

## LITERARY TOURISM IN SLOVENIA: THE CASE OF THE PREŽIHOV VORANC COTTAGE

### KNJIŽEVNI TURIZAM U SLOVENIJI: PRIMJER MUZEJA PISCA PREŽIHOVOG VORANCA

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#### *Abstract*

This article, which is based on interdisciplinary approach, examines the role of the Slovenian author Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc (1893 – 1950) in the development of literary tourism in Carinthia (Koroška) and the presentation of the writer at the writer's ethnographic memorial museum called The Prežihov Voranc Cottage ("Prežihova bajta" in Slovenian). This cottage is located in Preški Vrh above the Carinthian village called Kotlje, near Ravne na Koroškem, Slovenia. The article analyses how many tourists visit Prežih's cottage per year and aims to show that there is potential for further development of literary tourism in Carinthia by developing tourism products based on the personality of Prežihov Voranc.

#### *Sažetak*

Članak je utemeljen na interdisciplinarnom pristupu. U njemu se istražuje uloga slovenskog pisca Lovre Kuhara - Prežihovog Voranca (1893 - 1950) u razvoju književnog turizma u Koroškoj (Koroška) i ulogu piščevog etnografskog memorijalnog muzeja "Prežihova bajta" u tom procesu. Kuća se nalazi na Preškom Vrhu iznad koroškog sela Kotlje, u blizini malog grada Ravne na Koroškem u Sloveniji. Analizira se koliko turista godišnje posjeti ovaj muzej. Cilj analize je ukazati na postojanje potencijala za daljnji razvoj književnog turizma u Koroškoj i za razvoj turističkih proizvoda na temelju osobnosti Prežihovog Voranca.

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of literary tourism is based on the belief that by visiting the literary site a visitor is able to understand the author, his life and works more than by reading literary reviews. Literary pilgrims or literary tourists are interested in how a place had influenced an author and how a certain author or author's work created a place. Thus literary tourism encompasses many different activities, interests and locations: from sites that are physically associated with the lives of famous writers (houses, graves, statues etc.) to events, tours and performances that commemorate the author and his works. The importance of literary tourism as part of cultural tourism is growing, and especially in rural areas literary tourism can be useful in supporting the existent tourism activ-

ities and helping to develop new ones. Through literature, destinations can present and develop themselves in numerous ways.

#### 2. METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This article is based on the interdisciplinary approach. It analyses how many tourists visit Prežih's cottage per year (mostly primary school children with their teachers) and the role of the writer in Carinthian tourism. Contemporary examples of visiting Prežih's museum have been combined with textual analyses of Prežih's literary works, and research fieldwork has been conducted among the local museum guides. In this way, a varied perspective on the present-day in-

fluence of Prežih on literary tourism has been created.

Firstly, the phenomenon of literary tourism is analysed by examining the existing literature and the existing academic research of the area, further on, the methods of interview and data analysis are employed, together with descriptive and inductive methods.

Literary tourism as a type of cultural or heritage tourism, primarily connected to visiting "both those places associated with writers in their real lives and those which provided settings for their novels" /1/, is a phenomenon that has become an important niche in tourism. Another well-known literary tourism specialist Shelagh Squire /2/ provides a shorter and perhaps more complete definition of this phenomenon by describing literary tourism as "travel to places famous for associations with books or authors," and literary tourism scholar Nicola Watson /3/ believes that literary tourism is "interconnected practices of visiting and marking sites associated with writers and their work." Thus, it could be claimed that literary tourism comprises anything that is connected to literature, including literature events, performances and festivals. Yvonne Smith /4/ argues that also book signings and creative writing courses are parts of literary tourism. Her definition /5/ is therefore that literary tourism is "a form of cultural tourism involving travel to places and events associated with writers, writers' works, literary depictions and the writing of creative literature." She /6/ also points out that not only prose, drama and poetry inspire people to become literary tourists, but also biographies and autobiographies. When discussing literary tourism, the following scholars and their work should be considered: J. Urry's *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), M. Robinson's & H.-C. Andersen's (editors) *Literature and Tourism* (2002), N. Watson's *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (2006) and *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2009). These books show that the field of literary tourism is varied and by all means multidisciplinary. It is also one of the oldest forms of media tourism /7/ and based on the belief that by visiting the literary site a visitor is able to understand the author, his life and works more than by reading literary reviews. One of the earliest known examples of literary tourism is said to be connected to the writings of Petrarch in the south of Europe during the 15th century, and in the centuries that followed, literature continued to

