

## **Transformation and Transition to the Second Nature: Planned Creative Destruction for Sustainable Cities**

### ***Transformasi dan Transisi Kepada Alam Binaan: Kemusnahan Kreatif Terancang untuk Bandar Lestari***

Shaharudin Idrus, Abdul Samad Hadi & Abdul Hadi Harman Shah

Institute for Environmental and Development (LESTARI), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia.

E-mail: dinn6358@gmail.com

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### **Abstract**

Urban centres and towns in Malaysia today are the outcome of British administrative hegemony for over 650 years, encompassing parts of the period of western colonial era in the country. Malaysian urbanization involving the local populations - the Malays and all the Bumiputra population of the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak has a shorter history. Albeit the rise of the Malaccan empire around the 14th century dominated the life of people in most part of the Malaysian Peninsula, towns and cities of the country today are the creation of British intervention and administration of the country from about the 18th century. The Chinese tin miners soon invested in tin mining from capital accumulated while working in the mines as well as from merchants in the more established port towns of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. The British administration was tied with enormous capital for gold and tin mining to support the Industrial Revolution in European countries at the time. Parallel to these activities, the British was opening massive land mainly for rubber which had a high demand in Europe. British economic activities based on resource extraction could be categorised as Planned Creative Destruction. This paper discusses the form of creative destruction that lead to sustainability in the context of environment, economy and society as well as culture via green technologies to balance the previous destructions. This paper will also focus on the changes of land use in the context of urban sustainability and livability of the country that need the further attention and planned for innovative restoration.

### **Keywords**

Transformation and transition, planned creative destruction, sustainable city

### ***Abstrak***

*Pusat bandar dan bandar di Malaysia hari ini adalah hasil daripada hegemoni pentadbiran British selama lebih 650 tahun, merangkumi bahagian tempoh era penjajahan barat di negara ini. Pembandaran Malaysia yang melibatkan penduduk tempatan-orang Melayu dan semua penduduk*

*Bumiputera di Semenanjung, Sabah dan Sarawak mempunyai sejarah yang lebih pendek. Namun begitu, disebalik kebangkitan empayar Melaka sekitar abad ke-14 menguasai kehidupan orang-orang di sebahagian besar Semenanjung Malaysia, bandar-bandar di negara hari ini terbina hasil campur tangan British dan pentadbiran negara dari kira-kira abad ke-18. Para pelombong timah yang berasal dari Cina tidak lama kemudian melabur dalam perlombongan bijih timah dari modal terkumpul semasa bekerja di lombong-lombong dan juga daripada peniaga di bandar pelabuhan yang lebih mantap di Pulau Pinang, Melaka dan Singapura. Pentadbiran British telah terikat dengan modal yang besar untuk emas dan perlombongan bijih timah untuk menyokong Revolusi Perindustrian di negara-negara Eropah pada masa itu. Selari dengan aktiviti-aktiviti ini, British telah membuka tanah secara besar-besaran terutamanya untuk getah yang mempunyai permintaan yang tinggi di Eropah. Aktiviti ekonomi British berdasarkan pengekstrakan sumber boleh dikategorikan sebagai 'Pemusnahan Kreatif Terancang'. Artikel ini membincangkan perubahan guna tanah dalam konteks kemampuan bandar dan kehidupan di negara ini yang memerlukan perhatian yang lanjut dan dirancangan untuk pemulihan inovatif.*

### **Kata kunci**

*Transformasi dan peralihan, kemusnahan kreatif terancang, bandar lestari*

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## **Introduction**

Urban centers and towns in Malaysia today are the outcome of British administrative hegemony for over 650 years, encompassing parts of the period of western colonial era in the country. Malaysian urbanization involving the local populations-the Malays and all the Bumiputera population of the Peninsula, Sabah and Sarawak have a shorter history. The city became even more complex with rapid globalisation processes. City's complexity in parts is path dependent, with past behaviour patterns tend to influence the future direction of which an understanding of the process shaping the ensuing urban growth patterns is crucial. The growth process may not be linear, and could assume other forms, and more complex but providing more useful insights into the city's development process.

