

An Exploration of Architectural Identity in the Walled City of Famagusta

Surlarıçi Mağusa'nın Mimari Kimliği Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

Maintaining a sense of belonging and identity is one of the essential goals in the design of a built environment. That is why identity and its complex manifestation in architecture has been one of the main dilemmas ahead for architects. Such difficulty has been even more evident in the case of the built environments of islands due to their dynamic characteristics. Despite its importance, however, contemporary architecture in many islands, including Cyprus, shows little interest in creating meaningful and identifiable environments. Nevertheless, traditional architecture still offers the best solution for Cyprus in terms of cultural sustainability and identity. People who live in traditional buildings and districts more easily feel that some part of the environment belongs to them. Traditional architecture, representing a great deal of place-based experience, is thus worth studying. This study will assess the architectural quality and characteristics of local houses in "the walled city" in Famagusta. Traditional houses in this area demonstrate the identity of architecture in North Cyprus. This study uses observation and analysis to describe and categorize the characteristics of local houses, resulting in 10 identifiable characteristics for houses in the walled city. In finding and defining these characteristics, the study has focused on features that are still in use. Such living characteristics can be used in contemporary architecture as well.

Keywords: Identity, architectural characteristics, housing, Famagusta, Walled City

Özet

Yapılaşmış çevrenin oluşumunda, kimliğin ve ona bağlı gelişen aidiyet hissinin devam ettirilmesi esas hedeflerdendir. İşte bu nedenledir ki, mimarlar için kimlik ve onun mimarlıktaki kompleks ifadesi en temel açmazlardan biri olmuştur. Hatta, söz konusu açmaz, adaların yapılaşmış çevrelerinde, onların dinamik yapılarına bağlı olarak daha da açık bir şekilde görülür. Ancak, bu kadar önemli olmasına rağmen, aralarında Kıbrıs'ın da olduğu birçok adada, günümüz mimarisi özgün yerel karakterlerle anlam bulamıyor ve kendi özgün kimliğini genellikle devam ettiremiyor. Tüm bunlara karşın, Kıbrıs Adası'ndaki geleneksel mimari doku, kültürel sürdürülebilirlik ve kimlik açısından en iyi imkanları hala daha sunmaya devam etmektedir. Geleneksel evlerde, geleneksel mahallelerde ya da geleneksel çevrelerde yaşayan insanlar, buldukları yerlere karşı daha kolay aidiyet hissi geliştirebilmektedirler. Bu bağlamda yer, yani çevreye ilişkin özelliklerin öne çıktığı, aidiyet ve kimlik değerlerinin yüksek olduğu geleneksel mimarlık üzerinde durulmaya ve çalışılmaya değerdir. Bu noktadan hareketle, Gazimağusa Surlarıçi'ndeki geleneksel evlerin mimari kaliteleri ve karakteristik özellikleri bu çalışmada ele alınmaktadır. Bu bölgede yer alan geleneksel evler, Kıbrıs geleneksel kent evlerinin genel özelliklerini yansıtmakta ve genel mimari kimliği ortaya koymaktadırlar. Evlerin genel özelliklerini ortaya koymak ve sınıflandırmak için gözlem ve analiz metodları kullanılmış, ve Gazimağusa Surlarıçi'ndeki geleneksel evlere ilişkin toplam 10 ayırt edici karakteristik özellik belirlenmiştir. Karakteristiklerin bulunup tanımlanmasında, onların günümüzde hala kullanılıyor olmasına önem verilmiş ve böylesi yaşamsal özelliklerin günümüz mimarisinde de kullanılabileceğine dikkat çekilmiştir.

Anabtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, mimari özellikler, konut, Gazimağusa, Surlu Kent

Introduction

Various scholars have explored identity and its relationship with built environment from different points of views during the last decades. These studies vary in their main scope as some of them focus on building scale and architectural identity such as studies by Chris Abel (1997, 2000), Wegerhoff (2008), and D. King (2004), while some others have emphasized on relationship between identity and place in urban scale such as Proshansky (1978), Proshansky et al. (1983), Korpela (1989), and Twigger-Ross, C. L., Bonaiuto, M., & Breakwell, G. (2003). These scholarly endeavors have been followed enthusiastically in developing countries, which have been facing architectural identity crisis. After arrival of industrialization and modernism to most of the developing countries, their architecture has changed rapidly trying to follow the modern image of life. Being through such a rapid change has left almost no time for traditional architecture to adopt itself with the present time needs of its users.

