

Branding the legacy of “The Flying Finn” *

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A postcard motif: Nurmi memorial in front of the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki. It was signed by Paavo Nurmi in 1963 and sent to the Editor of the *Journal*. The runner's statue was commissioned in autumn 1924 by the Finnish government. It was the work of sculptor Wäino Aaltonen who was 30 years old at the time. The statue originally stood at the Helsinki Atheneum, and now has returned there. A copy of the original statue was placed in front of the Olympic Stadium in 1952. There are other copies in Nurmi's home town of Turku, in Jyväskylä, and in Lausanne.

Photo: Volker Kluge Collection



“His imprint on the track world was greater than any man's before or after. He, more than any man, raised track to the glory of a major sport in the eyes of international fans, and they honoured him as one of the truly great athletes of all sports.” (1986)

This paper examines sport tourism from the perspectives of tourism studies and brand management by taking the legendary Finnish athlete, Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973), as a case example. During his running career, he won nine gold and three silver medals in the Olympic Games (1920–1928), and is still considered one of the greatest athletes of all times. His achievements had an enormous significance for his country, the young and small nation which had just declared its independence from Russia.

In Nurmi's time, target-oriented branding was not a topical issue but, during the past decades, it has become

a focal concept in marketing literature and is now frequently discussed in relation to sports and athletes (Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014). Athletes can be considered as cultural products and brands in their own right but, as this case demonstrates, their legacy can expand to many other fields – even long after their lifetimes. A brand in sports is defined as a name, design, or symbol which differentiates it from the competition (Shank, 1999). Accordingly, Nurmi was a name, and his legacy is a brand: he had a name, a distinctive appearance, and a strong personality. In this paper, we discuss how his human brand has been leveraged to various categories of sport tourism and levels of branding.

The brand of Paavo Nurmi forms the basis for a series of sport tourism events that manifest his legacy and bring thousands of domestic and international sport tourists to Nurmi's home town, Turku, in Finland. The most significant event is the Paavo Nurmi Games, an internationally recognised track and field meet for the

world's leading athletes. The Paavo Nurmi Games is a part of the European Athletics (EA) Premium Permit Circuit and is also highly ranked by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), rising to the IAAF World Challenge Permit in 2017.

The Paavo Nurmi Games represents a traditional form of sport tourism, which centres on a passive observing of various sporting events. Indeed, event sport tourism has been the most recognised form of sport tourism with large-scale sporting events, such as the Olympic Games, greatly influencing this tendency (e.g. Gibson, 2002). Currently, there is also an increasing demand for more active forms of sport tourism that involve active participation in various sports-related exercises and events (Gibson & Fairley, 2014). As a response, the supply of active sporting events has increased significantly during the last few years, of which the Paavo Nurmi Marathon in Turku, with thousands of participants, is a good example.

Our aim is to describe how Nurmi has opened the way to multi-level branding and how his legacy is maintained and extended by various factors in order to benefit the local and national tourism industry, and even society, in a wider sense. In order to complete this task, we have conducted interviews, documentary analysis, and participant observation. This paper is written by academic researchers and, notably, one of the authors has been writing a biography of Paavo Nurmi, providing access to inside information and ensuring the accuracy of the factual content on Nurmi.

Sport tourism

During the past decades, sports and tourism have developed into highly desirable leisure time activities and have also become significant economic activities (Roche, Spake & Mathew, 2013; Weed & Bull, 2004). Tourism is regarded as one of the world's largest industries (UNWTO, 2016), while sport as the world's largest social phenomenon (e.g. Delpy Neirotti, 2003). Accordingly, sport tourism has become a major sector of the global travel and tourism industry (e.g. Ritchie, 2005). It is noteworthy that several scholars have argued sport tourism to be more than the simple combination of sport and tourism – greater than the sum of its parts (e.g. Weed & Bull, 2004; cf. Gibson, 2002). Weed and Bull (2004, p. 37), for instance, have considered sport tourism as “a social, economic, and cultural phenomenon arising from the unique interaction of activity, people, and place”.

