
ISUF President's Report

During my first 2 years as President of ISUF I have enjoyed the benefits of institutional wisdom provided by Editor Jeremy Whitehand, Treasurer Michael Barke, and past and present Secretary-Generals Kai Gu and Vítor Oliveira. We truly operate as a leadership team. Through consensus decision making we pursue initiatives as identified by ISUF members and Council. We also address challenges as presented by an increasingly expansive global organization. I shall touch on some of those challenges in this report.

Over the past 25 years ISUF has evolved into a vibrant international organization with an expanding global reach. It continues to benefit from the seminal vision of its founders. Many of their early aspirations remain relevant today. Founding President Anne Moudon delivered a keynote address in Nicosia Cyprus at ISUF's 26th Conference. In 1999 she had published an insightful President's report in *Urban Morphology* in the form of a letter to M. R. G. Conzen. Her outline of founding goals and aspirations in support of ISUF's mission illustrate how far we have come and suggest where we still need to go.

Moudon emphasized the importance of scholars meeting regularly to share their ideas. Since the first open Conference was held in 1997, ISUF has sponsored 26 international conferences and numerous Regional Network conferences. Participation has grown from an intimate group to several hundred.

The Conference in Krasnoyarsk in 2018 was successful both for its recruitment of new Russian participants and in providing opportunities to expand our understanding of urban form and social context. The Conference in 2019 in Nicosia served as a living laboratory to examine relational theories as applied to a significant crossroads for cultural and political influence, both historically and today.

Moudon applauds the journal, first published in 1997, as a critical venue to disseminate research. To date, thanks to the sustained efforts of Jeremy and Susan Whitehand, *Urban Morphology* has published 44 issues and continues to enjoy high rates of citation. Challenges remain regarding the best methods to recruit new university subscribers, especially given diminishing budgets. We call on ISUF members to meet with university library acquisition staff to solicit ideas concerning how best to disseminate the journal.

In 1998 Moudon suggested that ISUF members had made significant progress in sharing studies of individual cities. These studies were based on theories and methods associated with several schools of thought, largely Eurocentric in origin. She encouraged ISUF members to find more linkages between their research findings and to embrace methods for cross-fertilization.

Our current small grant programme, initiated in 2018, takes us a significant step closer to meeting these goals by encouraging collaboration between Regional Networks. At present two ISUF funded research projects supporting network collaboration are well underway. The Chinese urban morphology network and ISUFItaly are collaborating on a comparative project entitled 'Urban morphology and urban design: cases from Nanjing, China and Rome'. Researchers in Poland and Serbia are working on a collaborative project entitled 'Plot to plot urbanism: mapping post-socialist changes in urban tissues'. A recent update from Ivor Samuels demonstrates engagement by practitioners associated with the grant project in applications of urban morphology. Final grant reports are due on 1 February 2020.

In 2001 ISUF's first conference outside of Europe was held in Cincinnati, Ohio. Though Eurocentric foundations have remained strong, conferences have since been held in Brazil, China, Canada, Australia, Russia and Cyprus. Each conference has brought a new geography of participants. Their contributions further our body of knowledge about urban morphology throughout the world. In 2020 ISUF will return to the United States for the first time in 19 years. I look forward in joining Brenda Scheer and her organizing committee in welcoming ISUF members to Salt Lake City in North America's mountain west, on 1–4 September 2020.

In terms of research inquiry Whitehand points out that we still have much work to do to expand our global reach and impact. Non-Western countries constitute most of the urbanizing world, yet over 60 per cent of research published in urban morphology is about European and North American cities. Publications about non-Western cities remain under-represented. We must continue to recruit and support the engagement of scholars from parts of the world that are inadequately represented.

Whitehand, Samuels and others point out the weak connection between academic researchers in

urban morphology and the practitioners and policy makers who are best positioned to apply findings. Through my work on my city's local planning commission I can also testify to the need for materials that clearly but substantively explain urban morphology's value to local planning processes. We must continue our efforts to make research more visible and accessible to practitioners. Karl Kropf has agreed to lead an ISUF committee to help forward these objectives.

