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The Urban Lab of Europe !

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Project led by the City of Pozzuoli



**URBAN
POVERTY**



The MAC (Monterusciello Agro City) project

The MAC project seeks to reduce urban poverty in the neighbourhood of Monterusciello, where poverty is understood in the social and economic sense and within the physical environment. Monterusciello is a new public housing district with 20,000 residents with low-income, a high level of unemployment, and characterised by large unused spaces.

The proposal is designed to trigger a process of economic, entrepreneurial, and social development, together with the improving of the urban environment. The project will create a new agro-urban landscape which will radically transform the character of the neighbourhood: a landscape made of urban areas and agriculture land connected by a productive thread; the agriculture giving work opportunities, training and production to the city; the city benefiting of the agriculture areas as gardens, thanks to the innovative techniques which will also increase the vegetation.

Thirty hectares of Municipal open areas will be transformed into farmland, developed the innovative techniques of permaculture in order to spearhead an economic process and urban growth as a means to combat poverty. The project will have three pillars: implementation of agriculture through innovative permaculture; improvement of the urban environment; and encouragement of entrepreneurship and employment.

The content of this journal does not reflect the official opinion of the Urban Innovative Actions Initiative. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the journal lies entirely with the author.

Partnership:

- Comune di Pozzuoli
- Università degli Studi di Salerno - University
- Coldiretti Napoli - National Association
- Confagricoltura Napoli - National Association
- Agrocoltura - Private Company
- L'iniziativa - Associazione di promozione sociale - NGO
- Fondazione FORMIT - Research Centre

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Journal should have begun to draw relevant conclusions concerning the results of the MAC project and to report the key points of an international conference, which was to be held in Pozzuoli at the end of March on the role of urban agriculture in combating urban poverty. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic prevented this conference from taking place and affects the project in one of its most productive moments. In fact, at this moment, all the construction sites are open and the crucial actions in their implementation phase. This issue focuses on the design and implementation path that has characterized the last 12 months, it underlines the positive impact that the project is beginning to have on the local community, both in terms of events, training and implication of the inhabitants. This publication also reports how the Municipal Urban Authority managed to strengthen its management action,

and how it managed to mediate the conflicts between agricultural production, landscape design and accessibility of the commons brought into play in this process of urban redevelopment in order to trigger an economic recovery, which can reduce the impact of urban poverty in Monterusciello. Finally, it will highlight the elements that allow the project to be resilient and continue to function even in this very difficult moment. In the following and last Journal#6 is going to be reported the final considerations on this MAC experience and a definitive structuring of the lessons learned during the project cycle and which can be transferred to other interested cities. In this issue the focus is in putting in evidence the contexts generating the MAC related knowledge. The domains feeding and creating the MAC experience.

2. THE RESILIENCE OF THE REGENERATIVE PROCESSES LED BY URBAN AGRICULTURE

The MAC is a composite project in which the theme of urban agriculture (UA) defines the plot of a regenerative path that includes several components such as:

- The redevelopment and re-functionalization of the public space,
- the requalification of public lands abandoned for years and their transformation in a productive asset, but also, of an enlarged public space: The community space.
- The redefinition of a cultural landscape: a modernist new town that returns to dialogue with those spaces and functions that it had cancelled with its birth.
- The recreation and reinforcement of a local community disillusioned with public action, which begins to interact with the project, when the first results are seen.
- The training and creation of job opportunities for many young people from Monterusciello, those most affected by the problem of stagnant unemployment.

This issue does not report about the knowledge acquired and which can be transferred from city to city, but it begins to define the context in which it has been created, in Journal#6 the conclusions will be drawn and the matrix of knowledge generated by this experience will be organized and its degree of transferability will be highlighted.

A relevant context for transformations and urban regeneration actions in the MAC lies precisely in the complexity of the “planning plot” woven around the theme of UA. This project is showing that the recovery of huge abandoned public areas around urban settlements consisting mainly of blocks, also mainly public heritage (social housing), based on a project that orbits around the potential triggered by UA, can activate synergistically various local forces, which manage to define an integrated territorial development path.

