SLUMS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

In the present days, we are watching in Romania, a process of differentiation of urban spaces according to the conditions of living, regardless of size and level of their development. The period of economic transition has changed in worst the drawbacks already existing in slums, which have been mainly marked by economic and social seclusion, absence of any infrastructure, dilapidated overcrowded houses without any minimum social-economic endowments, high degree of insecurity in areas where habitation coexisted with unemployment, alcoholism, drugs, violence and crime. The paper analyses the conditions in the urban disadvantaged zones – *slums*- existing across the world and in Romania as well, and suggests a programme with a set of solutions to improve them, derived from the experience gathered abroad by other programmes. For the successfully rehabilitation of the mentioned zones, the programme stresses the need of newly built/renovated houses, implementation of economic steps to increase the employment rate, as well as granting law assistance/legal advice to the community people, setting up facilities for education, general information, social care, social activities to create an adequate cultural environment.

Keywords: urbanization, slum, housing, disadvantaget population, rehabilitation

1. Introduction

As Romania faces an economic transition, many poor people are living in slums, where the buildings offer only a minimum shelter against bad weather, being overcrowded and without hygienic and sanitary conditions. No matter how the incidence of poverty is analyzed, poverty rate increased during the last years, reaching its peak in 2005 (lacoboaea, 2005).

Since it first appeared in the 1820s, the term slum has been used to identify the poorest quality housing, and the most unsanitary conditions; a refuge for marginal activities including crime, "vice" and drug abuse; a likely source for many epidemics that ravaged urban areas; a place apart from all that was decent and wholesome (UN-Habitat, 2003a).

The term "slum" is used today to describe a heavily populated urban area characterized by substandard housing and squalor (lack of basic services, especially water and sanitation; inadequate and sometimes unsafe building structures; overcrowding; location on hazardous land; insecure tenure). Due to stigmatization, discrimination and geographic isolation slum dwellers have limited access to credit and formal job markets.

Worldwide slums have different names: *slums* in North America and Europe, *bidonville* in France, *kampongs* in Indonesia, *favelas* in Brazil or *barrados* in Peru etc.

It is difficult to estimate population living in the slum areas, but the total number of slum dwellers in the world stood at about 1 billion people (UN-Habitat, 2003a). This represents about 32 per cent of the world's total urban population. At that time, 43 per cent of the combined urban population of all developing regions lived in slums, while 78,2 per cent of urban population in least developed countries where slum dwellers. The total number of slum dwellers in the world increased by about 36% during the 1990s and in the next 30 years, the global number of slum dwellers will increase to about two billion if no concerted action to address the challenge of slums is taken (UN-Habitat, 2003b).

This overwhelming situation in the developing countries is due to the lack of adequate buildings for people having low incomes. According to the traditional model, the poverty is more specific to the rural areas, but this fact is changing now. Urban poverty is obvious in Latin America, Africa where the number of urban poor exceeds the number of poor people from rural areas.

TABLE 1. POPULATION LIVING IN SLUM AREAS	(PER CENT OF	URBAN POPULATION)
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	% of city population	City (country)		
1	30-40	Caracas (Venezuela), Dakar (Senegal), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Lima (Peru), Nairobi (Kenya), Madras (India), Manila (Filipine), Rio de Janeiro (Brazilia), Sao Paolo (Brazilia)		
2	40-50	Calcutta (India), Ciudad de Mexico (Mexic), Tunis (Tunisia)		
3	50-60	Bogota (Columbia), Mumbay (India), Delhi (India), Buenos Aires (Argentina), Lagos (Nigeria), Lusaka (Zambia)		
4	60-70	Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), Kinshasa (Zair)		
5	>70	Addis Abeba (Etiopia), Cairo (Egipt), Casablanca (Maroc), Luanda (Angola)		
	Source: UN-Habitat (2003a)			

Among the causes of creation and continuation of slums are:

- rapid rural-urban migration (city planning and management systems are unable to adequately cope with the massive population influx)
- poverty and inequality (too little economic growth in many of poorest countries and persistent inequalities that inhibited the poor from participating in growth that did occur)
- insecure tenure (secure tenure is often a precondition for access to other economic and social opportunities, including credit, public services, and livelihood opportunities)
- globalization (slum formation is closely linked to economic cycles, trends in national income distribution, and in more recent years, to national economic development policies).



