Adelina Fejza, Gregor Čok:
PROSTORSKI ELEMENTI, KI USTVARJAJO KAKOVOSTEN JAVNI PROSTOR
SPATIAL ELEMENTS THAT CREATE THE QUALITY PUBLIC SPACE

POVZETEK

Javni prostor je bistveni element človekove blaginje ter celotnega razvoja mesta in družbe. V prispevku je predstavljen kratek pogled na preteklo in sedanje stanje v zvezi z načrtovanjem in uporabo javnih prostorov v urbanih okoljih. Članek naslavlja ugotovitev, da se v teh okoljih postopoma izgublja fokus kakovosti javnega prostora, sčasoma pa se ti prostori preoblikujejo celo v človeku neprijazna okolja. Namen predstavljene raziskave je ugotoviti, kateri so ključni elementi, ki ustvarjajo kakovosten javni prostor. Za dosego tega smo uporabili primerjalno in deskriptivno raziskovalno metodo in izvedli primerjavo dveh relevantnih literatur oziroma avtorskih pristopov, Henaff and Strongova "Public Space and Democracy" ter Pérez-Gómezova "Attunement". Ta dva primera izpolnjujeta kriterije različnih interdisciplinarnih pristopov do javnega prostora, razloženih skozi različna obdobja in ozadja. Ugotovili smo, da so elementi, ki jih avtorji predlagajo kot ključne gradnike kvalitativnega prostora, ustrezno utemeljeni. Kot take jih je mogoče izvesti v celostni fizični obliki, saj temeljijo na človeškem faktorju oziroma na telesni prisotnosti in izkušnji v prostoru. V zaključku je podan predlog za vključevanje teh elementov v proces načrtovanja in oblikovanja javnega prostora v okviru izzivov sodobne kulture bivanja.

KLJUČNE BESEDE
javni prostor, kakovosten javni prostor, ključni elementi, človeški faktor, urbanistično načrtovanje in oblikovanje

ABSTRACT

Public space is an essential element of human wellbeing and the overall development of the city and society. This paper presents a brief outlook of the past and present situations related to the planning and use of public spaces in urban environments. In doing so, this paper addresses the finding that public spaces gradually lose the focus of quality in them, and as time goes by, these spaces are reshaping even in human-unfriendly places. The purpose of this presented research is to find out what are the key elements that create a quality public space. To achieve it, it is used a comparative–descriptive method comparing two relevant pieces of literature or authorial approaches, Henaff and Strong's "Public Space and Democracy" and Pérez-Gómez's "Attunement". These two examples fulfill the criteria of having different interdisciplinary approaches toward public space, explained through different periods and backgrounds. It is found that the crucial elements these authors suggest for building qualitative space are well-grounded. As such, they can be implemented in an integrated physical form because they base on the human factor or the physical presence and experience in space. In the conclusion part, a suggestion was made to include these elements in the process of planning and designing public spaces in the context of the challenges of modern living culture.

KEY-WORDS
public space, quality public space, key elements, human factor, urban planning and design

Figure 1: MFO Park – Zurich, Switzerland (Source: Author, 2013).

Figure 2: Mauritsplaats – Rotterdam, Netherlands (Source: Author, 2019).

1. INTRODUCTION

Open public spaces together with the matrix of streets, form the pattern of the city upon which all the build-up structures organize. It defines the city by being an »open-air living room for city dwellers« (UN-Habitat, 2018, p. 6). Public space manifests in different spatial forms such as squares, parks, neighborhood outdoor space, playgrounds, streets, sidewalks, boulevards, etc. (UN-Habitat, 2018, p. 3). It is (should be) a multi-functional and inclusive area where life happens in the form of outdoor activities, various cultural, political, and social events, trading, movement, etc. (Global Public Space Toolkit, 2015, p. 4). The places represented in *Figures 1, 2,* and *3* are considered good examples of that kind of space. Sufficient open public space successfully connected within a city, enables the cities to upgrade the quality of life and improve its function (UN-Habitat, 2018, p. 3). »It is for urban planning to establish and organize these public spaces, and for urban design to facilitate and encourage their use, in the process enhancing a sense of identity and belonging« (Global Public Space Toolkit, 2015, p. 4).

