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The Cartan form, twenty years on

`Abstract:` The period around twenty years ago saw significant activity in the specification of "Cartan forms" for variational field theory. As well as the positive results, there were some negative ones and also some open questions. We review these results and compare them with recent developments in the homogeneous version of the theory. An important tool in the latter theory is a bicomplex comprising spaces of vector-valued forms, and an associated global homotopy operator.