2. Slums in Romania

In Romania, the urban population that lives in slums was estimated in 2001, to 2.326.000 persons, (by UN-Habitat" Slums of the World: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium" 2003) representing 18,8% from urban population (UN-Habitat, 2003). Unlike the other elements of poverty, which register a tendency of reduction, the extreme poverty and the deterioration of living conditions (dwelling, locality, environment) has a rising tendency.

From a quantitative point of view, the present level of the slums in Romania is far from the limits reached by the developing countries. We can not speak at this moment about the presence of some expanded areas of slums having the dimensions of those slums from South Africa, South - East Asia or Africa. Comparing this situation with the situation from the other countries in Europe, the urban population that lives in such areas is numerous, 18,8% comparing to an average of 6,2% for the entire Europe, although during the last years, the migration from the urban areas to the rural ones has grown considerably, comparing to the migration from rural to urban areas.

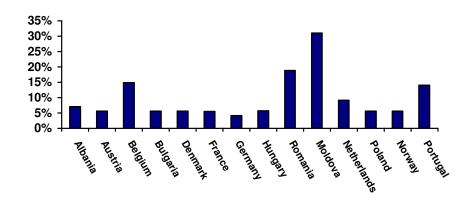


CHART 1. PER CENT OF URBAN POPULATION WHO LIVES IN SLUMS Source: UN-Habitat, 2003a

Slums could be identified in all types of localities in Romania (small and medium towns, big cities, multi or single-industrial towns or cities, etc) and they can take the following forms (Stanculescu, 2004):

- a) new-born communities, after 1990, beside waste deposits;
- b) former worker's accommodations or former industrial areas, made from ex-working camps, built at the edge of towns, close to industrial areas;
- c) houses taken from original owners by the communist system, located in historical areas;
- d) old areas, located at outskirts of cities.

The typical mechanism of forming slums in Romania is due to the structural changes on the work market, more precisely to the reduction of jobs number for those having a low education or for those having certain qualifications. This leads to the impoverishment of numerous population in the area and to the leaving of this area of those having an ascendant mobility. This fact emphasizes the deprivation of the area, decreasing considerably its social and cultural resources. All these take place due to a clear lack of interest for the area of the important people in the real estate companies and/or the retiring of the state from the area or due to its negative effect of its actions in the area (for example the forced concentration of the persons without dwellings).

a. The areas in the nearby of waste deposits: are communities of improvised buildings, newlyappeared after 1990, which are usually formed as the unemployed come to make a living out of recycling the reused materials from the waste deposits and they found small dwellings in the neighborhood. This area functions as a place where the impoverished inhabitants who lost their houses (have been evacuated from their houses due to the huge maintenance debts they used to have, due to the retrocession of the buildings where they lived, due to the fact that they have been evacuated from the social dwellings where they used to live after devastating these houses, due to the huge rent debts or due to the fact they lost their houses playing at Caritas etc.) can withdraw and it also functions as an area for the young persons coming from the rural area looking for jobs and a chance in life. In this area, most of the new comers are extremely poor, having no legal papers, having an improvised shelter or an illegally built house without having an authorization of building from the City Hall, "they do not belong to anyone, they are not registered in any area". Not having a formal registration in the area, they are placed outside the social aid programs (healthy insurance, social aid, solidarity help, children enrolled in no form of education). Due to the lack of legal papers and to an administrative stability, they are threatened with evacuation all the time.

The houses are made of cardboard, wood, wrappings, improvised materials, and they do not have any foundations. Urban infrastructure is not very developed; most of the times, the area is provided only with electricity and in many situations the inhabitants can not allow to pay this service and they are disconnected and they reconnect illegally. Water supply is done through wells, drinking fountains, whose protection area is actually lacking; this leads to water pollution. Generally, such areas do not have any sewerage, and the toilets built there are not ecological being a point of infection for the population and environment. The roads are made of earth and they are barely paved with stones. There are not emergency routes or approach roads (for ambulances, firefighters, or sanitation) and there are not any pavements. These areas are hardly accessible and they are isolated from the locality. The location itself, near the waste deposits, represents a risk for people health (the Romanian



