

CAN MENTORS OF ERASMUS STUDENT MOBILITY INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE TOURISM?

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Review

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Abstract

Purpose – According to the 25th anniversary of Erasmus program and closing of financing scheme 2007 – 2013 together with launch of new Erasmus era between 2014 and 2020, the time for evaluation of Student Mobility has come. In 2011 on Vocational College for Catering and Tourism Maribor the research within Slovenian domestic companies has been done to evaluate Student Mobility for Placements among domestic tourism companies (Zdolšek, R., 2011), this year the research among foreign Erasmus partner companies has been done. The aim of the paper is to compare the results of both studies and to give proposals for improvement of organization of Student Mobility for Placements with aim to foster tourism development in the region.

Approach – The data for research has be primal (own researches) and secondary (theory of Erasmus mobility). Data will be preceded by quantitative research method.

Findings – The results of the studies have shown that tourism companies home and abroad evaluate the influence of Student Mobility positively and would be more willing to employ the student that has mobility experience than a student without mobility experience, however, there is still much to be done in promoting Erasmus mobility among companies.

Originality of the paper – The paper about evaluation of Erasmus mobility open innovation in the field of hospitality will be used for the first time in hotel industry in Slovenia as the solution for overcoming the economic crisis.

Keywords Erasmus, mentor, student, tourism, tourism development

1. LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAM WITH THE EMPHASIS ON THE ERASMUS PROGRAM

In the following chapter the Lifelong Learning Program will be presented as well as the Erasmus mobility within Lifelong Learning Program.

1.1. Lifelong Learning Program

Lifelong Learning is a key program in the area of education and training. It was established for the period 2007-2013 with the decision of the European Parliament and of the Council and is the successor of Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci (2000-2006).

The purpose of the program is to contribute to the development of an advanced knowledge society with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and to protect the environment for future generations. It supports the interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems in Europe, so that they become a world quality reference.

The program is divided into four subprograms and is designed to target a number of groups from the education of children in kindergarten to students on the labor market, companies and educational organizations, associations, NGOs and the adults in their working life and the third age again returning to learning.

Program activities are divided into centralized (application to the Executive Agency in Brussels) and decentralized (application to the National Agency in the country of origin). As much as 80% of the program budget is for the decentralized activities, Slovenia donated about 7.5 million per year. In Slovenia, the tasks are performed by the national agency CMEPIUS (CMEPIUS, 2012).

1.2. The subprogram Erasmus - tertiary education

The Erasmus subprogram offers participants a variety of opportunities for tertiary education in the field of education, teaching, training, development and cooperation in the international environment. The aim of the program is to promote international mobility of individuals and increase the volume of cooperation between different organizations and improve the quality of tertiary education in Europe. An application may be submitted by organizations in the field of tertiary education, which are the carriers of the Erasmus University Charter (EUC). As partners can participate companies, societies, associations and all other organizations that see the added value and interest in cooperation with the tertiary sector (CMEPIUS-Erasmus, 2012).

1.3. About the Erasmus program

Erasmus allows students from different European universities to go abroad and study. It is also possible to do the traineeship abroad. Beside the European countries, Croatia, Lichtenstein, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey are cooperating and part of the Erasmus program. The period has to be from at least three months up to twelve. Combined between study and internship the time period can take until 24 months. Until now, more than 2.5 million students have already participated in the Erasmus program (European Commission – Erasmus for students 2012).

1.4. Aims of the program

One aim of the program is to improve the quality and to increase the number of student as well as the teaching staff mobility throughout Europe. The program aims also to improve the quality and to increase the numbers of international cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe. Moreover, the program aims to improve the

quality and to increase the volume of cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises (CMEPIUS – Erasmus aims, 2012).

1.5. Student mobility for study (SMS)

The study mobility for students offers the possibility to improve their academic knowledge, language skills, and culture experiences etc. Only students from universities which are enrolled in the Erasmus University Charta can apply for the Erasmus program.

Therefore, the exchange is only possible if both universities are enrolled. The sending university has also to choose the student fairly and on a transparent way (European Commission – Erasmus for students, 2012).