## **A historico-theoretical perspective of development and regionalization**

At the core of development is the theory of modernization which argues that developing states are able to compete with industrialized states if only they adopt the same economic and social system of the capitalist West. Yet this view of development in the late 1950s (Levy, 1967) was challenged by the dependency theory in the late 1960s (Petras, 1982). During the late 1970s the world system theory of specific places in the world hierarchy was dominant in explaining the development phenomena (Wallerstein, 1987). How development was perceived played an important role in the responses by the different

countries. Malaysia, early in its independence, has realised the need to attach itself to a common region, ASEAN econo-politically, and Nusantara, culturally. These allowed Malaysia to have a stronger voice which would otherwise be too dependent on its past economic rung, as an agricultural supply region, in the world market.

The end of the cold war didn't dampen the drive for modernization or the belief in the modernization perspective. Although it might result in dependency, development was still sought after, and the international vehicle for ensuring development persisted. However the focus shifted from ideal modernization goals to a context-based development process. This requires the inclusion of various institutions including family, religion, ethnicity, social class, social movement, multinational companies, international systems as well as interactive world economies. All contributed to the history of the third world and used to develop the regional constructs currently employed to counter the threat of totalizing globalization. Earlier discussions of this threat were focused around issues of dependency to the economic process only. Today issues of cultural and environmental dependency as well as sustainable development are valid issues in regional dialogues and summits as any economic concern.

### **Classical ideas and innovativeness**

Malaysia's attempts at regional development and regionalisation are varied. From proposals at the international level to initiate a supra-national economic region—the East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) – and membership in APEC, to the re-assertion of ASEAN, to the local-global regions in the form of the proposal for several sub national development regions of which the Sabah Development Corridor is one, Malaysia has ventured into developing new connections and networks which basically expanded its markets, suppliers, and the entire awareness and world view of its economy. At times Malaysia has strengthened its own identity while at other times adopting 'Asian' and 'Eastern' identities to link with its neighbours. The inter-connectivity is visualised, among others, through the many on-going Sister Cities projects.

Another effort at developing new regions is growth triangles that were once popular. While it takes a lot of efforts to get the components to work together, the basic concept is sound – that small locales need to combine to form a larger voice. Malaysia is fond of having its development occurring in special shaped regions—Segitiga Jengka, Segitiga Utara, Selatan (North, South triangles), the Multimedia Super corridor, and the latest development corridors—the Eastern and Northern Economic Corridors, The Iskandar Region as well as two Economic Corridors or Regions for East Malaysia. One might wonder why must there be a triangle, a corridor, or a gateway for development to occur. Must development occur only in these patterns? Planners or even the informed public know that development does not occur in triangles, squares or any polygonal shape for that matter. These triangles, corridors and other peculiar shapes are simply means of representation. The idea to generalize from a condition or an occurrence, and not to pre-judge or demarcate a development before it even occurs.

## **Regional development approaches**

Malaysia's approach towards regional development planning itself has undergone several changes over time. It began perhaps by a simple rural-urban dichotomy on development emphasis. This emphasis was and is still very much operationalized based on the agriculture-manufacturing duality that makes up the basic economic identities of the places. Early attempts at creating regional labels include the ideas of Jelapang Paddy, the pineapple and tin regions, and many other agricultural labels aimed at highlighting the major economic activities of the area much like the cotton and corn belts of the United States. When the complexities and interconnectedness of urban life began to take the form of environmental degradation and social problems including that of health, unemployment, congestions and pollutions, the development of the urban began to utilize comprehensive strategies via structure plans (under the Urban Planning Act, 1976). The development of rural areas early on focused only on introducing modern infrastructures such as roads, electricity and tapped water as well as efforts at making agriculture more efficient, at least until the 4<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan when development included industrial as well as agricultural programmes. The idea of the 'region' in Malaysian regional development then was more to encompass unincorporated or non-municipal areas rather than any effort at integration or comprehensiveness. Early programme based regions include Integrated Agricultural Development Projects such as the Muda irrigation schemes. Then regionalization moved to the opening up of new agricultural settlements especially that of FELDA. Later, seven regional development authorities were developed in Peninsula Malaysia under the now defunct Ministry of Regional Development. These regional authorities; KEJORA, KESEDAR, KETENGAH, DARA, KEDA, PERDA and JENGKA are still very much planning and developing the 31% of total land in Peninsula Malaysia under various ministries.

