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**INNOVATIONS IMPLEMENTED IN SELECTED  
SELF-GOVERNMENTS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC****Inovácie implementované vo vybraných samosprávach Slovenskej  
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**Annotation**

The objective of the paper is to identify and analyse the state and level of implementation of the innovative tools used for increasing of effectiveness, performance and quality of services offered by selected local self-governments in Slovakia. Self-governments realize the importance of innovations for increasing the effectiveness of the working process and quality of the provided services, therefore, they try to create and implement innovations within their financial, personal and organizational capacities. Regarding the type of innovations, mostly innovations of services and innovations of processes were identified. Lately, however, Slovak municipalities introduced also some more radical organizational changes. Implemented innovations are often of an incremental nature, even though, their frequency is rather high. Based on the degree of originality, they are mostly imitating innovations. Stimuli for innovations come from internal environment, from the employees of the municipal office and from inhabitants, as well as, from external environment, when the self-governments transfer the knowledge from other self-governments or from abroad. Self-governments obtain the key knowledge, which are an assumption in creation of innovations, from educational courses, seminars, presentations, trainings or from cooperation with universities. The transfer of knowledge in implementation of innovations is typically secured via media, information brochures or publications. The share of expenditures spent on innovations varies from 1% to 10% of the total budget of self-governments.

**Key words**

innovation, implementation of innovations, transfer of knowledge, local self-governments

**Anotácia**

Cieľom príspevku je identifikovať a analyzovať stav a úroveň implementácie inovatívnych nástrojov a inovácií pre zvyšovanie efektivity, výkonnosti a kvality služieb poskytovaných vybranými miestnymi samosprávami v SR. Samosprávy si dôležitosť inovovania uvedomujú a v záujme zvyšovania efektívnosti pracovného procesu a kvality poskytovaných služieb, sa snažia o tvorbu a implementáciu inovácií v rámci ich finančných, personálnych a organizačných možností. Z hľadiska druhu inovácií prevládajú inovácie služieb a procesné inovácie. Mestá však v posledných rokoch pristupujú aj k radikálnejším organizačným zmenám. Často sú inovácie len prírastkové (inkrementálne), i keď frekvencia ich výskytu je v mestách pomerne vysoká a z hľadiska stupňa originality majú prevahu napodobňovacie inovácie. Podnety k inováciám vychádzajú rovnako z interného prostredia, od zamestnancov mestských úradov a podnetov od obyvateľov, ako aj z externého prostredia, kedy samosprávy preberajú pozitívne príklady z praxe od iných samospráv, prípadne zo zahraničia. Kľúčové znalosti, ktoré sú predpokladom tvorby inovácií, mestá získavajú prostredníctvom vzdelávacích kurzov, odborných seminárov, prednášok, školení, či spolupracou s univerzitami. Šírenie nových poznatkov zhmotnených v inováciách mestá prezentujú prostredníctvom médií, informačných brožúr, či knižných publikácií. Podiel výdavkov na inovácie sa pohybuje v rozmedzí 1-10% z celkového rozpočtu samosprávy.

**Kľúčové slová**

inovácia, implementácia inovácií, transfer poznatkov, miestne samosprávy

**JEL classification:** H700, O310, R510

## 1. Introduction

Globalization and consequent need for innovation have varying impacts on regions within a country. Advanced regions can benefit from better networking capabilities and relationships with foreign partners. Contrary, in less advanced and peripheral regions, the low ability to produce new ideas and disproportionately targeted policies can be reflected in widening of the knowledge and technological gap between regions (Maguire et al., 2011, MacKinnon et al., 2002). Innovation-based local development is becoming crucial in the context of global competition, increasing population mobility, scientific and technological progress, and the emergence of spatial disparities. It is also a basis for companies' allocation, which increases local job opportunities. The introduction and dissemination of innovation at the level of town and rural municipalities is important in the context of the overall increase in private sector investment (Clark et al., 2010). Knowledge-based and technologically advanced areas can reach leading position within the country (Jans et al., 2015, Gress, 2015, Clark et al., 2010).