Beyond the MAC partnership, the role of the “second level partnership” built day by day through the actions of the MAC was important: from the technical-professional schools to the many associations present and active at the neighbourhood scale. **The MAC starts from an inherited situation of strong public action, which has led to a situation of failure, abandonment, distrust on the part of the local community and urban decay. The MAC urban innovative action supported by the EU, purely public, but endorsed by a hybrid partnership, with important openings towards the private world, is managed to trigger the spirit that a change is possible.** The community of Monterusciello - and this is the most relevant result of this last year of activity - is starting to appreciate the efforts done by the MAC and is increasingly interested towards the project's activities.

Urban regeneration based on UA actions of a relevant scale, as in the case of Monterusciello,

defines a context of resilient and inclusive development. This already constitutes a basic learning, a domain of validity for specific knowledge to be transferred to other practices. This resilient context is characterized by the following three aspects:

- **The work based on agriculture can be continued**, and becomes extremely necessary, in the context of severe humanitarian crises (**the cleaning and cultivation of the fields have been able to continue** safely even in this moment of global pandemic due to SARS-COV-2)
- The involvement of the pillars of local development (the inhabitants of Monterusciello in the first place, the local companies, the neighbourhood association forms...) finds many opportunities for economic, professional and cultural strengthening in urban agriculture actions, therefore the resistance of these local assets is increased and their action on the territory is reinvigorated.
- Shared access to the public heritage which **becomes a tool for production and job creation, and therefore a trigger for the local economy**, reconstructs the dialogue between citizens and administrators. This means **that urban**

agriculture, developed through inclusive actions, can help define the elements of a stable dialogue between inhabitants and administration and build a less fragmented community, more cohesive and ready to offer diversified responses in the face of sudden changes in society and economy.

Finally, a sort of “Reverse Broken Windows Effect” is triggered by the first visible results of cleaning the land plots. In fact, all private housing around these areas, often auto-constructions, started to clean and take care of the own spaces after that they saw how, through the actions of the MAC, the fields - for years abandoned- were cleaned up and prepared for production. Among other things, cleaning up the fields has allowed the inhabitants of Monterusciello to return having a view of the sea. This aspect is not insignificant, in fact, due to the bradyseism ([see Journal # 1](#)), these families have been separated from their relationship with the sea. Families that previously lived through the economies generated by the sea (fishing, trade) are now able to see it again, fixing a fracture that has never been completely healed for the community of Monterusciello, especially for the old generations.

3. AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, LANDSCAPE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY: THE CONCILIATION OF THE DIFFERENT SPATIAL USES AND THE REDISCOVERY OF A TERRITORY

The [Journal#4](#) put in evidence how the MAC was experiencing a very difficult period. This critical phase was characterized by:

- Delays due to the difficulty in having a stable and coordinated dialogue between the different project partners.
- Obstacles in aligning the timing of the EU projects with the one of the bureaucratic pathways underlying the phases of design, approval and site opening at local scale.
- A tough confrontation, or clash, between the two main planning tools that must support urban transformation, that is the Landscape Plan (LP) and the Agricultural Cultivation Plan (ACP).

At some point, it really seemed that the game was about to break and that the challenge launched by the MAC was not successful. Especially the misaligned visions between partners specialized in landscape design and the agricultural partners seemed to have reached a point of no return.

Among other things, many discussions in this “planning conflict” were based on a summary

knowledge of the territory to transform. In fact, years of neglect had been lost the memory of important infrastructural actions already carried out in the past on those territories. At this time, the action of the lead partner has been fundamental, even if belatedly. The Municipal Authority (MA) has intervened to mediate this conflict through the mobilization of professionals who knew how to mediate the discourse between landscape and agricultural cultivation. This has been a good intuition to mediate the conflict between the different visions conflicting within the MAC partnership (in the previous [Journal#4](#) has been deepened the issue of the conflicting planning tools)

The arrival of agronomists on the scene, finally combined with a strong management action operated by the MA, has allowed to constructively re-establish the dialogue between designers and agricultural partners, but above all, it has brought everyone, in literary sense, to the fields to be cultivated. When it started to enter the land with agricultural machines and with precise cultivation objectives, a territory was rediscovered, its history and the work of previous generations emerged. A previous



infrastructure came to the fore for the canalization of rainwater, for its collection and the protection of the soils to be cultivated. This infrastructure had been covered by the earth because it had not been maintained for decades until it had become useless and invisible. Obviously, the final solution undertaken was a hybrid between the two positions.

