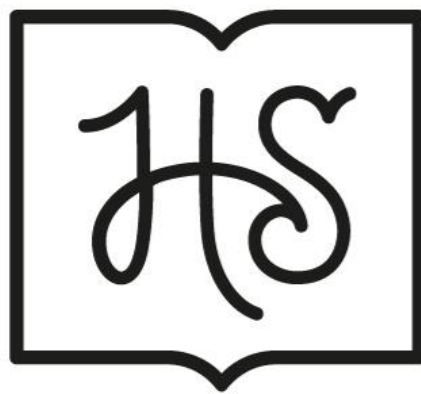


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“Garden-School, Garden City and Garden-Hungary” – Pedagogical and Life Reforms Alternatives in Hungary between the Two World Wars

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ABSTRACT

*“Garden-School, Garden City and Garden-Hungary” –
Pedagogical and Life Reforms Alternatives in Hungary
between the Two World Wars*

The paper brings into focus the Hungarian pedagogical and life reform concepts in the interwar period. The reform alternatives criticized the modernism and reflected their negative influences. Most of these tendencies looked for the solution of land reform and social problems. The attention of Hungarian intellectuals turned to rural Hungary. Proponents of the “New Education” saw the solution in folk education and wanted to create a new middle class out of poor peasantry. The official reform and theoretical concepts aimed at preserving the agrarian character of Hungary for the future. The garden (nature, countryside) was a common theme among the initiatives. The study presents three achievements of the period: the garden city of Budapest (Wekerle settlement), the Garden-School (Szeged) and the Garden-Hungary concept as a third way theory in the form of “Quality Socialism” (by László Németh). All these educational and social reforms reinterpreted the categories of nation and folk.

Introduction

After the World War I the borders of many European countries – among them the borders of Hungary – were changed. These transformations were caused due to decisions of the most influential victorious states and by complex international relations and national politics.

This paper outlines a research focusing on the main characteristics of pedagogical and life reform concepts in the interwar period. The educational reforms will be discussed in the socio-political context and as effects of the international educational and life reform movements, and finally, pedagogical paradigms in the changes of national education policy. Among them, the contact between school reforms and reform schools; the reception and its

results of reform pedagogical movement; the relationship between the reform pedagogy and the life reform movement and their institutionalisation will be presented, highlighting the nature-oriented and child-centered education (city vs. province) in Hungary.

This paper presents the so far unsearched pieces of the Hungarian life reform movement based on new international paradigms. Its purpose, on the one hand, is to describe the inter-relationships and divisions and, on the other hand, to analyse the variation from an international context in regarding to reference points of the international and the Hungarian life reform movements during the interwar period (Oelkers, 1992; Krabbe, 1974, 2001; Kerbs and Reulecke, 1998, Németh and Skiera, 2018; Skiera, 2006).

The research group of Theoretical, Historical and Comparative Pedagogy at Eötvös University has been researching (2004–2019) the topic of *Reform pedagogy and life reform – with their history of reception and institutionalization*¹ for more than 15 years. The results of research can add basically new facts and more interpretation for the understanding of complex historically educational reform-based phenomena, the differences between reality and illusion. The tendencies of the Hungarian life reform movement were summarized in numerous volumes (Skiera, Németh and Mikonya, 2006; Németh and Pirka, 2013; Németh, Pukánszky and Pirka, 2014; Németh and Vincze, 2017; Boreczky and Vincze, 2018; Németh and Skiera, 2018). One part of the reforms promoted the third way utopia, which wanted neither capitalism nor communism. As special subtopic of research, Garden-Hungary will be analysed among the life reform solutions (Vincze, 2010, pp. 297–310; 2017a, pp. 189–203; 2017b, pp. 35–57).

From a methodological point of view, the research primarily belongs to the pedagogical and educational discourse analyses. The sources are the main works on the history of reception; primary sources are school concepts, contemporary literary works and journals (essays). The presenters of reform movements were pedagogues or quasi pedagogues; however, the founders of the Hungarian reform schools were female grammar school teachers. The Hungarian intellectuals felt responsible for the Hungarian education and the future of the Hungarian state. All they understood that the ecological, economic and agrarian reforms only with educational transformation could promise social renewal for well-being.