Innovations can be found where there is an adequate base of human and physical capital, and vice-versa innovations create a dynamic economy that attracts such capital. The endogenous growth model fully reflects the view of innovation as a result of planned efforts, and it casts a new light on understanding of innovations' benefit for the dynamic growth (Crescenzi, Rodríguez-Pose, 2011). To make the use of opportunities for local development effective, local authorities need to adapt local policies to their needs, "adjust" their supply and make full use of the potential of the area. Only in such case they can be competitive within an international, open and knowledge economy (Clark et al., 2010).

According to the OECD (2014), innovations can be differentiated, based on their character, into technical (innovation of products, services, technological and administrative innovations) and non-technical (marketing and organizational innovations). Based on the motif of origin, technology push and demand pull innovations can be recognized. Types of innovation, in terms of scale of changes, were defined by Mulgan, Albury (2003) as incremental, radical and transformational/system. Widrum (2003) classifies innovation in public services as conceptual, political, and systemic. Franková (2011) further distinguishes innovations according to their content and the degree of originality to imitating and original. Gassman, Enkel (2004) defines three types of open innovation process:

- outside – in process – it increases the innovation capacity of an organization through integration of knowledge from the external environment with internal knowledge basis,
- inside – out process – it increases usage of organization's capacity through transformation of internal knowledge towards the external stakeholders,
- combined process – combination of the two previous processes, it is characterized by creation of lasting alliance with external partners.

In fact, there is a different approach in implementing of innovative practices in the private and public sectors (Jans et al., 2015), while the practice of the public sector is perceived less dynamically (Christensen et al., 2016). The reason for this may be the fact that the incentives for innovations in the public sector are rather the results of political and legislative efforts than the market forces and, moreover, their implementation is often accompanied by a lack of financial and personnel resources (Rusaw, 2007). By innovations in local self-government, we understand intentional changes that lead to new and better services, processes, or ways of organizing activities at all levels of the organization throughout the whole innovation process (Valach, 2014). In services, innovation is interpreted as a process in which organizations do something new, bring new processes to life, create new goods or services or introduce a new way of interorganizational relationships.

As a rule, innovations lead to improvements in outputs, efficiency, effectiveness, or quality of service. In case of public sector, majority of new practices are oriented on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of internal management processes, communication with individuals and organizations and dealing the stakeholders through improved availability of services (Warkentin et al., 2002). Cifranič, Valach (2014) state that in case of self-governments, innovation is an effective tool for increasing the quality of services for citizens. Innovation is seen as the engine of local economic and social development. Hanáčková, Balážová et al. (2014) add that innovation cannot be confused with the concept of change, as change is typical for majority of organizations, but innovation concerns the creation and implementation of new processes, products, services, and methods of their delivery. Innovations represent a qualitative and sustainable change. The following criteria may be also used to identify innovations: novelty/creativity, efficiency - focus on results, degree of importance of problem solving and usability. Cheah (2016) also emphasizes the importance of quantifying of economic impacts of innovation by

claiming that with significant R&D investment bringing changes in both private and public sectors, policy makers need to be able to implement logical tools and procedures estimating the economic impacts.

Staroňová et al. (2012) state that in case of the public sector, rather than defining innovation, it is more useful to focus on individual innovation attributes, which they define as follows:

- change of status quo - innovation is referred to as the introduction of something new,
- quality change - a change in the structure of an organization that is sustainable, new and large enough to change the nature and functioning of the organization,
- intentional change - intention is a decisive feature, by which innovation differs from other changes.

The effective direction of the innovation process is based on three main assumptions: the existence of an institutional framework for the innovation process, the identification of prototypes of development systems and the existence of leading actors in the innovation process (Fichter, Clausen, 2013). According to Nijkamp, Siedschlag (2011), the strength of the innovation system depends on links to the whole system, on the government policy and on institutions that support innovation. Existence and support for the creation of agglomerations and clusters is an effective mean for creating bonds, diversity, and thus innovation.

Under the conditions of decentralized policies, those are local self-governments, which serve a "laboratory" for implementing innovation in management (Füglister, 2011). The following are assumptions that local governments must meet to sustainably create values and service delivery:

- maintain a productive relationship with other public institutions and partners,
- easily and safely exchange knowledge, competencies and studies with others to improve internal processes and provide services to citizens,
- cooperate with inhabitants and other stakeholders to co-create new services (Feller, Finnegan, Nilsson, 2011).

