

# THE MANAGEMENT OF URBAN SERVICES IN JORDAN

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***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to examine management approaches of urban services based on Amman, the capital city of Jordan from 1918 to the present. The paper utilizes both a qualitative method employing in-depth, face to face interviews with top managers, as well as the historic method, based on extensive national and international literature, to present the evolution of service management models. For the hundred years since Jordan became a national entity, urban services have been managed through three distinct approaches, including the public sector approach, the private sector approach and the public-private approach. These approaches have resulted in some improvement in terms of quality of services and have produced several visible changes in the quality of life. In conclusion, urban services management took place in the absence of a complementary public sector long term strategy. Therefore, the contribution of these approaches to create sustainable urban development remains moderate; combining management approaches under one strategy would greatly improve sustainable urban development.*

***Keywords:** Urban Management; Services; Public sector; Private Sector; Amman; Jordan.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The basic task of urban government is to provide services in an attempt to improve quality of life at national, regional and local levels. Governments often provide two kinds of urban services; benefactory services and regulatory services (Garba, 2004; Caraley, 1977). Benefactory services are provided to maintain or improve living conditions in urban centers (Garba, 2004); and they can be divided into physical and social services (Alnsour, 2014). Physical services are comprised of basic infrastructure, including the sewerage system, drainage system, water supply and road network. Social services include waste collection, road maintenance, health amenities, education services, transportation, fire protection, safety and security, public parks, green spaces, leisure areas, libraries, worship centers and lighting in addition to services that are concerned with problems such as poverty, unemployment and blight. Regulatory services are concerned with the enforcement of regulations and restrictions, so as to

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secure urban services (Garba, 2004). Enforcement and monitoring are essential principles used in managing urban services (Alnsour & Meaton, 2009). Both benefactory services and regulatory services tend to be a real feature of the performance of government.

Urban services are changing to meet economic, social, cultural, technological, political and legal forces. These forces have produced changing patterns of ownership and changing role of sectors. Hence, several patterns of ownership appeared in terms of urban services, such as fully private, joint private and public ventures, private but publicly regulated, contracted out, the public with managed competition and public without competition (Doherty and Horne, 2002). The adoption of one or more of these patterns depends greatly on the extent of responsiveness of government to the needs of urban services growth. Government responsiveness is often influenced by leadership style, institutional resources, public relations, and the process of services delivery (Im and Lee, 2012; Garba, 2004; Doherty and Horne, 2002; Rakodi, 2001, 1991).

Four factors emerge to play a vital role in influencing the adoption of action when managing urban services. The first factor is leadership. An urban management system cannot operate without leadership. The functional role of leadership is the control in which urban organization can achieve its goals, take decisions and ensure that they are carried out (Doherty and Horne, 2002). Leadership can be centralized, where the local authority is in control of all management interventions, or decentralized, where management techniques are adopted with polices of the central government (Curtis, 1999). As urban systems are complex, the selection between centralization and decentralization should take place based on a complementary strategy in tune with changing urban problems and the social-economic context. Leadership has the ability to create successful internal processes, personnel development and continue to improve the organization's capabilities to deliver services (Doherty and Horne, 2002).

The second factor is comprised of institutional resources, including human, financial and technological resources. The technical function of these resources is to design and maintain systems and procedures for obtaining population and market information, carry out developments, maintain quality, keep accounts, ensure legal compliance, and to keep up-to-date (Doherty and Horne, 2002).

The third factor is the relationship between central and local levels of government, and the relationship between these levels and the public. Urban management includes several institutions working together at various levels, such as city and urban spatial units (Chakrabarty, 1998). Vertical and horizontal coordination among these agencies are important factor in the success or failure to cope with urban challenges and the provision of services. Clear delineation of the responsibilities and mandates for each agency and department involved in urban management contributes to effective management of urban services (Alexander, 1998). The relationship between the public sector and citizens is often determined by the degree of public participation in the decision making process, and their ability to influence this process. A participatory

approach can remove the obstacles facing employees and the problems of citizens. On the one hand, central and local authorities can better understand the needs and priorities of the public; on the other, people can better understand the challenges of these authorities (Im and Lee, 2012).