As the world is constantly changing, every discipline also faces changes in its domain. Ancient architecture has formed spaces that indicated encountered participation, where we understand ourselves through others, enabling human freedom and bodily communication (Pérez-Gómez, 2017). Modern urbanism has significantly put low importance on the idea of city space as a meeting place for people, the overall public space, and the walking experience in it (Gehl, 2010, p. 3). Nowadays, the situation is different. Private interests are escalating, technology

reshapes the real world into the virtual, and the economic and political domain is skeptical about the symbolic values of the space (Pérez-Gómez, 2017). Lawrence Herzog (2006, p. 5) argues about the current situation in Mexico, where the public space is gradually reshaping into something unrecognizable and unmeaningful. Transitional countries are additionally facing the issue of shrinkage or unactive public spaces. It seems like we are losing the focus of quality over quantity, compromising some of our basic spatial needs just for short-lasting benefits For example, in North Macedonia, with its capital city of Skopje, most of the public spaces within collective housing buildings are not in their intended function. They are not properly designed and managed, and they seem like they don't serve at all for a collective urban living (*Figure 4* and *Figure 5*). The human presence is missing, and what dominates is

Figure 4a and Figure 4b: Taftalidze - Skopje, North Macedonia (Source: Author, 2022).

Figure 3: Israels Plads – Copenhagen, Denmark (Source: Ramblersen, 2016).

Figure 5: Karpoš 2 – Skopje, North Macedonia (Source: Author, 2022).

the ramp access toward the underground parking, parked cars on the ground floor, and fences around the parcel that disables the pedestrian flow and accessibility.

Sahan (2021, p. 1) states there is a need for serious consideration of the relationship between humans and the urban surrounding. Pérez-Gómez (2016, pp. 15-20) makes a brief overlook of the past, the present, and the future of public spaces. He argues that historically it was the architect's responsibility to provide a sense of home in the city, where the public life prioritized the human experience, which is the opposite of the present situation (*Figure 5*), where public spaces have converted into places for consumption and transit. He emphasizes that it becomes even more drastic when we add the influence of technology which converts physical communication into virtual, neglecting the rooted human need for live dialogue and touch and putting our psychosomatic health into question. De Graaf (2017, p. 121) has a similar view for the virtual realms, pointing out that nowadays, the public space is not the only place that defines us as a collective. There are other virtual platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. who challenge the perception of public space.

Pérez-Gómez (2016, p. 20) highlights only two main possible paths for architecture in the twenty-first century who are opposite; it may intensify the human worth and capability, or it may intensify the production of even more digital environments. He wholly supports the first path. This paper also supports the human approach in creating quality public spaces. It delves into a literature review and focuses on extracting and finding the answer to the question: what are the key elements that create a quality public space?

2. METHODS

Seeking an answer, we have used a comparative-descriptive method of two relevant pieces of literature. The purpose of this literature review is to outline and extract the key spatial elements that create a quality public space. Those elements will be a subject of description/comparison. The first selected literature is by Henaff and Strong "Public Space and Democracy" and the second one is by Pérez-Gómez "Attunement". Even though there is a plethora of literature or various authorial discussions and research approaches about public space, the selected ones seem crucial and

appropriate for answering the research question. The selection criteria for choosing these two was: authors having different interdisciplinary approaches toward the field of public space and authors explaining their affirmations of public space through different periods and backgrounds. In this way, we can see distinctive points of view and have a wider chronological overlook of the extracted quality elements.

For justifying the first criteria, Henaff and Strong (2001) are trying to define what qualities a space must have to identify as "public" by connecting it with democracy. They make this connection because these two notions have in common their participants. They interact and manifest their democratic values within the public space. Public space and democracy cannot exist without its participants. Whereas Pérez-Gómez (2016) also has an interdisciplinary approach in his purpose for attunement. He connects philosophy, phenomenology, and neurobiology with architecture and urban design. The book's main idea is in confronting the difficulties of a spiritual place in this nondualist reality and point out its significance on human well-being and sustainability, one in which architecture can and should make a crucial contribution. For justifying the second criteria, Henaff and Strong (in the introductory chapter) refer to ancient times as a background for explaining their statements and definitions. Whereas, Pérez-Gómez refers to the contemporary problems as a background for his affirmations.