The exact definition of sport tourism has been widely debated, not only in terms of the core concepts of sport and tourism, but also how the field itself is described and how sport tourism is categorized (e.g. Weed, 2009). Sport tourism is frequently characterized by travelling,

to either actively participate in sports (e.g. scuba diving, skiing, and golf) or passively watch and observe sports (e.g. sports events and sports museums), where either sport or tourism can be the main motive (e.g. Gibson, 2002; Ritchie, 2005).

In this paper, we follow the classification of Gibson (1998; 2002), in which sport tourism is portrayed as a leisure-based activity with three overlapping categories: active sport tourism, event sport tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism. Although this categorization has been criticized for viewing events mainly as a spectator phenomenon and considering nostalgia as a sport tourism type, instead of a motivational factor (Weed & Bull, 2004; Weed, 2009), it offers a solid base for analysing sport tourism centring on the legacy of Paavo Nurmi.

Active sport tourism comprises several activities such as skiing, fishing, and biking, as well as active participation in different events and sporting tournaments (Gibson, 1998; Ritchie, 2005). During the last decades, active sport tourism has increased its popularity among traditional sports, such as skiing and golf (Gibson & Fairley, 2014), but also among endurance sports, such as marathon events, the number of which has exploded globally (Burfoot, 2007). This trend is partly explained by the increased awareness of the benefits of an active lifestyle, tourists' desire for a variety of experiences, learning and engaging



Nurmi medal, created in 1974 by Raimo Heino. On the reverse are the three Olympic cities in which Nurmi won medals: Antwerp, Paris and Amsterdam.



The “Flying Finn” – so called for his wonderfully easy running style. The photo shows Nurmi in the German Stadium in Berlin which was to have held the Olympics in 1916. Ten years later Nurmi set a 3000 m world record with a time of 8:25.4 min.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive

“The runner Nurmi” – bronze statuette by the sculptor Renée Sintenis. She was inspired when she saw him run in Berlin on 11th September 1926. Although the German Otto Peltzer took the 1500 m world record from Nurmi in this race with 3:51.0 min, she did not choose the winner as her model but instead decided on the Finn as the subject for her work.

Photo: Nationalgalerie Berlin



in something new, and also greater opportunities to take part in sporting activities during their vacation (Gibson & Fairley, 2014).

Event sport tourism is, to date, the most researched area of sport tourism, entailing large-scale events, such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup (Ritchie, 2005). These mega-events are characterized by an extraordinary significance, scale, and reputation with an international focus in terms of athletes, spectators, and substantial media spectacles that boost the tourism industry and attract new businesses (Gibson & Fairley, 2014). However, there is also an increasing interest in event sport tourism concerning smaller-scale

events, such as regional and amateur competitions, the popularity and economic importance of which has been noticed by both scholars and tourism professionals (Gibson & Fairley, 2014). Compared to short-term mega-events, small-scale sporting events can provide communities with more positive and less negative impacts as they often use existing infrastructure, require minimal public funding, are more manageable, and may minimize tourism seasonality (Higham, 1999; Ritchie, 2005). Today, many cities prioritize local sporting events and focus on both spectators and active participants in order to generate tourism income and develop destination image and branding (Gibson & Fairley, 2014).

Nostalgia sport tourism refers to something or somebody associated with sports. It is generally related to physical artefacts, such as sports halls of fame and museums, sport tourism tours to famous sporting stadiums, or sport-themed vacations (Ritchie, 2005). Furthermore, it relates to social interactions within different sport tourism groups, such as fan group tours (Fairley, 2003). Nostalgia sport tourism is still the least researched area of sport tourism and also largely ignored by the tourism industry (Gibson & Fairley, 2014), offering a vast future potential.

Sport tourism and the legacy of Paavo Nurmi

In general, legacy refers to what is inherited from one person to another, from one organisation to another, or from one generation to another (Holt & Ruta, 2015). In sport management literature, legacy often refers to mega-events, especially the Olympic Games, which must succeed in their own terms but also respond to the public's expectations of renewing a city, reviving an economy, and even re-branding the nation (Holt & Ruta, 2015). Instead of the mere short-term effects of sporting events, legacy refers to a wider transformation, long-term activities, and alternative forms of impacts such as creating new skills and improving communications (Holt & Ruta, 2015; Preuss, 2007).

The legacy of Paavo Nurmi is manifested through the various sporting events and attractions that, together,

Table 1
Events and attractions centering on the legacy of Paavo Nurmi.

