
TRANSFORMATION OF THE SEA TERMINAL IN GDYNIA INTO THE MUSEUM OF EMIGRATION

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ABSTRACT: The article concerns the adaptation of the historic Gdynia Sea Terminal into the Emigration Museum. The building was designed and built in the 1930s and is an outstanding work of modernist architecture. The building is located on an artificial pier of a marine harbour. It was used to handle passenger and cargo traffic sailing to, among others, New York. In 1943 the building was partially destroyed during an air raid and was not fully rebuilt. After World War II the building served various purposes, but has not regained its former glory. In 2012 the idea of creating an Emigration Museum in Gdynia was born. The conceptual design assumed reconstruction, in modern form, of parts of the building destroyed during the war and reconstruction of the interior design. The museum opened in 2016, and the following year the project was awarded the main prize of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage in the competition "Monument well taken care of".

KEY WORDS: Modernism, architecture, monuments, monument protection, Gdynia

Introduction

Thorough transformations of existing historical buildings in order to adapt them to new needs, after they have lost their usefulness to their original function, are processes that have become widespread in the last few decades. It is an important issue from the point of view of monument protection, to which numerous publications have already been devoted¹. In spite of the many examples described, these are still processes which constitute a considerable challenge for the conservators and other participants of these activities, largely because each case is different and requires an individual approach. In the times of serious social, economic and technological changes that have been taking place in Poland for several decades, a significant number of buildings and entire complexes of buildings have lost their initial function. However, some of them are carriers of important historical values. Thus, contemporary adaptations of historical buildings are, for the most part, the result of the loss of their former function, on the one hand, and on the other hand, they are most often forced by the conservation protection, which prevents their liquidation. The decisive factor in such cases is therefore the public interest connected with heritage protection, and not only practical and economic reasons. Adaptations of historical objects have become an important trend in Polish architecture in the last few decades, and those concerning historical objects covered by various forms of legal protection are a serious task for designers, investors, and also for conservators. Historical buildings intended for adaptation are subject to serious interferences, but these interferences are often necessary because they give the only chance for their further functioning and thus for preservation. Particularly numerous in this group are post-industrial and post-military ensembles and buildings, whose original usefulness has ended irrevocably. The design process for adaptation is in a way opposite to the typical design process. As a rule, a new building or group of buildings is built after being designed for a certain function and is adapted to it in terms of spatial layout, architectural expression and other features. In case of adaptation, assuming the necessity of preserving all or part of the historical structure, the planned function and other solutions should be adapted to the existing spatial-architectural solutions. Moreover, conservation protection imposes numerous limitations related to the possibility of transformation. Thus, adaptation is a process that requires the subordination of the new function to the existing building structure from the very beginning, i.e. the opposite of the new object design.

The number of successful adaptations in Poland is increasing every year and these implementations can already be subject to preliminary analyses and summaries. It seems that there are two main types of adaptation projects, differing in the type of investors, economic characteristics and types of functions, these are:

¹ For example, PKN ICOMOS publications devoted to this issue: Szmygin B., *Analiza obiektu zabytkowego jako element adaptacji do współczesnych funkcji użytkowych – metodologia Światowego Dziedzictwa*, [in:] *Adaptacja obiektów zabytkowych do współczesnych funkcji użytkowych*, ed. B. Szmygin, published by Lublin University of Technology, Warsaw-Lublin 2009, pp. 129-136, *Ochrona wartości w procesie adaptacji zabytków, collective work*, ed. B. Szmygin, Published by PKN ICOMOS, Museum of King John III Palace in Wilanów, Lublin University of Technology, Warsaw 2015.

COMMERCIAL ADAPTATIONS undertaken by business entities, in which historical objects are adapted to contemporary needs, but the purpose of the undertaking is business. It is usually connected with a completely new accompanying project and is often connected with it or even interspersed. The overall economic calculation is favourable because the deficit related to the adaptation costs is compensated by the profits from the accompanying investment project. Examples of such adaptations are the former textile factory in Łódź adapted for the Manufaktura Center and the complex of hussar barracks in Gdańsk Wrzeszcz adapted for the Garnizon housing estate. In case of such adaptations, the new, dominant function ensures the profitability of the undertaking. In the former, it is a commercial and service function, and in the case of the Garnizon estate, it is a residential function. In exceptional cases, e.g. in the situation of a very attractive location, low purchase price of a historical object, etc., the adaptation of a monument may be profitable without an accompanying new investment.