Ručinská, Knežová (2009) state that all public administrations are currently under great pressure to reduce public spending. Additionally, they are forced to respond to the ever-increasing demands for their efficient functioning and the provision of quality services; therefore, innovations in public administration are necessary. In practice, the reasons for innovation in the public sector are for example the need to respond adequately to changing public needs, the need to increase efficiency in terms of budget constraints, the need to improve the distribution and output of public services, and the need to maximize the usage of information and communication technologies (Franková, 2011). Žárska et al. (2010) claim that by using the concepts of self-government management and innovative methods (e.g. New Public Management, Good Governance, networking, quality and performance management, teaching self-government, etc.), the self-governments can achieve required level of quality of executive management and thereby ensure their direction towards the knowledge economy.

Staroňová et al. (2012) state that the public sector is shaped by the external and internal environment, in which it operates and which encourages the change. They recognize the reasons for innovation in public administration in citizens expecting the improvement of the quality of services accompanied by cost reduction. Orientation on customers as one of the features of New Public Management and an effort to encourage citizen participation in public policy making and decision-making are other reasons. Von Hippel (2007) claims that many public service innovations are based on the use of ICT. Information and communication technologies can significantly contribute to meeting one of the key conditions for successful implementation of innovation into the public service system, specifically the direct participation of inhabitants as consumers of public service in the innovation process.

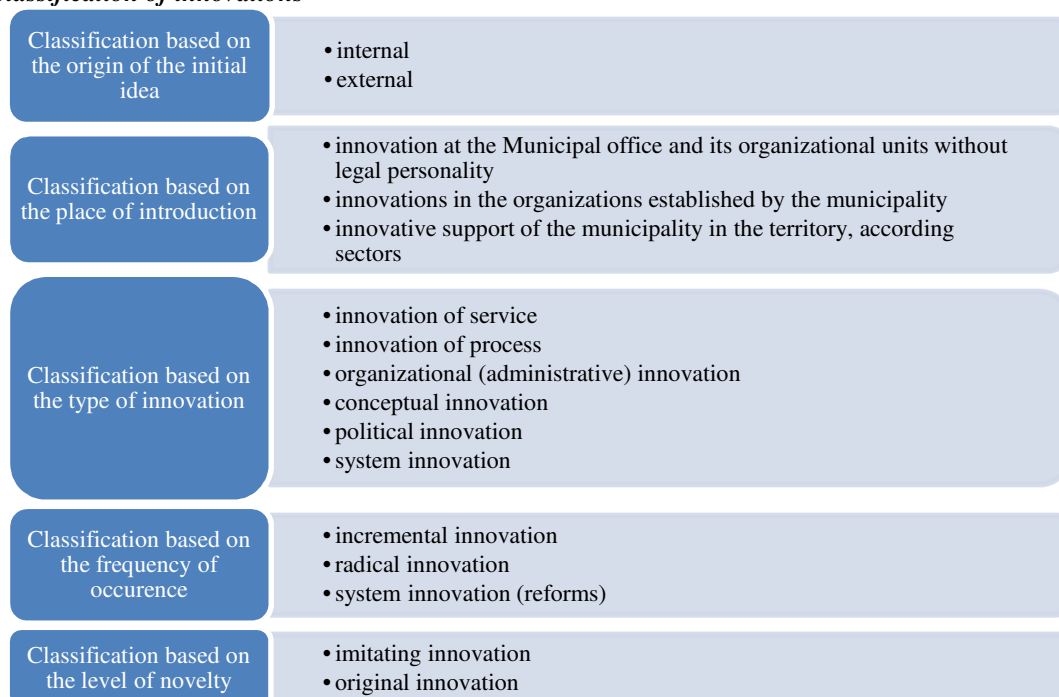
## 2. Aim, Methodology and Methods of Research

It can be stated that there is still a little attention paid to innovations in public services. Informatization of public administration (e-government), which should bring significant progress, is already gaining a real shape, but in practice, there are only partial improvements. The presented paper tries to reflect the given circumstances by addressing its main objective, which is to identify and analyse the state and level of implementation of the innovative tools and innovations used for increasing of effectiveness, performance and quality of services provided by selected local self-governments in Slovakia. Within the cross-sectional analysis, attention was also given to the factors determining the emergence, promotion and success of innovations in the selected local self-governments, key issues and barriers preventing successful implementation of innovative tools and the introduction of innovations. The following blocks were the subject of the study:

- A. **Incentives for innovations and types of implemented innovations** – for defining the innovation type, the classification stated in the Figure 1 was used,
- B. **Education and cooperation in the area of innovations** – analysis of forms of education and types of cooperation with institutions in the innovation process;

- C. Financial resources for innovations** – quantifying municipal expenditures spent on innovation and describing sources of funding;
- D. Institutional context of creation of innovations and transfer of knowledge** – a description of entities playing an important role in the creation and implementation of innovation, a description of partnerships and networks with entities and universities within the region, a description of the institutions coordinating the flow of knowledge;
- E. Summary** – defining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of introducing innovation in the analysed municipalities.

**Fig. 1: Classification of innovations**



Source: own processing

Methodologically, we relied primarily on sources from domestic and foreign literature examining innovation, as well as on internal materials of municipalities. The primary data were collected via interviews with superintendents of the municipal office in the selected 14 municipalities of the SR. In particular, those were the seats of the region: Košice, Prešov, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava, Trenčín and district towns: Prievidza, Považská Bystrica, Nové Zámky, Humenné, Lučenec, Snina, Svidník, Stropkov.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### A. Incentives for innovations and types of implemented innovations

The main incentive for innovation in the selected municipalities is above all the need to improve the quality of life of inhabitants. Further, it is the need to meet their growing demands, to increase the efficiency of employees, to make the work process at the municipal office more efficient, as well as the need for technological advancement and the need for self-governments to follow new trends, to introduce change and to innovate mainly through ICT with an emphasis on efficient management of public resources.

Ideas for innovations come mostly from the internal environment, which means from the employees of the municipality. However, inspiration is also gained from citizens and local entrepreneurs via questionnaires and surveys conducted by municipalities, via personal meetings with inhabitants and representatives of various interest groups. Inspiration from inhabitants is also received through the web surveys or social networks. Internal innovations that are implemented in municipalities are mainly based on strategic documents of the municipality. When acquiring external stimuli for innovations, municipalities receive key incentives through training, Internet, informal contacts and peer relationships. They also use professional consulting from external companies and in many cases; the municipalities use their networks and organize an excursion directly into an inspiring environment.

Innovations, however, are not only the result of individual incentives. When introducing an innovation, the municipal representatives need to keep in mind the long-term concepts that point to the direction of the



development of a specific municipality. These concepts are crucial in the process of implementation of investment projects, such as construction of transport infrastructure, development of education or entrepreneurial activities.

An inspiration for other self-governments was, for example, the town Banská Bystrica with implementation of a Community Multifunctional Centre - KOMUCE or the town Martin, which first implemented the project "Transparent town". The project "Transparent town" further served as a positive example and inspiration for the towns Košice and Prievidza.

Innovations in services, process innovation and organizational innovation dominate in terms of types of innovation. These are mostly incremental innovations with low level of innovativeness. Imitating innovations such as electronization of municipal services, using the City Monitor application, creating a client centre or implementing of the Urban Intervention project are mostly implemented, where the main concept has already been successfully tested in other Slovak municipalities or abroad. Although, imitating innovations dominate, municipalities are always trying to improve the process of implementation and add something new to the final product.

The willingness and effort of municipal employees are important aspects in the process of transforming the idea into a concrete form. However, not all employees are seen as innovators. In some departments (e.g. registry, economics, etc.), whose competencies are mainly given by the state, the employees act more as administrators. Contrary, in areas such as environment, culture, transport, or investment development, employees are expected to bring new solutions and proposals. Self-governments are trying to translate good ideas into innovations within their capabilities. Some municipalities take employees' activity into account using both financial and non-financial rewards.

### **B. Education and cooperation in the area of innovations**

Majority of innovations are the result of cooperation of several actors at different levels of governance and across different areas. The introduction of every innovation requires staff training in order to provide a service with the highest quality to make their work as effective as possible. Additionally, in some cases, it also requires the recruitment of new staff. Municipalities place significant emphasis on the qualification of their employees and highlight the need for self-education. Key knowledge, that is the prerequisite for innovation in municipalities, is gained through educational courses, professional seminars, lectures, training or cooperation with universities. Municipalities also try to ensure that the acquired knowledge is transformed into practice.

