

Formation and development of teachers’ professional competence in Latvia from 1830s to 1930s

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Abstract – *In this paper are described the historical changes relating to teachers’ competences with particular reference to their social relevance. Teacher training became important in the period 1830-1840. Teaching requirements were moral and religious more than cultural and intellectual as far as a teacher (above all if devoted to working classes) had to educate to discipline, social order and religious Christian approach to the world. A teacher had to organize and to lead the local cultural life and adult education of the country, where he/she was working, also facing difficult children. At the beginning of 20th century, thanks to New Education movement, teaching/learning process was activated, more and more women were involved in teacher profession and university was called to train future teachers. Summarizing the development of the teachers’ competence in the 19th and the first third of the 20th century it is evident that the teachers’ skill to teach pupils according to their class belonging, Christian faith and gender gradually lost its significance. The teachers’ competences that were connected with the activation of the teaching/learning process took a stable place in the hierarchy of the public demands. The transition of special education and adult education in the hands of the professionals meant that the competence of comprehensive school teachers in these areas was no longer considered essential.*

Riassunto – *In questo contributo vengono osservati i cambiamenti storici che hanno influito sulle competenze professionali degli insegnanti, con una riflessione sulla domanda di gruppi sociali con cui l’insegnante doveva essere capace di lavorare. La professione dell’insegnante fu consolidata insieme alla prima preparazione di insegnanti popolari negli anni 1830-1840. Una grande importanza veniva assegnata alla personalità dell’insegnante, che doveva essere di buona salute fisica e spirituale, ed oltre a ciò un/-a bravo/-a cristiano/-a. Queste qualità da un insegnante popolare si richiedevano più della preparazione culturale, giacché egli doveva educare gli allievi alla morale e alla disciplina, fornendo conoscenze e abilità in modo corrispondente al ceto sociale, al luogo di residenza e al genere dell’allievo. L’insegnante doveva essere in grado di organizzare e dirigere la vita culturale del luogo e l’educazione di adulti, come anche di lavorare con bambini con bisogni speciali. All’inizio del XX secolo la professione dell’insegnante subì l’influenza della nuova pedagogia e della femminilizzazione della professione, mentre l’università fu coinvolta nell’istruzione degli insegnanti. Paragonando le competenze degli insegnanti nel XIX secolo e del primo trentennio del XX secolo diventa chiaro che le competenze degli insegnanti, legate all’attivazione del processo educativo, occupavano un posto stabile nella gerarchia di requisiti della società, mentre l’educazione degli adulti e l’educazione speciale diventarono competenza di specialisti del settore.*

Keywords – Latvia, to teach, to learn, teacher, teachers training

Parole chiave – Lettonia, insegnare, apprendere, insegnante, formazione degli insegnanti

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1. 19th century – professional consolidation of teachers

Majority of historians, the researchers of teachers' professionalization agree that teachers as a particular professional group consolidated during 1830s–40s and this process was closely connected with development of teachers' professional education. Larson considers that work becomes professional when knowledge that is needed for its performance is being systematized and generalized, when this knowledge is being published and used in the acquisition of the profession¹.

During one hundred years (1830 – 1930), essential for the geneses of teachers' profession in Europe, demands regarding the teachers' competences grew and changed. This study seeks answers how teaching profession and teachers' competences in Latvia reflected the main social and educational trends of Europe.

In order to understand the landscape of teachers' profession in the 19th century in Europe some of the most essential changes that have taken place in "school matters" in this century should be mentioned.

Changes were encouraged, firstly, by the economic development that facilitated the growth of wellbeing and the need for qualified workforce. At the beginning of the 19th century, serfdom was abolished in so-called Baltic provinces of Russia – Estonia, Livonia and Kurland.² The new arrangements in the Baltic provinces were thus to embody the most progressive economic ideas of the time.³ The laws liberating the peasants accelerated economic development, stimulated the growth of the cities and increase of prosperity. Part of Latvians became small property owners, leaseholders of mills and taverns, traders, and owners of farmsteads. Basic

¹ See M. L. Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: a Sociological Analyses*, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1977.