The main research questions are the following: how could the special forms of life reform influence each other? What kind of answer did the Hungarian reformers produce that mainly brought the third way utopias to the surface? Which form could be adapted to the nature-oriented “garden motif”?

¹ The research leaders were (and are) Prof. Dr. A. Németh (Budapest), Prof. B. Pukánszky (Szeged), Prof. Dr. E. Skiera (Flensburg), Prof. Dr. J. Hopfner (Graz).

1. Background and reform efforts

The Trianon trauma² shocked the Hungarian society and led to form the authoritarian nationalist-conservative regime that was leading the country in the interwar period to define territorial revision as its ultimate goal. After the crises and losses, the focus was on the term “reform” as a magic word with which the country was to be saved by a general social reform after the catastrophe of the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920). As a result of peace, the country lost two-thirds of its territory, more than half of its population. Because ethnic borders were not taken into account, one-quarter of the approximately 13 million people who lived in the annexed territories were Hungarians. The public could not accept the unilateral decisions of entente powers, and the main national aspiration in the interwar period was to change the “robbery” to revision. The Revisionism of the Treaty of Trianon also represented the overriding national ambition of Hungarians living in both Hungary and the neighbouring states during the Horthy era. Children attending state elementary schools in Hungary during the Horthy era recited the irredentist “Hungarian Creed” at the beginning of each day (Romsics, 1999, pp. 139–147).

The political elite of the Horthy era found the possible way of survival in strengthening the Christian national idea (Mészáros, Németh and Pukánszky, 2000, p. 369). This gave educational policy an enormously important role in which Count Kuno Klebelsberg, the Minister of Religion and Education (1921–1931), believed that the time had just come to great cultural efforts. He promoted ideologically the conservative Christian-national spirituality and set as his goal the realization of the cultural and spiritual upswing and the cultural superiority of the Hungarian nation. His motto was: “*Today it is mainly not the sword but culture that can defend the Hungarian homeland and make it great again*” (Grósz, 1927, p. 604).

The educational policy found most important to form obedient citizens based on official canons. The traditions and school subjects such as history, literature, and geography were to strengthen national unity. The lessons focused on the knowledge imparted in the classroom. Adult education centres flourished in the 1930s. They were founded by state, church, and private sponsors and they provided education for poor peasant youth.

The official school policy wanted to eliminate or at least reduce illiteracy, so a primary school programme (1925) was introduced with the aim of building 5000 new classrooms in the countryside. To this day, this innovation has been the largest in Hungarian educational policy. The program supported the education of poor peasantry children. The classrooms were uniformly very well equipped. The walls of modern buildings were of brick and with larch flooring, huge windows and slate roofs. They also had a three-room teacher apartment with a brick toilet in the courtyard. These new farm schools became cultural centres of the farm world with a library, and equipped with gramophone and film projector machines. Host, industrial and reading circles were able to hold their meetings here.

² The Peace Treaty of Versailles (near to Paris) was underwritten by Hungary in Grand Trianon palace that is reason why it is called Treaty of Trianon in Hungary.

Klebelsberg's public education policy was characterized by the establishment of the unified secondary school system (1924), the legalization of the civil school as an independent secondary school (1924). The reform of secondary school education for girls (1926) and the reform of teacher training (1924) belonged to his name, too. The folk school policy reached that the 8th grade folk school was enacted in 1928 (Mészáros, Németh and Pukánszky, 2000, pp. 368–367).

2. Reform pedagogy in Hungary with special “Garden-School” in Szeged

Parallel with the official educational reforms, the Hungarian female grammar school teacher established new reform schools in Hungary, too. The genesis was at the turn of the 20th century, which means the reception of foreign models. The influences of pedology and the New School movement were significant. The psychologist, László Nagy founded the first Psychological Laboratory in 1899 and the Association of Pedology in 1903. He prepared the foundation of the Hungarian Society for the Study of Children (1906). The Society started its activities with departments for experimental psychology, data collector, pedagogical, legal and child protection³. It collaborated with the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology and Special Education and the Seminar of Pedagogy in Budapest, which organized courses in topic of New Education for pedagogues and parents, and had magazines with titles: “*Child, In the way of the future, School of action*”. The mediators of reform pedagogy were primary school teachers, who could be initiators because of the emancipation of women. The centre of the reform schools was the capital, Budapest, but there were also some in the countryside (e.g. in Szeged). The reform schools were for children from the “middle class” (children of bourgeois families / intellectuals) but there were initiatives to organise school for poor children from worker or peasant families (Pukánszky, 1999, pp. 219–221).