During the introduction of innovations, municipalities cooperate mainly with the private sector. In areas such as ICT or construction of local infrastructure, the cooperation with business entities is inevitable. The introduction of the information system for self-governments (named CORA GEO) required staff training and familiarity with the work in the system for interactive communication between the municipal office and inhabitants/clients. Municipalities, in cooperation with the company CORA GEO, are currently planning to launch e-forms, voting system, orthophotomaps, a survey for inhabitants, employees and a central register via an information system. The project team plays an important role in raising funds for innovation from the EU funds. Some municipalities work together with professional external project companies to develop and submit project proposals. As for cooperation with other municipalities, mutual communication and exchange of experience is taking place, but the municipalities have only few projects on the basis of such partnership.

In the innovation process, cooperation with regional institutions is clearly preferred mainly because of the knowledge about the local specificities and the needs of the citizens. Cross-border cooperation has led to innovations linked mainly to the environment, tourism and culture.

### **C. Financial resources for innovations**

The funds for innovation processes are obtained mainly from own resources, most of which consist of income from taxes and sales of capital assets. A large amount of funds are also formed by subsidies and grants from the EU. In the recent years, municipalities have become increasingly successful in gaining these resources, mainly due to experienced and initiative project team members. Some innovations have been attempted for implementation in the form of PPP projects, where private sector capital would be used. Aligning the demands of the municipality and the entrepreneurs is not easy, so they have often dropped out from such cooperation. The percentage of expenditures for the implementation of innovations from the total budget expenditures of the analysed municipalities is shown in Tab. 1.

**Tab. 1: Number of inhabitants of the municipality and the share of expenditures for the innovative activities from the total budget expenditures (in %) in the year 2015**

Municipality	Number of inhabitants until December 31 <sup>st</sup> 2015	Share of expenditures for innovation from the total budget expenditures (estimation) (%)
Košice	239 200	10%
Prešov	89 959	5-10%
Banská Bystrica	78 758	3%
Nitra	77 670	5-10%
Trnava	65 596	4%
Trenčín	55 698	15%
Prievidza	47 143	5%
Považská Bystrica	40 373	8%
Nové Zámky	38 721	5%
Humenné	33 945	7%
Lučenec	28 099	10-15%
Snina	20 174	10%
Svidník	11 289	1%
Stropkov	10 713	5%

Source: data from DATACUBE and data from interviews with the superintendents of the municipal office from the selected municipalities, 2015

#### **D. Institutional context of creation of innovations and transfer of knowledge**

Municipal management with a support from the municipal council plays a key role in the process of creation and implementation of innovations. At this level, the decision is made, which innovations will be supported and which will not, while technical and financial capacities are taken into account.

Managers of project team are also important actors in the process of creating and introducing innovation, while the staff of the relevant departments is then responsible for the physical implementation of changes and new improvements of the municipal life. They are also in the position of process managers who are involved in each phase of the innovation process.

There is a number of institutions, whether at national or regional level, which coordinate the dissemination of information and knowledge, such as the Union of Towns of Slovakia, the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia, Association of Superintendents of Municipal Offices of Self-governments, SARIO, Organizations of Regional Tourism, universities, interest associations and many others. Various educational institutions e.g. Regional Education Centre of Self-Government also contribute to dissemination of innovation. Their main task is to monitor the legislative process in Slovakia and to organize trainings, seminars and methodical meetings with the objective to inform municipal, regional and school staff about new regulations and important changes.

The transfer of knowledge, in case of successful innovations, is carried out via media, brochures or other publications. Promotion is provided by specific departments set up by municipalities to enhance their visibility, image and transparency.

Table 2 summarizes the most important innovations implemented in the analysed municipalities.