² In 18th century, the current territory of Latvia (Livland, Kurland and Latgale) was completely incorporated into the Russian Empire. Although by 1918 Latvia was formally part of Russia, intellectually it belonged to Europe. It was promoted by German nobility who ruled in Livland and Kurland since 13th c.

³ A. Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p.195.

education became accessible to all social groups thus primary school turned into a mass school. The society in Europe, including Latvia, accepted the role of education both in the professional development and social mobility.

Secondly, important factor was the consolidation of nations and the increase of self-esteem that promoted the formation of national education systems. A good example for Latvians were Finns, Czechs, Poles, Germans and Italians who were striving for their independence in the 19th century. Their experience stimulated Latvians' interest in their own history, traditions, and language, which strengthened national self-esteem and aspirations for independence from German nobility and Russian Impair. The works by the representatives of "Junges Deutschland" (Heine, Gutschlof, Laube) taught Latvians to have a critical view of reality, to compare the Latvian culture with that of the other nations, which resulted in a view that Latvians were able to hold an equal place among other peoples of the world. These ideas were promoted in the first Latvian periodicals, meetings, and societies. Education was considered as one of prerequisites for intellectual liberation.

Thirdly, the extension of international links, the possibility to travel that, in its turn, promoted the spread of similar ideas all over Europe – these were the ideas about compulsory basic education, standardized school curricula, examinations and teacher education.

Transformations in the European society brought about changes in the teachers' professional and social status. Casual people in teaching profession were heavily criticized not only by the enlightened local authorities and intelligentsia but also by prosperous citizens looking for the better future of their children. For instance, in Prussia tailors and war invalids worked as teachers in elementary schools⁴, in England even in 1840s the people who had turned out to be inadequate for other works, like dismissed servants, bankrupt tradesmen worked as teachers. They had been unable to write a simple letter, had not known whether the earth was quadrangular or round, or if Jerusalem was in Asia or America⁵. A similar situation existed also in the territory of Latvia – the farmers' children were taught by sacristans and church singers, craftsmen, former estate employees⁶, who often considered the teacher's work as it was also in other places in Europe only as a source of additional income along with their basic profession.

The solution of the problem was seen in a well-thought over, regular, professional teacher education. Prussia became the leader among other European countries in this respect where the issues of teacher education were widely discussed at the beginning of the 19th century and the experience of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) served as an example. Pestalozzi's ideas were brought also to Latvia through the correspondence of German nobility with Pestalozzi and teachers educated in Weissenfels and Klein-Dexen.⁷

⁴ A. Nóvoa, *Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing: Public Images of Teachers (19th – 20th Centuries)*, in "Paedagogica Historica", 36 (1), 2000, pp. 21-52.

⁵ R. Betts, "A new type of elementary teacher": George Collins 1839 – 1891, in "History of Education", 27 (1), 1998, p. 15.

⁶ A. Vičs, *Latviešu skolu vēsture* [History of Latvian schools], R.L.B. Derīgu grāmatu nodaļa, 1928, 11., 15.lpp.

⁷ See A. Zigmunde, *Die Beziehungen Johann Heinrich Pestalozzis zu Lettland*, Riga, RTU Verlag, 2010.

Teachers' seminaries that provided three-years long studies and prepared teachers for basic education institutions were established in Prussia in the first third of the 19th century as well as state controlled teacher examination and certification was introduced there. This experience was adopted by other European countries, Canada and USA. First teacher seminaries according to the Prussian example were founded also in the territory of Latvia in the 1830s – 40s.

The educator of Latvian folk teachers Janis Cimze (1814 – 1881) gained his education in the teachers' seminary of Weissenfels ruled that time by Wilhelm Harnisch (1787 – 1864). In 1837 and 1838, Cimze traveled around Europe and got acquainted with teacher training in Germany, Northern Italy, Switzerland and Alsace-Lorraine. In 1838, he attended the lectures of Adolph Diesterweg (1790 – 1866) and Hegel's student Georg Gabler (1786 – 1853) at the University of Berlin. Another Latvian teacher educator Andrejs Bergmanis (1810 – 1869) studied at the teachers' seminary of Klein-Dexen.