Year	Event or attraction	Form of sport tourism
1893/1997	Paavo Nurmi Stadium	Active, event and nostalgia sport tourism
1925/1952	Statue of Paavo Nurmi	Nostalgia sport tourism
1957	Paavo Nurmi Games	Event sport tourism
1992	Paavo Nurmi Marathon	Active sport tourism
1997	Paavo Nurmi Museum	Nostalgia sport tourism
2013	Paavo's Sports Day	Active sport tourism
2013	Master/Junior Games	Event sport tourism
2016	Paavo Nurmi Athletics Day	Active sport tourism



Finnish special stamps of 1997 commemorating the 100th birthday of Paavo Nurmi.

Far left: The final runner Paavo Nurmi, 55, lit the Olympic Cauldron in the Helsinki Stadium in 1952.

Photo: Volker Kluge Archive

form the Paavo Nurmi Festival Week, culminating in the actual Paavo Nurmi Games. As described in Table 1, these events represent all forms of sport tourism: active sport tourism, event sport tourism, and nostalgia sport tourism (cf. Gibson, 2002).

The most significant active sport tourism event is the annual road running race, the Paavo Nurmi Marathon, which was established in 1992, including half and full marathons, as well as a 10 km race. The Paavo Nurmi Marathon has grown tremendously during the recent years and recorded 4000 participants in 2016. The Paavo Nurmi Festival Week also includes events for beginners, while promoting sports, and especially athletics, to a wider audience. The Paavo Nurmi Athletics Day engages ordinary people of all ages in trying different track and field sports, while Paavo's Sports Day is targeted for children and families, attracting thousands of potential future athletes to try, and to enjoy sports.

In relation to the passive event sport tourism, the main event here is undoubtedly the Paavo Nurmi Games, an annual track and field meet, inviting the world's leading athletes to Finland. The meeting was first established in 1957 to celebrate the 60th birthday of Paavo Nurmi. For many years, it remained a grassroots event, but eventually developed into a major, internationally recognised sporting event, due to a more professional approach in terms of management, marketing, and branding. A significant turning point was the establishment of the PN Turku Ltd in 2012. The company was founded in cooperation with local sports clubs, the Finnish Athletics Federation, and Paavo Nurmi's son Matti to assure the legacy of Paavo Nurmi. The aim of the company is to develop the Paavo Nurmi Games, increase its international media coverage, and raise the meeting to higher levels in the international rankings.

Indeed, the Paavo Nurmi Games have expanded and evolved every year, and in 2016, more than 13,000 spectators attended the event. The event was also broadcast through the Eurosport and Discovery channels to approximately 100 countries worldwide, with millions of potential viewers. Furthermore, since 2014, the meeting has been a part of the European Athletics Premium Permit Circuit, and in 2016 the IAAF announced the elevation of the meeting to the IAAF World Challenge level.

As noted, the Paavo Nurmi Festival promotes physical activity to those of all age and skill levels. The Junior and Master Games is a track and field meeting for junior and senior athletes. The Paavo Nurmi School Tour brings professional athletes to local schools to endorse a healthy lifestyle, and the *paavonurmi.fi* website presents the achievements and legacy of Nurmi in nine different languages.

In relation to nostalgia sport tourism, the main attractions are the Paavo Nurmi Stadium, the home museum, and the statue of Nurmi. The multi-use

Paavo Nurmi depicted on a Finnish 10 Mark banknote in 1986.

Photo: Volker Kluge Collection



Figure 1
Extending the legacy
of Paavo Nurmi.



stadium, where the Paavo Nurmi Games are organised, was opened in the late 19th century, but named after Paavo Nurmi in 1997 to honour his 100th anniversary. The home museum is a small apartment furnished in the style of the 1920s. It is maintained by the Sports Museum Foundation of Finland and open to the public on Nurmi's birthday and other special occasions. The most well-known attraction is the statue of Nurmi located in the centre of Turku. It was originally cast in 1925 by the famous Finnish sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen. A copy of the statue was erected outside the Olympic Stadium in 1952 when Finland hosted the Olympic Games and Paavo Nurmi had the unquestioned honour to light the Olympic fire. Interestingly, the statue of Paavo Nurmi was illustrated also in the Olympic Poster, welcoming the sportsmen from all over the world to the home country of "The King of Runners".

