quality encounters and cooperation...

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# Scientific frameworks

- Applied linguistics/ Educational linguistics/ Pedagogy of languages
- Language Policy and Planning (LPP)



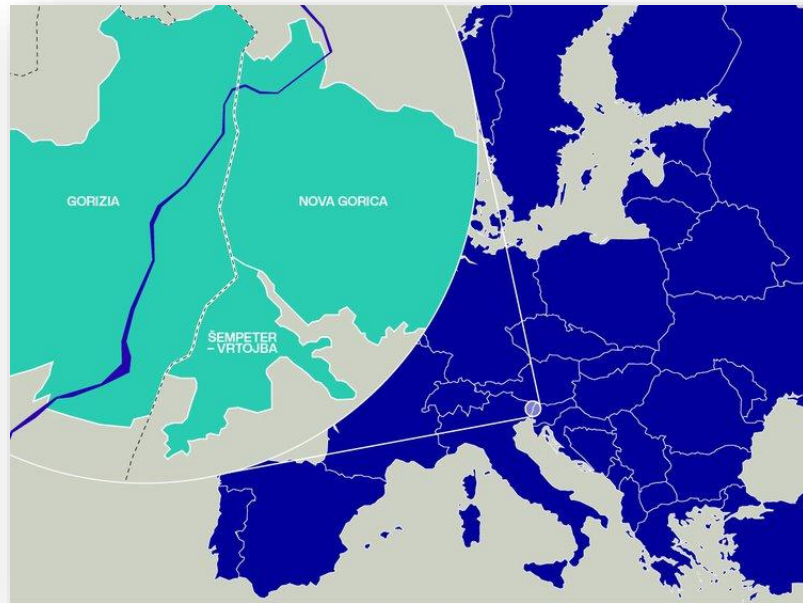
- Geopolitical issues regarding border regions and their languages

# Geographical context

- Italian-Slovenian border

Cities of Gorizia (IT) – Nova Gorica (Slo)

GO! 2025 - European Capital of Culture Nova Gorica-Gorizia 2025



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# Geopolitical context

- EGTC GO (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation GO)

**Italian public authority with legal personality**, founded in 2011 by the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba

with the aim of pinpointing and tackling the shared challenges and to make the entire cross-border area more competitive and more attractive.

As an entity, EGTC GO can reach across the border and, for the first time, make plans and carry out actions for a single cross-border city, composed of three no longer separate municipalities, but a continuous territory with no divisions.

(from <https://euro-go.eu/en/chi-siamo/cosa-%C3%A8-gect-go-e-come-funziona/>)

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## Core Themes:

- Territorial cooperation
- Regional development
- Economic and social cohesion
- Cross-border cooperation
- Strategic coordination
- Urban policy

## Key Areas of Activity:

- Infrastructure
- Transport and mobility
- Logistics
- Intermodal terminals
- Energy resources
- Joint energy planning
- Urban transport policy
- Environmental protection
- Spatial planning
- Tourism development
- Cultural dissemination

tasks)

of Gorizia (I), Municipality of Nova Gorica (SLO) and port territorial cooperation in all areas relating to regional A specific objective of EGTC is to strategically coordinate following:

infrastructure, transport, mobility and logistics;  
integrated management of transport services;  
area of the three municipalities;

oriented towards strengthening economic and social

l coop  
the EG  
e defin  
jects in  
nity;  
ess at  
erating  
EGTC

No mastery of neighbouring languages as a core topic or key activity!

ces to perform tasks and fulfil the pursued objectives, m the public about the achieved results and activities; operating area of EGTC in the decision-making process of ctoral policies in the framework of EU institutions and its

discussions, joint strategies for the management of the plementation of joint projects relating to the mission of the the balanced development of the region.

tial planning and environmental protection on the territory

erations by jointly promoting the region and its natural and

know and respect each other.

COM(2021) 393 final

Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions

### EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration

#### 3.3. Vibrant cross-border labour markets

*This is not yet the case: in the 2020 public consultation, respondents indicated **language differences and difficulties in the recognition of diplomas, skills and qualifications as the main difficulties** encountered in terms of education, training and employment in cross-border regions. (p.9)*

## Barriers in border regions

*the Adriatic Ionic Euroregion which, despite the general and lofty aims of creation and protection of the cultural heritage for improving the learning of the population, is detrimental by the European Association through its newsletter reported operation (AEBR, 2012) in 72% of the cases,*

To be updated, further investigation required ..., but. Has anything really changed in the last decade?