Through this literature review, we have identified the key elements that these authors refer to for defining a quality public space, and we find them crucial for the future planning of public spaces.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Chronological facts

Public space has been reshaped a lot through the years, and it will continue to reshape. It dates since the Ancient Greek (900-338 BC) when Agora represented this space (Caves, 2004, p.10). Agora was the central place of the town which had social, political, artistic, and economic value, serving as a market and formal or informal gathering space. Later, in this formation occurred the open-air gymnasia and the theatre. After Greek Agora, Roman Forums carried out its idea, consisting of the same activities and values as

Greek Agora, including temples, basilicas, shops, and other amusement areas like the theatre and public baths. During medieval times, the market was the central function and attraction in public spaces – it was formed mainly in front of a public building or some roads intersections. In the Renaissance period, public spaces were surrounded by buildings with unified facades, which enhanced the harmony and value of this place. Renaissance Plazas played a crucial part in the local social order and cultural development. (Chitnis, 2021).

In the Modern Era, the meaning of public space changed significantly due to industrialization and the rising urban population, which resulted in urban sprawl (Fainstein, 2021) and automobile-dependent movement. It increased the need for new recreational places within the city as parks and playgrounds (Fainstein, 2021), but on the other hand, significantly put low importance on the idea of city space as a meeting place for people, the overall public space, and the walking experience in it (Gehl, 2010). Nowadays, we are also facing significant changes in public space. The impact of globalization, the privatization of shared public spaces for commercial reasons (Nilsson, 2012), and the technological upgrade reshaped the contemporary public spaces into the concept of shopping malls (Chitnis, 2021) which isolates people from the outside environment. This approach leaves a significant change in the urban fabric, city image, and the health and psychology of the inhabitants.

3.2 Henaff and Strong — "Public Space and Democracy"

Henaff and Strong (2001, pp. 2-4) firstly seek to define the public space by comparing it with three other space types, claiming that »aside from being public, space may also be *private, sacred,* or *common*«. What distinguishes them is the standards that must be fulfilled for someone to have access to that space. A *private* space, besides the standards for access, is also characterized by the virtue of ownership, »such space is one's own space«, and they control it (Henaff and Strong, 2001, p. 2). The *sacred* space doesn't have the virtue of ownership because it is »land reserved to the gods«, and it has a sacred dimension, not human. As opposed to a sacred place, the *common* space doesn't represent any religious dimension, and it is not a public space because it is created by nature and given to humans, such as the sea, forest, etc., they can't own it or control it.

By making a simple diagram of these types of spaces (*Figure 6*), Henaff and Strong (2001, p. 4) concluded that: »Spaces may be human or divine; they may be a manifestation of the being that owns them, or not«. So, they defined *public* space as a space that is created »by and for humans« even though there are debatable rules that control its creation; it represents an accomplishment of mankind. It doesn't have the ownership virtue, and it is accessible by those who meet the standards. Public space is a rival representation of what can be brought or taken from the public life of a person who shares it with others.

When it comes to what qualities a space must have to be public, Henaff and Strong (2001, pp. 5-8) analyzed the

Figure 6: »Matrix of the spaces« (Source: Author according to Henaff and Strong, 2001, p. 4)
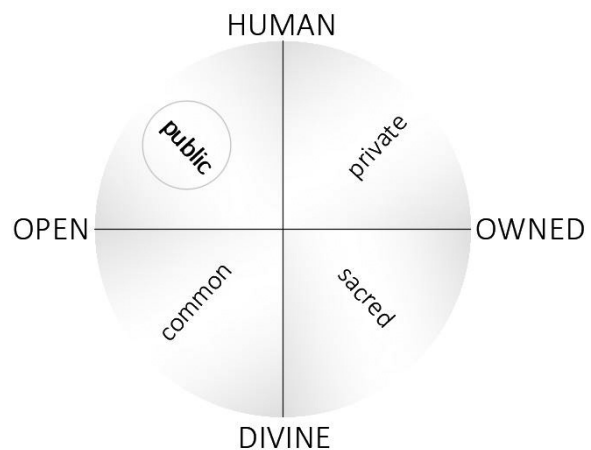
public buildings and Agoras of ancient Greek and the philosophers: Hippodamus, Plato, Nietzsche, etc., and they defined three qualities: being **open**, **artifact**, and **theatrical**. They state that the quality of *openness* determines a clear vision of the location itself and the access in it; the quality of an *artifact* explains human nature for trying to shape the place and enhance communication; and the *theatrical* quality implies the human interaction by defining a space connected with sight or vision and presentness. By seeing the others and being seen by the others, the aspect of publicness emerges in that space. According to them, the quality of theatricality divides into two different sub-qualities determined by the relationship between people in public space. The first one is **intransitivity** – which means a nonreciprocal relationship between people involved, and the second one is **transitivity** – which means a reciprocal relationship between people involved.