NON-COMMERCIAL ADAPTATIONS - usually undertaken by public entities. The change of the original function and adaptation of the object is made as a result of an undertaking financed entirely or with a large share of public funds. As a result of the adaptation, which is not of a commercial character, the object most often obtains functions generally available to the public, e.g. cultural institutions. This group includes e.g. the adaptation of the Gradowa Góra fort complex to the Hewelianum Center in Gdańsk, as well as the adaptation of the Sea Terminal in Gdynia discussed in this article.

The specificity of contemporary adaptations

The adaptation of a historical object is undoubtedly a very individualized and often complicated design and investment process. Complicated adaptations are most often due to the fact that at the planning and design stage it is not always possible to predict all the conditions related to the existing and historical object. Various new factors, resulting from the investment process, may influence the necessity of verification of design solutions and, therefore, the extension of the investment process and increase of costs. However, it is not a situation that occurs only during adaptations. Such complications also occur during completely new construction projects, due to new or changing conditions, especially in case of large projects. From the point of view of monument protection and conservation, adaptation is one of the most important and very often one of the most complicated processes, which is a challenge especially for conservators. In many cases, it is difficult to define precise limits of permissible interference in historic structures. These interferences during the adaptation process concern not only the way of approaching the historic structure, but also the introduction of new forms, which will have a clear impact on the reception of the monument. While in the first issue it is necessary, as precisely as possible, to determine the limits or field of permissible changes, the second issue is often difficult to determine at the initial stage, e.g. when formulating guidelines and can be the subject of an opinion only after design.

In the first issue, the conservator must define the limits of interference, i.e. the degree of preservation of the historic structure. Here, he can have clear evaluation criteria - guidelines,

conservation documentation, valorizations. The determination of these boundaries must be the result of a professional assessment of historic values². In the second issue the conservation office is also equipped with administrative competence, but the evaluation is not so clear and is less objective. There seems to be a lot of room for different interpretations here, depending on, for example, the education of the restorer, experience, doctrine or simply a more or less liberal attitude to contemporary architecture in the historical environment. Adaptation is a process that requires the cooperation of specialists in various fields, in which the role of the designer, the investor, and the conservator is important, but it is the conservator who agrees on the investment project, and bears a large part of the responsibility for the final result. From the designer's point of view, adaptations are not a very complicated technical issue. It does not seem to be a very difficult process for an experienced team of designers, including architects, when compared to e.g. design tasks in technically advanced contemporary buildings. The difficulty is undoubtedly connected with the specificity of a historical building, in which it is impossible to predict all the conditions at the design stage. It is worth remembering that the adaptations often take place in objects deprived of their use for many years, and during their use, in many cases, the buildings were not maintained in a proper way from the point of view of preserving their historical values. Protected objects, as part of the adaptations, require various conservation and construction procedures. This often applies to such conservation measures as restoration work, reconstruction work, etc. In many cases, it is necessary to strengthen or replace an existing structure, introduce new installations, etc. in terms of construction activities.

History of the Sea Terminal in Gdynia

The building of the Sea Terminal in Gdynia was erected in the 1st half of the 1930s, on an artificial pier built near the main entrance to the internal port³. The building was to serve the maritime passenger traffic and freight transport. The building with the plan of an elongated rectangle was situated parallel to the quay where the ships were moored. This greatly facilitated communication between the ships, warehouse on the ground floor and the passenger departure lounge on the first floor. The building consists of two main parts. The front part was built on a square plan and houses a single-space hall, topped with a reinforced concrete shell in the shape of a monastery vault, with a pyramid skylight (Fig. 1). On three sides of the hall, suspended on cantilevers, there are passage galleries leading to numerous rooms located along the perimeter. The rear, elongated part of the building was divided into two storeys. On the first floor, there was

² Szmygin B., *Analiza obiektu zabytkowego jako element adaptacji do współczesnych funkcji użytkowych – metodologia Światowego Dziedzictwa*, [in:] *Adaptacja obiektów zabytkowych do współczesnych funkcji użytkowych*, ed. B. Szmygin, Lublin University of Technology Publishing House, Warsaw-Lublin 2009, p. 129, 136.