When I became President of ISUF, I was fully expecting the usual passionate but collegial ideological debates that occur among academics. I did not foresee the impact that global politics could have on our organization. While we envisage ISUF to be insulated from governmental differences, political circumstances beyond our control can nevertheless interfere with our endeavours.

ISUF's goals to be both a global and an inclusive organization can sometimes be at odds with one another. It is consistent with our mission to engage more distant parts of the world. Holding our international conferences outside of central Europe supports our ability to recruit a more diverse membership. New conference frontiers enrich our knowledge of non-Western urban morphology. Our aspirations to extend ISUF's global reach sometimes conflict with our efforts to remain

accessible and affordable to all participants. This leads to necessary but unfortunate trade-offs.

As governments tend to adopt more nationalistic views, travel access may become even more restricted. The temptation is to minimize these challenges by not hosting conferences in countries that may restrict access. Despite these potential barriers we should continue our trajectory towards a more expansive view. To do this we must be willing to accept that sometimes members may be excluded from participating owing to political barriers or excessive travel costs. To maximize inclusivity, we should also continue to hold conferences in accessible countries on a frequent basis.

In closing, I wish to express sincerest thanks to Jeremy Whitehand for his steadfast commitment to ISUF over the past quarter of a century. Whitehand leaves a legacy of contributions that are manifested in a well-established international organization with a promising future. In addition to educating multiple generations of urban morphologists, as Editor of *Urban Morphology* Whitehand cultivates an expansive forum for critical dialogue.

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Twenty-Sixth International Seminar on Urban Form, Nicosia, Cyprus, 3–6 July 2019

The theme of the Twenty-Sixth International Seminar on Urban form was 'Cities as assemblages'. To use the words of the conference organizers, it was a concerted effort to discuss and debate 'the embedding of different theories and methods' in urban form analysis and design practice. High on the conference agenda, and featured as session topics, were the key challenges that face the field of urban morphology, such as the gaps between different approaches to urban morphology (Whitehand, 2015, 2017), the lack of cross-disciplinary studies, and the need for integrating research and practice (Whitehand, 2018).

Following the opening session, the first keynote presentation was by Alan Penn (University College London). He considered 2 decades of research on different approaches to defining a neighbourhood based on the geometry of street networks. Starting his talk with the sorites paradox, he questioned the point at which a neighbourhood exists. He explained how a series of space syntax measures

of part-to-whole relationship (see, for example, Dalton, 2007; Yang and Hillier, 2007) and different community detection algorithms (see, for example, Law, 2017) had been used for identifying socially and economically meaningful neighbourhoods. He also highlighted the fact that recent work on this had extended the scope to examining the effects of new information technologies, such as social media posts, in defining the spatial notion of neighbourhoods. Penn's talk revolved around a key message – that 'the city operates in the locality of multiple scales'. This essentially entails studying the city as a system in which knowledge about 'the local' has to be gained through understanding the larger context.

Urban form analysis was also the focus of the last keynote speaker, Giuseppe Strappa (Sapienza University of Rome), who provided a different perspective on the part-to-whole relationship in the context of studying ancient cities. By contrasting and comparing two opposing interpretations,



Figure 1. A keynote presentation by Wendy McClure, President of ISUF.

namely the city as an assemblage (urban elements are loosely grouped without a process) and the city as an aggregation (urban elements are organized in an orderly manner through phases), he argued that the legacy of the past city should be understood today as urban substrata: the original structures of the city could always be referred to in relation to the growth of new organisms. In other words, in this way current and ancient cities can be dynamically linked and one can be used to explain the form and formation of the other.

In contrast, the other two keynote speakers were more concerned with urban morphology and design practice. Anne Vernez Moudon (University of Washington) opened the second day of the conference with a presentation on an emerging trend of urban design. She argued that the advancement of tools and increasing availability of geospatial data have effectively broadened the scope and outreach of urban morphology, and that in this new environment different cities are now taking the strategy of *tabula plena* to reclaim urban spaces from the automobile and to recreate traditional urban forms – a reversal of Modernist urbanism and *tabula rasa* planning. In this process, urban morphology has been used as a means to react against Modernism and rethink superblocks. Moudon concluded the

session with a call for reworking the twentieth-century city in the twenty-first century.