## **Development corridors in Malaysia — past and present**

Development Thinking and Experiences through the Malaysian Development Plans (1956-2010) Malaysia had grappled to solve both the raging social as well as regional disparities as the outcome of over a century British intervention and administration of the former Federation of Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah, now embraced in Malaysia. Until the 1970 the development paradigm of the newly independent Malaysia was stressing on economic and social development of the rural area where the majority of the poor population of the country was found as well as promoting import substitution industries in the main cities, both for job creation in the face of the increasing urbanization rates as well to strengthen the Malaysian economy through diversification of its economic base beyond the export of tin and rubber, and timber. These development strategies were outlined in the first and second Malayan Development Plan and Malaysia Development Plan 1 (Malaya, 1955; Malaysia, 1960). The outcomes of the strategies were less than successful in meeting the goals that had been set for the Development Plans. Thus,

towards the end of the 1960-s hard core poverty group was still substantive, lingering around forty per cent of the population. Regional and social imbalances were still very visible. To make matters worse the social imbalances cut across racial lines, making the Malaysian state very vulnerable.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in the Second Malaysia Plan (Malaysia, 1970) was a bold strategy to address those imbalances, focusing on poverty eradication and social restructuring to evolve a truly multiracial Malaysian society. The policy was to run for two decades stressing on expanding the economic cake through sustained economic growth. With expanding wealth social and infrastructural developments were accelerated. Rural development strategy of earlier decades was made more focus on regional development while deliberate export industrialization strategy expanded industrial areas in cities to cater for the surge of foreign direct investment. Absolute poverty was slowly reduced in number, as reported in the subsequent five-year development plans (Malaysia, 1976; 1981; 1986). The paradigm stressing on economic growth and social development was continued in the period covered by the fifth to the ninth Malaysia Plans for the period 1990 to 2010 (Malaysia, 1990; 1996; 2001; 2006).

While acknowledging the overall achievement in economic growth and poverty eradication and the overall increase in the quality of life of the Malaysians as well as the general improvement of inter-racial mixing, the Malaysian environment leaves much to be desired. The Malaysian state has to grapple with degrading environment to which much attention has now been devoted. There have been strong calls for solutions from multi-stakeholders. That economic growth and development which has not been tempered with responsibility to nature may in the end bring down the level of quality of life achieved so far.

The paradigm of development has changed drastically from time to time in Malaysia in response to the change in intellectual and practical experiences from the rest of the world, in short from the pursuit of economic growth of the 1960-s to growth with redistributions in the 1970-s and beyond. A new paradigm has yet emerged after Rio de Janeiro 1992, pinning on sustainable development (WCED, 1987). This development paradigm considers economic growth and social development with environmental conservation- emphasizing on our responsibility to nature and to human beings (Harvey, 2006) with inter-generational equity.

There must be a balancing formula in the development effort, so that economic growth for wealth creation which can be spent to improve the citizen's quality of life without causing excessive damage to the environment. Implied there in, the people will enjoy their increasing economic power, social advancement through education, increasing mobility in well provided physical infrastructures and shelters in well managed ambience, in the end. Although the issue of environment was factored strongly in the Third Malaysian Development Plan, 1976-1980 and traces of its spirits in subsequent development plants only in the current ninth Malaysia Plan has the sustainable development concept shaped almost all aspects of activities and life in the

country. In the light of the changed paradigm, there is need then to look for a framework in the effort to effect a sustainable development for the Sabah Development Corridor.

