Regional policy and homosocial structures

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Introduction

This paper presents a study on regional development and innovation systems. The theoretical points of departure rest on human geographical and sociological perspectives. We focus on gender relations on regional and organizational levels and scrutinize the interrelations between these levels. The regional policy in Sweden today is characterised by a strongly emphasized governance model, i.e. an orientation towards networks and cluster initiatives. The regional development programme of the county of Värmland 2004-2007 was a template for this policy. It rested upon some basic principles such as partnership engagements, networking, EU-specific linguistic usage, and superstar rhetoric. But this seemingly innovative regional policy has roots in traditional industrial society (iron work and paper mills). The network planning model gives the opportunity for informal social structures to re-enter the area for regional planning.

Gender equality in regional government policy was challenged by the presence of a homosocial shadow (seamy side) structure such as secret networks and clubs on the outside of the official organisations. Networks were also important in the historical reproduction of traditional power structures, male dominance and hegemony. One conclusion is that networking can be used mutually as a progressive and as a conservative tool among actors in the innovation policy.

This is a story about the process of formulation a regional development programme of *Sustainable/ Growth (2004-2007*) for the county of Värmland, a county that is small and in relation to the Capital region is peripherally located at the border of Norway.

State of the Arts

The starting point for the program can be traced back to the negotiations for EU membership during the 1990s which gradually gave greater opportunity for the regional level to interpret the objectives and design for regional policy. Thus, in Sweden, there has been a transition from a state driven equality-based allocation policy based on an idea to equalize unequal spatial conditions, to a regional growth policy that both allows and encourages spatial differences. It has also been a shift from a top down policy to a bottom-up policy. This has changed the democratic arena. Undeniably, a bottom-up policy would make it possible for more people to participate in the decisions. But in terms of regional policy this is not necessarily so. While the Swedish parliament and the government managed to achieve gender balance and thereby improve the democratic composition at the national level, the boards that were built to implement regional development programs were put together on other grounds. As the regional organizations were to propose their candidates the representative democracy has been eliminated. There is a difference between a decision model based on elections by the people and a model where there are various organizations that choose the decision makers. By the former we can demand accountability and to vote away if they do not fulfil their task. We can not do this with the latter.

Partnerships and networks as an alternative to traditional democracy
New regional governance means that partnership, evaluation committees and decision groups will strive for a good representation of key stakeholders and organizations in the region. When the composition of these groups was clear, it appeared during the first years of Swedish EU membership, that the groups became strikingly male-dominated. It seemed that women neither as main actors of their respective organizations nor that their organisations were represented (*Mål 5b Västra Sverige. Slututvärdering*, 2001)

Today, after extensive criticism, the sex ratio in most regional groups and partnerships are relatively equal, even in Värmland. But gender is not just a question of a quantitative representation. It is also about the position of power in the groups. It is about what mandate to participate women have and which networks they have support of and access to. It is one of the key issues in our analysis.

A distinctive feature of regional development policy is that it is governed by networks (see Hedlund & Montin 2009; Hudson 2005; Jessop 2004). These networks consist of actors and relationships. All partners are considered to have equal strength in the network and hence the same power. In fact, we note that there often is a hierarchy within the networks in the sense that some actors may be more important than others and that some relationships are more frequent than others. It turn out to be a built-in instability in networks that also means that (informal) shifts of power among actors can occur, shifts that are not always apparent to outsiders and often not even for all the actors in the network. This means that mobile *power centre* develops within the networks (Westholm, 1999). This makes it unclear where decisions actually are taken, informal groups can be easily developed and they can change and move without any real transparency. Another characteristic of networks is that they may occur in many different guises and sometimes completely unknown to other networks and nationals.

New language for Regional Development
The redirection also introduced new decisions and new language. The concepts of clusters and innovation have over the past decade, both in research and in the regional policy, had a major impact in the discussion of what creates a so-called competitive business sector and economic growth. Regional policy is no longer based on the idea that competitiveness is created by low cost of natural resources and cheap labour. Economic growth is dependent of the regions' ability to use its unique skills and to be creative.