Following Moudon, the third keynote speaker, Wendy McClure (University of Idaho) (Figure 1) shifted the focus of urban design practice to the small railway towns and mining towns in the mountainous west of North America. She showed how the historico-geographical approach could be adapted and used to support planning policy development and inform design practice, and thereby preserve and sustain place identity in the face of significant social change and economic re-alignment. An interesting and very useful lesson from McClure's presentation, specifically her applied research, was the employment of urban morphology in design workshops as a tool to effectively engage the public as well as different stakeholders. She opened up the unrealized potential of urban morphology in facilitating participatory planning and design.

In the parallel sessions approximately 220 presentations were delivered in 45 sessions under five themes. These were theories, methods and urban design, and two specific topics – urban conflicts and divided cities, and Mediterranean port cities in a global context. GIS-based quantitative approaches to urban form analysis and generation



Figure 2. Kai Gu speaking at the book launch.

were central to the majority of papers. In light of the increasing availability of high-quality geospatial data highlighted by Moudon in her presentation, the further growth of this interest seems likely. However, there were very limited investigations and discussions on how these new methods are related to different traditions of urban morphology, and how existing approaches might continue in the new data environment. Equally rare were presentations that focused on the combination of different morphological approaches, despite the fact that one theme was devoted especially to this particular issue. These contrasted with a relatively few endeavours that aimed at explicating existing methods and further consolidating the very foundations of urban morphology.

Particularly noteworthy were four special parallel sessions on the theme of urban conflicts and divided cities. These were conducted in the afternoon of the first day at the Chateau Status, right beside the buffer zone between the northern and southern parts of Nicosia. More than twenty presentations were given on research on different forms of social and spatial segregations in Nicosia and other cities around the world. This triggered lively

discussions afterwards and throughout the reception in the evening. Another special parallel session that caught the attention of many participants was that on ISUF's Regional Networks. Seven Regional Networks shared their various activities, including their conferences, workshops, research achievements and publications. This allowed conference delegates who could not attend many of the parallel sessions to obtain an overview of present research on urban morphology internationally.

One of the highlights of the last day was the book launch of *J.W.R. Whitehand and the historico-geographical approach to urban morphology*, recently published by Springer. The editor of the book, Vitor Oliveira and the chapter authors, namely Kai Gu (Figure 2), Michael Barke, Peter Larkham, Karl Kropf and Ivor Samuels, each gave a presentation about Jeremy Whitehand's tremendous contributions to the definition of urban morphology as a field of knowledge, and the establishment and key ideas of the historico-geographical approach. Very touching and remarkably memorable for many in the audience was that all authors vividly shared their close collegiality and co-operation with Whitehand over



Figure 3. Discussion during the walking tour in Nicosia.

the past half-century, and appreciated his great personality which was unknown to many members of ISUF. Not being able to attend the conference, Whitehand expressed his gratitude to all the contributors through a video recording.

In the closing session, the President of ISUF, Wendy McClure reviewed the development of ISUF over the past 25 years and in particular emphasized the need to encourage and promote collaborative research between ISUF Regional Networks. Larkham was welcomed as the new Editor of *Urban Morphology*, replacing Whitehand who has been serving this role since the birth of the journal in 1997. At the end of the session Brenda Case Scheer gave a foretaste of the next ISUF Conference, which has the theme ‘The twentieth-century city’ and will be held in Salt Lake City in the United States from 1 to 4 September 2020.

The organizing committee, chaired by Nadia Charalambous (University of Cyprus), deserve much praise for their great endeavours in organizing a smoothly run and successful conference. Sincere thanks should also be recorded for their efforts in orchestrating a series of activities, especially the walking tour to the north and south of

Nicosia in the middle of the conference (Figure 3), the post-conference tour to the medieval city of Famagusta, and the small exhibition on the conference site about the historical development of Nicosia. Together these activities created a congenial atmosphere for fruitful exchange between all participants.

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ISUF Council Meeting, Nicosia, Cyprus, July 2019

A meeting of the Council of ISUF took place on 2 July 2019 in Nicosia. This report summarizes the principal matters covered.