Facing the problems of detachment of users from their built environment, in the so-called modern architecture of these countries has made scholars and architects to question the architectural quality of new built environment. Therefore, in quest for returning of cultural values and architectural identity to the built environment, various studies have been dedicated to revival of architectural characteristics of each region. While most of these researches demonstrate great enthusiasm for returning to traditional and regional architectural characteristics, few studies have focused on acceptance of changes, which people have made in their traditional environment, as a positive contribution to place identity formation. In addition, questing architectural identity in conflicted regions, although has been more complicated, it is less studied due to the challenges ahead for researchers.

In view of that, the present study focuses on Walled City of Famagusta in North Cyprus, where following the 1974 conflicts between Turkish and Greek Cypriots has led to division of Cyprus into northern (Turkish Cypriot) and southern (Greek

Cypriot) parts. During the events of 1974, resulting in the displacement of 200,000 Greek Cypriot and 40,000 Turkish Cypriots, many people left their homes with few personal belongings, thinking that they would not be gone for too long (Seretis, 2005). Being through such unexpected rapid displacement has had deep effects on sense of belonging of each group in their new settlements. Moreover, the consequences of such an important event remain highly contested between and within both parts of the island during the present time. Therefore, even, the interpretations of the past have found various forms of expression in Cyprus (Seretis, 2005). Indeed, one of the most important outcomes of reading the past in various ways is identity crisis for a society, which would be reflected in its built environment too.

As results of such unresolved conflict, in addition to the consequences of arrival of modernity, the built environment in North Cyprus is questionable in terms of sustaining regional values and identity at present time. Doratlı and Hoşkara (2010) believe that the root and origin of identity predicament in the island goes back to 1950s when shift in life style and emphasis on tourism development, has made traditional settlements on the islands to change, which this lead to loss of identity and local values. In view of that, the valuable historic urban areas are mainly replaced by a scattered distribution of slab-like buildings during the present time (Oktay, 2002).

In view of that, the present study focuses on the Walled City of Famagusta, where it has been declared as a "Conservation Area" (Doratlı et al., 2003) and most of its traditional dwellings are preserved. Traditional houses in general and historic urban areas in particular demonstrate the identity of architecture in North Cyprus. In discussing the values of historic urban areas, Doratlı and Hoşkara (2010) states that these areas are considered as part of the cultural heritage of any country and since 1960s historic urban areas have been re-evaluated with their overall positive qualities. In addition, traditional architecture generally represents a great deal of place-based experience, is thus worth studying.

In the Walled City of Famagusta, although the characteristics of traditional houses are reserved, people have adapted them with the contemporary life style. Therefore, studying the architectural pattern of this built environment might enlighten the way toward questing architectural identity in present time. In investigating the traditional architectural characteristics, the study, however, has not been limited to any particular historical period. Instead, what has been left from the past in Walled City, and still is in use by people, has been taken as the focus of the study.

This study uses observation and analysis to describe and categorize the characteristics of local houses, resulting in 10 identifiable characteristics for houses in the walled city. In finding and defining these characteristics, the study has focused on features that are still in use. Such living characteristics can be used in contemporary architecture as well.

Identity and Architecture/ Place Identity

Identity has been one of the most challenging concepts in the social science. Identity suggests ways in which people perceive themselves and are characterized by others (Vertovec, 2001). Questions of 'who we are' are often intimately related to questions of 'where we are' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). In scholarly works, there are generally two ways in which place has been related to identity. The first one is called place identifications. This refers to people's expressed identification with a place. The second way in which place has been related to identity is through the term 'place identity', a construct promoted by Proshansky et al. (1983, 1987) (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

Proshansky (1987) defines place-identity as those dimensions of self that define the one's personal identity in relation to the physical environment. Such relationship accomplishes by means of complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment.