Clusters and innovation has become two of the linguistic tools to work with (see Carlsson 2000; Christensen & Kempinsky 2004; Edquist 2000; Nilsson & Uhlin 2002; Malmberg 2002). Cluster initiatives mean collaboration between companies and with actors from the universities and public organisations in the region. Another tool is the so-called "clustering engine" that creates arenas in which businesses and other stakeholders can meet and exchange knowledge. This new language had a clear impact in the Värmland Regional Growth Programme for the period 2004-2007.

Aspiration for superstar Region
An other feature of the regional development policy is the desire to be bigger (see Perrons 2004). The regional growth programs express a general desire to grow, not only economically but also in terms of population. There is an ambition of many regions to become part of a network of large regions. Many Swedish regions are unlikely to be able to join the network of global city regions (Global Cities) but the aim is to be part of a network of metropolitan regions. The small-and medium-sized cities want to form alliances in a European network of urban areas. This encourage a network hierarchy where the primary objective is to become a node in as important network as possible. Swedish regions are trying to become larger by creating attractive environments for their research and teaching university through the development of Triple Helix configurations together with public and private partners. This desire, we also find in the Värmland Regional Growth Programme.

Research focus and Methods

Sustainable Growth in Värmland was the name of the Regional Growth Programme (RGP) for the period 2004-2007. How did it happen that the regional actors came to the conclusion that the main growing potential would come from the three clusters Paper Province, Steel & Engineering Industry and Compare? Which actors participated in the process and who had influence on the final product?

Our aim was to scrutinize the regional growth programme with gender analytical tools. How could the process behind, what became the most important innovation clusters in Värmland, be understood, who were the important actors and how were they organized and by whom were their networks and partnerships compounded?

Our findings are the result of a study based on interviews among a number of women and some men who took part in the program development process. Their interpretation of what happened during the process pointed us to investigate networks, and this also led us to make some historical analysis to make comparison with historical network society. We also made observations and document analysis.

We thereby studied the process from historical, geographical and social perspectives. Of particular interest to us was to understand why gender equality was given such a modest role in the program despite the fact that the directives were clear. Gender equality would be a horizontal objective and permeate the entire work. It was initially explicitly formulated: *Regardless of gender, we have equal opportunities. To achieve the goals of gender equality mainstreaming strategy should be applied. This means that a gender perspective must be incorporated in all decision making at all levels and in all stages of the process, by the actors normally involved in the decision-making* (County Counsil, 2003, p 9 our translation).

Findings

In the historical review we found two types of networks in Värmland traditions. One has developed as a response to a society that puts new requirements for citizenship, such as crisis time-dependent associations, unions, road and fire associations, interest groups, economic associations, consumer associations, etc. Taken together, these can be called social movement organizations. What is peculiar to them is that they gathered people from the popular classes at the turn of the 20th century in order to organize themselves to meet the emerging industrial society. They were thus a reactive kind of organizations (Gräslund Berg in Forsberg & Lindgren (red) 2010).

Reactive networks transforms with a focus on concrete issues and form loose associations of individuals who choose to join the network. The networks have come and gone and their reproductive ability has ceased when the substantive importance waned. These networks have not been given the status of core network and therefore they did not become important actors in contemporary regional development policy.

The second form of networks has its roots further back in time and has a clear pro-active nature. We found these networks in the upper layer of the iron work and paper mill society. This was the future elites of the county that was expanding their power base. Here we find nobility, clergy, industry owners, military and civilian officials.

The proactive networks expanded its power through the establishment of Värmland Savings Bank. Leading representatives exploited their contacts and loyalties of already existing network to ensure its success in new areas. Contrary to the re-active networks, these pro-active networks require, as a rule, that you are appointed to join and their influence on regional development policy seems to maintain.

We have made acquaintance with the county's current proactive network and its links to the regional partnership. There are certain features in common with the historical networks, particularly the importance of the seamy side venues. Even today we can see that the elite from various key activities in the community are linked together in more or less visible networks. There is also a striking consistency between the leaders of the partnership and other proactive network.

At the heart of the networks we find mainly male actors who themselves possess or have strong and close relations to the power-bearing positions. In these groups the homosocial core has its power base. Here the reproduction and consolidation of power on regional development are manifested. They gather together in breakfast, lunch or dinner meetings. They are invited to the same hunting, freemasonry or rotary clubs.

Meeting places like this comes and goes. Some municipal officials and leaders can unite behind a strong person. They received much criticism for some specific support to some companies. That is how 'brothermoney' are distributed. But many officials today are not at all like that.