play an important role in both instigating and directing literary tours, mainly for the English elite /8/, although Smith /9/ states that the earliest known practices of literary tourism have been traced to the ancient Roman world. Later, the classical Grand Tour was a limited itinerary, focusing on the antiquities of Italy, and did not include Greece or Spain /10/, also it was primarily meant as an educational experience which included the pursuit of culture, pleasure and health /11/. According to Ommundsen /12/, literary tourism is associated with many different activities, interests and locations: from sites that are physically associated with the lives of famous writers (houses, graves, statues, places where they studied, ate, drank, wrote, etc.) to events, tours and performances that commemorate the author and his works. The sites may simply be marked by a commemorative plaque, or they could be developed into complete tourist attractions: turned into museums, preserved or reconstructed to look exactly as they were at the writer's time; they may also host collections of memorabilia: personal relics, photographs, paintings, letters, manuscripts, and early editions. Some museums provide audiotapes and videos as well, including readings of the writer's work. Then there are events, tours, performances or commemoration. Ommundsen /13/ also mentions festivals which according to him have characteristics of their own, for example "a tendency to confuse art and life and a desire to recreate the author as representative of and spokesperson for national, social or ethnic groups".

In Europe literary tourism is especially developed in Great Britain, where nowadays according to Watson /14/ literary tourism is so naturalised as a cultural phenomenon that literary sites are described in guidebooks and marked on road maps. Literary places attract many lovers of literatures, teachers, pupils and students, because, according to Aristotle, 'mimesis'- 'imitation', is the natural human inclination, namely Aristotle believes that "as means of learning about nature" mimesis and mediation are fundamental expressions of the human experience within the world /15/. Or as Smith /16/ argues, "people enjoy stories because they give them pleasure." Thus literary tourism represents an important part of the heritage tourism, and literary tourists can be regarded "as a particular kind of heritage tourist" /17/. Smith /18/ also points out that in literary tourism "the customary process of reading leading to tourism

(‘text-to-tourism’) can be inverted to an evolution of tourism leading to reading (‘tourism-to-text’).” Recent research on literary tourism also indicates “a growing awareness that literature is an important element in the structure and development of tourism and the behaviour of tourists” /19/, and it should also be observed that “modern, international and intercultural communication needs to imply respect and promotion of cultural differences, as well as protection of cultural identity” /20/.

### 3. LITERARY TOURISM IN THE LOWER MEŽICA VALLEY, SLOVENIA

Also in Slovenia literary tourism is being developed, but scholarly research in this field in Slovenia is underdeveloped – not even one academic research has been made, but there are, however, various brochures and publications on writers, their homes, graves, festivals, etc. Homes of writers and poets are becoming interesting tourism points, especially after the Slovenian Writers Association introduced The Slovenian Writers Trail in 2013, which leads across the entire Slovenia, connects the birthplaces and homes of Slovenian writers and poets, from Miško Kranjec’s birthplace in Velika Polana in Prekmurje to the birthplace of Oton Župančič in Vinica in Bela krajina, to be precise, the Slovenian Writers’ Trail leads from the Mura region to the Drava region, and further on to Koroška (Carinthia), where it turns to Savinja region, Celje, and the Obsotelje region, continues to the Sava regions (Posavje and Zasavje), continues to Gorenjska (Upper Carniola), then turns to the Coastal region and the Karst, eastwards to Notranjska and comes to the capital of Slovenia, Ljubljana, and then ends in Dolenjska (Lower Carniola) and Bela Krajina. The road distance between more than hundred authors’ stations makes more than 700 hundred kilometres. Every region in Slovenia has its popular literary places, and the most famous in Slovenia are probably literary places connected to Slovenian greatest poets and writers, among them France Prešeren in Vrba (Carniola), Ivan Cankar in Vrhnik, Primož Trubar in Velike Lašče, etc. The trail tells the story about Slovenia through literature and thus represents Slovenian literary heritage. The trail has become an integral part of Slovenian tourism product, and it also has the potential to become an important factor in Slovenian cultural tourism.