The first "modern" teacher training seminary in Latvia was set up in 1833. It was followed by five other seminaries covering almost all territory of Latvia with educated *Volkschule* teachers. The local nobility maintained three teacher training seminaries, but the others were state-controlled.

The first Latvian teacher educators, as well as their students were originated from peasant families. Becoming teachers often was the only possibility for intelligent children from lower classes to attain higher level of education⁸.

As the society's interest in education and teacher training increased the issues of pedagogy were discussed in the press; they were written about in books. Administrators and teachers used to changed their experiences with colleagues; they attended international conferences and exhibitions. Courses aimed at acquisition of teaching methods and child-studies were organized for teachers. Teachers united in professional associations, came together in conferences. German model in organizing teacher conferences (the pioneer – Adolph Diesterweg) was successfully adopted in the territory of Latvia by Janis Cimze. Vidzeme⁹ Province Association of Mutual Assistance of Teachers and Former Teachers founded in 1898 was the first organization of Latvian pedagogues; in 1907 it turned into a professional organization – the Latvian Teachers' Union which functioned until 1911.

2. Ideas about the teachers' professional competence in the 19th century

Society requested an educated, professional teacher; besides, the still leading dominant Christian faith formed the context of notions concerning the image of a good teacher. A good Christian in teachers' position was more important than a skilled professional. Janis Cimze has admitted, personal features in the teacher's work become the professional qualities – a

⁸ D. A. Coppock, *Respectability as a prerequisite of moral character: the social and occupational mobility of pupil teachers in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries*, in "History of Education", 26 (2), 1997, p.174.

⁹ Vidzeme – the central part of Latvia, *Livland* in German.

bad person cannot be a good teacher: "Those who are lazy, like to carouse and think only about material benefits"¹⁰ should be excluded from the rows of folk teachers. Cimze's teacher, Harnisch has described an ideal teacher in the following way: "A young man who is sound in body and mind is fit to be a teacher. Being sleepy or easily irritated, too agile or too inert person is not suitable for the teacher's work. Good memory power is very desirable but even more important is a healthy ability of judgment and looking at things in a simple way. But it is even more important that the young man who wants to become a teacher should be acquainted with what has come from Heaven so that he would take us, the lost sinners, to the Heaven; so that they had mind for divine things, they would always lead their life in unison with God therefore they would look upon everything in life from the Christian- religious position, they had sensitive and frail conscience, they would truly belong to their church and would not hesitate to do good"¹¹.

Depaepe depicts the image of the teacher of the 19th century as a restrained, reserved, kind, helpful, true, and friendly but not an unceremonious person who is able to achieve strict discipline and good academic achievement from pupils with the help of personal authority¹². Larsen writes that starting with 1830s teacher is viewed as an active, enthusiastic person who is devoted to studying, who will be able to "translate" philosophical theories in teaching strategies and methods. The teacher's task was to understand the laws regulating the human nature, to stimulate children's development and most importantly – to provide moral education "to work Christian values into pupils' hearts and minds".¹³

As teachers cannot be separated from the social layer they are teaching¹⁴ then no broad intellectual knowledge was expected from the teacher of lower classes. For example, the schools' adviser (*Schulrat*) Otto von Klot in 1856 wrote to Cimze: "Some of our seminary students as regards their education has shot up too high and is not suitable for our folk teachers"¹⁵. The key task of the elementary school teacher was to influence pupils' moral values and virtue, namely, to discipline their pupils.

Examining the issue about the scope of social groups the teacher had to be able to work with, it should be mentioned that in the 19th century the pupils' class belonging came to the first place – and according to that they had to acquire necessary knowledge and skills in school. Strict conviction dominated in the classes in power (landed gentry, clergy) that a teacher's vital task was to prepare children for their "adequate" place in the society. In the territory of Latvia it meant that farmers' children received knowledge that determined their be-

¹⁰ K. Rinkužs, *Jānis Cimze*, Rīga, Valters un Rapa, 1938.