The most important reform schools were in Budapest. Emma Domokos-Löllbach founded the first school. It called the New School, which was based on the self-development of children and worked the longest time from 1915 to 1949. After the meeting with Rudolf Steiner, dr. Mária Nagy-Göllner opened the first Waldorf School in her own villa (1926–1932). Erzsébet Bélaváry-Burchard learned in Rome the Montessori pedagogy and founded the first Montessori-Kindergarten in 1927 and one year later the school (1928–1941)⁴. Márta Müller-Nemes had a role model in funding a school following O. Decroly's pedagogical principles and she opened the Family School (1919–1943), in which were project-oriented learning and creative activities. Júlia Vajkai popularised the work-schools with 13 institutes in the working quarters of Budapest⁵ (Pukánszky, 2019)⁶.

³ The Society has been active in promoting a child-centred pedagogical approach. The journal *The Child* (1907–1943) edited by László Nagy played an important role in this. In 1914, the organization had 10 branches with about 4,000 members.

⁴ The Franciscan Order opened the first Montessori School in Hungary in 1912.

⁵ The Working-schools, with the support of the British Children's Rescue Fund (Save Children Found), have prepared girls of 12 and 15 years old from poor working families to perform their tasks in adult life.

Alongside the Budapest-centred reform pedagogical endeavours, Szeged stood out, playing a leading role in the introduction of pedagogical reforms in the 1930s. The Pedagogical College for Citizen School Teachers of Szeged was the centre of innovation in the countryside. The model school of the University of Szeged with teacher research was named as Active School (1933–1944), with Prof. D. Kratofil). Its journal appeared with the title: “*Active School*”. In Szeged, D. Várkonyi Hildebrand founded the first department of psychology. They had a psychological laboratory and a doctoral school which enabled psychological observations, measurements, tests (following Claparède, Decroly, Freud, Jung). With the support of D. Várkonyi H., Erzsébet Dolch (Dombrádi)⁷ opened the Garden School (1936–40) as a new reform school. They emphasized the importance of nature-oriented education and teaching in the national spirit. The friendly and family-like nature of the teacher-student relationship prevailed in the school in Újszeged⁸. Child-centred procedures were used in teaching, emphasizing the method of action. The school was transformed into a welcoming home for these 6–10 years old. The atmosphere of the institute was determined by the fact that it worked in a detached family house near the bank of river Tisza. At Garden-School, children were intensively engaged in intellectual, physical, psychical and moral education. The educational practice and the methods of the school in many ways were linked to the pedagogy of the “Family School” founded in Budapest in 1915 and to the globalization method of the famous Belgian medical reform teacher, Ovide Decroly (1871–1932). The central issue was activating and educating children for independence. E. Dolch used the so-called globalizing, literal teaching method of reading. The children were already able to read around November and finished the reading-book by February. Learning to write took into account the age-specific characteristics of children. Pupils in the first year learned writing not with a pointed pen, but with a “spherical, finely crafted” writing tool. The practice took place in a playful form, such as competition. The quantity was increased slowly and gradually. Teaching writing only began in April and was always linked to a student experience or natural observation. In order to improve vocabulary and overcome the strong broad accent of the local children, pupils told stories and practiced smaller roleplaying. Fairy-tale weaving often took place several times, exploiting childlike imagination. Children learned counting in a playful way, and the illustration helped them work with chestnuts and dominoes. The garden of the house in Újszeged proved to be a suitable place for physical education. Here, too, plants were grown, and the experiences gained during gardening were later discussed. Erzsébet Dolch made sure that the child acquired the ability to work together, to cooperate in team based on the division of labour, and to develop self-discipline and community awareness essential for social co-existence. The school did not select children. Its pupils were from different social classes. They included the children of doctors and civil servants, but also the children of ordinary factory workers. The teacher consulted parents on issues affecting

⁶ The movement declined in the 1940s and was banned completely for decades after the Socialist regime from 1949. It was not until the late eighties that it was possible to organize some of the institutions of reform pedagogy again.