Experts often call for the pursuit of an integrated approach, and the thought immediately goes to the construction of bonds within non-dialoguing governance paths (silos thinking and acting), spatial fragmentation or convergence of policies, **but here we see that the lack of integration in the planning paths is also characterized in a temporal way:**

- **by forgetting what has been done previously,**
- **by forgetting and not knowing how to maintain and integrate the efforts of the generations that preceded us.**

A sort of thinking of sustainability on the contrary, looking at the past and not at the

future. This is another interesting planning aspect that emerged in recovering assets and land for agricultural use based on a sustainable and ecological methodology, such as that of permaculture.

In this sense, the practical knowledge of the agricultural partners combined with a hybrid professional figure (such as that of the agronomist) has made it possible to bring the project on the right track and also to enhance the theoretical vision of a public space extended to the scale of territory - hypothesized by the landscape architects in their LP - and to reconcile it with the needs of the ACP. After overcoming this impasse, the MAC began to recover the land through the cleaning of the areas to be cultivated and regenerated (we are talking about 50 hectares, see [Journal#3](#) for details). Currently, 40 hectares of public land, mainly abandoned or used in small parts in an informal and unauthorized way, have been cleaned and prepared for cultivation.



It is important to notice that informal agricultural activities developed in an “illegal” way during the period of abandonment of the land have been recovered to production and agreements with informal farmers. Indeed, currently the project is trying to define possible uses of part of this

abandoned lands by people of the community, in order to start small scale horticultures, orchards and thus have a smooth transition towards the new use of land without creating conflicts within the local community.



4. TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION: THE PROJECT DIALOGUE WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The soft action carried out in the component related to training in the MAC, of continuous structuring of knowledge and creation of relationships between the young forces belonging to the community of Monterusciello, was also in the last year a constant point of reference for the actions of the MAC. This action, is now experiencing difficulties in relation to the organization of the fourth and final training cycle, for obvious logistical reasons related to the spread of SARS-COV-2.

During 2019, however, the second and third training cycles were completed. The topics addressed (details on training courses can be found In [Journal#3](#)):

- The farm: from land to permaculture principles
- Permaculture, Ethical production and Rural Marketing
- Innovation Business and Start-Up

About 80 young people from the local community have been involved in the courses this year.

The training actions created a task force of young people specialized in the management of actions related to urban agriculture. This injection of professionalism will have an impact even beyond the context of Monterusciello and Pozzuoli. In this sense, the dialogue that the Municipality is

trying to establish with the regional level (this was a fundamental topic of the conference that had to be postponed) could generate scaling-up opportunities, letting those professionals express themselves in an enlarged context, which starts from Monterusciello (as a pilot) but which could then involve neighbouring territories, reaching a regional scale.

These acquired professional skills can be spent in a close context that increases the competitiveness of the Campi Flegrei area, but which could also be valid in an emerging market of bio-agriculture and proximity economies based on quality food and gastronomy.

In a nutshell, three relevant aspects are to be highlighted in the impact of this training action on the local community:

- **The importance of the connection between students and companies.** Over the past two months, a series of on-site educational visits have been organized with companies in the regional agricultural sector and with some new innovative companies in the sector.
- **The construction of the relationship with the neighbourhood community through awareness of the project themes,** through the tool of the travelling info desk, created with the help of the students of the courses.

- **Small experiments in participatory agriculture involving students and residents.**

The students of the courses shared with the community and some local associations the harvest and fruits of the educational garden that they are taking care of.



As far as the impact of the events is concerned, clearly, the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic has been more abrupt here, as all ongoing initiatives are blocked. The call open to artists, which in addition to having a strong resonance involved over 30 singers and bands of high national importance

too, was creating an interesting short circuit **between the rediscovered access /use of public spaces, urban agriculture and art.** An event that started to promote an inclusive campaign and a redefinition of community ties in a territory accustomed to not believing in the organized impact of public action.