¹¹ A. Birkerts, *Kopotī raksti. IX Latviešu inteliģence savās cīņās un gaitās. II daļa* [Complete works. IX. Battles and activities of the Latvian intelligentsia. 2nd part], Rīga, A. Raņķa grāmatu tirgotava, 1927, 228.lpp.

¹² M. Depaepe, *Order in Progress: Everyday Educational Practice in Primary Schools. Belgium, 1880-1970*, Leuven University Press, 2000, pp. 162-163.

¹³ M. A. Larsen, *Pedagogic knowledge and the Victorian era Anglo-American teacher*, in "History of Education", 31 5), 2002, pp. 463-465.

¹⁴ D. A. Coppock, *Respectability as a prerequisite of moral character: the social and occupational mobility of pupil teachers in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries*, in "History of Education", 26(2), 1997, p.165.

¹⁵ K. Rinkužs, *Jānis Cimze*, Rīga, Valters un Rapa, 1938, 75.lpp.

longing to farmers. Too broad education for the children of lower classes was nowhere considered useful; they could acquire only “a bit more”: sailors’ children – knowledge in navigation, children of workers in manufactories – basic of mechanical sciences, farmers’ children – knowledge in agriculture¹⁶. Pupils’ living place was also closely connected with their social class thus teachers worked differently with children who lived in the cities and in the countryside.

Since the 18th century pedagogues and the society had been strongly convicted that boys and girls not only should acquire different knowledge and skills but they also learnt differently¹⁷, co-education in some countries (e.g. France) was not acknowledged also due to religious considerations. Thus the teacher had to be able to teach both genders in a differentiated way and, certainly, it was more logical that a female teacher taught girls and a male teacher boys. It should be mentioned that teachers – “married men of respected age” in girls’ schools were considered more acceptable than female teachers for boys who were older than 12 years because that could lead to “feminization” of young men¹⁸.

Starting with the 19th century teachers in some educational institutions began working with special needs children¹⁹. Such institutions were founded also in the territory of Latvia, and they mainly functioned under the wings of private entities and public organizations. Teachers from special education schools most frequently gained knowledge outside Latvia – usually they studied in Prussia, and from the beginning of the 20th century also in St. Petersburg, or they learnt through practicing. Janis Cimze had received the rights to be the teacher of deaf-and-dumb children and he trained teachers for such children in the teacher seminary he ran. In their turn, Cimze’s students ran the schools of deaf-and-dumb children in Riga and Valmiera²⁰.

However, teachers’ activities went beyond their profession: they not only did their job but also managed the social activities thus occupying a special place in the rural society which so far had been ruled by the clergy. Having musical education Latvian teachers organized and lead secular choirs as well as turned their efforts to adult education- they organized self-learning groups, libraries, gave lectures. For example, a teacher Juris Caunītis (1826 – 1861) established the first Latvian educational circle in Riga, the Sunday school for workers, a library and participated in founding The Riga Latvian Society. Winzer writes that in the 19th century teachers gained power over culture, their authority – new forms and possibilities²¹.

The institutionalization of adult education in the middle of the 19th century also broadened

¹⁶ M. A. Larsen, *Pedagogic knowledge and the Victorian era Anglo-American teacher*, in “History of Education”, 31(5), 2002, p. 470.

¹⁷ See Ch. Mayer, *Anthropology, gender and the rise of modern education in Germany at the turn of the 18th century*. Paper presented at ISCHE XXV “School and Modernity”, July 16th – 19th 2003 in Sao Paulo.

¹⁸ J. C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century: a comparative perspective*, in “History of Education”, 22(3), 1993, pp. 260-261.

¹⁹ See M. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993.

²⁰ See A. Zigmunde, *Die Entwicklung der Gehörlosenbildung in Lettland von den Anfängen in Livland und in Kurland bis zur Gegenwart*, Rīga, RTU Izdevniecība, 2011.

²¹ M. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993, p. 226.

the social scope of teachers' activities. In 1844 Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783 – 1872) founded the folk high school that became a role model for similar institutions in Europe and Latvia as well.