*scholars who identified “command of neighbouring population” among structural factors which enable a higher communication (Klemenčič, 1987 in Bufon, 2002, p. 459). population is a border population (Bufon, 2002). homogeneous but as far as cross-bordering is concerned, it differs daily with neighbouring countries.”*

*fact! An introductory study to CoBLaLT, p.36*

# B-solutions and Best Practices for multilingualism

***b-solutions: Solving Border Obstacles. A Compendium 2023-2024***»

Not directly tackling language teaching but indirectly sustaining the need to better crossborder integration through:

- crossborder schooling
- Joint degrees

B-solutions selected

- *Limitations in cross-border (further) education*
- *Financing cross-border pupils' education, Communauté de communes Pyrénées Haut-Garonnaises – France*

Best practices (Border Focal Point)

- 9 projects on multilingualism, crossborder projects

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# The research context

*Strengthening a (socio)constructivist approach in Slovenian border regions Primary FL teaching and learning through a co-constructed extension and evaluation of the CoBlaLT model*  
(ARIS Slovenia - National agency for research -, project n. J6-3132, 2021-2024)

**CoBLaLT** = Contact Based Neighbouring Language Learning and Teaching (Cavaion 2016, 2019, 2022)

AIM:

Fostering **reciprocal language learning** among **primary school pupils** (ages 11–15) in border regions for social integration, **through** the methodological use of both virtual and face-to-face **contact**, supported by an **interdisciplinary** and **socioconstructivist approach**.

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# The theoretical framework

## Highly interdisciplinary

- Sociolinguistics
- Intercultural studies
- Second Language Acquisition Theories
- Psychology of Groups (*Contact Hypothesis*)
- Psychology of Relationships
- Social and Linguistic Psychology  
(*Integrativeness, Ideal self*)
- Educational Linguistics
- Language Policy and Planning
- Intercultural and Digital Language Teaching
- Socioconstructivism

Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998;  
Amichai-Hamburger, McKenna,  
2006; Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997,  
2006; Kramsch, 2009; Čok, 2003,  
2006, 2009; Gardner, 2001, 2005;  
Dorney, 2013; Rivers, 1987; Long,  
1996; MacIntyre et al. 1998;  
Schumann, 1997; Lantof, Thorne,  
2005, Kumaravadivelu, 2006,  
Romaine 2001, 2023..

# The theoretical framework and the method

Reference study: “Europe, frontiers and Languages”, Albert Raasch, in: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe. From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education, 2002

“Languages [...] represent culturally marked opportunities for expression. They are therefore an integral part of “frontier policy” and can become both an instrument for demarcation or exclusion of countries, cultures and individuals and an occasion for encounter, contact and cooperation. Training authorities must ensure that the teaching and learning of languages – both in general and in the frontiers regions particularly – are directed at encounter, understanding and agreement between different cultures, and thus with the neighbouring cultures.” (Raasch, 2002, p. 18)

Qualitative research.

Ethnographic

Action research method

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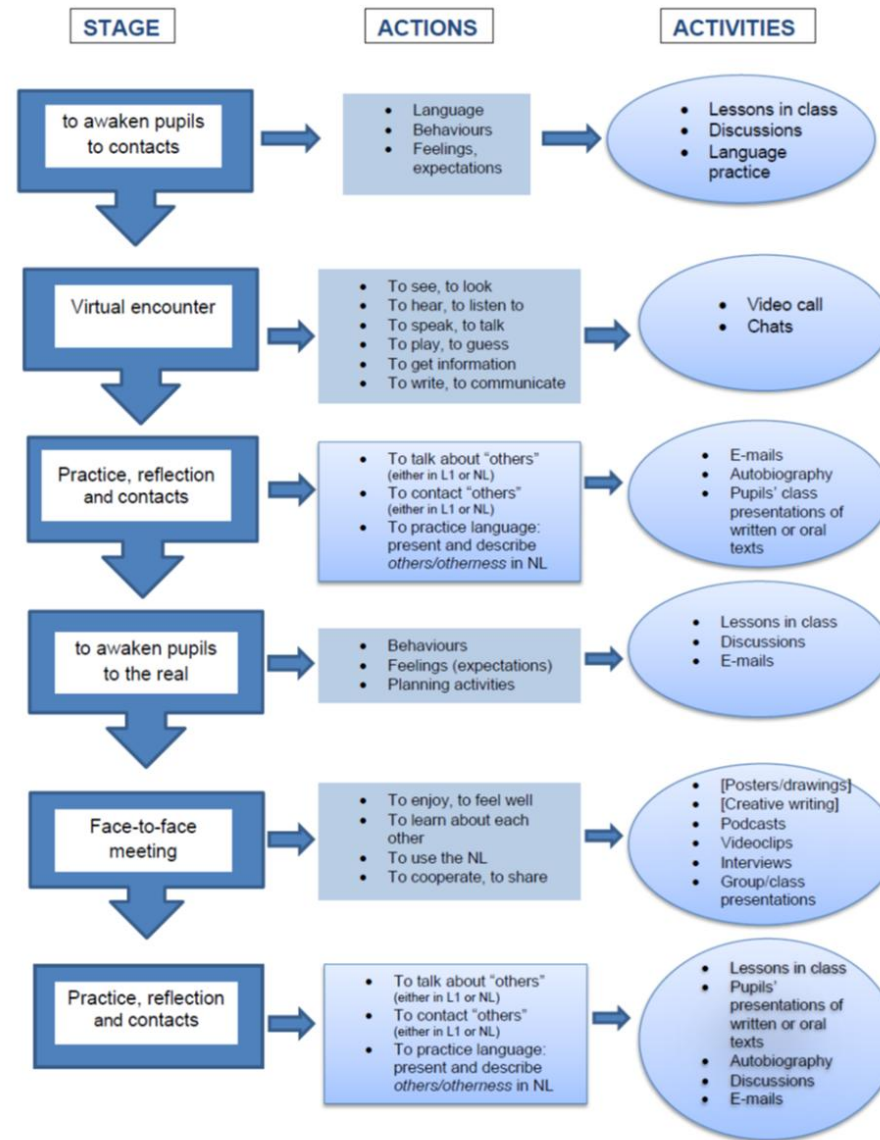
  