The fourth factor is the process of service delivery. Process refers to cost, decision making and techniques used by the public sector when delivering urban services (Curtis, 1999). Adopting simple techniques that are cheaper in terms of cost, money, time and implementation should be favored when institutional resources are insufficient (Curtis, 1999). Decisions can be made directly by the central government, in which all information about services are delivered to a central point, or monitored by means of indirect indicators of local performance (Curtis, 1999). The nature of the tasks to be implemented and existing skills available to implement them should be taken into account when preparing management techniques (Curtis, 1999). Designing appropriate instruments for users would positively influence the performance of the public sector for managing services.

The literature on urban services can be divided into two fundamental areas: academic studies and technical studies. Academic studies emphasize two dimensions: the economic and social costs resulting from service delivery (e.g. Memon, et al. 2006); the alternative or intermediate technology to reduce the cost of service delivery (Carruthers & Ulfarsson, 2003; Graham & Marvin, 2001). Of course, these dimensions include studies of public satisfaction with the service itself and the quality of service provision. Technical studies are related to the structural issues and technical standards of urban services which are often produced by public and private institutions. This has led urban management researchers (e.g. Alnsour, 2014; Garba, 2004; Rakodi, 2001; Chakrabarty, 1998; and Pirez, 1998) to criticize the lack of attention currently paid to the importance of management approaches to the management of urban services. Examining the way by which urban services are managed can enrich and enhance such practices, whilst increasing knowledge.

Jordan is engaged with using appropriate approaches to provide suitable service conditions and infrastructure. Providing good quality services can directly improve quality of life. At present, the population of Jordan is about 7 million inhabitants (Department of Statistics, 2013). Part many of these are not citizens, but are made up of forced migration refugees; for example Palestinians estimated at 2 million (UNRWA<sup>1</sup>, 2014), Iraqis account for 1.4 million (Potter. 2009: p.118), and the most recent, Syrians, who account for more than 1.4 million refugees (Alnsour, 2014, P.272). Unfortunately, these migrations are accompanied by acute lack of natural resources in terms of water and energy; such rapid urban growth has created numerous challenges for the public sector, in particular a huge demand for services. Hence, an evaluation of management approaches to the provision of urban services will contribute to enhancing the ability of Jordan's urban authorities to improve the quality of life and enhance sustainable urban development.

This paper aims to evaluate approaches to the management of urban services since the establishment of Jordan in 1921 to the present. For the purposes of this study, the historic evolution of urban services management has been divided into two phases; the initial phase from 1918 to 1996, and the secondary phase from 1996 to the present.

The evaluation of urban services management is part of an attempt to seek ways to improve urban management practice in developing countries in general, and Jordan in particular, by benefiting from empirical findings. Additionally, it has the potential to introduce policy for addressing urban services management. The evaluation also addresses how the understanding of urban services management is a further step in the direction of producing effective planning strategies.

## **2. METHODOLOGY AND THE STUDY AREA**

This paper utilizes a qualitative method, employing in-depth, face to face interviews, in order to understand management approaches to urban services in Jordan. The target group for interviewees was personnel in high ranking public sector management positions, which they estimated at 40 top managers. The initial aim was to conduct 40 interviews; unfortunately, several top managers declined to take part in this study. As a result, 22 in-depth interviews only were conducted. The paper also uses an historic method, based on extensive national and international literature, to present the evolution of urban services management in Jordan.

Amman is the capital of Jordan and lies in the north-west section of the country, roughly 40 km east of the Jordan Valley and approximately 80 km south of the Syrian border (Meaton & Alnsour, 2012). The hilly topography has influenced the pattern of urban growth (Meaton & Alnsour, 2012). It is the political and economic centre of Jordan. Amman was targeted as the study area because it is by far the biggest Jordanian city in terms of population (about 39% of Jordan's population lives in Amman), housing (about 43% of is the total number of houses in Jordan are in Amman), services and infrastructure (about 60% of public and private sector services provision is in Amman) (Department of Statistics, 2012).