Before students start with the Erasmus program they receive documents about the scholarship, learning-agreement and the Erasmus student Charta which explains the rights and duties of the student. At the end of the Erasmus program, the host universities have to send a transcript of records to the home universities. The home university has to accept the successfully done courses, primarily in ETCS-points (European Commission – Erasmus for students, 2012).

1.6. Student mobility for Placements (SMP)

After this short presentation of the Erasmus program and mobility concepts, the conceptual background for SMP will be presented. The conceptual background is the basics for SMP evaluation.

Student mobility for placements enables students at higher education institutions to spend a placement (traineeship/internship) period between three months and twelve months in an enterprise or organization in another participating country. The main objectives of SMP are (European Commission – SMP, 2012):

- To help students to adapt to the requirements of the EU-wide labor market
- To enable students to develop specific skills including language skills and to improve understanding of the economic and social culture of the country concerned in the context of acquiring work experience
- To promote cooperation between higher education institutions and enterprises
- To contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals.

Host organizations for student placements might be enterprises, training centers, research centers and other organizations. Before departure, the students are provided with (European Commission – SMP, 2012):

- A placement agreement (grant agreement) covering the mobility period and signed between the student and his or her home higher education institution
- A “Training Agreement” regarding its specific programme for the placement period; this agreement must be endorsed by the home higher education institution and the host organisation

- A “Quality Commitment” setting out the rights and obligations of all the parties specifically for placements abroad
- The ERASMUS Student Charter setting out the student's rights and obligations with respect to their period abroad.

At the end of the SMP, students are provided with (European Commission – SMP, 2012):

- Full recognition must be given by the home higher education institution for the period spent abroad, preferably using ECTS credits, recognition shall be based on the training agreement approved by all parties before the period of mobility starts
- In the particular case of a period of placement that is not part of the curriculum of the student, the sending institution shall provide recognition at least by recording this period in the Diploma Supplement or, if not possible, in the student's transcript of records. In addition, the use of Europass mobility documents is encouraged.

The studies will be presented in the following chapter.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND FOR EMP EVALUATION

Firstly, the importance of evaluation of SMP will be presented. The chapter will be followed by presenting the reason for conducting the studies on the field of SMP.

2.1. The importance of evaluation of Student mobility for Placements

Evaluation of SMP aims to evaluate the whole process of organization of mobility in the relation between home institution – hosting institution - mentor on internship and student.

Picture 1: **Scope of evaluation of organization of mobility**

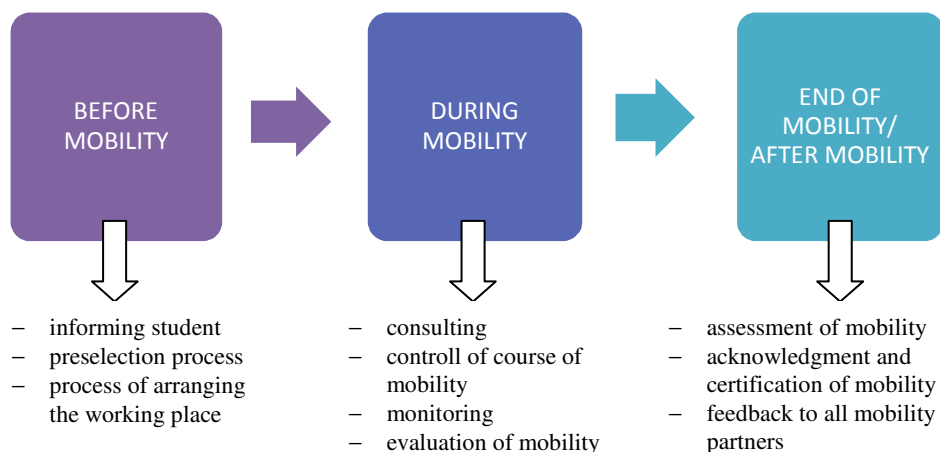


Source: Own, March 2013

The organization of SMP on Vocational College for Catering and Tourism Maribor is individually organized and aims therefore to provide highest quality of SMP. Mainly students leave for SMP and not for SMS (Mobility for Study). For the aim of the paper we concentrate on SMP.