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# Modello CoBLaLT

## Contact-Based- (Neighbouring) Language-Learning-and- Teaching (CoBLaLT)

Cavaion, Moira (2015): *Teaching and Learning Primary Neighbouring Language through Crossborder Contacts*. Doktorska Disertacija. Koper: UP PEF, p.297



awakening

To meet, virtually

Reflect, to use the language, to contact

awakening

To meet face to face

Reflect, to use the language, to contact



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# Principles

- Code language:

- Free choice of language for communicating (within real encounters, both virtual/face-to-face)
- Given by teachers within class activities

- Reciprocity:

- No language supremacy, rather correct relationships (ethically, affectively)

- Cooperative learning

- Liberatory pedagogy (Kumaradivelu, 2006), fostering autonomy

- Ecological approach: respective of local teaching practices and of the specificities of school communities

# ACTIVITIES

At school ...



tours...

Outside school ...



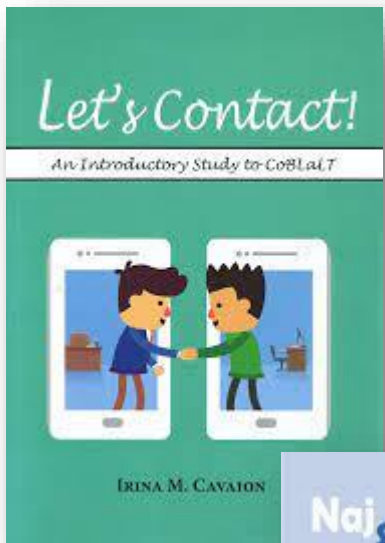
shopping...

Institutional encounters...



Encountering the Major of the neighbouring municipality...