Democracy as a term originates from the ancient Greek word "democratia" which means "rule of the people" (Liddell and Scott, 1999). It »does not mean politics as a way of life… But it does mean politics (citizenship) as a way of living: an expected element of one's life« (Daly et al., 2000, p. 112). Democracy represents the »institutionalization of freedom« (U.S. Department of State - IIP, 2013).

By defining these three qualities of public space – *open, artifact, and theatrical*; Henaff and Strong (2001, pp. 9-12) conclude that: »democracy is necessarily built into any conception of public space«. They explain that the essence of the public space is in its democratic form, nothing can hide, and everybody has the right to observe and interact with all that appears in public. The authors note that democracy requires transparency and visibility, which only public spaces can provide. It has its roots in ancient Greek, where the need for public debate, shared knowledge, and public law decisions emerged. In this way, the newly political, juridical, intellectual, and religious aspects of life; were formed in the public spaces of the city, which represented a convenient space for direct expression and development. »Democracy manifests itself within that space; the public expression of its being resides in its very being« (Henaff and Strong, 2001, p. 12).

Public space is connected closely with the practice of democracy since its creation. When united, they have the power to impact humans life and the overall urban environment, a fact that was evident in ancient Greek when the intellectual class emerged. That's why public space that supports democracy is a quality space because it enables society's development. Parkinson (2012) also embraces this powerful connection. He adds that nowadays, democratic freedom and actions still require physical public space, even though virtual social platforms are overtaking it, and public spaces are becoming more restricted and controlled.

3.3 Pérez-Gómez – "Attunement"

Pérez-Gómez (2017), in one of his lectures at the University of Sydney, argues about the theatrical value of public spaces by making a historical review of the theatre that defined the public realm back in the 18th century and how it has transformed drastically at the beginning of the 19th century in Europe. He argues that in the 18th century, human religious and political values were intervened within these theatrical conventions. It was a place where all the main events took place. The theatre itself had a continued perspective that represented an imitation of the urban life where everybody had the right to speak and, even the audience, showed contentment or discontentment for the performances. Pérez-Gómez (2017) explains that in the 19th century, drastic changes occurred when the theatre was no longer a resemblance of the city life. It became a simulative entertainment on stage, where the audience had to keep a certain distance from the scene and to be disciplined and quiet. He argues that such cultural transformation affected the overall human life, undervaluing and ignoring public participation. This societal transformation had a significant impact on architecture, turning its primary meaning into creating private dwellings. Pérez-Gómez (2017, 18:03) highlights that even this historical retrospective denotes that the primary function of architecture was »to open up communicative spaces for focal actions, disclosing a political, social, or mythological order to a community, making, therefore, a good life possible, a wholesome life, both healthy for the body and the mind«. He considers ***communicative spaces*** the same as public spaces.

Compared with Henaff and Strong, who do not mention architecture and its role in constructing a quality public space, Pérez-Gómez is interested in public space as a potential result in architecture and urban planning. In his purpose for creating an attunement, Pérez-Gómez (2016, pp. 127-128) argued that nowadays, when it comes to a design decision; we neglect the narrative, emotional, and cultural aspects of a place by focusing only on the physical attributes, analyzing them only objectively and superficial. He states that what happens between humans and objects - is the act of ***perception,*** a subjective feature that cannot be compared with "nothing" because different places influence us to think differently. The qualities of the space can be perceived directly through our senses and consciousness, but this is a complex issue for technology because it tends to ignore the value of such perception,

and gradually reshapes our spatial experience from actual real perception into a virtual one. An addition to the action of perception is the action of ***movement***, which was argued by Schmarsow (as cited in Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 148), claiming that people can observe the space through movement also.