³ The Sea Terminal has been described in several publications e.g.: Sołtysik M. J., *Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*. Urbanistyka i architektura, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1993; Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Architektura i układ przestrzenny portu gdynińskiego lat międzywojennych jako dziedzictwo kulturowe*, PhD dissertation Faculty of Architecture Gdańsk University of Technology, supervised by Maria J. Sołtysik, mps Gdańsk 2013; Hirsch R., *Ochrona i konserwacja historycznej architektury modernistycznej Gdyni. Zarys problematyki*, Gdańsk University of Technology Publishing House, Gdańsk 2016.

a warehouse, and on the second floor, there was a passenger departure lounge and check-in hall, which could be directly connected by a bridge to the deck of the moored ship. Both storeys of the rear part could function separately - the warehouse on the first floor was serviced from the quayside, while the passenger check-in hall on the first floor was functionally connected with the main hall. The rear, longitudinal part was covered with ten repetitive, reinforced concrete cradles made of thin-layer reinforced concrete coatings with longitudinal skylights.



Fig. 1 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, front facade, view from the 2nd half of the 1930s, archival photo from a private collection

The Sea Terminal was ceremonially opened in 1933 and very quickly became an important feature in the life of Gdynia. Until the outbreak of the war, the main hall was the most representative interior of all the city buildings. The station was a flagship work of the modernist architecture of the 1930s, which used an excellent functional layout, modern structural solutions and elegant but discreet interior design characteristic of modernism. Apart from its architectural values, the building had a unique symbolic and patriotic meaning. In the most exposed part of the hall, there were commemorative plaques with reliefs depicting Marshal Józef Piłsudski and President Ignacy Mościcki. On the opposite wall there were stone plaques with inscriptions commemorating the construction of the port.

For the issues related to the contemporary adaptation of the Station, very important are the events of World War II. The Sea Terminal was then used by the German Navy. All Polish symbols were removed from the building, including eagle reliefs from the front elevation and commemorative plates from the hall. On October 9, 1943, the building was heavily damaged

during the Allied air force bombing raid⁴. The north-western part of the building with its rooms and internal galleries in the hall was badly damaged. The reinforced concrete covering of the hall survived. The damaged building was partially rebuilt during the war, but the unfinished corner remained significantly lower than before the war. The most visible remnants of the war, fixed for several decades, were: the unfinished part of the northwestern corner of the building, particularly visible through the asymmetry of the front elevation (Fig. 2), and the lack of inner galleries in the hall and the cantilevered roof over the entrance in the northern part.



Fig. 2 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, the north-west corner, destroyed during WW2 and not rebuilt to the original height, 2015 r., photo. R. Hirsch

After the last war, the significance and prestige of the building definitely declined. Occasionally it was still used as a passenger terminal, but this also ended with the end of the Polish maritime passenger fleet. It was still briefly used at times, as a place of exhibitions and other cultural and even sporting events, but the time of its magnificence is gone forever. The transit warehouse on the first floor, serviced from the port quay, has continued to be used intensively, just like before. The corner destroyed during the war was not rebuilt until the adaptation was undertaken in 2012.

⁴ Kaźmierczak A., *Samoloty nad Gotenhafen*, „Rocznik Gdyniński”, no. 10, 1991, p. 126.

Transformation of the Sea Terminal

The Sea Terminal is unique in its function, form and construction. In 1990 it was entered in the provincial register of monuments⁵.

The justification for the decision of the Provincial Conservator of Monuments in Gdansk defines the building's advantages in this way: "The Sea Terminal in Gdynia is a valuable example of a modernist public utility building. It presents a harmonious combination of simplicity of formal, logical construction and bold composition with a grand scale of two formally and functionally different elements of the building: representative and storage space. The impression of elegance typical for modernism was obtained thanks to very economical use of means of artistic expression. Moreover, the Sea Terminal is a proof of the momentum with which the port in Gdynia was created, as, despite some slight functional changes, it has been functioning until today. The building was entered in the register of monuments in the preserved state after the destruction of World War II and also when it no longer served as a passenger terminal.