There are three main phases of evaluation of SMP – before, during and after mobility. Evaluation of stage before mobility is scoping, informing student, preselection process, process of arranging the working place and logistics (accommodation, information about destination, organization of travelling to destination). Evaluation of stage during mobility is scoping, consulting to student and host organization, control of course of mobility, monitoring and evaluation of mobility. Evaluation of stage after mobility is aiming to evaluate assessment of mobility, acknowledgment and certification of mobility, feedback to all mobility partners (home and host organisation, student).

Picture 2: Evaluation stages of SMP



Source: Own

Furthermore the background ideas – internal and external from College point of view – will be presented. The ideas were the reason for research conduction.

2.2. Background ideas for research conduction

The SMP has a long history on Vocational College for Catering and Tourism Maribor. Since 1997, more than 150 mobilities have been realized. As it has been already mentioned, the organization of mobility is individual and aims to assure the highest quality standards. Beside the quality standards of Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programs (CMEPIUS), the College has to follow the standards of Slovenian Quality assurance agency for higher education (NAKVIS). Consequentially, the constant evaluation of mobilities is necessary. Furthermore, the College has partner host-institutions that are being constantly evaluated yearly by students and by College. In year 2011, the first research has been done to evaluate the influence of Erasmus mobility on career path of students

of Catering and Tourism on College. Last but not least, this year is the 25th anniversary of Erasmus programs and at the same time the EU is preparing to enter the new program scheme 2014 – 2020, called “Erasmus for all”.

All these reasons were treated as internal and external reasons for conduction of the research. Furthermore, the key results of the domestic research from 2010 will be presented and will be followed by key results of the international research from 2012.

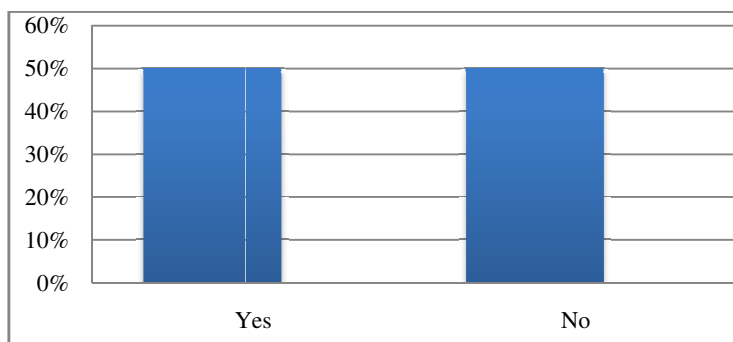
2.3. Presentation of domestic research and key results

The domestic research (The influence of Erasmus mobility on the career path of students of catering and tourism) was done by Zdolšek Romana in 2011. The aim of the paper was to research the impact of mobility of students of Vocational College for Catering and Tourism Maribor on their career path. The paper aimed to contribute to the promotion of Erasmus mobility on College. The scope of the research was national and was conducted by two different patterns – 26 students and ten companies that cooperate with the College. There are three hypotheses given:

- H1: Students who attended the Erasmus individual mobility have a greater chance of employment.
- H2: The tourism companies are generally not familiar with the value and meaning of SMP.
- H3: The tourism companies are interested in participating at College event that will be performed to promote Erasmus mobility among students.

50% of the pattern of tourism companies answered that they are familiar with Erasmus mobility program. And 50% of the pattern of tourism companies answered that they are not familiar with the Erasmus mobility program.

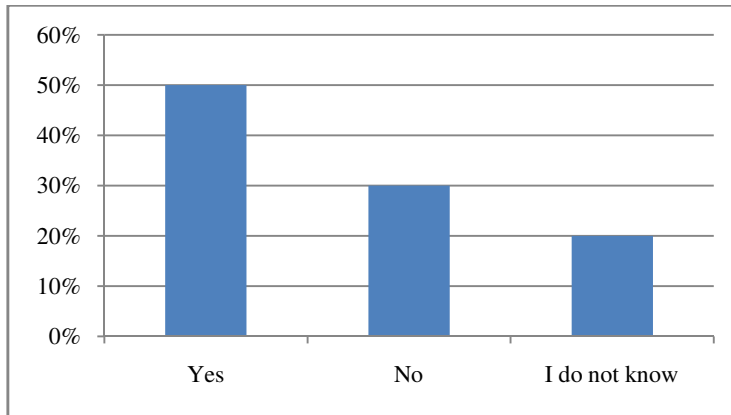
Picture 3: **Familiarity of the companies with Erasmus mobility program**



Source: Zdolšek, R., 2011

50% of the companies for the pattern considered Erasmus experience of students important in their career path and 30% did not consider Erasmus experience as important.