President's report

The President, Wendy McClure expressed the thanks of ISUF to the Conference organizers, who were led by Nadia Charalambous, and to outgoing Council members, Wowo Ding, Anna Agata Kantarek, Irina Kukina and Brenda Scheer. She noted that the previous year had been a difficult one and she appreciated the support of the Executive members of Council. The Krasnoyarsk Conference had been a success and she thanked Russian colleagues for their participation and hoped that evidence of cross-fertilization in research would soon emerge.

Reports on the two research grants to Regional Networks would be forthcoming in February 2020 and these would inform a second round of invitations for joint research proposals.

The continuing need to recruit 'non-Western' members and bridge the gap between research and practice in urban morphology were stressed. It was regrettable that global politics were increasingly interfering with ISUF's endeavours, but it was necessary to recognize that trade-offs between political acceptability and the aim of increasing the global reach of ISUF would probably be more likely in the future.

Secretary-General's report

In the report of the Secretary-General, Vítor Oliveira, it was noted that three members had been elected to Council – Howard Davis, Feng Song and Renato Leão Rego. It was agreed that Jeremy Whitehand should be invited to remain on Council and that Brenda Scheer, head of the organizing committee of the ISUF 2020 Conference

in Salt Lake City, be co-opted for 2 years. A sub-committee was constituted to examine the Constitution in recognition of the fact that small adjustments might be necessary in light of recent and forthcoming changes in ISUF. It comprised Vítor Oliveira, Wendy McClure and Giuseppe Strappa. It had previously been agreed that a member of Council should be appointed to act as co-ordinator of the Regional Networks. Giuseppe Strappa was appointed to this position.

There was considerable discussion as to how to further ISUF's commitment to strengthening the links between research and practice. The idea of an award for examples of where this linkage had been successfully demonstrated had been investigated by Brenda Scheer but considerable work on this still needed to be done. A further suggestion was that appropriate courses in urban morphology be put on for interested practitioners – Wowo Ding and Giuseppe Strappa agreed to explore this suggestion.

A general discussion followed on the role of ISUF in a changing world. Teresa Marat-Mendes suggested that ISUF Conferences should engage with newer and younger members to discuss the problems relating to urban morphology today, perhaps in a specific session at each Conference. Brenda Scheer noted that this was one of the themes of the Salt Lake City Conference. Teresa Marat-Mendes agreed to clarify this idea and to organize a discussion at the Salt Lake City Conference. It was noted that the creation of a 'Morphopedia' had lacked active support and would not be pursued further at present.

It was recognized that a continuing unresolved problem was how to improve communication between ISUF Conferences. Greater use of the journal for this purpose, especially the Viewpoint section, was reaffirmed. The need to promote ISUF and its scientific basis more actively was emphasized. ISUF needed to be more purposeful in demonstrating the basis and value of urban morphology.

Treasurer's report

The financial strength of ISUF was underlined by the Treasurer, Michael Barke. Attention was drawn to the fact that precise annual accounting was complicated by the irregularity of payments of some individual and institutional subscriptions over the course of the year, often blurring the distinction between one financial year and the next. Journal expenditure for Volume 23 was relatively low owing to the smaller size of the Krasnoyarsk Conference and hence the reduction in the numbers of copies printed for those attending. Concern was again expressed at the relatively small number of regular individual subscribers. Few of those attending annual Conferences subscribed in the following year. However, institutional subscriptions were holding up well at a time when many journals were losing subscribers.

Webmaster's report

In the report of the Webmaster, Richard Whitehand, it was noted that the unique number of 'visits' to the website had decreased by about 20 per cent compared with the previous year, but the amount of downloaded data remained at a similar level, the average time spent by visitors having increased by about 20 per cent. The online journal section continues to be by far the most visited section of the website, the most downloaded articles having averaged over 200 downloads per month. The Conference section is the most visited non-journal section with around 500–600 unique views per month. The number of institutional subscribers with online access is approximately 150 out of about 200. It is surprising that a considerable number of long-term subscribing institutions still have not registered for online access. There is an increasing demand for usage statistics, but it is not possible to provide these with the simple hosting solution currently used for the journal.

Editor's report

Peter Larkham presented the Editor's report on behalf of Jeremy Whitehand, who was thanked for his many years of service as Editor of *Urban Morphology*. It was agreed that Whitehand should be recognized in the journal with the title of 'Founding Editor'.