Methodological Norms for Health establishes a waste deposit protection area of 1000m to the nearest building).

b. Former worker hostels areas and deallocated industrial areas are block of flats areas having a reduced comfort, built differentially during the industrialization period, and inhabited by newly formed communities. The history of these areas follows the path determined by the policy of industrializing the cities: during the process of industrialization the forced migration of the population from rural areas to urban areas takes place as a consequence of the need of labour force: the industrial platforms and worker quarters inhabited by the new-comers from around the countries appear. The worker hostels and the single people hostels have a reduced comfort and they are attended by the building administrator, the owner of the factory/company, that is the state. After factories/companies closing / reorganization, the dwellings which used to be in the factory ownership are sold to the official receiver or are simply abandoned. Parts of the fired workers withdraw at the country side and the opposite phenomenon takes place: the migration from the urban area to the rural one. Either being abandoned or sold, these places start to be the target for the poor families that can not afford the maintenance of a house in a residential quarter or they live in these houses either legally or illegally, depending on the tutorial status of the building. After 1990, these areas become withdrawing places for the poor people in the cities and attractive areas for young people from other towns or rural areas who look for a job, but can not afford to live in other areas of the city. Totally, the new coming population, after 1990, represents 3 quarters of the entire population of these areas. The phenomenon of replacing the former inhabitants of these areas with poor population leaded to the forming of the ghettos. The term "ghetto" is not used only for an ethnical group (such as gypsies), but it is a combination between place and ethnic, mixed in order to define, isolate and contain a particular group of population whose position is inferior to the society around it.

The local authorities attitude to these areas is different from one locality to another: ones administrate them and try to repair the buildings in order to transform them in social buildings of an acceptable standard, others use them as "reservations for poor people" in the poor condition they are. At the same time, the interest of the real estate companies is very different, in the sense that in the more developed cities, many of these kinds of buildings have been bought by the private companies which transformed them in building offices.

The buildings from such areas are collective buildings; they are situated in blocks of flats which include either single people hostels / former single people hostels, either social blocks of flats poorly maintained and generally they are the first constructions of the respective city. The blocks of flats are standard

buildings with rooms having common bathrooms (a bathroom on each level), without kitchens. They are characterized by degraded facades, flats in a poor condition (without windows or with degraded windows), enterings without doors, blackened by smoke or mould, infiltrations on terraces or in the basements, general mess around the buildings. The appearing of suburbs is that of decay, promiscuity around the blocks of flats or buildings is relevant not only through the lack of taking care of public places but also through the presence of the children and adults in the street, giving an insecurity feeling (not necessarily justified) to the passers-by.

Other characteristics are: the small surface of apartments/ buildings, the overcrowding of the buildings by numerous families with many generations with many small children; the organization and resting pattern is that of an old bed made of wood in the shape of an L where all the family rest and the lacking of auxiliary places.

Due to the nonpayment of the utilities, the blocks of flats were disconnected from cold water supply or electricity. Being disconnected from thermal and electrical energy and not having the possibility of installing their own thermal station, the inhabitants of such buildings do not benefit from the social heating aid during winter time. Consequently, they use improvised ovens with wood, stalks, cardboard, they use heating plates if they manage to reconnect illegally or they do not warm at all. The evacuation of biological waste is done at random, including public places, and that's why these public places and the terrain around are full of garbage.

c. Areas from historical centers of cities: are mostly due to the direct interference of the authorities, which before 1989, waited for their degradation in order to demolish them. From the point of view of the inhabitants, these areas are more stable than the one presented above, the "old" population, settled in this area before 1990, representing 40% from the total residential population. The history of the old centers is different. The houses from this area have been nationalized during the socialist regime. The tenants who lived in these houses did not invest in repairing and maintaining them. Unfortunately, the former ICRALs (State Company for Housing Maintenance and Administration) that were responsible of their condition did not contribute to their maintenance. After 1990, being in a degraded condition, they are not required by anyone (or they are not retroceded) being used as social houses by the local administration or they are abusively inhabited by the impoverished population of the city. After 1990 the strong afflux of very poor people hurried and emphasized the process of area impoverishment. In this case, the real estate companies are interested in these areas due to their great development potential, but they do not have access to them.