Nurmi as a brand and an extension of his legacy

Applying the brand concepts by Shank (1999), Thomson (2006), Keller (2008) and Arai et al. (2014), we define an athlete brand as "the public persona of an individual athlete whose name and fame have established functional, symbolic, and economic value" (cf. Knott, Fyall & Jones, 2015). As illustrated in Figure 1, we suggest that this value also applies to the legacy of an athlete. Primarily, the brand of Nurmi benefits the Paavo Nurmi Games and other main sporting events. Secondly, this brand value can be expanded into various other levels of branding.

According to Arai et al. (2014), an athlete's brand image consists of three dimensions: athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle. In relation to Paavo Nurmi, his individual achievements and athletic capability were outstanding, and his performance in competitions demonstrated a burning will to succeed. Nurmi was known for his virtuous behaviour and love for running. In Finland, there is a traditional virtue that can be described as "silence is golden". Paavo Nurmi, who did not like to talk to reporters, was like a symbol of the old virtue, "work,

don't talk". He was one of the first athletes known to have a systematic approach in training and even though perceived as cold and unemotional, he respected his competitors. Nurmi had aesthetically pleasing physical characteristics and he was ideally built for long-distance running (174 cm and 65 kg).

However, he was an introvert by nature and often seemed bleak and remote, training with a dedication and intensity that had never been seen before. A famous Finnish sports journalist has stated: "There was something inhumanly stern and cruel about him, but he conquered the world by pure means: with a will that had supernatural power." (Jukola, 1935).

Moreover, Nurmi had an appealing life story. As the eldest son of a poor working class family, Nurmi had to quit school after the death of his father and help his mother in providing for the family, but during his leisure time he was always running. With his incredible achievements, Nurmi became a true role model, as the newly independent Finland was in need of a national hero who could reunite the nation after the bitter Civil War in 1918. Even though Nurmi's personal manners were not always appreciated, he was valued for being extremely hard-working. Nurmi stubbornly avoided all publicity, but was always ready to do good for the cause of sports and Finnish society. In relation to his brand value, his successful American campaigns in 1925, 1929, and 1940 were nearly as important as his Olympic medals. During these tours, Nurmi was praised by the American media, and his popularity was even paralleled with a hero myth from Greek mythology.

Product branding

The legacy of Paavo Nurmi has been noted in several books and he has been memorialized on various medals and stamps. In addition, already in the 1920s, Nurmi authorized the company Oy Karl Fazer Ab to sell peppermint candies with his name. As Keel and Natarajan (2012) note, celebrities have long been used to sell various products and the trend has only increased with the current trend of celebrity-branded products.

Today, the Paavo Nurmi Festival has many sponsors, and two of these, the Finnish coin company Moneta and the sporting goods company Karhu, feature product-level branding in relation to Nurmi. The Bank of Finland featured Nurmi in a ten-mark note in 1986 and during the next six years his face became familiar to all citizens and tourists. Currently, Moneta offers Paavo Nurmi gold coins that have been designed in collaboration with PN Turku Ltd, and a share of the sales profit is directed towards supporting the Paavo Nurmi Games. According to Jari Salonen, the Managing Director of PN Turku Ltd, "The coins, honouring the legacy of Nurmi, have become an important part of the Nurmi awareness and culture, both in Finland and abroad." (personal interview, 25th August 2016)

City and destination branding

Sporting events can play a major role in a city's tourism strategy. Cities can proactively attract sporting events by creating a destination image which is favourable to tourist segments (Roche et al., 2013). In the case herein, it was vice versa. First, there was Nurmi – who happened to be born in Turku – and much later in the 1950s, the Paavo Nurmi Games were established.