The MAC reopens a dialogue, opens glimmers of opportunity and restarts the dialogue by giving confidence through tangible results. The MAC - which has never been a perfect project, as it had often to “learn by doing” - is not wrong in centring the most important aspects of any urban regeneration process:

- Recreating the links between socio-cultural relationships, through both soft actions (training, events, presence on the territory, identification of local stakeholders that have an impact on the population), but also by involving and effectively communicating the results related to physical transformations through clear and continuous messages from partners and policymakers
- Presenting the results achieved in high impact local television networks on the local population
- Explaining the decisions taken within the partnership in a simple way to the local community using the social media
- Highlighting new economic opportunities linked to the MAC actions and involving the local community to take part.

5. FROM AN IDEAL FORUM TO AN OPERATIONAL CENTRE FOR URBAN REGENERATION

The MAC is not only a major redevelopment operation of 50 hectares of abandoned spaces and their reuse through ambitious urban agriculture actions. It is - above all - a participatory and integrated development mechanism. The

“brain”, the coordination hub, is created and made operational through the functions that will be established in the redeveloped Piazza De Curtis.



In [Journal#3](#) you will find the details of the redevelopment project, in [Journal#1](#) you can see the state of abandonment of this urban infrastructure at the beginning of the MAC. It is worth just recalling here, before showing how good is advancing the renewal works in the building site, the key functions that are going to be integrated in this central square of Monterusciello:

- A mill for the preparation and sale of ancient grains, and productions derived from these, which have grown in the regenerated lands in Monterusciello
- An incubator centre of enterprises generated by the recovery of abandoned land
- The Agro Urban Centre, as a meeting place for urban policies and urban development initiatives on a neighbourhood scale, as well as a meeting place for the Agro Urban Forum (get more at 1st MAC Zoom in).
- A Permaculture Permanent Laboratory
- An ethical and supportive production laboratory
- A factory to experiment with innovative techniques and structures related to urban agriculture



The redevelopment of this square is not only fundamental as these functions will guarantee social, economic and cultural sustainability to the initiatives undertaken in the MAC, but this implicitly has always been the MAC flagship project. The most visible project for residents, the abandoned and inaccessible square that returns an asset for everyone, the sign of failure that returns to being an active square with aggregation,

development and productive functions. A square that is an active participation forum through the Agro Urban Centre offices, which is innovation and experimentation through laboratories, which is an opportunity to create new jobs through an incubator, which is a place of ecological production through an ancient asset such as the mill, which becomes a symbolic driver towards a new nature of ecological and 0 km agricultural markets.



In every urban regeneration process, it is very important to give back to deprived communities working public assets, public spaces generating new opportunities. The redevelopment of Piazza De Curtis is about to become that enormous generator of trust towards the public action, the result that reconnects a dialogue interrupted for years between the community of Monterusciello and the Municipality in its sense

of institution. Above all, it is important that the project is not only carrying out a partial redevelopment but will cover the whole square and also its reconnection, in the sense of accessibility and landscape transition with the close residential neighbourhoods and with the cleaned open spaces reused for urban agricultural purposes.