Each of the issues of the journal covered by the report contained 100 pages, reflecting the gradual growth of the publication over the last few years.

During the period 1 May 2018 to 30 April 2019, 60 full-length articles had been submitted, 9 had been accepted and decisions on a further 3 were pending. The average time-lag from article submission to authors being sent an Editorial decision was just over 3 weeks. The average time-lag between the receipt of revised articles and publication was 5.8 months. The rejection rate was high but good papers were not rejected and many authors benefited from the advice given by referees. The Editor thanked the Editorial team and referees. A large number of back issues of the journal had accumulated and it was likely that these would be offered at a nominal price, or donated, to suitable institutional recipients.

Discussions with commercial publishers were continuing. Key considerations were maintaining income for ISUF from the journal and appropriate editorial control over content. Journal production methods and the quality of output, including the use of colour, and the effectiveness of online access, needed to be kept under review in a very rapidly developing market of journal publicity and access.

Peter Larkham was thanked for agreeing to take on the role of Editor. The first issue to be published under his editorship would be Volume 24, Number 1 (April 2020).

Future conferences

Two proposals to host the ISUF Conference in 2021 had been received. The Urban Design Studies Unit in the Department of Architecture, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow had proposed a conference on 'Urban form and the sustainable prosperous city'. The Department of Political and Historical Geography and Regional Studies in the University of Łódź, Poland, and the Institute of Architecture and Town Planning at Łódź University of Technology and the Institute of Urban Design at Cracow University of Technology, had proposed a conference on 'Urban redevelopment and revitalization: a multidisciplinary perspective'. Following presentations of the proposals, the Council agreed that both were suitable venues and themes for an ISUF Conference and the Glasgow proposal was approved for 29 June – 3 July 2021 and the Łódź proposal for a date to be agreed in 2022.

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Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM): Report 2018/19

This report covers the ninth year of activity of the Portuguese-language Network of Urban Morphology (PNUM). After hosting the first conference of the network in 2011, and the Twenty-First Conference of the International Seminar on Urban Form in 2014, the Universidade do Porto was home to the Seventh Conference of PNUM. The event, held in the Faculty of Architecture of this university on 18–20 July 2018, included almost 200 presentations. Most participants came from Brazil and Portugal, but there were also representatives from Spain and Mozambique. In 2019, the eighth annual conference of PNUM will take place in Maringá on 21–23 August. Maringá, a new town founded in 1945 in southern Brazil, was planned according to formal garden-city principles (Meneguetti and Costa, 2015). It offers a stage for debating the complex relationships between urban form and nature. Five themes frame the organization of the conference: ecology in cities, systems of open spaces, urban growth, morphological patterns, and history and heritage. A record number of abstracts has been submitted (more than 500) and a large attendance at the conference is anticipated.

In January 2019, the editorship of *Revista de Morfologia Urbana* (RMU) changed for the first time since the foundation of this journal in 2013. Julio Celso Vargas (Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul), Renato Saboya (Universidade

Federal de Santa Catarina) and Vinicius Netto (Universidade Federal Fluminense) were appointed as the new editors of the journal for the next 3 years. In addition, *Revista* has a new website at <http://revistademorfologiaurbana.org/index.php/rmu>. The most recent issue of the journal includes papers on the persistence of the elements of urban form over time, processes of land subdivision, the role of informal settlements in contemporary urban growth in Latin America, and gated communities and closed condominiums.

The fifth annual workshop of PNUM on ‘Design the city based on the analysis of urban form’ took place in Porto, on 16–20 July 2019 (Figure 1). After another successful workshop in 2018, in Maringá, the workshop’s return to Porto was in a partnership between the Universidade do Porto and the local authority of the city. Based on the morphological analysis developed by the participants in the Porto intensive workshop, which was a two-week event held in September 2018 promoted under the framework of the European project ‘Emerging perspectives on urban morphology (EPUM)’ (<http://epum.eu/>), the participants in the latest PNUM Workshop were invited to consider two topics: first, reflect on the current real estate pressure on the historical centre driven by an unprecedented tourist presence in the city; and secondly, develop planning, urban design and



Figure 1. The fifth annual workshop of PNUM, in the local authority of Porto.

architectural proposals that could balance the tension between conservation of the built heritage and transformation aiming at accommodating contemporary residential demands, both long- and short-term. After a first day devoted to walking on the site (Larkham, 2018), learning from the analytical work of the EPUM project and discussing strategies for balancing preservation and change, the participants started to develop proposals in a studio environment. Each day of studio work started with a lecture on major themes framing the workshop. Two of these days ended with a comprehensive debate involving all students and tutors. Over the subsequent 3 months, until October 2019, the participants are continuing to develop the design proposals, aiming at publication of an e-book at the beginning of 2020.