In 2010 the local government of Gdynia decided to create a new cultural institution in the city - the Emigration Museum - to commemorate the huge number of people who have permanently left Poland. It was also an excellent opportunity to reuse the historic building. The lack of an appropriate function of the Sea Terminal and the prospects for its sensible use made the city authorities agree with the user, i.e. the Port of Gdynia Authority, to use part of the Terminal to house the newly created Museum.

Due to the historic character of the building, the design works were preceded by extensive historical and conservation research. Various conservation studies were commissioned by the City of Gdynia, which were based on research of the object and analysis of very rich photographic documentation⁶.

In the conservation recommendations, one of the main postulates was to rebuild a part of the northwestern corner, destroyed during World War II.

Based on the conservation guidelines, a conceptual design for the adaptation of the building was prepared by architect Andrzej Bomerski. The author anticipated the reconstruction of the original body of the building⁷, but proposed to combine the conservative approach in some elements with a very contemporary shape of the northern elevation. This was a clear departure from the conservative conservation guidelines formulated in the documentation. The faithful reconstruction with the reconstruction of the reliefs of the eagles was to cover the front elevation,

⁵ Decision of 24 April 1990., entry no. 1084, current number in the register: 1307.

⁶ The most important studies were: Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., *Wstępne wytyczne konserwatorskie dotyczące układu funkcjonalno-przestrzennego Dworca Morskiego i Magazynu Tranzytowego w Gdyni w celu adaptacji na Muzeum Emigracji*, mps. Gdynia 2010; Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., Kriegseisen A., Huk-Malinowska I., *Dokumentacja konserwatorska Dworca Morskiego oraz piętra Magazynu Tranzytowego w Gdyni*, mps. Gdynia 2011; Urzędu Miasta Gdyni. The studies were commissioned by Gdynia Municipal Office.

⁷ Bomerski A., *Analiza przystosowania budynku Dworca Morskiego w Gdyni do funkcji Muzeum Emigracji*, Gdynia 2011; a study commissioned by Gdynia Municipal Office; Bomerski A., *Koncepcja dostosowania budynków Dworca Morskiego oraz magazynów Tranzytowych w Gdyni ul. Polska 1 do potrzeb ekspozycyjnych Muzeum Emigracji*, Gdynia 2011.

due to its symbolic meaning, and deformed since the war. In the design concept assuming the restoration of the historical mass, apart from the reconstruction of the façade, the designer proposed a quite contemporary form for the reconstructed fragment of the side elevation. It was assumed to be made in a modern steel structure with maximum glazing, opening an excellent view of the sea (Fig. 3). Inside the building, in the reconstructed cubic capacity, strings of rooms and two levels of cantilever galleries were designed. The aesthetic goal was associated with very serious structural problems. The use of a reinforced concrete structure, as originally designed, proved impossible because the static system was permanently damaged by a bomb explosion. Thus, a specially developed, lighter steel structure was used (Fig. 4), which made it possible to finish the surface in such a way that it did not visually differ from the original parts of the reinforced concrete structure (Fig. 5).



Fig. 3 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, the reconstructed facade and glass-panel side elevation, 2017, photo by B. Ponikiewski



Fig. 4 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, finishing the steel construction of the galleries inside the main hall, 2014, photo by R. Hirsch