We note that although the idea of partnership is based on non-hierarchical and inclusive network of equal partners they do not work in practice as a policy tool to break the previous power structure but rather may strengthen existing structures and actors. In turn, this means that new activities and potential economic clusters are difficult to develop. In the historical analysis, we thus obtained support for our hypothesis that the durable social structures are infiltrating the regional policy today.

One striking aspect is the presence of freemasons in the regional policy, a persistent and homosocial structure. Contrary to historical tradition, they now tend to act on the seamy side of public partnership, maybe because of the idea that Sweden is a country of gender equality. Our question about the issue of power and influence of women is not unwarranted.

What also seems clear is that network based planning gives reasons for actors to gather in the seamy side of their own organizations. The positive analyses of the networks as Putnam (1996) advocates seem somewhat naive in the light of our analysis. The proactive networks and their male and female actors create with historical "necessity" the image of a coherent story of Värmland with bias towards the old industries. We ask ourselves what´s left outside.

We even analysed some networks that can be seen as a modern version of reactive networks in the region. We choose one of the typically female-dominated entrepreneurial networks of the so called wellness industry. The choice of this network was based on the fact that different groups that worked up proposals for the *Sustainable Growth Programme* had identified the health and welfare as a possible innovation cluster even though no representatives from that sector (mainly women) gained acceptance for their business ideas when they applied for financial support. Neither did they have any position in the regional growth discussion. The analysis showed that these networks did not overlap with the influential networks and did not have any power relationships that could facilitate cluster development. Moreover, these networks were usually reactive and had not as a principal aim to promote their positions. In our interviews with women entrepreneurs the concept of growth in regional development were problematized.

It seems that too tight homosocial networks tend to lead to a stagnation and business *as usual*. It is a kind of path dependence. New industries that have no access to the right channels may not get the support they need to grow. This applies more to female-dominated industries. One factor that plays a role in this context is that these women seldom have access to a male or a senior mentor of the type that young men acknowledge that they have when they become elected to male networks such as the freemasons.

Contributions and implications

Our results points at some theoretical reflections. They are not unique for this region. There are theoretical supports for a homosocial bias in decision making on various levels (Lindgren 1996,1999). At the same time this example has its specific spatial flavour. The general structures and processes take shape of a somewhat local and regional manner. We structure our gender analysis on networks with a geographical and a social focus.

Local elites
The network model has increased the possibility for informal networks to have influence in the formal decision-making systems. In key functions people with good knowledge of Värmland are required - and these people are easiest found in informal networks. Official networks that do not overlap important informal networks have limited opportunities to get represented. One example of such a network is the organisation *Resource for Women* which has not managed to take place in partnerships or in other important groups with impact on the development of the *Sustainable Growth Program*.

Despite the idea of a flat organization, network governance and decentralization there is still a spatial hierarchy, with the municipalities in the Karlstad region on the top. In relation to more remote municipalities, the former has a privilege when it comes to formulating problems. *"Karlstad is the locomotive, no doubt about that. If not Karlstad works then there will be problems in the rest of the county. "*

Among the other municipalities in the county (all in all 16 municipalities) there were few who were able to assert themselves and obtain key functions in the governance organisation. It is from the regional centre the story of Värmland is constructed. There are only a few strong (men) from the more peripheral municipalities that have had the opportunity to be part of the most influential group. There is a constellation of power that is both formal and informal. It was easy for all respondents in our study to name who were included in the informal leading group and from which municipalities they came.

Development of a monotopian space
The European regional policy - which also influenced the Swedish national policy for regional development and growth - can be summarized as striving to construct a *monotopia* , ie. a society that does not allow diversity, but who present a monotonous story. It is a one-dimensional society built up with the help of a political discourse that seeks to reproduce itself through hegemony and a passive acceptance of the overall story of how regional development is created. (Jensen & Richardson 2004, p 179)
There is not much cooperation between municipalities in the Karlstad region, either. There is a special culture in Karlstad. It is believed that there is a underdeveloped country around. Policy is not characterized by cooperation; instead it is a battle between companies and different municipalities.

Is it possible to say that Värmland is building a monotopia? By analyzing the interviews, we can conclude that there are some essential features of the regional development that can be said to be a part of such a building. In particular, the prime innovation systems are mainly based on old structures

that hardly govern the global economic realities any more, but that still affects the social system and social networks.