The city of Turku and the Paavo Nurmi Festival Week make up a synergetic combination, together fulfilling the criteria of successful events (see Roche et al., 2013). The various events are targeted not only to tourists, but also to local residents, thus having an impact beyond the economic value. From the perspective of destination branding, it is important that Turku, the former capital of Finland, offers high quality tourism services and various interesting attractions. The issue of safety has also become extremely important, especially after the recent terrorist attacks in sporting events around the world. This is likely to increase the attractiveness of Turku, and the country of Finland, one of the safest countries in the world, as sport tourism destinations. Antti Pihlakoski, the Board Member of the EA and the IAAF, has stated that "Paavo Nurmi ran Turku and Finland onto the map of the world. Treasuring his legacy is an honour and a great possibility". (TS, 2016)

However, it seems that the true value of Paavo Nurmi was acknowledged only very recently. The city of Turku and its destination marketing organisation, Visit Turku, started to promote strongly the city of Turku as the hometown of Paavo Nurmi, only after the establishment of PN Turku Ltd in 2012. The museum and the themed guided tours also seem to have much potential, but their commercialization is still in progress (cf. Henriikka Heikinheimo, Communications Officer at the Sports Museum of Finland, personal interview, 13th June 2016; Tiina Gustafsson, Authorized Tour Guide, personal interview, 25th July 2016). Furthermore, Markus Kalmari,

the Director of Sports Services in Turku, has stated that "Turku will strengthen Nurmi's world-wide fame and legacy even more in the future." (personal interview, 29th June 2016)

Country branding

Countries around the world are increasingly developing their nation brands (Dinnie, 2016) and one way of doing this is celebrity endorsement, which refers to associating a country with a person whose name is well known (Van Heerden, Kuiper & Saar, 2008). Paavo Nurmi has always been an unending source of national pride for Finland. Additionally, his personality and commitment to running represent the nature of Finnish people in general. Nurmi is considered a model example of the Finnish "sisu" (i.e. perseverance), a trait that is also related to other Finnish sportsmen, such as the Formula One driver, Kimi Räikkönen. Räikkönen has been nicknamed "The Ice Man", describing not only his cool temper under pressure but also his "actions speak louder than words" attitude.

The legacy of Nurmi has significance for Finland in terms of country image, but also in economic measures as noted by Pihlakoski: "The complex built around the legacy of Paavo Nurmi is justified also from an economic point of view. Employing hundreds of people voluntarily and bringing in visitors, Paavo Nurmi Festival has an enormous impact on the Turku area and the whole country." (TS, 2016). Regardless of the enormous power of athletes, both current and former, it seems that the potential of athlete branding has not yet been fully understood when branding Finland as a country or as a tourism destination. The challenge is most likely related to the fact that service providers often act in ignorance



Special stamp to mark the death of Paavo Nurmi.

When Nurmi died on 2nd October 1973, he received a state funeral. In the photo: State President Urho Kekkonen, himself a successful athlete in the Nurmi era. Kekkonen was NOC President from 1938 to 1945.

Photos: Volker Kluge Archive



PAAVO NURMI GAMES

of each other and there is confusion about who controls and manages the brand. Thus, networking and a shared vision are highly needed (cf. Gnoth, 2002).

Wider societal significance

Jari Salonen from PN Turku Ltd emphasises the opportunity, but also the responsibility involved in branding Paavo Nurmi and his legacy: "It feels great to realize that the Paavo Nurmi Games and our other events have brought about the notion that Paavo Nurmi and his legacy also have a wider societal significance. This adds depth to our work and needs to be kept in mind when organising events that carry his name." (personal interview, 25th August 2016)

The legacy of Nurmi has, indeed, value beyond branding. After his running career, he became a successful businessman and made a considerable fortune. He maintained a healthy lifestyle and promoted physical activity throughout his life. To honour his lifework, a health and sports research centre, the Paavo Nurmi Centre, was established in 1957. However, Nurmi suffered from heart disease and eventually died of a heart attack at the age of 76. Before his death, Nurmi decided to use his wealth to solve the puzzle of heart diseases and established the Paavo Nurmi Foundation in 1968. The foundation is still running and contributes to the research of heart and vascular diseases, as well as public welfare in Finland, by organising international science conferences and offering grants to individual researchers.

Conclusions

Sport tourism has become one of the cornerstones of the international tourism industry in terms of its size and economic value. In this paper, we have discussed sport tourism in relation to branding by using the record-winning Finnish long-distance runner, Paavo Nurmi, as a case example. We have illustrated how an individual athlete and his legacy can be considered as a brand, how this relates to, and brings about, different forms of sport tourism, and how an athlete brand can be utilized at various other levels of branding and even have a wider societal significance.