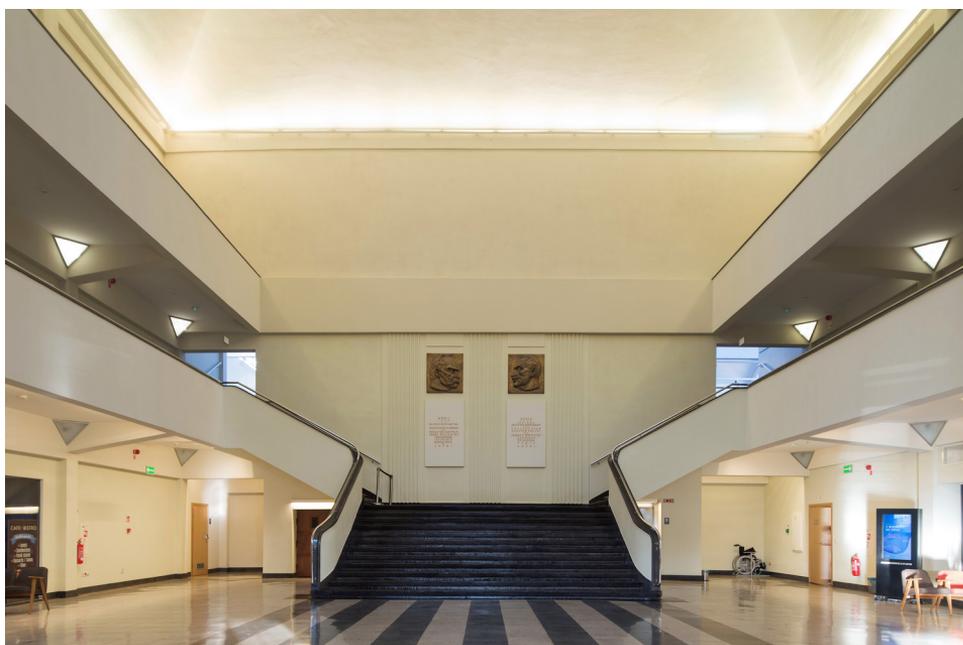


Fig. 5 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, main hall interior after reconstruction of the gallery on the left-hand side (with steel structure) and interior decoration, 2017. photo by B. Ponikiewski

In the adaptation project, the distribution of museum functions was adjusted to the historical space to the maximum extent. The hall and adjoining rooms are the most accessible area, with offices, educational rooms, a restaurant, bookshops, etc. The museum exhibition space is located on the second floor, in the former passenger check-in hall. In order to separate the exhibition part from the structure of the monument, an independent, modular cubature was designed to accommodate the exhibition space. Thanks to this, all installations have been placed in the new structure and the hall structure is still visible. Along the entire northern elevation a wide corridor was left, from which you can exit onto an oblong terrace. In order to demonstrate the spaciousness of the former interior and the cradle structure, the first two spans of the check-in hall contain a hall (Fig. 6). Located under the check-in hall, the warehouse remains used by the port.

In 2012, on the basis of the previous concept and conservation guidelines, a construction project was carried out. A detailed design was also made, including accurate drawings of historical interior design elements, based on archival materials, which were carefully reconstructed. Two relief eagles, once decorating the front elevation, which were removed by the occupant during the war, were also reconstructed. The adaptation works were completed in early 2014.



Fig. 6 Gdynia. Sea Terminal, interior of the passenger check-in hall with inserted modules to house a permanent exhibition of the Museum of Emigration (dark structure in the background), 2014, photo by R. Hirsch

Conclusions

The opening of the Emigration Museum in the adapted building of the former Sea Terminal took place in 2015. As a result of the project, the body of the building regained its original outline after about 70 years. The architect's vision, with the reconstructed front elevation and the modern plane of the main hall side elevation, seems to have gained widespread acceptance. The project was awarded in 2016 with the title "Monument well taken care of", in the category "Adaptation of historic buildings", in a competition organized annually by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. Positive evaluations of the investment are also common, expressed by many specialist conservators from Poland and abroad visiting the facility.

In the publication about the Emigration Museum, published after the opening of the museum, a very positive assessment of the whole undertaking was expressed by the researcher of the architecture of Gdynia and co-author of the conservation guidelines Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, who stated that: "As a result of the works carried out, both the interiors of the historic Sea Terminal, as well as its facade and the remaining elevations have obtained their perfect form, almost identical to that of the 1930s. Not only was the intended, perfect architectural and functional effect achieved, but also an important and very valuable part of the heritage of Gdynia modernism was restored. The reconstruction of the Sea Terminal and its adaptation for the needs of the Emigration Museum is in line with the excellent achievements of the Polish conservationist thought, thus finding its permanent place in both Polish and world culture"⁸.

Of course, one can put forward a thesis that this acceptance is partly due to a certain consistency of the form of the modernist building (although historic one), with the introduction of modern architectural solutions, which are not completely alien to the style of this place.