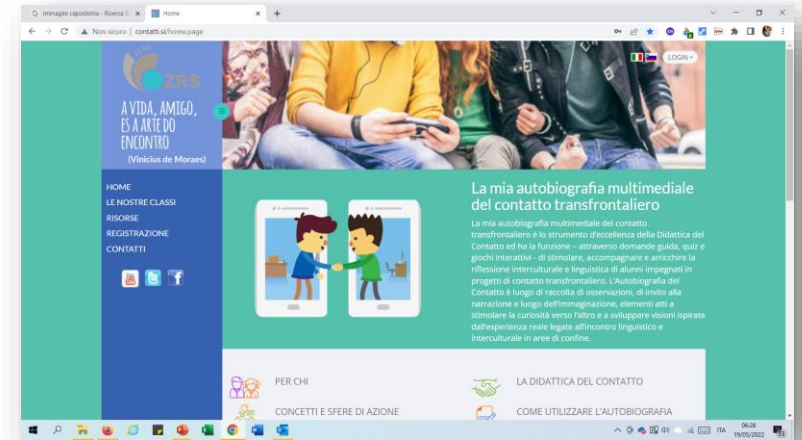




The theory



The handbook,  
co-constructed with teachers



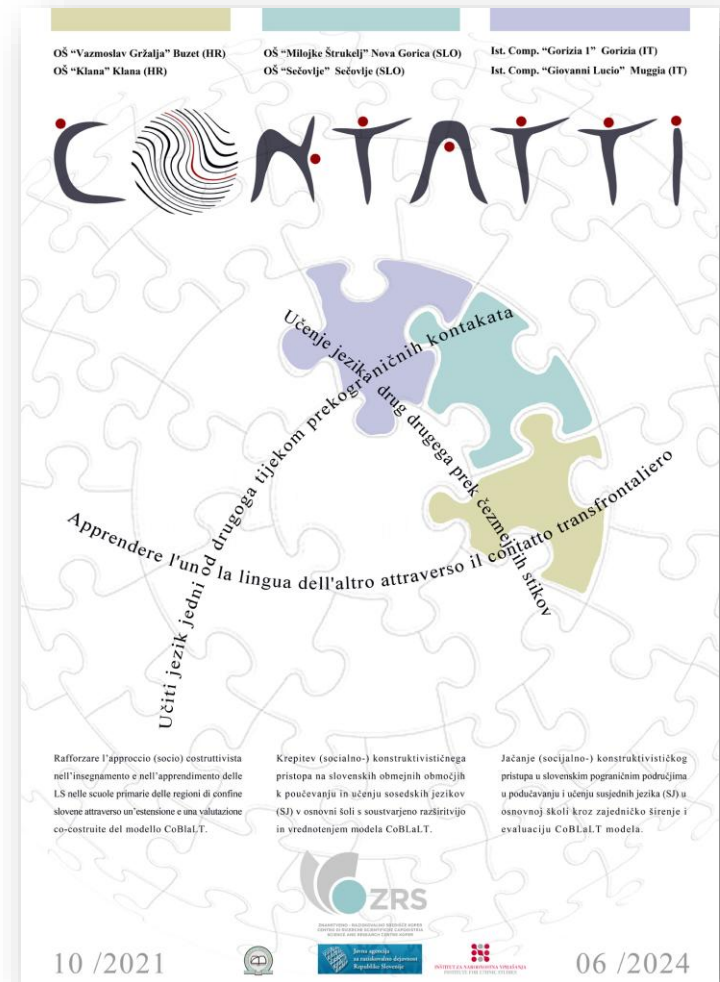
The e-autobiography

# Facts and figures

## Progetto CONTATTI! 2021-2024

- 7 schools (11 classes, about 200 children, 5 years old, about 20 teachers)
- 3 countries (Slovenia, Italy, Croatia)
- 5 municipalities (Buzet, HR; Trieste, IT; Gorizia, IT; Nova Gorica, SLO; Trieste, IT)
- 5 languages (Italian, Slovenian, Croatian, Istrovenetian, English)
- 3 years (dozens of activities, virtual and live meetings, hundreds of communications... in all the local languages..., sometimes Istrovenetian as lingua franca!)

Neighbouring language teaching non compulsory or even extracurricular/experimental (a few hours per year!)



# The research within research: school communities perceptions of (local) language policy in border regions



Two CONTATTI! project twinned schools in Gorizia (IT)- Nova Gorica (SLO)

- 3 classes (70 pupils)
- 8 teachers (Italian/Slovenian as NL; history; literacy; citizenship; art)
- 2 school heads (actually 1..)

AIM: to co-construct a meaning of reciprocal neighbouring language learning through an interdisciplinary and sociocostructivistic approach.

Neighbouring language teaching non compulsory or even extracurricular/experimental (a few hours per year!)

## ACTIVITIES:

3 modules of CoBLALT:

2022-2023:

1. *Crossborder walks*: cross-border routes with cultural and historical itineraries explained from children to children and visits by their schools
2. *Peace Walks*: participation in the Assisi Peace March

2023-2024:

3. *Walks of peace in places of War*: Joint and co-constructed visit of World War I sites and visual literary workshops
4. *Round table*: 3 years of CONTATTI!

# The research within research: school communities perceptions of (local) language policy in border regions

## ACTIVITIES:

### In class, in contact

- Discussions
- Videocalls
- Chat
- Digital language learning
- Thematic lesson/NL module
- Preparing activities, materials for the *others*
- Reflection: *My multimedial autobiography of crossborder encounters*

### Out of class/school, in contact

- Thematic meeting in the *others'* school
- Visiting *the others'* place (town, village, surroundings..)
- Visiting places together
- Working together

# The research within research: school communities perceptions of (local) language policy in border regions

Research questions:

1. How do children, teachers, heads in border areas perceive linguistic needs for young people living near borders?
2. What do children think about reciprocal learning of neighbouring languages, based on their three-year-CONTATTI! experience?
3. How did the socioconstructivist approach encourage them to see language learning as a matter of contact, collaboration, cooperation, and cultural exchange?
4. How did it foster self-engagement and individual agency in language learning?