## **3. MANAGING URBAN SERVICES FROM 1918 TO 1996**

In 1921, the population of Amman was estimated to be 10,500. It had grown to 10500 in 1930 and 45,000 by the early 1940's (Potter. *et al.* 2009, p. 118). Several public services agencies were established soon after the country was inaugurated, such as the Department of Public Affairs in 1921, the Department of Mail and Telephone in 1922, the Department of Public Health in 1923, and the Department of Education and Antiquities in 1923 (Robins, 2004). During the 1920's, the public sector provided urban services directly to citizens. Various additional services were provided by the private sector, such as electricity. This demonstrates that services were provided by both the public and private sectors. Approaches to urban services management were varied, based on which sector provided the service. In this context, it can be suggested that

there are two models in relation to urban services management, namely the public sector approach and the private sector approach.

### **3.1. The Public Sector Approach**

The public sector approach is the provision of services directly to citizens by the public sector. Public sector urban services are financed through taxation rather than direct customer billing (Doherty and Horne, 2002). Even if there is a charge, the public sector often has politically defined objectives to ensure service provision for those who cannot afford them (Doherty and Horne, 2002). The two components that form this model of services management are the public sector, as the service provider, and the citizens, as service users. Each can be described as a power and a necessity, in keeping with the urban growth process (Pirez, 1998). The relationship between the public sector and the service user is specified by law and governance.

Due to the first Palestinian refugee influx after 1948, the population of Amman rose to 104,000 inhabitants in the early 1950's. Unfortunately, urban growth was accompanied by a lack of natural resources and hard economic conditions (Potter *et al.* 2009). According to the interviewees, the public sector continued to manage services modestly, and, as a result of urban growth, further public sector departments were established during the 1920's and 1930's for urban services provision. Furthermore, some departments were transformed to Ministries during the 1940's and 1950's, such as the Ministry of Education in 1939 and the Ministry of Health in 1950. The interviewees also commented that, by means of these Ministries, various political roles were specified at both the national and local levels, as well as practices of regulation and control. Unfortunately, the quality of services provided by the public sector tended to be low, because the scale of public expenditure available to pay for these services was insufficient for requirements. For example, between 1924 and 1946, public expenditure on health services was estimated at 2% of total public expenditure (Abu Nowar, 2005).

In 1955 the Municipalities Law was promulgated by which services were entrusted to local municipalities. According to Article 41 of the Law of 1955, municipalities are responsible for undertaking thirty nine functions, which vary from Town Planning to Hygiene and Public Health. Again, according to the interviewees, linking these services from the national level to the local municipalities led to an essential transformation in the public sector approach, whereby two techniques emerged. The first was public participation, in that people are able to elect municipal councils and mayors. The second is the enforcement of regulations based on municipal by-laws. In this context, most of the interviewees agreed that public participation is focused mainly on electing mayors and other municipal representatives, and little effort has been made to ensure public participation in the decision making process. Moreover, participation of some segments of the population, such as women, youth and the urban/rural poor, is limited, and there is little participation in Civil Society Organizations (CSO's). Urban authorities in Jordan are not always conducive to CSO's, and hinder articulation of their mandates.

Participatory mechanisms at the local level are normally constituency-based, which hinders the participation of CSO's.

Amman's population was estimated to be 215,000 in 1961, 600,000 in 1974, and 777,800 in 1979, this substantial increase was due to the second wave of Palestinian migration to Jordan in 1967 (Al Rawashdeh and Saleh, 2006, p.214). The fundamental challenge was to provide services beyond governmental capacity. Hence, another important transformation took place in the public sector approach, which was the transference of urban services provision from the local level to the national level, with many public sector companies established to take responsibility for them (Centre for Strategic Studies, 2004). According to the interviewees, the reason for this transformation was the lack of institutional capacity (in terms of financial, human and technological resources) available to local municipalities for high quality service provision. Water, sewage, gas, education, health, social action, and housing, among others, were transferred completely outside the responsibility of municipal institutions. In this way, service provision created a link between the citizens, as service users, and public institutions, as service providers, at the national level at the expense of the local level. This required rearranging the principles of institutional relationship among political, administrative, municipal and public service institutions. The relationships between them were again regulated by law and governance.