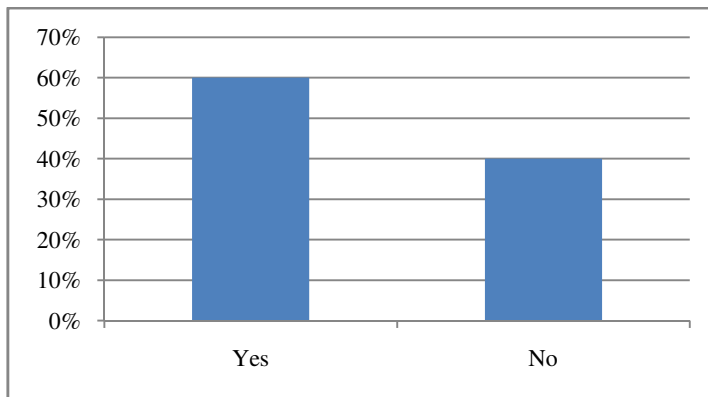
Picture 4: **Importance of Erasmus mobility on career path**



Source: Zdolšek, R., 2011

Furthermore, companies were asked to answer the question of how much they were taking into account the experience of Erasmus mobility of the students when they were invited for a job interview. 60% of the companies would take into account the student Erasmus mobility experience and 40% answered they would not take into account the Erasmus mobility experience.

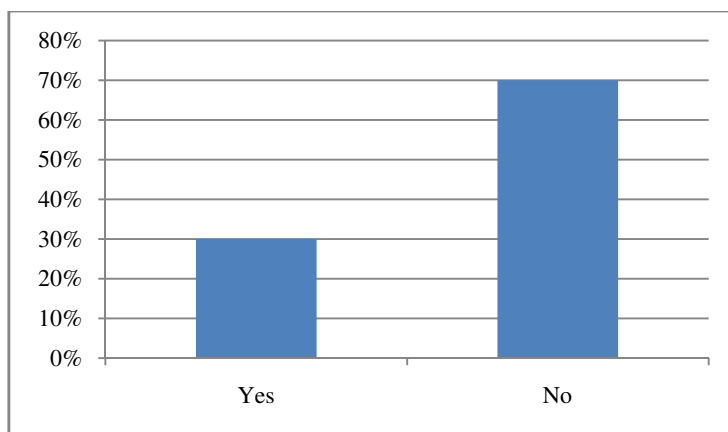
Picture 5: **Importance of Erasmus mobility on job interview**



Source: Zdolšek, R., 2011

30% of the companies from the pattern have already employed the student that had Erasmus mobility experience and 70% of the companies have not employed such student yet.

Picture 6: **Experience of employing the student with Erasmus exchange experience in catering and tourism company**



Source: Zdolšek, R., 2011

60% of catering and tourism companies considered the knowledge that students gain on Erasmus mobility has an impact on their career path and 30% of companies did not shared this opinion.

Furthermore, the summary of conclusions of domestic research will be presented. The conclusions will be later in paper confronted with conclusions of international research.

Summary of conclusions of domestic research

The conclusions of domestic research are the following:

- The main motive of students for taking part in Erasmus mobility was to gain international experience
- More than 50% of students thought that tourism companies are familiar with Erasmus program
- 50% of the tourism companies are not familiar with the Erasmus program
- Tourism companies are willing to accept Erasmus students for placements, but have not done it yet
- 50% of tourism companies consider the Erasmus experience important step within career path of the student

The research has confirmed all three hypothesis. Furthermore, the international research will be presented and the results will be interpreted.

3. THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH ON EVALUATION OF SMP (FOREIGN MENTORS VIEW)

The aim of the paper is to analyze the system of practical education in companies abroad where students work within the Erasmus program.

The data has been collected within quantitative research method with a method of electronic questionnaire.

The collection of data was held between 1st September and 1st October 2012. For creation of e-questionnaire we used free Google Docs program.

Jennings (2010) states the main advantages of electronic way of collecting the data such as simplicity of collecting and analyzing the data, minimal costs of survey conduction and ability of fast data analyzing.

Among the main disadvantages of e-collecting the data, the same author points out the threat of missing the targeted respondent (because the wrong email address) or automatical direction of the email into the "spam". The author concludes by stating that e-surveys are gaining popularity and importance within tourism researchers because of their advantages.

There have been two hypothesis given:

H1: The system of practical education abroad is more clearly structured and organized in large and established international tourism organizations.

H2: More than 70% of mentors abroad have positive opinions about the Erasmus program.

The questionnaire consisted from questions about three stages of Erasmus mobility organization – before mobility (informing students and hosting organisation, organisation of Erasmus mobility), during mobility (process and mentorship, awarding system) and at the end/after mobility (final evaluation of students and success of mobility).

The whole amount of questionnaires was 17 (13 hotels, four restaurants). All of them were useable, which means that the sample is $n = 17$.

The data has been analyzed by using EXCEL. After they had been transferred to it, they had to be coded for using and working with them. The analysis method is descriptive which means, "Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study. They provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures. Together with simple graphics analysis, they form the basis of virtually every quantitative analysis of data." (Trochim, 2006).

Picture 7: **Pattern**

Country of company	Scale of the company
Croatia	1 company, international company, hotel
Germany	3 companies, 1 from international chain (hotel), 2 small companies (restaurants)
Austria	3 small hotel companies
Belgium	1 company, international chain, hotel
Ireland	1 small company, hotel
England	2 small companies, hotel
Spain	2 companies, 1 international chain hotel, 1 small hotel
Italy	2 small companies, restaurants

Source: Own

All the companies from the pattern were familiar with the Erasmus program.

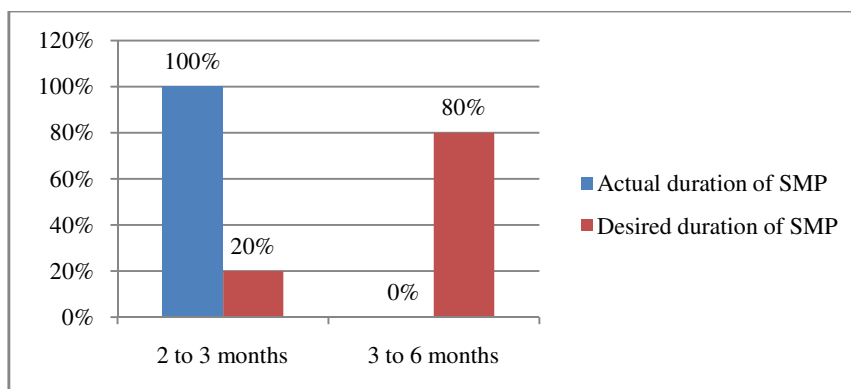
Results of the research

The key results of the research will be now presented. At the end, the key results will be discussed with the domestic research.

90% of the companies answered that Erasmus internship is also a way to fill the employment gap. For 10% of the companies this is not an option.

The difference between the actual and the desired duration of SMP in a company is obvious since 80% of companies would like to extend the duration of internship.