Analyzing the investment carried out from the conservation point of view and without questioning the general, positive opinion on the realization, it is worth pointing out some elements of the project, which, from the point of view of conservation theories, can be a starting point for discussion and solutions that perhaps could have been carried out in a better way.

The theoretical discussions may, for example, be triggered by the treatment of the architectural form of the Sea Terminal, shaped for several decades as a result of reconstruction at the end of the war. In the project of the Emigration Museum, it was decided to reconstruct the front elevation, without any indication of the extent of the interference. The side elevation was treated quite differently, reconstructing the outlines of the body, but introducing a completely modern architectural expression. This is undoubtedly a certain lack of consistency, which can to some extent be justified by the original shape of the architectural form of the building and the different exposition of individual elevations. Nevertheless, this solution may be the subject of conservation discussions.

In the interior of the main hall, on the other hand, it was decided to maximally reconstruct the appearance of the 1930s. The galleries destroyed during the war (Fig. 4) and elements of the

⁸ Sołtysik M. J., *Przywrócone dziedzictwo. Od Dworca Morskiego do Muzeum Emigracji*, [in:] *Przestrzenie emigracji. Dworzec Morski i infrastruktura emigracyjna w Gdyni*. Gdynia 2018, p. 193.

decoration, such as plaques, doors, lamps, balustrades, etc., were very carefully reconstructed based on photographs. However, it was also decided not to differentiate the authentic and reconstructed parts. It is worth noting, however, that many of the preserved original elements of the building's interior, e.g. the floor of the hall, the finishing of the stairs and part of the wall surface have been restored.

In the course of carrying out detailed designs and the realization of the project itself, it was necessary to interfere in the authentic elements of the structure. For example, the need to meet the requirements for smoke removal forced the introduction of smoke extraction flaps in the main hall glazed panel ceiling, which entailed the partial removal of the lower layer of glazing in the ceiling and replacing it with openwork elements. The new elements of the technical infrastructure, which appeared on the roof in the form of quite massive devices and installations, could not be fully concealed. The lack of recognition of some of the authentic elements of the building, e.g. skylights, resulted in the fact that their preservation was not taken into account in the design and they could not be protected during the execution stage.

The above mentioned issues only confirm how complicated are the problems connected with the adaptation of a historical building. The development of the conservation documentation and the construction project is not a guarantee of undisputed solution of conservation dilemmas and avoidance of some mistakes.

Moreover, comparing the conservation documentation developed before the realization of the project with the final solution, it can be stated that the final architectural effect differs significantly from the initial conservation objectives, which were very conservative and assumed a reconstruction maximally reproducing the historical form. The conservation documentation of the Sea Terminal from 2011 contained guidelines for the revalorization of individual elevations, which postulated the restoration of the state from before the destruction during World War II⁹. Solutions deviating from the guidelines, e.g. a glass side façade and a glass, cantilever platform at the waterfront, were proposed by the architect and did not comply with the conservation documentation. However, they were forced by the designer and the investor, who wanted to give the building at least partially modern expression. These forms were accepted by the conservation office in the course of the agreement procedure. It seems to have had a positive effect.

The transformation of the Sea Terminal into the Emigration Museum was not carried out on the basis of one coherent conservation concept, but it respects the basic principles of monument protection. This case shows that the adaptations sometimes require a non-doctrinal and flexible approach. It seems that in conservation studies and guidelines, the aim should be to determine the values and elements to be preserved and to protect them unconditionally. However, an unconditional reconstruction of destroyed elements is not always necessary. Adaptation is in many cases an activity on the borderline between conservation and architecture, that is, it can

⁹ Sołtysik M. J., Orchowska-Smolińska A., Kriegseisen A., Huk-Malinowska I., *Dokumentacja konserwatorska Dworca Morskiego oraz piętra Magazynu Tranzytowego w Gdyni*, mps. Gdynia 2011. Fig. 2 Side (northern) elevation of the Passenger Hall, contains guidelines regarding reconstruction of the destroyed elevation, including detailed description of elements to be re-integrated, in accordance with the pre-war state.

contain a serious dose of creation. In case of this type of a project, the role of the designer is extremely important - their knowledge and sensitivity. The conservator should guard the basic principles of monument protection, not eliminating the possibility of architectural creation, which can be enriching also for a historical object.

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