In the lower Mežica Valley there are many tourist attractions, among them many cultural attractions as well: the Ravne and Javornik castles, the Forma Viva sculptures, several statues dedicated to the Slovenian national liberation struggle during the Second World War, Partisan hospital Mirta, the Prežihov Voranc Cottage etc. With the legacy of the poet Blaž Mavrel, the writer Leopold Suhodolčan and the most famous Carinthian writer Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc foundations for the development of the literary tourism in the lower Mežica Valley are laid. According to the *Strategy of the development of tourism in the Mežica Valley* /20/, the most important goal is to increase the number of visitors and stays in the Mežica Valley. Further development of literary tourism in this area could help to achieve the strategic goal and enrich the tourist offer of the Mežica Valley and the whole of Carinthia.

#### 3. 1 *The Mežica Valley*

The Mežica Valley consists of four hilly municipalities: Črna na Koroškem, Mežica, Prevalje and Ravne na Koroškem. The majority of the municipalities’ inhabitants live in the four towns in the valley, while the surrounding hills are rural. The Mežica Valley as a tourist destination has unused natural potential and rich cultural and ethnographical heritage represented by churches, chapels and old homesteads, which authentically show the past lives, habits and living environment of the people. In some areas thematic museums or collections, which besides many natural attractions represent an additional potential for the development of the tourist offer, were set up /21/. The Prežihov Voranc Cottage – the memorial museum of the Carinthian writer Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc is situated in the Municipality of Ravne na Koroškem, in the area, where in the past people had to face harsh and difficult living conditions. In the second half of the twentieth century this area was mainly industrial, but the municipality’s long-term vision is to diversify the predominant industrial sector and develop other economic areas as well, especially rural, sporting (also adventurous) and cultural tourism. The Municipality of Ravne na Koroškem is situated in the lower part of the Mežica Valley. It comprises 63.4 square kilometres and has about 12 thousand inhabitants. The landscape of the municipality is geographically diverse /22/.

The major barriers for developing literary tourism in this area are bad traffic connections of this part

of Slovenia to other parts of Slovenia and Austria, and, according to curator Liljana Suhodolčan /23/, the lack of investment into infrastructure associated with Prežih. There is also the lack of recognition of Prežihov Voranc outside Slovenia.

#### 4. PREŽIHOV VORANC, HIS WORKS AND STYLE

Prežihov Voranc, born as Lovro Kuhar in a poor rural family in Kotlje near Ravne na Koroškem, Carinthia (Koroška in Slovenian) on 10 August 1893 was a self-taught writer, an author of novels, stories, short stories and travelogues. His life was marked by hardships of poverty, World Wars (during World War II he was in the Sachsenhausen and Mauthausen concentration camps), Communist political activism and political conflicts, which resulted in threats of his arrests and consequently his migrations to Vienna, Prague, Berlin, Norway, Moscow, Bulgaria, and many other places across Europe. He died in Maribor on 18 February 1950.

Austrian contemporary writer Karl-Markus Gauss describes Prežih as a writer, a vagabond and a communist, and as “the song from a margin that became a magnificent epic” /24/. Borovnik /25/ argues that his literature was often misinterpreted and used for political purposes. According to Benko and Zorko /26/, Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc is first and foremost a short story writer, novelist and children’s author, who intentionally decided to take a literary path of socially engaged realism. Borovnik /27/ disagrees with labelling Prežihov Voranc as a social realist and quotes Marja Boršnik, who found elements of naturalism and expressionism in Prežih’s works of 1920s and described Prežih’s works of 1930s with the term “new reality” (“nova stvarnost” in Slovenian).