Picture 8: **The difference between the actual and desired duration of SMP**

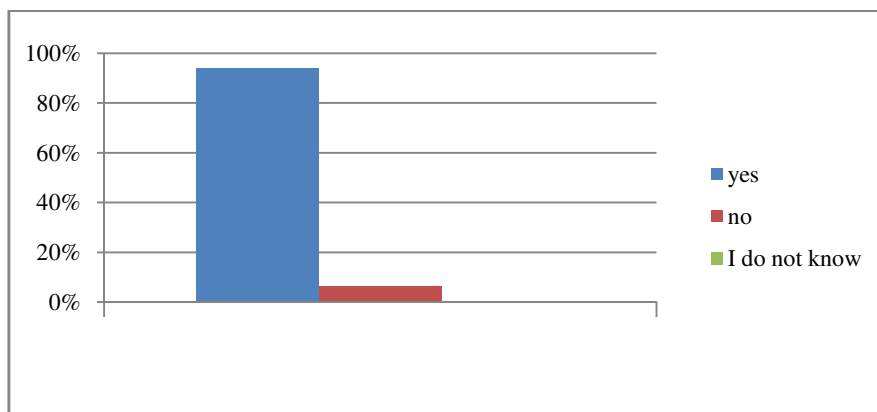


Source: Own, 2013

If the company had a chance to choose between two candidates with similar educational background but one of the candidates had Erasmus experience, 80% of the pattern would decide to employ a student with Erasmus experience.

94% of the pattern had the opinion that competences gained during Erasmus exchange has a positive impact on future career path of the student, 8% of the patterns thought that experience gained on Erasmus exchange would not have the influence on career path of the student.

Picture 9: **Influence of the Erasmus exchange on career path of the student**



Source: Own

Summary of conclusions of international research

The conclusions of international research are the following:

- Selection and assignment of students in companies are well-organized, especially in international companies
- Companies would prefer longer period of practical training (six months) since this is the period when they can expect the “return of the knowledge”
- The SMP fulfills the shortage of people employed
- Companies consider Erasmus experience as important factor by employment of student
- Mentor on internship is always available to the students; in case of unavailability the second mentor is available
- There is no public system of educating the mentors in the companies from the pattern. The tourism companies do not cooperate with external organisations by the process of educating the mentors
- The main condition for becoming a mentor are personal characteristics (internal factors) not working experience and age (external factors)
- The language is not a barrier with conduct of Erasmus mobility
- Learning about foreign cultures is important factor within catering and tourism companies

The research has confirmed first hypothesis, the second hypothesis was partially confirmed. In addition, the results of both studies will be confronted and conclusions will be given (suggestions for improvement of organisation for SMP).

4. CONFRONTATION OF THE RESULTS OF BOTH RESEARCHES

In this chapter the results of both researches will be presented. The confrontation will lead to suggestions for improvements for organization of SMP.

Picture 10: **Confrontation of results of both research**

Domestic research	International research
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tourism and catering companies from the pattern consider the Erasmus experience (SMP) as important factor for career path• Erasmus experience (SMP) has positive impact on employment chances for student of catering and tourism (home and abroad)• Tourism and catering companies are partially informed with Erasmus programe possibilities• Internship is fulfilling the shortage with people employed• Knowledge gaind abroad has a positive influence on career development path• The adequacy of SMP duration was not the element of research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tourism and catering companies from the pattern consider the Erasmus experience (SMP) as important factor for career path• Erasmus experience (SMP) has positive impact on employment chances for student of catering and tourism (home and abroad)• Tourism and catering companies are informed with Erasmus programe possibilities• Internship is fulfilling the shortage with people employed• Knowledge gaind abroad has a positive influence on career development path• The adequat period of SMP is 6 months.

Source: Own, March 2013

On the basis of the confrontation of both studies, the conclusions will be drawn. The conclusions are presented as ideas for SMP improvement.

5. CONCLUSION

Research has shown that promotion of mobility consequentially means better chances for employment. Therefore, a greater promotion of SMP in the range of companies is needed. Moreover, the duration of SMP should exceed the three months minimum if they want to generate the fluent working process in catering and tourism companies. The mentor is the key factor in educational process in companies and thus his value has to be recognized and appreciated. The domestic research has shown that the view of educating mentors in companies in cooperation with public institutions in Slovenia is a good example of how to educate mentors on mentor positions in companies abroad. What is also the lack of companies abroad is the legal system of checking the quality of the working and mentoring processes in companies. For all the reasons stated the greater importance has to be given and further research has to be done, especially now, when the new Erasmus era (2014 – 2020) will start. We strongly believe that mentors can affect the future image of tourism, because the instructions and competences that they are transferring on tourism students are the basics for further development of

tourism. Erasmus students of tourism will create in few next years the tourism industry and they will use the knowledge and competences, especially from abroad.

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