⁷ E. Dolch used later surname Dombrádi.

⁸ Újszeged is a district of Szeged.

school life. The Garden- School in Southern Hungary was an important pedagogical and psychological laboratory in Hungarian education, which as a reform school connected only to teacher training of the University in Szeged (Pukánszky and Németh, 1996; Mészáros, Németh and Pukánszky, 2000, pp. 382–388; Pukánszky, 2019).

3. Garden City in Budapest: Wekerle settlement

At the beginning of 20th century, the leadership of Budapest reflected on the challenges of modernism. István Bárczy (1866–1943) was a Hungarian politician and jurist, who served as Minister of Justice between 1919 and 1920. István Bárczy as Lord Mayor of the capital, aimed at solving social tensions of school development (1901–1906) by implementing a complex urban innovation program (1906–1920). The program has given a prominent role to the economic and cultural rise of the poor people. There was a significant difference in the standard of living. Most workers had housing problems. Basic hygiene conditions were missing because the streets lacked of a drainage system and the drinking water was infected. Children many times did not go to school because they had to work to support their family. Bárczy wanted to develop the folk school system, the living conditions and the health care. He supported the initiative to establish a garden city at the edge of the Budapest (Németh, 2005, pp. 69–98).

In 1908, the first Hungarian (so far the only) garden city was founded near Budapest (in Kispest) based on the English model, in order to improve living conditions in the capital. Wekerle estate was named after Sándor Wekerle. He was the prime minister, who supported the idea of building comfortable, human-scale housing estates for workers and government employees, and determined the creating a garden city habitat. The new district ensured not only healthy and nature-closed life for the inhabitants but also nature and children centred education. Many successful architects of the time submitted plans for one or two-story houses, ranging from duplexes to 12-flat apartment houses. One-story buildings placed along smaller streets had 2, 3 or 4 individual apartments, and two-storey 6, 8, and 12-apartment houses lined wider streets, forming a unique “spider web” street layout, centred on a round square with a large park in the middle. The most common arrangement is the 45m² two-room apartment in 12-apartment complexes. 3-room 59m² apartments are also common. There are a few larger apartments in the 2-storey buildings on the central square. They are villa-like housings with larger apartments, referred popularly as “headmaster’s house” or “doctor’s apartment”⁹. Between 1911 and 1914, four schools and two kindergartens were completed with 48 classrooms, 18 kindergarten rooms and 2 secondary grammar schools. There were different services, restaurants, library, laundry, shops, pharmacy etc. (László, 1926).

The main, central square was very important for the concept of “building for the community”; thus planning of the main square was a separate project won by Károly Kós, one of the star architects of the period. He designed the arrangement with the radial street layout and also

⁹ However, many of the famous architects of the era (e.g. Lajos Schodits, Béla Eberling, Dezső Zrumeczky, Gyula Wálder and Dénes Györgyi) designed houses on the square.

one of the trademark wooden gates (the eastern one¹⁰). All designs followed the “Transylvanian style” established by Károly Kós with high roofs and generous use of wooden structures. All the houses provided spacious gardens and the street layout was envisioned with comfortable, tree-lined avenues.

Fifty thousand trees were planted during the construction. The estate had its own gardening service which not only took care of the plants, flowers and trees of the community spaces but also helped renters to groom their own gardens as well. Four fruit trees were planted for each apartment (altogether 16.000), and thanks to the sandy soil and to the care of the new dwellers, various kinds of drupes bloomed (for example currant bush). Thanks to the garden idea, a new green belt could grow in the city which was an island within the capital. Due to the safe garden character of the estate, children could go alone to schools and enjoy the free time outdoor activities being observed. The construction of Wekerle estate with its familiar atmosphere created opportunities for public life and forming of togetherness (László, 1926; Nagy and Szelényi, 2008).