At the end of the 1980's, the public sector continued to suffer greatly from this lack of finance, as a result of the 1988 economic crisis. Many of the interviewees believe that this crisis was a direct result of the reduction of financial aid from the Arab Gulf States, due to the First Gulf War in 1990. In addition, about 400,000 people, of either Jordanian or Palestinian origin, returned to Jordan from Kuwait and Iraq, and settled in Amman (Potter *et al.* 2009). This increased the demand for services enormously. At the same time, the public sector employed a large number of untrained and unskilled employees (Centre for Strategic Studies, 2004). As a result of these issues, it was not possible for the public sector to manage services efficiently. According to the interviewees, several dimensions were required for skilled human resources, such as regular monitoring of outcomes, analysis of economic variables, comparing outputs with actual costs, preparing budgets, conducting plans and strategies, and understanding the needs and priorities of people. They also averred that the public sector continued to offer low level services, and were not able to access accurate information; on the contrary, decisions were often made on the basis of unreliable reports, and outcomes evaluated through both formal and informal meetings.

Most of the interviewees argued that the 1988 economic crisis caused the public sector to become a supervisor of service delivery, and its responsibility defined on the basis of decision making policy. This resulted in the complex role of the central government in managing services. Intricate systems were developed to attempt to provide adequate services and ensure accessibility to these services, with intent to reduce public expenditure on urban services. In cases where the government was unable to deliver adequate urban services, it gave tacit approval for illegal practices

so that citizens were able to obtain such services, for example, illegal housing. Hence, the ambivalence of public policy oscillated between attempts to control and efforts to provide services. Illegal channels to obtain services cannot be condoned; however, their contribution to the alleviation of hardship due to the lack of service provision cannot be ignored. This illustrates the limits of the public sector to provide adequate, good quality services.

According to the interviewees, the above transformation led directly to another transformation in the public sector approach; the rapidity of change in policy and leadership during the 1990's. Decision making was in a state of flux, with policy altering frequently, due to swift changes in leadership. The provision of public services was based on decisions made by short term heads of department, without the requirement of specifying policies and strategies of services delivery. Therefore, the basic role of leadership, which includes developing the community's role in law and order, creating workable inter-ethnic relations, and enhancing public participation, could not materialize. Achieving and maintaining high standards for best practice requires relative longevity in leadership, and changes of policy in tune with the local social-economic context.

Based on the arguments of the interviewees, it can be stated that the public sector approach could not provide adequate services in step with rapid urban growth. It was also unable to maintain adequate provision of public services, and the quality of services which were provided tended to be in poor. In addition, it was unable to address present urban challenges or to predict future urban problems. The public sector model resulted in inflation of human resources, limited capacity, lack of funding, and poor technology in the management process. It also increased the complexity of procedures and communication channels between the government and its citizens.

### **3.2. Private Sector Approach**

Urban services range from those that are fully owned by the public sector to those that are fully in private ownership. The private sector can move both up and down in this spectrum of ownership. For example, the public mail and telephone services were managed by the British Communication Company (Cable and Wireless Communications Company); the Jordan Electric Power Company was established in 1938 to provide the electricity service in Jordan (Abu Nowar, 2005). The interviewees defined the private sector approach as "the provision of urban services owned by the private sector to citizens under the responsibility of the government."

In the private sector approach, the public sector had overall responsibility for the services, but production was achieved by the private sector. Three components were required for this approach: the public sector, the private sector and the service user. Each can be identified in keeping with the process of urban growth: power, profit and necessity (Pirez, 1998). The relationship between these components was regularized by means of laws and regulations, such as the first franchise that was

granted by the Jordanian government to the Jordan Electric Power Company in 1947 (Alnsour, 2011).

During the 1950's and 1960's, the private sector approach witnessed several developments, such as the establishment of the National Petroleum Company in 1956, which provided gas and oil services (Alnsour, 2011). The public sector also allowed the private sector to invest in services such as private hospitals and schools. The responsibilities of both the private and public sectors were defined at the national level, as well as the provision of regulations and controls. Ensuring the provision of infrastructure to prepare, implement and monitor services was the responsibility of private companies. Specifying policies and regulations were the responsibility of governmental bodies. This distribution of responsibilities, from the interviewees' perspective, did not guarantee a complementary relationship between the two sectors, mostly because of the citizens' dissatisfaction with the relatively high price of services provided by the private sector, irrespective of their quality. According to the interviewees, the cost of services such as electricity, telecommunication, gas, universities, hospitals and transportation were not on par with the average local citizen's income; The interviewees agreed that there were two reasons for the relatively high price of private services: firstly, the private sector sought to achieve increasingly higher profits, and secondly, as time passed, the public sector tended to increase taxation on services provided by the private sector, in order to supplement the state treasury. In addition, the relationship between the public and private sectors continued in the absence of evaluation programs designed to identify the performance of services and prices provided by the private sector.