At the end of 2018 Jorge Correia (Universidade do Minho), one of the most active members of PNUM since its creation in 2010, retired from the Council and Teresa Heitor (Instituto Superior Técnico) was elected to replace him. In the past year, PNUM has continued its promotion of the study of urban form in Portuguese-language countries, notably in Brazil and Portugal. Furthermore,

it has been continuing to promote its relationships with the other ISUF Regional Networks, whose role and organizational dimension has been highlighted by the recent election of the first networks co-ordinator (Giuseppe Strappa, Sapienza Università di Roma), and with the International Seminar on Urban Form.

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Report – International Conference on Cities and Change, Darmstadt, Germany, 17–18 May 2019

This conference, held at the Technical University of Darmstadt (TU), marked 30 years since the fall of state-socialism in 1989. It was organized by Post-doctoral Research Fellows from the Urban Morphosis Lab led by Nebojša Čamprag. The Lab was established in 2018 to 'focus on investigating complexity and diversity in contemporary urban changes'. The event was supported by the German Research Foundation, the organization for promoting early career researchers at TU Darmstadt ('Ingenium'), and the interdisciplinary research group AG Stadtforschung.

The venue was a remarkable building, the *Maschinenhaus*, built in 1904 by the architect Georg Wikip, which until 2001 had been the power plant of the City Centre Campus of the University, later to be converted into a large lecture hall and several seminar rooms. With four keynote lectures, 74 presentations in 15 parallel sessions and 125 participants, including academics and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines, the two days were very intensive. As in most conferences there was the difficulty of choosing between the rich and wide range of parallel sessions. But this was eased

by the closeness of the meeting spaces and their layout, which allowed transfers between sessions to be made with only minor disruptions to speakers and audiences.

The theme of the conference was the transformation over the past 30 years of Central and Eastern European countries from centrally planned societies and economies to those based on market forces. Not only had the economic and political contexts of the countries dramatically changed but at the same time they had undergone the equally significant shocks of post-industrial transformation experienced within the cities of Western Europe. The keynote lectures illustrated a wide spectrum of responses to these transitions. Oleg Golubchikov (University of Cardiff) introduced these cities as agencies of change, while Nina Gribat (TU Darmstadt) illustrated conflicting urbanisms of post-socialist and post-industrial urban transformations in East Germany. Some perspectives were more optimistic, such as that on the planning for sustainability of Slovenia, presented by Kaliopa Dimitrovska Andrews (New University, Ljubljana). This provoked a considerable reaction

because it contrasted so dramatically with the changes undergone in the majority of the countries represented, where development was proceeding on a more disorderly and haphazard basis with little regard for the long-term implications of the patterns being established.

The eleven themes of the parallel sessions offered a diverse range of topics. These included approaches to the conservation of the cultural heritage of the socialist regimes, the way new towns founded on now obsolete heavy industries are being transformed, and the unique case of Skopje, where neoclassical façades are being grafted onto modernist buildings. ISUF members proposed, and several participated in, two heavily subscribed sessions on the urban morphology of post-socialism.

The countries discussed stretched from Germany to Uzbekistan, with a particularly prominent representation of the States of the former

Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. They manifested a diversity of cultures, religions and histories and it was striking how the inheritance of pre-socialist history still has an impact on towns and cities. For example, patterns of land ownership in the small towns in Poland are still heavily influenced by the partition of that country between Prussia, Russia and Austria that ended a century ago. But of course 30 years is a relatively short time for urban fabrics to be transformed: a point made by the final keynote speaker Luděk Sýkora (Charles University, Prague), who at the same time challenged the audience through his interpretation of capitalist pasts and socialist futures.

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