Thus several trends in which teachers' competence developed became apparent in the course of the 19th century- upbringing of pupils in morality and discipline, providing knowledge and skills according to pupils' social class, place of living and gender. The skill to organize and manage local cultural life and adult education supplemented the teacher's competence; education of special needs children developed gradually as a separate sphere.

3. Teacher's professional development in the first third of the 20th century

Since 1890s European universities had widely participated in teacher education. Teacher seminaries or institutes as well as secondary schools continued preparing teachers for lower grades. Jakobs points out that to become a teacher at the beginning of the 20th century was already an intellectual achievement²². In Latvia²³ teachers could receive university education starting with 1919 when Pedagogy Department of the University of Latvia was founded. Several teacher institutes also trained teachers in the 1920s -30s.

Important changes in the teacher's profession in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century and during the interwar period were connected with 'The New School Movement' or *Reformpädagogik* in German. The new age put forward the demand for a new man and thus also new requirements concerning the educator of this man – the teacher. Since 1890s the society had been more and more criticizing the teacher of "the past"- strict, unapproachable, boring... He was contrasted with the new image of the teacher – active, creative, imaginatively rich pedagogue who using different means was able to activate the teaching/learning process, who was not afraid of trying out new activities and experimenting.

Like their peers in other European countries, in Latvia, too, teachers criticized "the old school", which, to the Latvians, meant not only old-fashioned education, but also dependence on Russian Impair. The new ideas were searched for abroad: the Latvian pedagogues became familiar with the works of John Dewey, Georg Kerschensteiner, Hugo Gaudig²⁴, Ellen Key, Helen Parkhurst, Maria Montessori, Cecil Reddie and Ovide Decroly. 'The New School' was discussed in the press, teachers' professional organizations, vocational training courses, pedagogical exhibitions and international conferences. With regard to the introduction of 'the New School', the two major teachers' organizations had a dividend opinion – the left-wing Teachers' Union called for more radical school reforms, while the conservative National Teachers' Union warned against rushed innovations. On the basis of the German and Austrian experience, the teacher-experimenter movement emerged in Latvia in 1923. It was not a mass

²² A. Jakobs, *Public examinations and female teachers 1860 – 1902*. Paper presented at ISCHE XIV "Secondary Education: Institutional, Cultural and Social History" July 2002 in Paris.

²³ The independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed in 1918.

²⁴ See A. Zigmunde, *Hugo Gaudig. Pädagogische Konzeption und sein Besuch im Baltikum im Herbst 1922*, Riga, Verlag der Technischen Universität Riga, 2010.

movement; it did not gain the support of the majority of the teachers either; however, it demonstrated the public demand for a socially active, independent and creative personality. In their work, the Latvian teacher-experimenter used excursions, projects, elements of Dalton plan, designing single-subject classrooms. Some of them practiced child-studies in a special experimental school. A very popular was 'work school' (*Arbeitschule* in German), which was most compliant with the Latvian upbringing traditions and the needs of the new democratic country.

Another important change effecting the teacher's profession starting with the end of the 19th century was its gradual feminization: 75 % of primary school teachers in England around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were women²⁵, the number of female graduates of teacher seminaries in France exceeded the number of male teachers²⁶, the number of female teachers in the European part of Russia (including Latvia) in primary schools was around 70 – 75 % and until 1911 it rapidly increased²⁷.

On the one hand, this situation was determined by the decrease in the prestige of teacher's profession because both the number of schools and the number of teachers increased and the teacher's remuneration was not very high: e.g., the worker in Birmingham was able to earn more than the teacher²⁸. Coppock mentions another reason for the low prestige of the teacher's profession – the teacher in his/her work was never able to achieve such autonomy as it was possible in other professions²⁹; he/her always depended on the education administrators and pupils' parents; he/her also had to feel responsible for his/her unsuccessful, uneducated colleagues.