### The Malaysian development corridors

In the ninth Malaysian Development Plan (Malaysia 2006) the Malaysian government introduced the concept of development corridors with the broad aim to develop the so called lagging regions of the country. These are; Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER), East Coast Economic Region (ECER), Iskandar Development Region (Iskandar, Johore-Malaysia; Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE) and Sabah Development Corridor (SDC). These five development corridors should provide the necessary fit to the earlier industrial corridors of the development decades under the New Economic Policy namely; the Penang- Kulim- Sungai Petani - Gurun industrial region, The Klang Valley industrial region which has the oldest industrial estates going back to the 1950-s and the Johor – Bahru Pasir Gudang Industrial complex. These

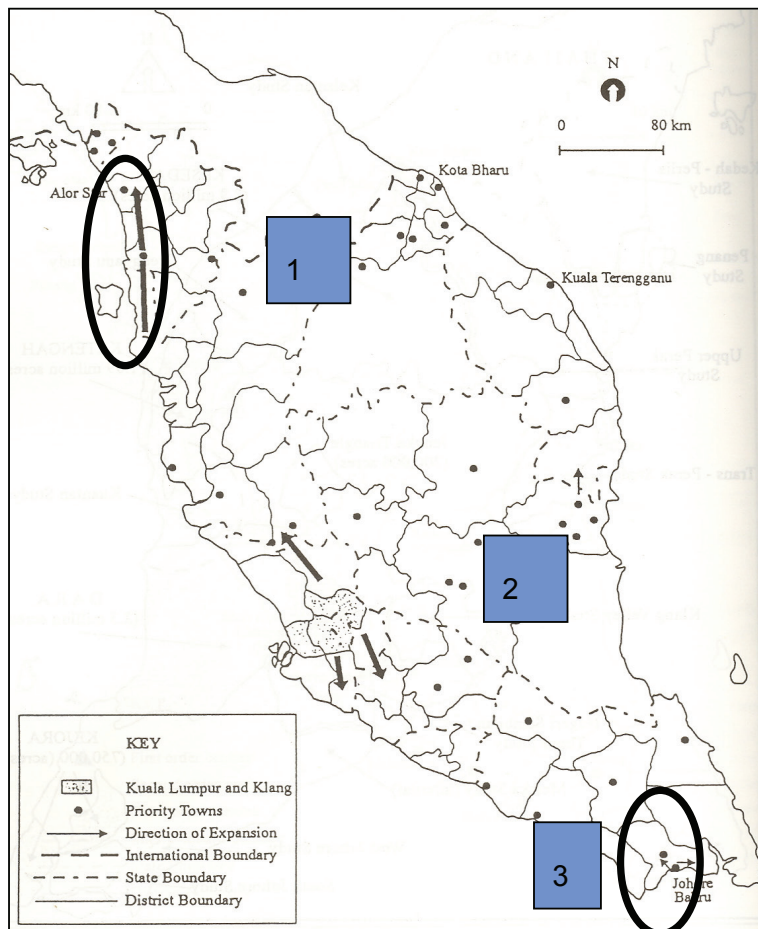


Figure 1 Development Corridor in Malaysia, 1956-2012

**Table 1** Planned creative destruction for urban development in Malaysia

No	Development Belt/ Corridors	Period	Goals/ Vision	Transformation	Malaysian Development Plan
1	Colonial Base • Resource Extraction	Pre- Independent	• British needs	Forest – Agriculture/ Tin Mining Initiated Urban Development/ Transportation	
2	Agricultural Base FELDA • Pahang Tenggara • LADA • KADA • MADA • Ketengah (Lembaga Kemajuan Terengganu Tengah) • FELCRA • RISDA	1970's – late 1980'	• Import substitution • Rural Development	Forest – Agriculture/ Settlements/ Industries/ Transportation	• IDR • First Malaya Plan • Second Malaya Plan • RMK-2 – RMK6
3	Urban Corridors – Industrial Base • Klang Valley (Kuala Lumpur- Petaling Jaya) • Penang –Bayan Lepas • Johor Bahru – Pasir Gudang	1970's – late 1990'	• Growth Pole Strategies	Forest/Agriculture – Urban Settlements/ Urban Transportation	RMK2- RMK7
4	Economic Region Base • Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) • Eastern Corridor Economic Region (ECER) • Iskandar Malaysia • Sabah Development Corridor (SDC) • Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE)	2006 – now	• K-economy • renewable energy • high technology	Forest/Agriculture – Agriculture/ Urban/ Settlements	RMK9-RMK10

Source: From various government documents

industrial regions have risen to become the propulsive regions for the Peninsula, with the capabilities to effect economic and social transformations of the country. In the march to 2020 when Malaysia will achieve its developed country status, the development corridors could fill up the necessary development needs in lagging areas that the industrial regions on their own have somewhat limited effects. Figure 1 shows the overall development corridor in Malaysia (Malaya) during after Independence (1957) until now and Table 1 summarizes the economic development and relationship with the development corridors.