Place-identity is a substructure of self-identity, and contains perceptions and conceptions of environment (Hauge, 2007). These perceptions and conceptions can be categorized into two types; one type consists of memories, thoughts, values and settings, and the second type consists of the relationship among different settings in the built environment. Place-identity can be based on personal and emotional ties, in this case, individuals and groups assign a place's value, without necessity involving a strong communication between the physical attributes of the place and its meaning (Williams et al., 1992).

In view of that, Alexander (1977, 1979) tried to explain that architecture connects people to their surrounding in different ways which most of them are subconscious. Alexander (1979) by emphasizing the role of living patterns in founding architectural characteristics, states that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep happening there. These patterns of events are always linked with some geometric patterns in the space. He argues that each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space. Alexander (1979) clarifies that these specific patterns can be alive or dead. He claims that "the more living patterns there are in a place, the more it comes to life as an entirety, the more it glows, the more it has that self-maintaining fire which is the quality without name".

Alexander in his book 'The Timeless Way of Building' describes the essential nature of the task of makings towns and buildings. He argues that towns and buildings will be alive only when all people participate in making them, all these people share a common pattern language to make these buildings, and this pattern language should be alive (Alexander, 1979). In his second book 'A Pattern Language', Alexander (1977) explains the structured method and a practical architectural system, which like a language can be used to describe a good built environment, which has the quality without name.

The quality without name would help to make a strong relationship between one's personal

identity and physical environment. Moreover, the accomplishment of such relationship is based on complex patterns of conscious and unconscious ideas (Proshansky, 1987) and compound patterns creating a pattern language for an environment (Alexander 1977).

Dynamic Character of Identity

Correa (1983) in defining the term 'identity' explains that identity is a process and not a found object. He states because of being a process, identity cannot be fabricated and yet it is not a self-conscious thing. Breakwell (1986, quoted in Twigger-Ross & Uzzell 1996) proposes that identity can be conceptualized in terms of a biological organism, which moves through time and develops through the accommodation, integration, and evaluation of the social world. Thus, instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, one should think of identity as a "production" which is never completed and always is in process.

Vertovec (2001) discusses that identity and transnationalism are concepts that juxtapose. This is so because many peoples' transnational networks of relationships are based on perception of common identity. Therefore, identity of many people is transformed by social worlds that span more than one place. In view of that, Seretis (2005) argues that even within the same society, it is not possible to talk about bounded, homogenous 'societies' or 'cultures'. Even if such societies do exist, they are exceptional and incomparable. This dynamism intensifies, if one considers that the landscape is never static too. People engage with it, re-work it, appropriate it, and contest it (Seretis, 2005).

Based on dynamic character of identity, it is usually difficult to quest for a certain type of architectural identity. This difficulty is getting more, if one considers that architecture cannot be identified easily according to political boundaries. Sometimes one country's political boundaries may not cover its entire cultural and architectural territory (Sani,

2009). In addition, identity is unavoidably connected with the memory of the past, which is selected and embodied dependent upon what proves to be useful for the identity-constructs (Seretis, 2005).

In the case of Cyprus and Walled City of Famagusta, since Cyprus was ruled under the Roman, Byzantine, Lusignan, Venetian, Ottoman, and British civilizations throughout history, thus, the old walled city of Famagusta has witnessed various civilizations and different architectural styles. By developing under the impact of various ruling powers and their architectural styles over a long period, nothing can describe the people of Cyprus and their material culture better than its traditional architecture (Pulhan & Numan 2006). However, such a rich historical background in addition to the fact that various ethnics and religions have lived in Cyprus would make the quest for architectural identity even more challenging. Moreover, it gets more complexity when it was tied into concepts of being either Greek Cypriot or Turkish Cypriot by the 1950s. In Cyprus, the memory of 'place' and of 'home' is still strong and is clearly visible in the physical landscape (Seretis, 2005). As a result, after the ethnic conflict and the consequent internal migration by the 1958, refugees construct their own monuments trying to remember who they are. Therefore, one of the essential tasks in revival of architectural identity in Cyprus is to pay specific attention on local characteristics.