Prežih wrote literature in the Standard Slovene language, while the Mežica dialect features are visible in dialect lexis (*solzice* - *teardrops*, *dăčva* – *girl*, *janka* – *skirt*, *pankrt* – *illegitimate child*, *devžej* - *pocket* etc.), set expressions (*pobarati* – *to ask* etc.) and metaphors (*mladi kljuni* – *children* etc.) /28/. His major and most famous works include the novels *Jamnica* (subtitled “the neighbourhood novel”), *Doberdob* (about the Battle of Doberdo in World War I), *Požganica* (about the Carinthian Plebiscite and the Carinthian Slovenians under Austria), the short story collection *The Self-Sown* (*Samorastniki*), travelogues *Borba na tujih tleh* (*Fighting in Foreign Lands*) and the children’s short

story collection *Teardrops* (*Solzice* as the lilies of the valley are called in Koroška) /29/.

The legacy of Lovro Kuhar-Prežihov Voranc continues with his works, with several primary schools across Slovenian ethnic territory that carry the name of the writer, in the Carinthian Central Library there is the Prežih’s Memorial Room, near Kotlje there is also the literary path of Prežih called *Vorančeva pot* in Slovenian (it starts in the centre of Kotlje, continues to the water spring called ‘Rimski vrelec’, Kotnik’s house and nearby Pekel (Hell – from *Teardrops*), to the Kogel homestead and the Ivarčko Lake, the Šrotnek homestead, and finishes at the Kotlje cemetery where Prežih is buried) and many cultural and scientific events carry Prežih’s name or are devoted to the memory of him, and last but not least, there is the memorial museum of Lovro Kuhar called the Prežihov Voranc Cottage.

#### 5. THE PREŽIHOV VORANC COTTAGE

Writer’s ethnographic memorial museum called The Prežihov Voranc Cottage (“Prežihova bajta” in Slovenian) is located in Preški Vrh above the Carinthian village called Kotlje, near Ravne na Koroškem, Slovenia. Nowadays it is a part of the Carinthian Regional Museum (Koroški pokrajinski muzej). It represents a monument of farmhouse architecture, a characteristic home of a small-scale farmer from Carinthia (called “bajtler” in Carinthian dialect) at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries, especially for having an open-hearth kitchen. Together with the stall the house represents the parallel type of a peasant home. The wooden cottage, which was bought by the Kuhar family in 1911, was turned into a memorial house in 1979 and since then in the museum some Prežih’s biographical and literary fragments have been displayed, which enable visitors to pursue Prežih’s literary works and tell stories of his life at a young age. Nearby the cottage stands a bronze statue of the writer overlooking Kotlje, designed by the academic sculptor Stojan Batič. The museum also offers a view of Kotlje in the East and of the Uršlja mountain in the South /30/. At the Prežih farmyard, there is also the Krauper granary, which is another monument of the past farmhouse architecture. It is made of wood, it has a cellar and a typical roofed balcony called “gank” in the Mežica dialect. In the past, it was used for storing grain and meat products /31/.

5.1 Data Analysis

Visitor Statistics of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage in the years 2010-2014

Table 1: The Year 2010

Youth	3.367
Adults	1.527
Senior Citizens and Invalids	775
<b>Sum</b>	<b>5.669</b>

Table 2: The Year 2011

Youth	3.489
Adults	1.091
Senior Citizens and Invalids	1.057
<b>Sum</b>	<b>5.637</b>

Table 3: The Year 2012

Youth	3.028
Adults	909
Senior Citizens and Invalids	1.188
<b>Sum</b>	<b>5.125</b>

Table 4: The Year 2013

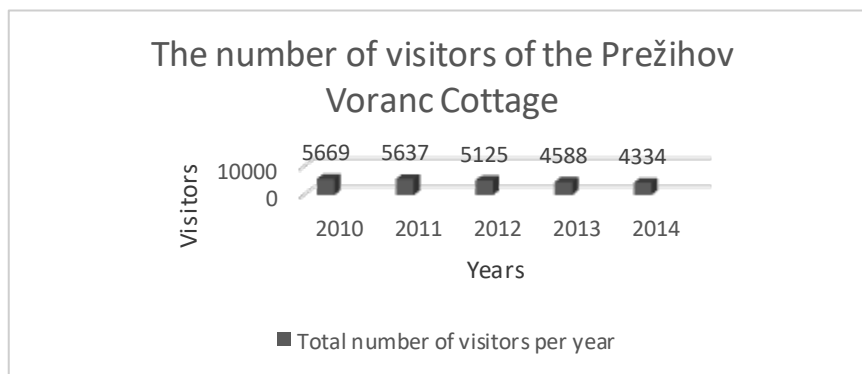
Youth	2.636
Adults	1.128
Senior Citizens and Invalids	824
<b>Sum</b>	<b>4.588</b>