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The buildings are old, in many cases they have an architectural or environmental value, on the one hand, a process of physical degradation has affected them during the last 20 years, and on the other hand they have been affected by the change of juridical status and by the change of the owner. The houses are over-crowded and very degraded, having a low level of the technical equipment.

In fact, the problem of historical areas degradation is present in all European countries starting from the '50, when the war destructions and the urban destructions of the modernism appeared. Residential quarters having a traditional line were demolished in order to be rebuilt or they were abandoned in favour of the "healthy modern, bright, new" blocks of flats. The inhabitance of the historical areas was considered as unwholesome, old, undesirable, and the central residential guarters were abandoned. Firstly, the rehabilitation problems of such areas are connected to the quality of living in such buildings (the apartments equipment remained at the end of the war level of improvement), secondly the problems are connected to the traffic and parking (the streets width is most of the time insufficient for driving or parking a car).

Unlike other areas, the central historical area has utilities and services (school facilities, health facilities, shops and public offices)

d. The old quarters from the outskirts of the cities are rather the poor "traditional" quarters of the cities, rural localities at their origin, which after 1989 degraded more seriously compared to the other areas of the city. The buildings are made of adobe, having one or two rooms (a terrace, a hall in the middle of the house and 2 rooms where the inhabitants cook and sleep). These houses do not have a kitchen, a toilet or a bathroom, but they have a lot of outbuildings. These houses are overcrowded having at least 4 persons, and in general the average for a room is over 2 persons.

Generally, theses areas being at the outskirts of the city, because of the high costs of investments, did not benefit from the water supply, sewerage, thermal heating or gas supply. The streets are made of earth material, without pavements, hardly accessible during winter or autumn time.

Slums are inhabited in proportion of over 50% by persons having incomes and expenses under the national poverty level, mostly beneficiaries of some social assistance programs (the minimum guaranteed income is the most important for these people).

The concentration of a big percentage of poor population in these areas and the living conditions lead to the appearance of some serious social and demographical phenomena: monoparental families, unofficial marriages, a great number of children, high incidence of alcoholism, violence in the family and

minor crimes, considerable educational deficit, (considering the adults, the young people and also the children) and the poor health of the inhabitants.

We can notice a common aspect, maybe the most serious one, of these urban areas: the lack of implication of local authorities and the lack of implication of the neighborhood communities in order to remedy such situations. The lack of some local policies and consistent central offices is one of the causes of apparition and expansion of slums, whose definition does not appear in the present legislation.

The existing programs do not counteract the flux to such areas and can not stop the forming of other slums. There is no preoccupation to identify these areas and to mark them in the City Masterplans.

3. The rehabilitation of urban slum

Attempts to improve conditions in slums have existed since the interwar period. During the late 40 years, the high authorities of many developed countries have been searched a way to put an end to this challenge. Slum clearance preceded by grant-aided construction of low/moderate-rent new dwellings (the so-called "social" ones) where slum people could move-in, was supposed to fulfill all such desires. Such scheme was only partially brought into being because in many locations, the authorities failed to provide them with public basic utilities and/or to promote employment opportunities in the near-by area. Moreover, as the estimates of the constructions work were commonly well underrated, the actual cost was higher, so the dwelling rent went also well up to refund all the money spent on contingency. Only average-incomers could afford such rent. Out of these reasons the results were considered as disappointing by the frustrated low-income people who were evicted from their homes but could not regain them. As a result, they had to resettle to new areas at other edges of the town, enlarging or overcrowding other heavily populated slum that has existed there.

Slum rehabilitation that involves demolition of existing and relocation into new *public housing*, proved to be too expensive for the governments that initiated such projects, as the results were not commensurate with the cost. This scheme met with success in developed countries of Europe only and in some developing countries of Asia, like Singapore.

In other countries the aforesaid scheme is accompanied by several shortcomings, one has to cope with, namely those related to the promised fair or cheap "social" dwellings -*public housing*:

- The price for buying or for renting such a dwelling place, are still prohibitive for a direpoverty-stricken family.
 - They fail to meet the every-day needs of such families in the case of large membership.

- Their number does not equal the demand.
- They may lead to some form of social segregation.