The Old City of Famagusta

Famagusta is located on the eastern coast of Cyprus and is the second largest city in North Cyprus with nearly 26 000 population. Famagusta has been built during the first century AD and the contemporary city has developed throughout seven periods: the foundation of the city; the Lusignan (1192–1489); the Venetian (1489–1571); the Ottoman (1571–1878); the British (1878–1960); the Republic (1960–1974); and the period after the war in 1974 (Onal et al., 1999). The construction of city walls in Famagusta dates back to the Lusignan period,

which later followed by the Venetians. The Walled City of Famagusta is considered to be one of the most precious ensembles of Medieval Architecture in the world (Onal et al.,1999). During the 300 years of Ottoman rule, until the beginning of British colonial period in 1878, residence within the city walls of Famagusta were mainly Muslims, while the Christian population settling in the area called Varosha outside the walls (Scott, 2002). Today, the walled city stands in the Turkish part of the island, close to the borderline between Turkish and Greek parts. Because of the proximity to the borderline, growth of the city has seen towards the opposite direction in the north along the coastline. In this spatial development, the walled city has remained almost on the south edge of the city, close to the borderline.

Due to the socio-economic and physical reasons, the existing residential buildings (845 dwellings) within the walled city of Famagusta are generally in poor condition. Since the dwellings mostly do not meet contemporary living standards, the district becomes a pole of attraction for low-income families (Doratlı et al., 2003). Despite the aforementioned challenges and inevitable changes in the city structure, which occurred after arrival of modernization to the island, the Walled City of Famagusta still keeps its historical character and identity. Such preservation of architectural quality has happened because of different reasons. The main reason could be the location of Walled City, which is within an island. As Doratlı & Hoşkara (2010) explain because of being away from the mainland, and accordingly late arrival of rapid urbanization, the traditional and local identities of the settlements on Mediterranean islands including Cyprus have mostly been preserved prior to arrival of modernization in 1950s. After modernization, even though changes have happen in this historical area, the problems of decay and deterioration that are seen in many historic settlements have not reached a critical level in Walled City. This is mainly due to the restriction of building heights, which has been applied since the 1960s (Onal et al.,1999).

Overall, the walled city of Famagusta is still one of the important districts within the contemporary city of Famagusta. Since social, political, economic, and cultural influences of modernization have changed the built environment of Famagusta radically, and most of those changes have failed to create an identifiable built environment, architectural quality of Walled City can be used as main source of inspiration.

Therefore, to overcome architectural and urban problems of Famagusta and North Cyprus, studies have been directed toward re-evaluating historic areas including the Walled City. For example, Onal et al. (1999) in a study regarding identifying urban problems of Famagusta and proposals for the future suggests that historic identity of the Walled City will have to be emphasized. Onal et al. (1999) claims that unique characteristics of the Walled City derive from the uses; the height, scale, and bulk of buildings; the color, materials and texture; edges; roof profiles; and landmarks. Accordingly, present study tries to explore the architectural identity of Walled City through an observatory view. The main attempt of this study is to rather than having regular architectural and urban analysis of Walled City, tries to embrace the quality without name in this built environment.

Methodology of the Study

In order to explore the architectural identity of Walled City, literature on place identity and historical background of Famagusta have analyzed by using thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis is highly inductive, that is, the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher. In this type of analysis, the data collection and analysis take place simultaneously. Even background reading can form part of the analysis process, especially if it can help to explain an emerging theme (Kothari, 2004).

To describe and categorize the characteristics of settlements in walled city of Famagusta,

observation of physical environment features is done through structured observation. Structured observation is considered appropriate in descriptive studies (Kothari, 2004). Observation is characterized by definition of the units to be observed, which in this study are traditional houses in the walled city of Famagusta.

The selection of data to be observed has been based on Alexander (1977, 1979) approach in observing and analyzing the built environment. Alexander defines a practical architectural system for observation. In observing medieval towns, he finds these towns attractive and explains that this happens because they were built out of specific features that architects were free to adopt them to specific situations. Thus, observation is based on a free interpretation from Alexander's (1977) structured method of describing built environment.

Observation, however, is limited to micro-scale features of the physical environment; the traditional houses which are still in use by people. Data is collected through in-person observation, conducted by walking through the setting and coding observations. For identifying settings for observation, a limited area within the Walled City has been selected. The selected area has shown in Figure 1.