Table 5: The Year 2014

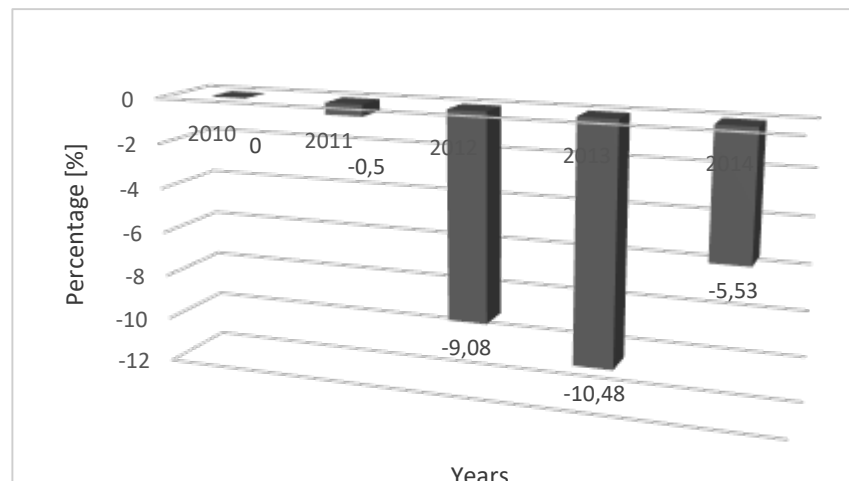
Youth	2.655
Adult	765
Senior Citizens and Invalids	874
<b>Sum</b>	<b>4.334</b>

(Source: Curator Liljana Suhodolčan, Carinthian Regional Museum, 2015)

Despite the fact that the Prežihov Voranc Cottage was established as a small museum in 1979, the numbers of visitors for the period of the last five years have been observed since they are exact and since they show the current situation of the development of this museum. The tables above clearly show that the number of visitors of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage is decreasing. According to Suhodolčan from the Carinthian Regional Museum, there exist more reasons for that. The number of visitors is clearly smaller, but the number of guided groups has not decreased that much. In recent years, however, in the Carinthian Regional Museum they have observed smaller groups. In the previous years, various groups used to come also by two buses, today, however, the groups have only about 30 to 40 visitors. As far as the school groups are concerned, it has been recently more usual that only one class instead of several has come. In addition to that, the economic crisis is also a reason reflected in the number of visitors, according to Suhodolčan /32/.



Graph 1: The number of visitors of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage



Graph 2: The decrease in the number of visitors compared to the previous years

Graph 2 shows that in 2011 the number of visitors had fallen by 0,5% in comparison to 2010, in 2012 by 9,08% in comparison to 2011, and the greatest fall was in 2013 in comparison to 2012, that is 10,48%. In 2014 there were fewer visitors than in 2013, but the fall was smaller than in 2013 in comparison to 2012 – in 2014 the number of visitors had fallen by 5,53%.

#### 5.2 Strategy of the development of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage

According to the curator Suhodolčan from the Carinthian Regional Museum, in the public institution of the Carinthian Regional Museum responsible for the protection of cultural heritage curators are aware of the current economic crisis and of the fact that in these times visitors should be offered more than in times without crisis. Years ago the municipality of Ravne na Koroškem bought a barn that is a part of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage. The museum has prepared the concept for the newly expanded museum contents, because inside of a memorial museum itself, space does not allow the expansion of the contents related to the life and work of the writer. The Carinthian Regional Museum tries to enrich the cultural life in the summer months, especially around 10 August, the author's birthday. In 2015, the thirteenth traditional meeting at a courtyard of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage was prepared. Each year, the central theme is selected, various authors and researchers, who speak of life and work of Lovro Kuhar – Prežihov Voranc, are invited. In 2015, the Carinthian Regional Museum opened the interior of the Krauper granary, which is located at the edge of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage, to the public. During the summer of 2015,