These structures consist of:
- Family based relationships
- Place bound social capital
- Regional gender contracts

The informants testify the importance of kinship for position and access. Belonging to a Värmland family is an important gateway to the informal networks. By right relationships, even women may have the opportunity to some important position. Informants agree that Värmland is a small and closed county and that everyone would like to know who the others are. The iron and paper based industrial structure has also brought a specific self-esteem, called Jantelag. You shall not stick out and do things that are not in accordance with local tradition. This culture also has a clear gender structure with clear markers for each gender. Economics and politics is not an area for women, their roles are more linked to health, care and altruistic work. We found that family relationships existed in the historical process that built up the place-bound capital of Värmland. The power could be inherited and family relations within the highest levels of society were frequent and often guaranteed by marriage and inheritance.

It is more family here than in other counties. I have not lived in all counties but I have been working and living in some..... It is more family here. Here you are a relative if you are a cousin, second cousin or third cousin, and many have lived here very long. It is deeply rooted; it plays a huge role.... Because family is important and if I have a business and you are from the family it means that I can rely more on you in various contexts. Blood is thicker than water, and this blood reaches very far out. It is so very much relatives.

The place-bound social capital means that people are defined by a spatial position. By coming from a specific farm or a specific place follows a certain social status. By contrast, if you are descent from outside the county your social capital can be challenged. It is not so useful (especially for women) to come from for instance Uppsala (an old university town) and be intellectual, as one respondent put it.

We're extremely proud to be from Värmland. If Värmland had its own flag, it had been hoisted of course. And ... I'm more from Värmland, the more relatives I have here. People do not say that they come from Karlstad, or Årjäng, they say they are from Värmland. All understand what that is. It guarantees something. It is some sort of an epithet.

Closely associated with the place-bound social capital is the form that gender contracts take shape in the Värmland municipalities (See Forsberg 2001; Forsberg 2004). Gender contracts can be described as the informal regulations that govern the everyday relations between men and women. While there is a general gender patterns that can be distinguished regardless of geographic environment and historical era, there are local and regional variations to this pattern. These contracts are designed by the various economic systems as well as the local economy in a historical perspective. They survive because they are practiced while they are challenged in the context of economic and social transformations.

In Värmland, these gender contracts have some characteristics in common even if they vary among municipalities on a couple of indicators. The common features have to do with traditional gender relations; in the labour market, in politics as well as in the family.

All of these social structures have become increasingly important in the context of the network model developed as a principle for regional development. As the social and informal networks of significance is mostly homosocial, the formal social networks (partnerships) also becomes homosocial - even if entitled to a Värmland family of importance and a corresponding place-identity may give you some entrance even if you are a woman.

Monotopia becomes Homotopia
So far, we can assume that there is a link between the construction of a monotopia and the homosocial informal networks and that the monotopian strategy is homotopian. The Värmland regional process, therefore, builds a homotopian regional development.

Our informants regret that there is so little public debate and civic interest in regional policy issues. The paradigm of consensus is strong and not challenged. The conflicts that exist within the economic system and within the clusters do never become public. Thus it never appear in public debates in the

region that there exist a competition about which strategy for development that shall be supported and strengthened and that the chosen strategy can be contested.

It's very seldom someone stands up and says no, we certainly do not think this was a good idea. It's really a shame. I am a friend of constructive conflict. But everyone is so amazingly afraid. It must be consensus. But then there is nothing. If you shall agree on everything, then you reach just a small piece. For the lowest common denominator is so small. But people think that conflict, you are almost quarreling. But I think that there are these situations that give birth to new ideas.

The monotopian region created by the development of a *monotopian rationality* construct the notion of a region free of conflicts. In a county of the size of Värmland (280 000) there is a small group of people who act in the regional development context. Värmland - and for that matter other counties in Sweden with the same approach – developed an EU language, taken from the ESDP operations (European Spatial Development Programme). Using this language, the regional actors were held together, while those unfamiliar with the use of concepts such as additionality, subsidiarity, added value, priorities were kept outside. One could call this the language of monotopia, or homotopia when it is also dominated by words belonging to a unilateral homosocial environment.