In marketing literature, the athlete brand is a fairly recent concept that has so far been examined mainly

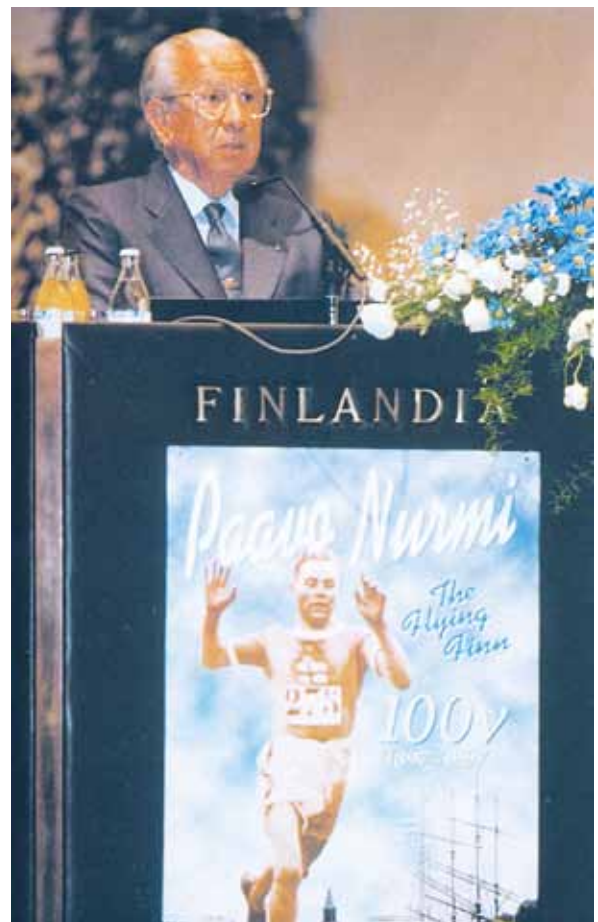
in relation to living athletes, either during their athletic or post-athletic career. Similarly, in sport tourism literature, branding is quite an unexplored theme and the significance of an athlete brand has been sparsely addressed. With this case, we have demonstrated that an athlete brand can exist and even extend – long after an athlete's lifetime. Nurmi's athletic capabilities and achievements created a fame that made him a brand in his own right. Today, his legacy lives on in the many sporting events and attractions built around his name and brand, illustrating how one person can make a difference.

The challenge is, however, keeping alive the legacy when the number of people who have personal memories and shared stories about the athlete, is constantly decreasing. Notably, the legacy cannot be taken for granted, but instead, it needs to be cherished and reinforced in order to keep it alive. The role of the different actors, including for example, service providers, as well as the city and destination authorities, is crucial in maintaining the legacy and passing it on to the future generations. In order to succeed, constant collaboration and networking are needed among all the actors.

Compared to mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, that have a legacy of their own, smaller sporting events are often based on the legacy of local sporting

IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch honoured the "Flying Finn" at a ceremony in Helsinki's Finlandia Hall to commemorate his 100th anniversary. Samaranch, as a young journalist, was present in the 1952 Olympic Opening Ceremony, when Nurmi brought the Olympic fire in the Helsinki Stadium.

Photos: picture-alliance; PN Turku Oy / Paavo Nurmi Festival





Very Finnish: At the 54th Paavo Nurmi Games in Turku in 2016 the German javelin thrower Thomas Röhler broke the 90 m barrier for the first time in his career. Nine and a half weeks later the 25 year old became Olympic champion in Rio de Janeiro.

Photo: PN Turku Oy / Paavo Nurmi Festival

heroes and the enthusiasm of local actors. People generate stories that are powerful in mediating the legacy of an athlete, evoking emotional responses. Accordingly, combining athlete brands to small-scale sporting events creates not only economic, but also symbolic and emotional value, that further strengthens their appeal. In conclusion, embracing an athlete brand is a worthwhile opportunity, especially when developing and promoting small-scale sport tourism events and attractions. As this case has proved, a good story, enthusiasm, and hard work can turn local sporting events, such as the Paavo Nurmi Games, into world class sporting events. ■

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