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# The research within research: school communities perceptions of (local) language policy in border regions

## Method

Qualitative, ethnographic study and Action research

## Data collection

- Observation with triangulation
- Analysis of materials (pupils' written texts, dialogues, drawings, poeties, posters, autobiographies)
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Questionnaires (descriptive analysis)
- Researcher's diary

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# Results

1. How do **children**, teachers, heads in border areas perceive linguistic needs for young people living near borders?
2. What do children think about reciprocal learning of neighbouring languages, based on their three-year-CONTATTI! experience?

## Pupils

Starting point was very far from the ambition of the research question.

- **Initial perception was narrow, limited, and fragmented** regarding the communicative needs of pupils in cross-border areas.
- **Linguistic unawareness:** understanding of language linked mostly to studying it in school, rather than its role in daily communication or society.
- **Languages seen through a school-based lens**, not appreciated for their individual or societal multilingual value.
- **They do not understand what “language policy” means.**
- Those who come close associate it with **authorities deciding its fate**, rather than a participatory or societal issue.

- **Reciprocity** was very much valued!

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# Results

1. How do children, **teachers, heads** in border areas perceive linguistic needs for young people living near borders?

## Teachers

- **aware** of what youth language communication may need **but undecided** about what actions to propose
- very **negatively influenced by the lack of language policies** and curricular presence of neighbouring languages in the curricula of their schools

## Heads

- not really aware of local language policies  
no contact with those dealing with it at local political or administrative level
- happy and supportive of the project not (all) really ready to take initiatives outside the school  
no trust in local/national **administrators**

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# Results

3. How did the socioconstructivist approach encourage them to see language learning as a matter of contact, collaboration, cooperation, and cultural exchange?
4. How did it foster self-engagement and individual agency in language learning?

“This is not a project it is a revolution!”

“We can decide what we learn”

“We learn the things we need”

“I am not afraid to make mistakes”

“I want to invent an app for my friend to learn my language!”

“We have learnt to endure difficulty and go beyond misunderstandings”

“I can decide how much I want to learn”

“We want to tell other schools about this experience”

Teachers’ observations

- More included
- More reflection
- More interested in local history!
- Some cases of extremely self-engagement

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# Discussion

- **Organisational Efforts:** Initiatives were limited, often unsuccessful, and burdensome from an organisational standpoint.
- **Awareness Gaps:** Low awareness within school communities about the importance of local language policies.
- **Language Learning Perception:** Students, teachers, and school leaders value learning neighbouring languages but view it as difficult or unachievable.
- **Positive Outcomes:** The project initiated a new process, boosting self-confidence and recognition of school-led initiatives.
- Gradually, a change is noticeable in the community from a sense of immanence of the meaning of language policy to a desire to 'do something'

# Discussion

- **Lack of Institutional Support:** Schools generally receive no support from local administrations.
- **Mistrust in Politics:** Deep mistrust exists towards political efforts to address border community needs.
- **Neglect by Institutions:** Despite their value, school efforts are overlooked by local institutions and excluded from mainstream political agendas.
- **Need for Structural Support:** A structured framework and political backing are necessary to help such initiatives grow.

# Conclusions

It is necessary to develop a political consciousness in school heads, teachers and pupils as well as to provide a context not only for vibrant labour market but also for the labour market to need linguistic communication with a value of reciprocity, of intercultural encounter.

Albert Raasch (2002) *docet*:

- Learning (and teaching) must be geared to the needs of society and thus justified by a political interpretation and perspective
- There is a need of experts who are first and foremost language teachers
- Teachers are needed, who are “aware” of their political role
- Pupils are also needed, who are aware of their role in the region and for the region, who do not adopt conventional assumptions regarding language Learning
- Institutional and administrative networks are needed which can create the framework and supply the basis for specific learning and teaching adapted to the frontier situation and conditions
- The regions/Euro-regions are in an especially good position to promote transfrontier integration directed at what the Council of Europe and the European Union call the European dimension

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# Conclusions

Researchers, school communities, labour market representatives, politicians should sit around the same table, local or national, and discuss the communication needs of citizens

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# Bibliography and contact

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# THANK YOU!

GRAZIE!

HVALA!

KÖSZÖNÖM SZÉPEN A FIGYELMET!

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