On the other hand, the teacher's work became more and more attractive to women because it offered a respected, publicly appreciated- feminine, motherly career, certain economic and social independence, a "transition period between school and married life"³⁰ (married women did not work as teachers). Women teachers were also more convenient for the education administrators – they were "more economic"³¹ as they could be paid lower salary, sometimes even one third of the male salary³². Women usually worked in lower classes and educa-

²⁵ W. Robinson, *Women and teacher training. Women and pupil-teacher centres, 1880-1914*, in J. Goodman, S. Harrop (Ed.), *Women, Educational Policy-making and Administration in England. Authoritative Women since 1880*, London, New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 99.

²⁶ P. Harrigan, *Women Teachers and the Schooling of Girls in France: Recent Historiographical Trends*, in "French Historical Studies", 21(4), 1998, p. 605.

²⁷ J. C. Albisetti, *The feminization of teaching in the nineteenth century: a comparative perspective*, in "History of Education", 22(3), 1993, p. 255.

²⁸ D. A. Coppock, *Respectability as a prerequisite of moral character: the social and occupational mobility of pupil teachers in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries*, in "History of Education", 26(2), 1997, p. 171.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p.168.

³⁰ M. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993, p. 228.

³¹ D. A. Coppock, *Respectability as a prerequisite of moral character: the social and occupational mobility of pupil teachers in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries*, in "History of Education", 26(2), 1997, p. 172.

³² M. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993, p. 227.

tional institutions for girls; they were welcomed in the work with special needs children. For example, the first indication that the future teachers in Latvia had also learnt about the special needs children was found in the curriculum of the female gymnasium of 1913³³.

Adult education continued to develop. After World War I it had become an area of interest of broad social groups; its key objectives were to provide professional training and increase the general level of culture; since 1930s after the economic recession the acquisition of the vocation became especially topical. The legal foundation of adult education in the 1920s-30s in Latvia was laid by the Law on Education adopted in 1919 which envisaged the establishment of courses and Sunday schools, the Law on Folk high schools adopted in 1922, the Law on Education, 1934, which anticipated the functioning of courses and folk high schools in the frame of general education.

Adult education in Latvia included both vocational training (folk high schools, courses) and professional further education (e.g., summer courses were organized for teachers starting from 1919; pedagogical weeks – since 1922), and cultural education (folk high schools, associations, etc.). Mainly university teachers and the professionals of a certain area worked in the sphere of adult education (e.g., in folk high schools); the teachers of general comprehensive schools lost their position in this field³⁴.

During the years of the World War I special education institutions stopped their work and renewed their activities starting with 1919. Latvian state legislation envisaged compulsory education also for children with special needs that had to be implemented in separate educational institutions. In the 1920s-30s in Latvia there functioned 15 to 21 special education schools (called also schools for defective children, peculiar schools)³⁵. In order to receive rights to work with special needs children one had to obtain the education of the primary school teacher and pass examinations in special pedagogy and psychology which could be mastered also in courses. Winzer indicates that in the 1930s special education teachers and their pupils were isolated in special education institutions and the teachers of “ordinary” schools had minimum contact with them³⁶, “special” education and “ordinary” education continued their existence in different, separated spheres.

Summarizing and comparing the development of the teachers' competence in the 19th and the first third of the 20th century it is evident that the teachers' skill to teach pupils according to their class belonging, Christian faith and gender gradually lost its significance. The teachers' competences that were connected with the activization of the teaching/learning process took a stable place in the hierarchy of the public demands. The transition of special education in the hands of the professionals and adult education in the hands of the university teachers and professionals meant that the competence of comprehensive school teachers in these areas

³³ *Rizjskaja zjenskaja gimnazija V. P. Maldona. Kratkaja ucebnaja programma* [V. P. Maldon Women gymnasium at Riga. The short curriculum], Riga, 1913, s.54.

³⁴ See I. Kestere, *Adult education in Latvia*, in “Ricerche Pedagogiche”, 188-189, 2013, pp. 25-30.

³⁵ *Latvijas kultūras statistika. 1918-1937* [Statistics of the Latvian culture, 1918-1937], Riga, Valsts Statistikas pārvalde, 1938, 13, 22.lpp.

³⁶ M. Winzer, *The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration*, Washington, D.C., Gallaudet University Press, 1993, p.370.

was no longer considered essential.

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