4. “Garden-Hungary” and “Quality Socialism” – a third way solution

The “national question” after the Trianon shock highlighted other unsolved issues. At the same time, the problems of late bourgeoisization (after 1867), the backwardness of rural society and the consequences of late modernization with the participation of assimilated Jews had to be dealt with. The disappointment led to criticism expressed by the Hungarian middle class and the search for new leadership elite. Politicians and intellectuals asked the following questions: Who was responsible for the present and future? What is Hungarian? Who does the nation belong to? The participants analysed such categories as “nation, folk, and tribes”. The traditional concept of the nation changed and had a new interpretation. The nation created a new semantic category: the word nation meant folk (Romsics, 1999, pp. 172–186; Szóke, 1994, pp. 34–36). In the rhetoric of the Horthy-regime the word reform was interpreted as a “magic expression”. The reforms should have given solutions on different levels. We can see that pedagogical and life reform initiatives overstepped their border areas and effected social and political changes. Not only the official politics but also the Hungarian intelligentsia turned to pedagogy.

The debate between the two groups of Hungarian intellectuals (first of all writers) determined the thoughts about the identity of the Hungarian nation. The urbanists with their cosmopolitanism formed the first group and the populist (folky) authors with their nationalism formed the second one. The so-called folky writers represented the poverty and adversity of provincial people and the situation of the poor peasants in little villages in their sociological isolation. They reported the life of farmers, their everyday routine, social and cultural backwardness and economic deprivation. The writers informed the public opinion of the declining number of births, migration to the capital, and emigration overseas through the press and radio. They described the lives of the farmers, not only in terms of their poverty

¹⁰ Today, it is called Kós Károly Gate.

but also in terms of the beauty and harmony of provincial life that reflected an original way of being. Most of the writers believed that the peasants' mentality was uncontaminated, and that young peasant boys (and girls) were the reserve power of the nation. They drew the attention of the intelligentsia to the education of peasant children. One part of the elite shared the opinion that Hungary needed to choose a third way. This meant neither capitalism nor socialism (Gombos, 1990, pp. 80–81; Monostori, 1994, pp. 46–48).

László Németh¹¹ (1901–1975) was one of the remarkable figures of inter-war intellectual life in Hungary who theorized a “third political way”. His saviour theory called “Garden-Hungary” amalgamated elements of pedagogical and life reform ideas. However, his rhetoric partly incorporated into the Central-European “folkish theory” as well. In his utopian vision of society, he saw the new deal in raising rural Hungary to a higher cultural level, which could mean a better future for the nation. Holistic cultural and educational reforms composed his tools which evolved in the 1930s. He worked out a special Hungarian “third way” as a vision of the future which even has followers today. László Németh appeared in the role of a quasi-pedagogue. He formulated a conception of an overall reform of schooling aimed at educating the “new man” (Monostori, 2016).

Németh wanted to establish “*The Revolution of quality*” which the nation could reach through the implementation of Garden-Hungary and qualitative socialism. Németh recommended that poor young men should be educated in order to be able to work as new settlers. It was necessary to ensure the improvement of their skills for quality farming. He meant that it was essential to reform the education of young people in the countryside, as the middle class was in crisis and only a new generation of youth would have the chance to lead the country. He proposed that learning opportunities should be provided at different levels. L. Németh also worked out a new form of education called folk high school that provided adult education to 20 years old boys. The training was to be connected with military training. Thus, the youth would learn discipline, timeliness, and purity while learning to use weapons (Németh, 1933, pp. 137–139; 1940, pp. 9–24).

The peasant dormitories (as folk high schools) and the adult evening classes would ensure the training of the new intellectuals. The special curriculum would be based on national subjects. Young people would learn about the history of the Hungarian nation and language within the so-called “self-knowledge subjects” (Hungarian literature and grammar, history, geography, and music). L. Németh wanted the universities to be attended by new people who came from promoted, gifted, yet poor farmer families. The professional self-training circle, library, and interdisciplinary training were intended to lead to the cultivation of new generation (‘new nobleness’), which could aspire for leadership in the country. L. Németh hoped if the best young people were selected, then they could be the new settlers (Németh, 1933, 1940). Traditional farmers could create a “Garden-Hungary” which could produce vegetables, fruit,

¹¹ László Németh was a doctor, a writer and a pedagogue (not a politician); he wanted to be a “mental catalyst” of his time.

kinds of cereal, and animal products of the highest quality. However, L. Németh drew attention to the types of difficulties which might arise in folk education. He underlined the problems of lost identity and the barriers of social integration (Németh, 1933; 1940, 1992, pp. 285–296).