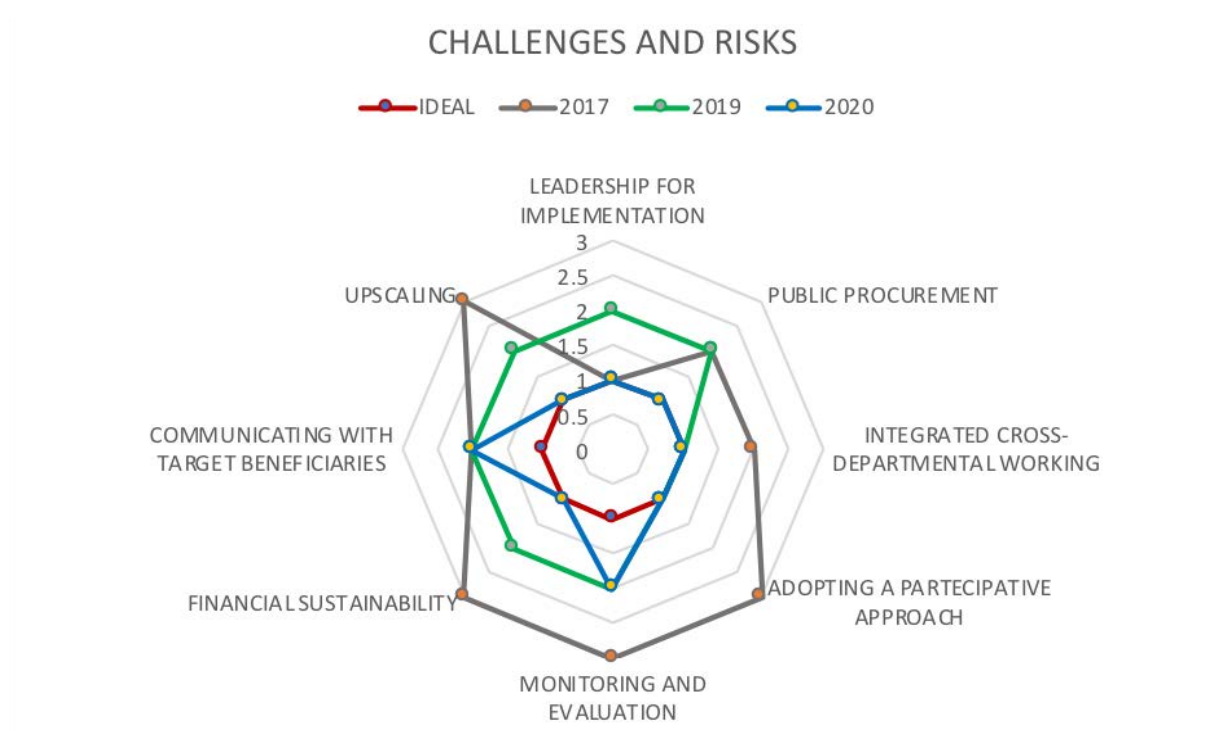
6. MAPPING THE CHALLENGES IN VIEW OF THE FINAL ARRIVAL

In the [Journal#4](#) there is a detailed table on the evolution of the challenges closed to the MAC experience, IN THE TABLE here below it is basically reported the evolution in this last year (03/2019 - 03/2020).

TABLE 1: MAPPING MAC AGAINST THE ESTABLISHED UIA CHALLENGES

| Challenge | (Risk) Level | Observations |
|--|--------------|---|
| 1. Leadership for implementation (2020) | LOW | Despite the SARS-CoV-2 emergency, the work related to the cleaning and the cultivation of the areas devoted to urban agriculture can be continued in respect of the safety of the involved workers. The same is happening in the building sites. The Municipality took during last year key decision and has been coherent with them providing a good acceleration to the project. Many critical activities have been implemented or are under implementation. The dialogue with the local community is definitively improving. |
| 2. Public procurement (2020) | LOW | The key decision taken by the municipality management facilitated even the work of launching the public procedure. As stated in the previous Journal, The MUA is very well prepared in dealing with all technicalities related to the design and management of a public procurement Now the new unknown is linked to the uncertainties about the timing of the emergency induced by SARS-CoV-2. there will certainly be slowdowns again. |
| 3. Integrated cross-departmental working (2020) | LOW | As in the previous period, the coordination among different departments within the MUA of this urban regeneration process demonstrated to be quite good. It is improved even the issue related to the vertical governance, the dialogue with the Region, that is the managing authority, seems to be on a good track. |
| 4. Adopting a participative approach (2020) | LOW | It is to confirm the good trend started about one year ago. Many things have been further improved in the dialogue between the Municipality and the first and second level partnership. The feedback coming from the local community is of course stronger in the moment that the first results are visible. |