It makes it very difficult and many women do not recognize themselves in the milieu. They really do not do that. Not even in the language used. It's so strange to talk that way.

The homotopian region is constructed by this language with the help of specific concepts and expressions containing a particular way of looking at the region in question. The major actors own the power to define what are clusters, innovation systems or networks. The networks also tend to be self reflective. Those who are very close connected to a network may fail to see what is outside. Women have difficulty entering into the male-dominated networks, not for its glass ceiling but for its mirrored walls. Mirror walls prevent the network from finding "suitable women" with the right qualifications, even if they are trying.

I have heard people say with pride in their voice, 'I have employed 10 people without having to formulate a single job posting'. If you don't belong to a network if is not easy to become integrated to the local economy.

The eternal question of power
Värmland is our study area. But we believe that Värmland certainly do not differ from other regions in Sweden in terms of concentration of power to certain groups, which have different compositions depending on the business tradition and on natural resources in the region.

   However, we believe that our results differ in a crucial way from the results shown in a national study of the power elite. The study *The Power of Gender - men and women in the Swedish power elite in the 2000s* shows how the elite dominate culture, politics, media, businesses, organizations, science and management (Göransson (red) 2006). This is exciting reading for everyone interested in issues of power, and especially for those who want to learn more about women's (missing) position among the power elite.

   The national empirical data has minor correlation with our Värmland case in terms of membership in the elites. With the exception of individuals such as the County Governor and the Vice Chancellor very few people in Värmland belong to the national elite. Data indicates that the national elites seem to be increasingly closed tubes. You get educated into a tube and then you advance within the hierarchy. Mobility among elites tends to decrease and it seems as if one must be borned or married into the elite in order to meet the requirements for advancement.

   This description is perhaps appropriate at the national and global level. At the regional level, however, such a description seems to be directly misleading. What we found is rather that the informal networks in the seamy side can bring together policy makers from various fields and thus overcome different power bases. This difference between the national and regional level can be a question of method. Surveys among the national elite may not have been able to capture the seamy side venues. We assume, however, that the national elites also have meeting places in the seamy side. Therefore, the sealed tubes between them may be only an illusion. Regardless of that it is evident in our study those contacts between networks are frequent and that there are overlaps between power bases at the regional level.

   The national study also reports other results that contradict our data. The authors tends to conclude that women in the national elite have a considerable social capital through networks and that: *Network*

capital is a social capital that the men have less of and which can possibly compensate for the negative equity to be a woman in the elite (s. 223). It is likely that the survey method may cause results of this nature. Another plausible interpretation is that women tend to notice, at a higher degree than men, the people they need (because of their effort) in order to get hold of information. Men tend to get information effortlessly, so to speak, in the environments which they by nature have everyday access to (Lindgren 1996). Previous research supports predominantly our scepticism about the results, which does not mean that we don't realize that women are eager to build their networks (see Kanter 1988; Wahl & Höök 1998; Kvande & Rasmussen 1994; Holgersson 2003)

The elected and the anointed
The situation in Värmland and in the Nation also have strong similarities, for instance women's access to power positions. There are women in politics and in positions that require clear representative and appointment procedures, while they decrease drastically when informal peer selection methods are used, as in the private sector. It is therefore not a surprise that Värmland can have such a homosocial regional planning while there is an unusually large group of women with high and central positions in the public functions (Eduards 1992). One shall not be misled to believe that the number of women in public and policy necessarily involves a greater equality in society. The significance of politics declines as the economy gathers more and more space. And the *"women's resistance"* of the private sector's leadership will become an informal model for other areas as the growth of the neo-liberal discourse rather discreetly is invading an increasing number of spheres of influence.

A looser form of governing, where a broader spectrum of actors is involved and where actors representing companies, `the market`, are given a special status, goes hand in hand with the increased status of economic growth´ as an overarching political goal. (Rönnlund 2010)

A new masculinity?
Connell & Wood (2005) note that the global influence is affecting the gender order of hegemonic masculinity in a way that counteracts the gender equality discourse in Sweden and Scandinavia. The transnational companies operating on the global market will have influence on the situation in peripheral regions. Maybe even to such an extent that those peripheral regions are aware of these changes long before the metropolises do.

Hegemonic forms of masculinity in modernity are historically derived from the growth of industrial capitalism and the growth of imperialism (ibid. p. 348).