Pérez-Gómez (2016, p. 48) relies the concept for attunement on the German word ***Stimmung***. This word is an association of ***atmosphere and mood*** and suggests »a stable "tunedness" of the mind, the attunement of embodied consciousness«. How can we apply this concept in contemporary architecture to create a possibility for attunement? He argues that we have a situation where urban planning and design reduces and focuses on calculational proportions, urban traffic, and monotonous housing blocks, providing a neutral space for better control. Meanwhile, ignoring the atmosphere of public spaces results in forming a negative mood such as anxiety and emotional discomfort (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 26).

Atmosphere may be the main aim of the architect that is slightly unreachable (Wigley, 1998). It can be compared with the French word "ambiance", meaning a »"cheerful" to "melancholy," "light" to "oppressive"« activity (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 27). Hermann Schmitz (1969, as cited in Rigby, 2011, p. 143) notes that atmosphere doesn't come just from the inner self because it is a form of emotion that results during some spatial experience. According to Pérez-Gómez (2016, p. 30), atmosphere challenges the virtual communication of the present time by prioritizing bodily presence and experience. It also challenges modern architects such as Le Corbusier, who followed Durand's decisions for unifying the architectural drawings into precise lines, using a grid and focusing only on solving a problem, meanwhile avoiding the atmospheric features and intuitive expression because they are impossible to materialize. Anyway, he adds that some architects embrace the atmospheric value, for example, Peter Zumthor – whose buildings differ by creating atmospheres that »reveal qualities of *place* that appear as autochthonous, resonant with the activities to which rooms and spaces in his projects are particularly dedicated« (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 30). Zumthors' work represents Adolf Looss' statements about the importance of recognizing a feeling - to create the desired outcome (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 30). The situationist Guy Debord (as cited in Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 30) also contributed to the sphere of urban design, defining the modern planned city as incapable of creating unique perceptible atmospheres.

Moods are intertwined directly with the atmosphere of a place, they come to our inner self in the form of emotion, but we cannot materialize and project them in a particular space; they imitate natural and manmade spaces, establishing »cognition, action and thought«, as claimed by Pérez-Gómez (2016, pp. 36-39). The author states that »emotions are crucial for cognition; they have a life-enhancing, evolutionary origin and are borne out of the body's engagement in the world« (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 36). That is why qualitative architecture should focus on creating atmospheres and moods that result in positive emotions, positive life,

healthful humanity, sense of belonging, homeness, and soci-alness. »The inner is the outer« (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 36).

Pérez-Gómez (2016, p. 166) also highlights that the attu-nement space has the risk to not result in impacting us in a way it is envisioned by "Stimmung". Anyway, »enactive understanding and embodied perception are crucial to our grasp of Stimmung« (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 166); it has potential for further development of contemporary architecture and urban design. He concludes that spiri-tual aspects of a place can have global positive feedback on health and sustainability, in which architecture should have the crucial part in the process of creating it. Just as Vitruvius (ca. 25 BCE) believed that a well-designed city is in harmony with nature, climate, orientation, and propor-tion of buildings - creating a balanced life between man and the environment - Pérez-Gómez (2016, pp. 14-21) classifies well designed city as a feeling of attunement with the surrounding - which has a vital meaning in hu-man psychological health and well-being. He states that this attunement in a certain place, provided by human actions may be the most lasting feature that architecture gives to humanity.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the reviewed literature, the key elements that create a quality public space are: ***open, artifact, theatrical*** (Henaff and Strong, 2001), ***atmosphere and moods*** (Pérez--Gómez, 2016). Eventhough, they are formed through different approaches and different background periods, the essence in all of them is the same, and it is the human dimension in the space itself, the bodily presence and experience (*Table 1*). The quality of being *open, artifact* and *theatrical* are all interlinked with the human perception, recognition, and interaction within the public space. Spatial *atmospheres* that create *moods* of positive emotions have a direct connec-tion with the inner human spirit. Based on that conclusion,