During the 1970's and 1980's, the private sector approach continued to expand, providing most urban services, particularly in the transport sector. According to the managers interviewed, the private sector (which had the responsibility for the quality of service) was characterized by its technical and operational competence. In reality, the performance of technical and regulatory competences often depends on the effectiveness of the contractual and relational dimensions in which they take place (Alnsour, 2014). A contractual dimension aims to deliver services to citizens and towns in a transparent and equitable manner (Alnsour, 2014). In this context, private companies should provide the same service to all people in all cities. A relational dimension denotes the form of the relationship between citizens and a private institution. Issues such as an agent's profit, competence, impartiality, and legitimacy play an important role in determining the form of the relationship between the user and the service provider. The relationship between the private sector as provider and a citizen as the user, from the interviewees' perspectives, was indirect; if people were dissatisfied with the service, the governmental bodies would bear the responsibility. According to the interviewees, the public sector has a dual relationship between the private sector and the citizen body, by which the interests of the public sector can be improved. The interviewees stated that it is important to remember that this form of relationship creates user hostility towards both the public and the private



sector in the case of a company's inability to take local socio-economic conditions into account.

As a result of the low level of public expenditure on urban services, due to a lack of economic resources, the activities of the private sector increased widely during the 1980's and 1990's. This occurred in several services, notably for education and health. Privately owned institutions were more likely to follow free market forces. For example, there are ten public universities in Jordan, and seventeen private universities. Fees for private universities are very high, particularly when considering that 55.7% of population at that time was under 15 years of age, and currently still remains at approximately 45% (Department of Statistics, 2013). This demonstrates that leaving basic services under the auspices of uncontrolled market forces is a severe risk in terms of providing these services at a cost which can be reasonably borne by the general populace.

Based on the opinions of the managers interviewed, it can be concluded that the private sector approach has positive and negative rewards with respect to service delivery. Indeed, the private sector approach has improved the quality of services and created some changes in the quality of urban life. The major criticism of this approach is that services are priced without consideration of local income; low income, and, to some extent, middle income families are not able to sustain the cost of these services. This occurred because of the lack of monitoring by the public sector for services provided by the private sector.

The main objective in allowing the private sector to invest in urban services was to improve the level of service and to enhance the quality of life; however, this did not result in sustainable urban services, due to the fact that proper monitoring was not in place. In addition, the lack of evaluation by the public sector, whether periodically or annually, for the performance of services provided by the private sector contributed to the reduction of sustainable urban services. Furthermore, the public sector has never conducted any studies to assess citizens' satisfaction with services owned by the private sector.

#### **4. MANAGING URBAN SERVICES FROM 1996 TO THE PRESENT**

At the present time, Amman's population exceeds 2.5 million inhabitants, which represents approximately 39% of Jordan's total of 6.5 million (Department of Statistics, 2013). Challenges associated with this rapid population growth include ensuring urban services.

Privatization began in Jordan by the end of the 1990's. Privatization was defined, based on the Law of Privatization of 2000, as "adoption of economic policy which enhanced the role of the private sector in the economy to include those state enterprises that should be managed on a commercial basis" (Abu Shams & Rabdi, 2003). Services such as electricity (generation and distribution), transport, airlines, communication, water, the sewage system and postal services were privatized (Abu Shams & Rabdi,

2003). According to the managers interviewed, such privatizations led to the occurrence of the public-private approach to management. Based on the Law of Privatization of 2000, the central government decides on the primary roles, including policies, enterprises, methods, consultants and contracts, and private companies are used as the means of carrying out these roles.

Three components emerged to form this model; the state, the private institution and the user. At the national level, the Cabinet must approve the privatization process, the Privatization Council decides on policies of the privatization process, and the Executive Privatization Commission is responsible for proposing and supervising the privatization process, in co-ordination with relevant institutions (Abu Shams & Rabdi, 2003). Government involvement in this momentum has until now promoted a system marked by technical dominance (Pirez, 1998).