As the global ideas, venues, capital and networks are becoming more important we, like Connell & Wood, can assume the emergence of a new *transnational business masculinity that* can knock out the gender equality from the agenda. On the other hand, globalization is a very turbulent and unstable phenomenon in which many centres of power manifest themselves and where the outcome is by no means given. The countries of Europe are democracies, certain laws and reforms, including gender equality, must be in place for the membership to be approved. However, it is a distinction between moral systems and the informal and real organizing as we tried to show. Much of the "unification" that constitute globalization which influences the gender hierarchy, will also sneak (be transformed) into a discursive packaging that starts a new gender organizing long before the gender equality gatekeepers have time to react (Rönnblom, 2008).

We can identify a hegemonic masculinity in Värmland and it probably has much in common with the old industrial society. But maybe it has some new ingredients in relation to networking. The wires stretched to global nodes, both in terms of global markets and contacts with Brussels language, but also in the homosocial networks, such as the Freemasons, which moreover has been a global institution from the start. A brother can as easily be found in Brussels as in Karlstad.

What we found in Värmland is perhaps an up-and-coming form of "trans-network masculinity", a masculinity which is involved in all relevant networks irrespective of a direct benefit.

We are talking here about a masculinity seeking different types of supportive contacts in a turbulent and uncertain surrounding, rather than about identification with a particular group. This means that you can play around with the rituals, without any ambition to make a Freemason or Rotary career. It can even be a bit embarrassing to be a member sometimes, but the meetings are valuable if the right people are represented and the time that it consumes is compensated by a better orientation in the power landscape.

You can build trust for your own person and show loyalty to those who have power by flowing in and out of the major networks (checking status and people) and hence become visible by showing respect

for different categories of achievements. This can be described as a socially skilled representative of a new "doing gender" - practice. Through a sensibility for the masculinity lowest common denominator in various male groups, the hegemony can be secured. This practice leads to safer orientation in a world of complexity where long wires and long-range networks are attached to strong nodes in the stable tradition of roots.

   Women work in the same way as men, but are repelled away from the male homosocial groupings. Women's homosocial variations may be a strategy but is not a solution. Women on top have both men and women around her (intentionally or not). Men more often have only male colleagues (the industrial boards). Women are thus building   more diverse collegial groups than men (Göransson (red) 2006). Perhaps women are recruiting staff with different experiences (men and women) and avoid yes-men? It is evident that the uncertainty and insecurity at the top tend to advocate like-minded single-sex context, nevertheless, women leaders seem to believe that they can secure their position and do well with a diversity strategy (Kanter 1988). Are they right?

The future of regional policy
We have in this study analyzed the innovation efforts in the Värmland regional development policy, based on how they can be judged from a gender perspective. We note that equality and growth was seen as separate policies rather than reciprocally supportive efforts. From our studies of networks and seamy side structures, we ask the question how the region's actors can make use of the potential of integrating growth and gender equality policies.

   During the project numerous contacts with key organizations and networks have been taken and we have integrated our topics in contacts with regional actors. Perhaps this interactive approach has contributed to an increased attention for the need of gender mainstreaming in regional development and that the project thereby have played a role underway in the region. The new Regional Development Document gives support for such conclusion. Here the women-dominated Wellness-and-Care sector has been appointed as a possible innovation system.

   The regional rhetoric used in the network-driven regional policy is not sensitive to the diversity of stories told in a region. The tree male dominated Clusters for Steel, Forest and Computer industry are more of the same in the historical perspective in Värmland. Two of them have dominated since the golden days of iron works and paper mills; the third one is the cluster for a new production technology that is profitable for the historical clusters and their future development. This is the result of homosocial understanding in networks of power and their successful reproduction over time.

   But reality can best be understood as ambiguous and disparate. Värmland, like other regions, has a choice to make. The lack of conflict is what Chantal Mouffe calls "pain-free politics", *led by a closed circle of elite white males who enjoy power and do not want to give it up* (Mouffe 2000: 112 and Rönnlund 2010). Either they continue to build on homotopian stories with the help of the male seamy side structures, or they start writing new, heterotopian descriptions of their region where there is room for weak links and network bridges. That could be a strategy where a gender analysis of regional innovation could fit in and sustainable development for the majority of citizens could be reached.

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