As the experimented scheme involving clearance of underprivileged city areas (the slums) and eviction of their inhabitants, gave rise to disappointment in the developed countries, new schemes for the solution of the problem have been devised and applied, out of which the so-called "*slum upgrading*" one, is more conspicuous.

Its main features are the following:

- Regularization of the right to land and housing.
- Improvement of the existing infrastructure by providing it with public utilities like water supply, electricity (including street lighting), sewerage system for sewage and rain water as well as the city network system.
- Providing basic services in community public health and educational facilities.
- Relocation of inhabitants away from hazardous zones.
- Providing governmental grants, money and construction materials, for self-made buildings conceived within the framework of a unique architectural and structural concept, carried out under the supervision of trained technicians of the local authority. Usually upgrading does not involve home construction, since the residents can do this for themselves, but instead offers loan options for home improvements. In that respect, according to the opinion of the experts of the World Bank based on the experience gathered in Bosnia, Georgia, Azerbaijan or Vietnam with similar programs, an amount of about 2000 U.S.A.\$ provided as grant or loan, mainly for covering the cost of building materials, provided that elementary public utilities and facilities does exist and the required technical assistance is available, might successfully back up the achievement of a first core of decent dwellings meeting the needs of the people living in even dire poverty conditions.
- Integration into project of other social programs.
- Promoting or engendering new employment opportunities like services and jobs.
- Providing communities costless advice and information on law and town-planning matters with a view to regularize any settlement which is too large or too old to be suppressed or thoroughly reshaped.

This applied version of the slum upgrading resulted in a lower cost (about ten times lower than the money spent on site clearance and on relocation version), in a minimized disturbance of economic or social life of the community, results which were also readily visible. It goes without saying that other drawbacks still persist.

The maintenance of public utilities and facilities that should have been under the care of the local community itself has been poor. Subsidy vanished out as soon as foreign experts left the assisted country. Schemes aimed at assisting construction project in that country quickly sank into oblivion.

Since 1980, programs based on self-help concept were given a new impetus when in the end, it was clearly understood that the private sector has priority in mobilizing capitals and resources of the population, over the government, whose main tasks from now on should consist only of removing any bureaucratic hindrance that might block enforcing the projects it forwarded, of releasing legal approvals as soon as possible as well as allotting due ease to those concerned by the projects. Unfortunately, this strategy has not quite been translated yet into common practice, still this proposal is a step forward in the battle to abate poverty.

Regularization of the right to land and housing, accompanied by certain economic growth, were the premises for improving the disadvantaged zones. Now their inhabitants need to be more deeply involved in taking decision concerning the priority tasks for the redevelopment of the respective zones. It seems that the above method is a better one and should become common practice.

4. Slum issue in Romania

Demolition of illegally-raised buildings and/or inhabitants being evicted for illegal occupancy is ones of most frequently applied solution to the issue. Nobody cares for the present or future lodgment opportunities offered to evicted persons. Nobody asked whether the benefits of getting a habitable space would be surpassed by the price the whole society is bound to pay later on, for clearing up the new social issues the eviction did create. In fact, bare eviction devoid of any immediate relocation is not an eligible option. Neither can the emergency demolition of a decrepit building justify the dissertation of the evicted by the administrative bodies under the pretext, neither free habitable space nor means of helping them were available. The tasks incumbent on local authorities, tasks regarding the homeless persons, are very ambiguous. On one hand, the authorities are liable to protect only those living within the area under their administration, on the other hand the Law 116/2002 (on the prevention and eradication of social seclusion) as well as Law 416/2002 (warranting a minimum income) have included an innovating clause, namely the right of the homeless to derive advantage from the provisions of both laws.

Practically that means that demolition and eviction are decisions that have to be preceded by warranting a place for relocation or in other words they are to be followed suit by relocation of the concerned persons (that can not be secluded).

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Out of this only strong reason, one possible optional way out might be

- The rehabilitation of slum areas without any relocation of the inhabitants.
- Relocation, only.

Rehabilitation without relocation should be preferred in the zones where all social conditions required by a smooth integration are met, its environment meeting also all legal requirements, its location is neither endangered by natural hazards like flooding or land sliding, nor is it too near from high tension aerial cables, highways, garbage damp etc. or too near from extremely polluting industries. A main asset would be the vicinity of a residential quarter which favors high standards for the dwellings and the proximity of the town should not hinder the extension of the community. Relocation of already destructured community is not advisable.