Figure 7: Integrated diagram of elements of quality public space, a combi-nation of Henaff and Strong (2001) and Pérez-Gómez (2016) affirmations.
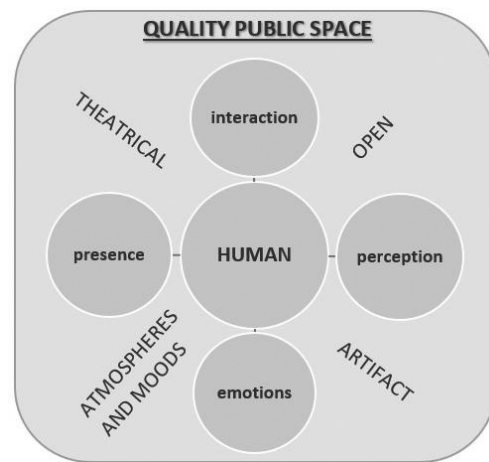
we have formed an integrated diagram which is a combi-nation of both authors' affirmations (*Figure 7*), and it repre-sents the key elements that create a quality public space.

These quality elements can be designed only with an inter-disciplinary approach in urban planning and design, colla-borating with disciplines such as urban anthropology and urban sociology, that study the human aspect in public spaces, their behavior, social needs, movements, feelings, perceptions, use of space, etc. Although, as Pérez-Gómez (2016) mentioned, all these elements are subjective featu-res and are difficult to measure and materialize; anyway, the risk of not achieving the envisioned goal is way lower if urban planners and architects consider them. Architects have the skills, knowledge, and intuition to plan these kin-ds of quality spaces through interdisciplinary collaboration and direct communication and involvement with the users. De Graaf (2017) also encourages people's involvement in creating the city. »Taking part is not just a matter of reflec-ting on its current state but also a matter of self-reflection«

Table 1: Comparative/descriptive table based on two literature reviews about quality spaces.

	Interdisciplinary approach	Background period	Quality elements of the space	Characteristics
Henaff and Strong	The concept of Democracy in public space	Ancient time	OPEN	Human perception
			ARTIFACT	Human recognition
			THEATRICAL	Human interaction
				Human communication
Pérez-Gómez	The concept of "Stimmung" as an attunement in architecture	Present time	ATMOSPHERE	Human presence
				Human experience
			MOODS	Human emotions
				Human feelings

(De Graaf, 2017, p. 374). Also, through collective participation in the management and maintenance of public spaces within residential areas, the quality of public spaces can be effectively increased (Mandeli, 2010, pp. 170-171). Marcus states the same, arguing that this strategy »provides a profound sense of shared responsibility and community« (Marcus, 2003, p. 6.9/10). The community should also have the right to use the public space however they decide, and even there is a law that forbids some activity, they still have the power to fight the law and prove them they are right (De Graaf, 2017, p. 121).

By analyzing theoretically Henaff and Strong and Pérez-Gómez and reaffirming their claims with other authors' conclusions; we can state that - architecture and urbanism that aim to produce good buildings and spaces should consider the non-material aspects such as human interaction, human feelings, human perception, human needs, human participation; while analyzing and designing the physical attribute of places and buildings. This approach is essential because it is directly connected with the mental state of the human being, providing positive life and healthful humanity that goes hand in hand with the increase of economic and sustainable indicators. »Well-designed neighborhoods inspire the people who live in them, whilst poorly designed cities brutalize their citizens« (Rogers, 2010, p. ix), as Gehl (2010, p. 9) says: »First we shape cities – then they shape us«. Nowadays, it is worth questioning whether the public spaces that we find - spatial but empty, new but unattractive, programmed but dysfunctional, as illustrated in *Figure 4* and *Figure 5*, lack the human dimension as a top priority in the process of urban planning and design. »Public space is made up of more than parks, plazas, and sidewalks; it is a shared world where individuals can identify with one another and see themselves through the eyes of others« (Kohn, 2004, p. 7).

Even though the human approach to planning and design was argued a long time ago, now it requires even more commitment in the contemporary culture of living, where we deal with all kinds of superficiality in this field. The newly framed diagram about quality public space (*Figure 7*) represents a step beyond superficial planning and design. It consists of more abstract notions of operation, but at the same time, they are closer to the human physical and spiritual dimension. They can guide architects and other concerned professionals toward a better possible future for these spaces.

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