Observation of Physical Environment in Walled City

The result of observation in the selected area within the walled city has revealed several architectural patterns/features that construct the main characteristics of area. Observation is done based on a free interpretation of Alexander (1977, 1979) approach on observing living patterns in a built environment. Alexander in 'Pattern Language' (1977) provides a language for building and planning; the other book 'The Timeless Way of Building' (1979) provides the theory and instructions for the use of language. The book 'Pattern Language' describes the detailed patterns for towns, neighborhoods and houses. The other book explains the discipline, which make it possible to use these patterns to create

a building or a town. Based on the observation, the following living patterns have been distinguished in the walled city. These patterns have been categorized within three groups: (i) Physical Appearance focusing on private terrace on the street, front door chair, street windows, number of stories, and transitional spaces, (ii) Plan Organization discussing houses linking to street, courtyard, and front and rear garden, (iii) Additional Features covering color and materials, and trees.

Private Terrace / Balcony on the Street



Figure 1. Selected Area in the Walled City of Famagusta

People generally have tendency to keep their individuality and at the same time communality. Most of the houses in the walled city have at least one terrace on street. These private terraces can give the sense of intimacy of a private space and simultaneously they can enable their users to



Figure 2. Private Balcony on Street

participate with public world. By considering the fact that there is eight month of summer in Cyprus, these terraces are the most used spaces among other spaces in house (Figure2).

Front Door Chair

The most common type of participation in street life and public world is sitting out. In Walled city, in almost all private terraces and/or in front of the main entrance of houses, there are always few chairs. Those chairs would allow people to sit in the edge between private and public zone. Many people especially elderlies, sit outside to work at something or just have the pleasure of watching street life. These



Figure 3. Chairs in Front Garden

chairs, even though being empty for some time, could bring a sense of intimacy and friendship to the built environment (Figure 3).

Street Windows

Street windows are the link between the life inside and outside of buildings. Through evolution of traditional urban houses in Cyprus, the street façade lately found more importance than the garden façade and the ground floor rooms were visually connected to street life by means of eye level windows (Pulhan & Numan 2006). Watching the street from especially upper story window has come originally from traditional times in Cyprus. During the Ottoman period, bay windows were quite common in residential architecture. Bay window (Cumba) was providing a secure place for the especially women from which they could view the outside without being seen. Today, although bay windows are not used anymore in residential architecture, culture of using them is still with people. Almost all houses' windows have shutters in the walled city. It is common to leave the window open while shutters are closed so, residents of house could view the street and benefit from the breeze without being seen (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Shutters of Traditional Houses

Number of Stories

The traditional urban houses of Cyprus are generally two story buildings (Pulhan, 2008). The walled city of Famagusta, also, has an organic tissue with a great variety of buildings and mundane one/ two story terrace houses (Doratlı et al., 2003). The restriction of building heights has been applied in the walled city since the 1960s. Taking such a decision is proved to be useful in terms of keeping the main architectural characteristics of this historic area. The common view of this area consists of a more or less horizontal skyline which some historical monuments stand above it. The harmonious relationship between heights of buildings has given a sense of unity to the area.

Transitional Spaces

Generally, segregation of public and private domains and relations of indoor and outdoor spaces were achieved with the use of a special transitional



Figure 5. Elevated Transitional Space at the Entrance



Figure 6. Transitional Spaces at the Entrance

space, which is locally called *sundurme*. (Pulhan & Numan 2006). *Sundurme* could be designed in two floors. On the ground floor, *Sundurme* prepares people to enter from a public to a private realm as an entrance hall, while providing a place to watch the street life without being seen at the upper floor (Pulhan & Numan 2005). During the more recent time, and in the absence of traditional *sundurme*, it is commonly found that entrance halls and balconies are considered by people like inner and outer *sundurme* (Pulhan & Numan 2005).