### Transition from first nature to second nature in the development corridor: a case of Bernam-Linggi Basin

Over the past twenty years (1990-2012), it has been exposed to various global events that impact upon the local car industry, the new universities, and townships. In the Bernam Valley the Proton City Project, Bukit Beruntung and Lembah Beringin are among the major developments that arose out of these plantation areas. Unfortunately, to date, development projects in the Bernam Valley have faced major financial setbacks, especially with respect to the latter two. The Proton Plant at Tanjung Malim started construction in 1996 but was deferred one year later. It only resumes work in 2001. This is an example of the *on again off again* pattern of development in the region. Development setbacks have impacts that last for years, often exacerbating into other problems including social, environmental and even health. These are established agricultural areas that have remained consistent, without major changes since the 1950s. The focus on agriculture continued after the first two Malaysia Plans (MP2, 1971-1975 and MP3, 1975- 1980). The very stability of the regions was not conducive

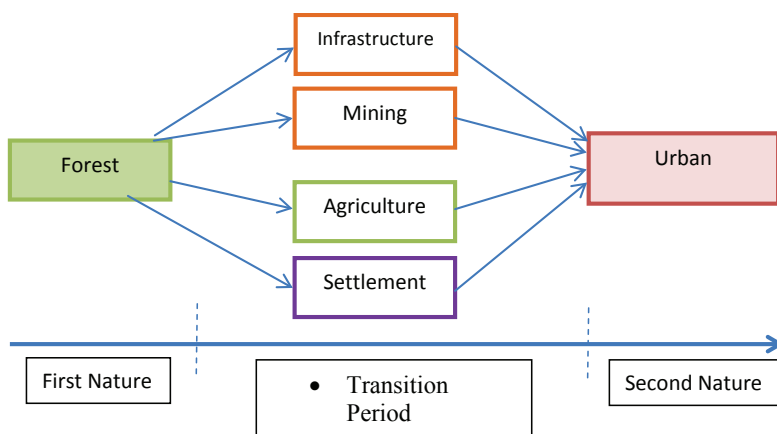


Figure 2 Transition From First Nature to Second Nature

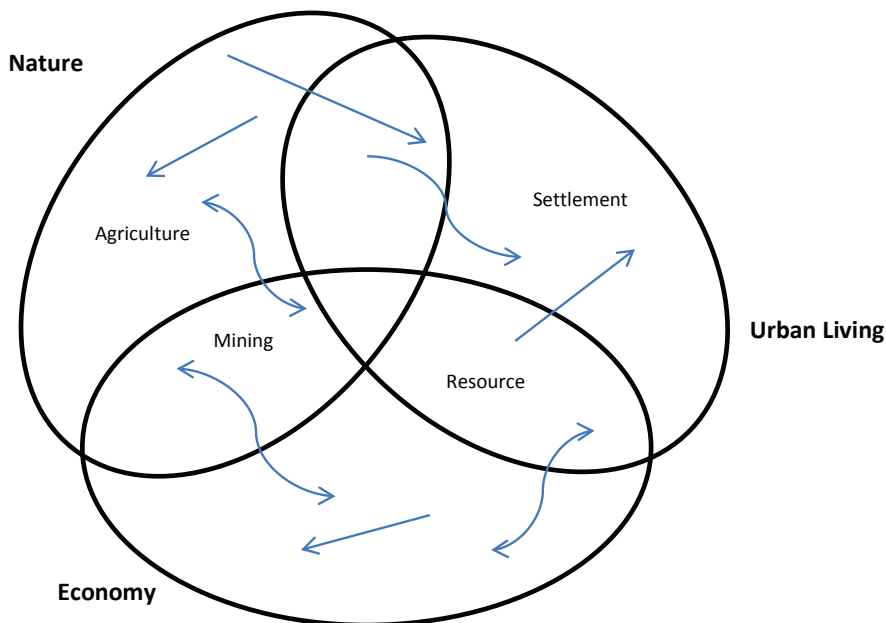
to change towards industrialization. The focus then was to intensify agriculture, even intensifying it to include areas that were either undeveloped or underdeveloped. Only



after the 1980s period did small industrial areas appear in the Bernam section of the basin.