Rehabilitation should imply upgrading blocks of flats, where the living standard of all future inhabitants should be so high as allowing them to bear the cost of maintaining common services running (water supply, electrical power, domestic sewerage, supply of gas).

It is also advisable to device a post-renovation monitoring system in these blocks of flats and to take actions to ease the social integration of the early inhabitants into the new social environment.

The above option is adequate for former edge areas which have a background distinguished by its permanence.

Another essential criteria to decide in favor of the above option was the proximity of the available jobs.

Relocation only. This option has emerged either at the request of both public and private circles that wish to provide the inhabitants of the disadvantaged zones with adequate dwelling and living conditions or from the need to optimize the use of the available land or to find a solution to reduce density within the urban area at issue.

For the enforcement of the above options, the interactive co-operation of the following five agents, is required:

- The urban politics of the pertinent institutions devised within the provisions of the applicable laws.
- Planning and managing the enforcement at every stage.
- The availability of an adequate area fit for relocating the existing inhabitants.
- Ensuring the efficient social and economic development of the selected area intended to receive relocated people.

Within the urban rehabilitation, relocation of people possesses most touchy features to cope with, namely the need to allocate subsidies in the (national or local) budget or unexpected forms of reaction of ordinary people affected by the relocation.

All available free lands might be scarce, remote or endangered by natural hazards, far away from the employment places or educational facilities.

The selected type of the habitable premises intended to lodging relocated people should match as much as possible either their traditional way of living or their recent preferred experience.

The main ways to achieve relocation are:

a) Clearance of the slum area at issue should be first, followed by the development of another new settlement.

Actually, actions may often be performed in a reversed order, that is, new housing facilities are at first erected at a new location and later on, the old one is cleared forever. The reason for adopting this way out, is the urgency for clearing the old location in case of potential natural hazards are expected to occur any time, remoteness, lack of any hope on opportunity of further development to appear.

b) Clearance of the disadvantaged zone (plus provisional relocation of its entire community) followed by rebuilding and the coming back of the community (both on/at the same site).

Although it is an established pattern of action, it may have unpredictable results in case the affected community is in dire poverty condition, as almost every time the price of renovating the buildings soars faster while the incomes do it slower. Post-relocation studies evidence the fact that either the coming back population is to a least extent equal to the off one (see Satu Mare case) or the newly occupied homes have been soon deteriorated (see Energeticienilor Street, Bucharest case).

c) Clearance of the disadvantaged zone at first, then the rehabilitation of the site with a view to using it for another purposes, followed by the development of another new settlement, the displaced community is to be relocated into.

It was the best solution when dealing with communities that are homogenous from the social status or income standpoint. It was also the ideal solution for block of flats or economically highly-rated buildings.

d) Clearance of the disadvantaged zone at first, then the rehabilitation of the site in order to use it for another purposes, followed by relocation on a family by family basis.

This process presumes at first both the availability of an adequate number of decent dwellings the displaced families may move-in, as well their capability of affording them and beside these, a quite long



expectation lapse of time given the fact, family members are often quite numerous. The process requires also a mobile and efficient administrative staff.

The looming dangers that may become facts, consist in losing control over the results, as no feed-back were available, and in the restoration of the old community, should a too long clearance period occur.

The above solution can be successfully applied within the historic town districts as well as to the less developed edge quarters but situated on economically or ecologically very promising land.

No matter how many-sided are the challenge to cope with, the proposed programs have to include without fail, schemes aimed to creating job opportunities and employment places, to providing steps for improving the educational and structural features of the society, to prevent criminality within area, etc.

Unless their inhabitants are actually involved there in and each action is assigned to well-defined social groups (youngsters, ethnic groups etc) the community would fail to attain these goals.

All critical features of the disadvantaged zones needing improvement have to be dealt with at national level by the strategic programs proposed by the political parties within the existing legislation.

Any improvement program and the steps to be taken to enforce it, should be detailed for each case apart. There is no panacea available to redevelop any disadvantaged habitable zone.

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