**Tab. 2: The most important innovations implemented in the selected municipalities**

Town	Innovations
Košice	Electronization of municipal services; Strategy for transportation development; integrated railway system; project “Transparent Town”
Prešov	Digitalization of the municipal territorial plan; introduction of the Digital Municipal Council; mail delivery by town couriers; upgrading the system in the Client Centre; ABREM - municipal application designed for monitoring of companies in bankruptcy and restructuring; creation of a modern communication channel for the town Prešov, portal gopresov.sk
Banská Bystrica	Project “Inter-labour Market”; reconstruction and modernization of the clock tower; electronization project “I-city”; educational path „Serpentine Urpín“; reconstruction and new use of Radvanský manor house; creation of the Regional Tourism Organization for Central Slovakia; the establishment of the KOMUCE community multifunctional centre
Nitra	Electronization of municipal services; inquiry from citizens via the “City Monitor” mobile application; implementation of the project “Urban Interventions”
Trnava	"Energy Cluster - Western Slovakia"; Automobile cluster Slovakia; creation of Regional Tourism Organization - Trnava Tourism; Trnava Municipal Industrial and Technological Park
Trenčín	Project „Trenčín is you“; establishment of a 1 <sup>st</sup> client centre; employee remuneration project
Prievidza	Project “Transparent Town”; introduction of internet into public buses; establishment of the portal Odkazprestarostu.sk (message for mayor); modernization of the camera system in the town; creation of sports and relaxation zone
Považská Bystrica	Anticorruption line; reporting of illegal waste dumps; portal of the self-government information system; cross-border co-operation project between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic "Cycling Routes Marking"; project "Return to Carpathian Traditions"; project "Invasion of the Talents"
Nové Zámky	Digital town; project „Oasis for soul“- reconstruction of the site of national cultural heritage „Jazdiareň“; integration of Nové Zámky and Šaľa region; restoration of historical artefacts „sv. Trojice“; project “Calvary for all”
Humenné	„Green watch“; establishment of client centre; card of benefits for inhabitants of Humenné; Senior card; Junior card; creation of Regional Tourism Organization Horný Zemplín a Horný Šariš; innovative platform for cooperation of a network of towns of Carpathian Euroregion
Lučenec	Reconstruction of Jewish synagogue; reconstruction of the Town hall; transformation of a traditional fair into social even called „Municipal days“; project “Enjoy Lučenec – Architects in town”; project “Strand”
Snina	Construction of bio-swimming place Sninské Rybníky; creation of integrated spot for inhabitants; construction of container stands and increased effectiveness of complex system of waste collection in town; innovation of cleaning mechanics for improvement of air quality in town; reconstruction of a historical site – Manor house Snina; innovative platform for cooperation of a network of towns of Carpathian Euroregion
Svidník	Office of 1 <sup>st</sup> contact; establishment of daily stationary; informal education for active seniors; national project „Data centre of municipalities“; Ekointegration – cooperation of Krosno and Svidník; talking map
Stropkov	Creation of Roma community centre; establishment of Roma civil watch, creation of brown industrial park

Source: Data from interviews with the superintendents of the municipal office from the selected municipalities, 2015

## Conclusion

Innovations are seen as an important issue not only in the private sector, but also in the public sphere. Self-governments are aware of the importance of innovation and in order to increase the efficiency of the work process and the quality of the services, they seek to create and implement innovations within their financial and personal capacities.

From the point of view of implementing innovations, municipalities identified following strengths: a relatively stable population, a sufficient number of college graduates among employees, who are willing to self-educate themselves, self-governments support the innovativeness of their employees, they are members of various civic and interest associations, they cooperate and develop cooperation with other municipalities, firms and institutions



within or outside the region, they seek to build quality relationships, they increasingly use the possibilities of structural and investment funds, they try to meet the needs of the inhabitants and active groups, they develop their own knowledge and learn from other municipalities, they introduce a large number of innovations and disseminate information and knowledge about new successful innovations.

When implementing innovations, municipalities have to also cope with problems and shortcomings. Not all employees are innovators and want to bring something new to the municipality or to change the work processes. The municipality is thus experiencing unwillingness and passivity in implementing innovative changes from some of its employees. Majority of innovations come as a result of projects funded by subsidies and grants from the European Union. Here, however, the problem is that the conditions for obtaining the resources are set too broadly. In many cases, the real needs of self-government are not reflected, and some regulations do not always prove to be correct and effective. It would be more appropriate to set up individual regulations, which enable the municipality to have an impact on what the innovation should ultimately bring.

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