| | | |
|--|---------------|--|
| 5. Monitoring and evaluation (2019) | MEDIUM | The ability to look with constructive self-criticism at the implementation paths is an asset of the project and is developing more and more. Unfortunately, it is to confirm that not all partners have reached the same degree of maturity in this process of monitoring and measuring the work done and under implementation. |
| 6. Financial Sustainability (2019) | LOW | Real opportunities on how to continue the MAC after the financing period are seriously considered and discussed within the partnership and with institutional and non-institutional private actors that played important roles even as second level partners. Juridical forms are assessed in order to define how to officialize the post MAC collaboration. |
| 7. Communicating with target beneficiaries (2019) | MEDIUM | Same situation of the previous year, but the current situation is made more difficult by the COVID 19 emergency. The tools necessary to improve the dialogue with the target beneficiaries (The Consulta Urbana, the Agro Urban Centre), are partially operational. In the last year, there has been a good communication towards the target beneficiaries operated by the partners responsible for communication and training activities. |
| 8. Upscaling (2019) | LOW | There is a lot of interest in the planning process started with the MAC, and a lot of expectations, not only locally, but also nationally. The idea of the MAC attracts a lot of interest even on a European scale, in this sense the partnership is presenting its results in international seminars and conferences. The credibility of the proposed regenerative process is increased through the first results achieved and visible on the ground. |



7. FINAL REMARKS

The pandemic caused by SARS-COV-2 catches the project in a moment of great acceleration on all the main action fronts, namely:

- The redevelopment sites of the central square of Monterusciello,
- the cultivation of the land recovered and cleaned up,
- the latest training actions, communication events with the local population,
- dialogue with institutions to define post-UIA financial sustainability,
- Comparison with other UIA projects and exchange of knowledge on urban regeneration and urban agriculture practices.

However, this Journal highlighted the resilient aspect of this project.

A project that has struggled to activate itself, but that has reached its balance and in this moment, despite the SARS-COV-2 induced crisis, is not collapsing, but rather it has the capability to continue relevant activities under these unusual and unexpected conditions.

Agriculture, and therefore UA, operated at a considerable scale and organized through professional work and means within an urban context, is an economic activity that can continue to be carried out even in periods where many productive activities must to be stopped, undeniably, it becomes crucial for the well-being of the whole community.

The sentence pronounced by the planning Deputy Mayor of Pozzuoli, Roberto Gerundo, characterizes very well the period that is going through this project:

“The work of the farmer, lonely by tradition, wins over the misfortunes of the moment and makes us feel in action, without losing the time of nature”

The resilience and sustainability of the MAC, and of other projects based on the same principles, is based on knowing how to find harmony between the times of economic development and the rhythm of natural time.

Another resilient aspect is also linked to the fact that the redevelopment of the central square of Monterusciello, Piazza De Curtis, the operational, community and symbolic centre of the project, can continue in safe conditions. The stop concerns all the actions that provide for social contact, the laws introduced on social distancing in Italy prevent to operate events related to communication and training actions. At this moment, the project management is preparing to respond to the implementation of these activities considering the use of online platforms, or simply postponing them.

In conclusion, the project managed to build a general infrastructure, now, it has to build a new “mission partnership”, namely:

- To bring together those who want to continue cultivating the soil and strengthen the creation of the local economic chain.
- Schedule regular events to strengthen the bond with the local community.
- Continue the work on start-ups. The start-ups that will be identified will shortly accompany the final phase to become protagonists for managing the requalified commons.

This project aims to achieve something lasting and projected into the future:

- Stable cultivation that reconstructs the landscape and
- increases the capital level of public goods (soils) and
- stimulates local economies by increasing the quality of life

The MAC is steadily getting into social and market economy project and continues to open up to more actors and operators starting from the agricultural ones, as a necessary condition, but achieving the sufficiency through the inclusion of all the professionals open to innovation and experimentation.

SOCIAL-MAC

WEBSITE:

<http://www.macpozzuoli.eu>

SOCIAL NETWORKS:



@macpozzuoli



@PozzuoliMac



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Monterusciello Agro City



MAC Pozzuoli

Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) is an Initiative of the European Union that provides urban areas throughout Europe with resources to test new and unproven solutions to address urban challenges. Based on article 8 of ERDF, the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.

UIA projects will produce a wealth of knowledge stemming from the implementation of the innovative solutions for sustainable urban development that are of interest for city practitioners and stakeholders across the EU. This journal is a paper written by a UIA Expert that captures and disseminates the lessons learnt from the project implementation and the good practices identified. The journals will be structured around the main challenges of implementation identified and faced at local level by UIA projects. They will be published on a regular basis on the UIA website.



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