Németh had ideas about the Garden-School too: “*The new school – ceterum censeo – can only be a large garden in which learners can talk all day long. In addition to the four basic subjects, [...] in the garden could also teach other skills: wine pruning, vegetable gardening, shoe repair and carpentry. The physical exercises could also be the subjects of the garden: here the art lovers could draw and play the violin, meanwhile the typewriters rattle under the planes here. Otherwise, the readers can imagine the other things themselves: the benches of the library, the bet in the gardening, the festivals, the circles...*” (Németh, 1962, p. 178).

Garden Hungary appeared as the goal of a new Hungary, garden as a metaphor for quality work and as an ideal place for life, for work and for learning. It meant that by going back to nature (to originality) it was possible to create an organic development for Hungarian society.

5. Summary

The Hungarian school and life reformers criticised the educational and political system and realised the reception of the life reform movement in Europe; however, they sought their own answers. They represented the political responsibility and self-responsibility of the Hungarian intellectuals. With the searches for a way out, they re-evaluated the categories as nation and folk. They discovered the peasantry as the clean source. They incorporated folk (poor peasantry) into the nation.

Three examples were analysed which are all connected to reform initiatives. The Garden-School in Szeged as a reform school in the countryside exemplified that the reform pedagogical movement was institutionalised in Hungary, too. Children and nature-oriented education underlined the importance of activities, which developed different skills in children. This school, on the one hand, was based on international results of pedagogy and psychology. On the other hand, it cooperated with psychological laboratory and teacher training while it could form its own national character. “New Education” saw in the untainted child the salvation, the new power for the future. The child seems to be a prophet, a prototype of the New People. This viewpoint is a common motif between the reform pedagogy and life reform (Skiera, 2006, pp. 22–48).

The garden city movement had a special place in the forms of life reform movement. Among the communes (life and art societies, new religiousness) and sanatoria (with therapies, sport activities focusing on the body), garden cities belong to a group for ecological and economic reforms, agrarian reforms. The method of urban planning in which self-contained communities are surrounded by greenbelts, became quickly popular renewing entities of ‘grey cities’. In terms of its deeper structure, the garden cities belong to ecological, respectable socio-genetic life reforms. However, it has an affirmative-participatory relationship (e.g. the

idea of redemption for vegetarians) and expresses a spiritual-vital concept in overcoming alienation in the individual life and in the community (Krabbe, 1974).

The creative sensitivity of L. Németh led him on the path towards a utopia, since the Third Way appeared to be an imaginary transformation of reality. Compared to the German-speaking regions, utopias were more characteristic of Hungary. In Austria, Germany and Switzerland, the life reformers implemented much more practical solutions. The novelty of his solution lied in the fact that he had a firm belief in humanistic values, and by mediating them, he believed the organic way could save the nation without violence, i.e. without revolution. Education was a means of cultivating inwardness through the individual way of social problems.

It is important to underline that there were different viewpoints about living and working in the countryside. The urban inhabitants had free time activities, and were used to making excursions and tours in nature. Rural people had other connection and habits to nature. Nature for them is rather an everyday habitat, a place of traditional work in vineyards or orchards. It had long traditions of fruit and vegetable growing in the sandy soil in the 18–19th centuries. For three million poor people, the cultivation of gardens provided the basic ingredients of everyday meals. They generally honoured the soil and the gifts of nature, but most of them identified nature with disciplined, monotonous work. Because of the regular heavy physical work involved, the folk underestimated mostly natural beauty.

The idea of Garden-Hungary was a projection of garden motif on the whole of the Hungarian state. It was such an utopia which reflected the actual problems of society but disregarded the historical changes and daily events of Second World War. The complex educational and social program was based on anti-modern critique and mixed different philosophical and political interpretations. The “new man conception” did not consist of solely race theory or race protection. The rescue of nation supposed the active presence of Hungarian folk (it means without not Hungarian, i.e. without Jewish people) (Vincze, 2017b, pp. 35–57).

The activity of Hungarian intellectuals intensified the internal debate about the alternatives of the state in a war situation. The literature (instead of philosophy) had an intermediary role in highlighting general opinion. The turn to the life (and social) reform movement could be understood as self-defence of the elite. The oversized importance of education made it clear that the reform of education was interpreted as a motive for salvation. The strategies of survival in reform proposals were in most cases expressed in utopias.

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