Privatization, as a redistribution of roles between the private and public sectors, has taken place in two major ways. The first relates to the transfer of ownership of many former public companies completely from the public sector to the private sector. The second relates to the transfer of ownership, either partially or completely, of shares or quotas of public companies to the private sector. Occasionally, the service may be distributed to one or more companies (Pirez, 1998). This multiplicity can occur on a sector basis, such as the division of the electricity sector into three categories, generation, distribution and sales; or a regional basis, such as the establishment of the Electric Power Corporation of Irbid in the north of Jordan. It is clear that the private institutions involved are in control of the level of profit, not the government (Pirez, 1998).

According to the interviewees, the needs and priorities of users emerged in two modes, either directly with a private institution or indirectly as a user-citizen in relation to different institutions. Due to the weakness of the role of local authorities and the dominance of a centralized system, the relationship between citizens and the government tends to be fragile. As a result, users emerge simply as the holders of rights with respect to the regulatory standards and not as agents with interests, priorities and needs.

Most of the managers interviewed argued that, even if privatization contributes to the improved effectiveness of urban services, it has a negative impact on the distribution of wealth, income and political power. They declared that economic power in the form of physical infrastructure and social services is transferred from the public sector to the private sector. In addition, these privatizations have a negative effect on social-economic development. Problems such as poverty and unemployment are still the major concern of government, and the contribution of privatization towards meeting these challenges is limited. Since the beginning of privatization in the 1990's the poverty rate has oscillated between 14% and 15%, and the unemployment rate has remained between 12% and 14% (Department of Statistics, 2013). Process improvement, as a way to introduce positive changes in performance, is mirrored in the form of

decisions these private companies make in order to become effective in the market place. In this way, increasing profits regardless of local income considerations has led to the absence of the concept of basic needs when formulating public policy. Such decisions, from the interviewed managers' perspectives, have been placed directly under the control of the private institutions, which allows them to exert power which they did not have in either the previous public or private approaches.

## **5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on in-depth interviews with top managers and available literature, it was revealed that urban services have been managed through three different approaches; the public approach, the private approach and the public-private approach. The contribution of each approach to improve the quality of services and thus the quality of life is considerably varied. The public approach provides inadequate, low quality services. It is not able to produce tangible changes in the quality of life, because of hard economic challenges. In comparison, the private sector approach improved service quality and, thus, produced visible changes in the quality of urban life; despite several reservations, in particular the higher price a similar service. The public-private model has also improved the quality of services, but growing arguments about this policy is creating interest in the role of the government sector within this model. However, public-private policies have clearly not attempted to limit basic socio-economic challenges, for example poverty and unemployment.

Indeed, the management approaches towards providing urban services took place in the absence of a complementary public sector long-term strategy. Therefore, their contribution in terms of the creation of sustainable urban development remains at the medium-scale. A combination of management approaches under one strategy is an important step to facilitating citizen access to sustainable urban development. Reliance on a single type of management approach, for example privatization, may not raise the level of services nor improve quality of life, unless it is combined with other approaches, such as an enhanced private-sector and public participation. In reality, introducing such combinations may be difficult for two reasons. First, there is a multitude of public agencies and private companies responsible for managing services in the city of Amman. The fundamental challenge is how to create an effective urban management strategy using these approaches whilst working within a massive overlapping of urban agencies, which takes legal, political and administrative impacts into account, and which meets the challenges of urban growth. Second, socio-economic characteristics, needs, priorities, and implications can be diverse from one city to another, and even within the same city. Affordability, willingness to pay, public participation, and lifestyle may also be different. In Amman, there are several poor urban areas, and others which are much wealthier. Consequently, creating appropriate action across the board may not be easy. Further research could help to produce a complementary strategy in accordance with the overlapping of urban agencies, challenges of urban growth and the characteristics of different areas within the city.

In addition, future research should examine these results in other Arab countries, where comparative research supports knowledge extensively.

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### *Note*

1. UNRWA is the United Nations Relief & Work Agency for Palestinian Refugee. It was established in 1949 by the United Nations General Assembly and provides relief and works programs for over 5 m registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle-East.

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