Then, in more recent examples, transitional spaces of entrance in Walled City houses are defined generally by elevated planes, which have taken it inward or outward. These spaces sometimes may be combined with a roof plane and create a semi open

Houses Linking to the Streets

Although in the early examples of traditional urban houses in Cyprus, segregation of public and private domains had realized through various mediums such as sundurme, late traditional urban houses explicitly opened to street life (Pulhan & Numan 2006). In most of existing houses in the walled city, despite having a defined transitional space at the entrance of houses, there is no sequence of public and private spaces in using the house. In other words, even though in plan organization there was a division between indoor and outdoor spaces, the present time use of houses does not support such an idea. Houses generally link to street directly. People would prefer to leave the entrance door open to enjoy from especially summer breeze and the same time communicate with street's passersby (Figure 7).

Courtyard

Older houses in the walled city, as in any other historic area of North Cyprus, generally belong to either Ottoman (1571–1878) or British (1878–1960) periods. Houses that left from Ottoman period have the traditional Turkish style in which rooms are mostly organized around open courtyards. In these houses, there were no special spaces like living rooms, dining rooms, or bedrooms. Rooms were multi-functional serving various activities simultaneously (Ozay, 2005) and closely interrelated with the life in the courtyard. Courtyard (locally called Havli) was a big private open space enclosed from all sides with an irregular layout, which was acting as an outdoor room for the traditional urban houses of Cyprus. Courtyard along with sundurme and rooms were the three major spatial components of the house (Pulhan, 2008).

During the late British period, by changing of the life style new spaces have been added to houses. For example, bay window of the Ottoman Period has given its place to the balcony. Instead of the open courtyards, the spaces such as veranda, terraces, balconies, and gardens became more popular (Ozay,

2005). At present time, people keep using balconies and terraces more than the courtyards. Even if houses only have open courtyard and no balcony, people would prefer to sit by the entrance door and communicate with the outside via the open door.

Front and Rear Garden

Since there is almost nine months summer in North Cyprus, home gardens are used sometimes more than interior spaces. Front gardens are generally the place for social activities, sitting and watching the street, watching TV, etc. Rear garden (courtyard), generally are used as private open area for doing some household tasks, growing flowers and vegetables, drying laundry, etc. (Figure 8).

Color and Material

The dominant color in this historical area is yellow color. Most of houses, which have been built during the British period, are made out of yellow



Figure 7. Direct Link of House to Street, Easy Communication with Street

limestone. Combination of yellow stone and adobe materials could be seen quite often in the walled city. Most of the renovated houses also have yellow color in their facades. Some of the newly added or renovated houses, however, use white color in their facades instead of the authentic color of the building material.

Trees

Trees have a very deep and crucial meaning to human being. There is even indication that trees, along with houses and other people constitute one of the three most basic parts of the human environment (Alexander 1977). In the walled city of Famagusta, also trees are an important part of the built environment. Cyprus generally is known with its Date palms and olive trees and the walled city of Famagusta is no exemption to this. Within the walled city, Date palms are the significant elements of the public as well as private courtyards. The overall view of streets is consisted of having palm trees above the horizontal skyline of this area (Figure 9).

Concluding Remarks

People need an identifiable spatial unit to belong to it. They want to be able to identify the part of the city where they live as distinct from all others. This study attempts to displace some traditional architectural features and conceptions to contemporary built environment. The cases were selected from the traditional dwellings, which are in use during the present time and can demonstrate concept of place-identity. Through observation of architectural characteristics of housing environment in historic area of Famagusta, which are still used by their inhabitants, totally ten characteristics and conceptions have been outlined.

It is argued in this study that for the revival of architectural identity it is not enough to limit the investigations into distinguishing traditional architectural characteristics. Although respect for local



Figure 8. Front Garden



Figure 9. Date Palms in Walled City

architecture is essential, the more important factor is the acceptance of those traditional characteristics by people during the present time. Some of architectural characteristics although have been essential in defining traditional architecture of a region, since they are not used by people any more, they cannot have key role in defining architectural identity. While on the other hand, some other characteristics, which are still in use by people, can be practiced in revival of architectural identity.

In other word, to achieve an identifiable built environment, it might be useful to give more attention to people and their preferences within their environment rather than just focusing on physical features of traditional architecture. In view of that, although it is not possible to limit the architectural identity of a built environment in just some conceptions, it would be helpful to have an observatory look to how people use historical areas and traditional architecture. It argues that such researches are valuable in that it has established the importance of place for creating and sustaining architectural identity.

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Biographical Sketch

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