the cottage rustic garden typical of the time when the Kuhar family lived in the cottage was put up. Suhodolčan also argues that the Carinthian Regional Museum as a public institution is limited by financial assets, and financial income obtained by admissions cannot be used for further promotion of the location, but only for the realization of substantive projects. According to Suhodolčan, the Carinthian Regional Museum will try to renovate the barn and give it new contents related to Prežih in the future, and this multipurpose space will also allow the implementation of the programme throughout the year. Currently the Prežihov Voranc Cottage is still bound to spring and summer months (from 1 May - 15 October), when the museum is open every day between 9 am and 17 pm and on Sundays between 14 and 17 hours, on Mondays the museum is closed.

#### 6. LITERARY EVENTS

Literary events, conferences and festivals are becoming popular ways of celebrating authors and their work. According to Smith /33/, they "can attract both domestic and international tourists," and generate tourism. She further on mentions the Alabama Shakespeare Festival and the Kalevala Day in Finland. As far as the profile of literary tourists is concerned, literary tourists "are more likely to be employed in white collar, professional or managerial positions, they generally earn more and spend more whilst on vacation, and are usually more highly educated" /34/, and thus, literary tourists are "a profitable market to cultivate" /35/.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Carinthia has rich and diverse literary heritage, but literary tourism remains underdeveloped. The economic crisis could be stated as one of the barriers that hindered the development of this type of cultural tourism in Carinthia along with bad traffic connections of Carinthia with other parts of the world and with the lack of recognition of Prežihov Voranc outside Slovenia. There is, however, the potential for further development of literary tourism in Carinthia, also by developing tourism products based on the personality of Prežihov Voranc, who is the most famous and the most important Carinthian author. Further on, a cultural village could be made in Preški Vrh as a platform for exposing tourists to Carinthian traditions and dialects. Various performances could be held in such a village and then accompanied by discussions, workshops, conferences, festivals, etc. During the summer holidays, children's festival, including with children's camp, could take place in Preški vrh (involving children's workshops and activities suitable for children and inspired by Prežihov Voranc and his children's short stories *Solzice - Teardrops*). Since in Carinthia there are

many artists inspired by the works of Prežih (singer and songwriter Milan Kamnik, painters Leander Fužir and Kristina Cvetko Mlačnik etc.), a souvenir shop, where visitors could choose among high-quality products related to Prežih, could be put up as a part of the Prežihov Voranc Cottage. In addition to that, following the model of the Shakespeare's Globe in London, an open-air theatre, which would stage Prežih's (plays *Svetneči Gašper* and *Boj na požiralniku*) and other authors' works, could be put up near the Prežihov Voranc Cottage (perhaps in the barn). There are also a lot of sites in Slovenian and Austrian Carinthia that Prežih visited or described in his works and could be included in the Prežih tour, for example: Mt. Petzen (Peca), the town of Bleiburg (Pliberk) and Zollfeld (Gospovetsko polje), which are closely connected to Prežih's life - as well as Črna, Koprivna - Koprein Sonnseite, Luscha Alm (Planina Luže), Eisenkappel (Železna Kapla) and Klagenfurt (Celovec) from Prežih's short story titled *Čez goro očetu* (Over the Mountain to Visit the Father) /37/, /38/. Carinthia, also known as the Land of King Matjaž, could also be called the Land of Prežih. Sites could be visited partly by a car, partly also by bikes, and on foot.

Map 1: Map of Prežih's places in Slovenian and Austrian Carinthia



What is more, by promoting the story of Prežihov Voranc and his works through tourism development, the importance of Slovenian literature would be further promoted, and by it also reading and literacy. It should be noted that literary tour-

ism can be used as an important tool for branding tourist destinations. William Shakespeare and Prežihov Voranc can hardly be compared, but Shakespeare is an excellent example of developing tourism products through literature (not only

in Stratford-upon-Avon, but also in London, Verona, etc.). By promoting writers and their works, destinations can be promoted and distinguished. In the future also tourist guides should be educated in the field of literary tourism, and perhaps some faculty module on cultural (literary tourism) could be developed for future tourist workers.

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