Figure 2 above, shows the transformation processes from First Nature to Second Nature in the linear thinking process or at the macro level. The area that covered by the forest was transformed directly to the urban area such as in Senawang in Negeri Sembilan and Damansara area in Selangor. The infrastructures such as roads, highways, water supply, and electricity were developed to provide facilities to the peoples and their well-being. In this transformation processes there is a transition period that will be vulnerable to the people and to the area. For example, during the construction of the housing and roads will disturb the traffic flow in the surrounding areas that become vulnerable to the people. These transformations seem to be linear if we view from the macro level.

Nevertheless, if we view from the bottom or at the micro level, the transformations were not-linear. Figure 3 below showing the integration between three components of the pillars – nature, economy and urban living to show the complexities of the integration of the three pillars.



**Figure 3** Showing non-linear form of thinking from first to second nature.

In the case of housing development in the Lembah Beringin in Selangor that was abandoned for the past nearly 15 years and now become the “ghost town”. The area is located about 70 km from Kuala Lumpur towards to the north. The original planned was to develop the huge housing scheme in four phases of housing projects contains

657 units is about RM200, 000 each units (Mingguan Malaysia, 29 August 2004). Lembah Beringin Township near to the Selangor and Perak border, marks another symbol of the 1998 economic recession when the market was given much emphasis and the state cannot control that impacted to the society. The planned mega new township now has become a secluded and scary housing estate leaving only a Golf course as its main attraction. Some plantation workers who had bought the houses with their lifelong savings have no choice but to continue the rest of their lives at this spooky failed township. The developer Lembah Beringin Sdn Bhd has been blacklisted for involving in abandoned project as of 31 May 2011.

The other cases were during the construction of the impoundment in Kuala Kubu Bahru. The area was flooded to build a dam (impoundment) for water supply and consumption by the people at Dusun Tua in Kuala Kubu Bahru. The location is about 6.5 km from Kuala Kubu Bahru towards Bukit Fraser. The impoundment is located in the Selangor forest reserve in the district of Hulu Selangor. The impoundment is about 600 hectares or 3 per cent from the catchment area about 167,000 hectares (Hasan Mat Nor et al., 2001). The impoundment was developed to provide water supply for the people living in the Klang Valley area almost 1 million people. In this case, the nature that provides goods and services for the people was transformed to the new form of structure but remains the function as a first nature.

### **Future direction of urban development?**

The first observation is that the process of transformation from first nature to the second nature in case of becoming urban is not a linear process. This is a common assumption in traditional urbanization planning where people move from the traditional to the modern with urbanization being the vehicle for such a move. In a country that emphasizes science, technology, growth and the idea of being modern, it is an understandable assumption. Those that question the move are labelled as outdated, naive, anti-development, and perhaps even 'subversives.' Yet the study showed that the process of accepting the urban is a complex series of selections, discarding and adopting from both the urban and rural with contestations from both sides of the spectrum. The rural do not shed its identity totally in the face of urbanization, and urban values are always questioned even though the idea of urbanization as westernization and therefore of 'yellow culture' is no longer dominant.

In such a process the traditional both help and hinder the process of being urban. Traditional activities such as agriculture and food making often provide an entry point to the urban market, and urban technologies allow inclusion in the mass production base of the consumerist urban society. The study also showed that the process is dependent on social acceptance of the specific element of urbanization undertaken with some elements of urbanization, especially that of physical infrastructures are easier to adapt and accept rather than others such as social connectivities between rural and urban.

Moving planning from a top down approach to a more bottom up governance framework cannot assume that the structure is in place for such a shift. A society that is all to embed in a top down hierarchical process, from that of a feudal society, to a colonial structure and local rule that combine both elements, a re-examination of local grassroots networks is necessary for governance to be in place. Current development programmes should no longer be assumed to have a deterministic impact on communities. Rather, the uncertainty of success is dependent on the communities' acceptability of the programmes and the risks of individual development efforts vary given the underlying networks that link individual community members to the programmes themselves.

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