



## ROLE OF CULTURAL AND ARTISTIC FESTIVALS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETIES (CASE STUDY: TAR AVA FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL IN SHIRVAN)

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### ABSTRACT

*North Khorasan region, with the coexistence of different Iranian ethnic groups, has unique characteristics compared to most regions of the country. This cultural pluralism also exists in the way of life of the people and their various artistic activities so that in the various arts, from local games to local music, from local foods to the way of covering and local clothes, it has a unique capacity and can have a positive effect on the development of this region.*

*In different regions of North Khorasan, because of the ethnic and cultural density and the prevailing artistic expressions, holding cultural and artistic festivals can corroborate various social and economic effects by using the existing capacity and recognizing their bottlenecks. With a case study of Shirvan as a city with various cultural and artistic capacities, and with a view to the holding of the Tar Ava local music festival, this research analyzes the effects above and draws a vision of these capacities in the development of the entire region.*

**Keywords:** *Transformation of societies, Cultural and artistic festival, Cultural value, Shirvan music festival, Indigenous culture*

### INTRODUCTION

If culture is a set of beliefs and thoughts of the people of different lands, then art is an aesthetical manifestation of the same thoughts and beliefs. One of the best options for introducing the culture of a society is to hold cultural and artistic festivals.

These festivals can occur in different branches of artistic expression. Holding music festivals centered on indigenous culture can be effective in the development of a society economically, culturally, and politically. Considering the large presence of local and Folk musicians in the North Khorasan region, especially Shirvan as a local and Folk musical pole, holding such festivals is more important than ever. By examining documents and interviewing different groups, including musicians and local and government officials, we can arrive at various analyses of the effects of holding this event and finally examine the cultural developments of the society, as the research's point. This research will analyze these developments by examining the event of the

cultural and artistic festival with a focus on Folk and local music titled Tar Ava Music Festival, held in Shirvan in 2023.

### *Research question*

This research studies the performance of cultural and artistic festivals in the evolution of societies. Hence, the fundamental question of this research is: what role do cultural and artistic festivals play in the cultural evolution of societies?

It has studied key concepts, such as culture, indigenous culture, and creative cultural industries, in order to answer the research questions.

### *Research background*

Internal research on artistic and cultural festivals and their various economic, cultural, social, and political effects, etc., have mostly focused on creative industries and cultural industries. This research discusses those types of research that have addressed the cultural aspects and cultural values resulting from cultural and artistic programs. In an article entitled "*Reviewing the Position of Creative Cultural Industries and its Relationship with the Promotion of Cultural Capital in Iran*," Sephernia (2013) paid attention to the importance of cultural capital and cultural consumption. It analyzes the creative industries and cultural industries, the relationship between these two, and it analyzes the changes in the pattern of cultural consumption and the development and promotion of cultural capital by enumerating the characteristics of creative and cultural industries, the type of cultural consumption, and investment in cultural industries. He then tried to provide solutions by enumerating internal problems. In his article titled "*Reviewing the Place of Cultural Industries and creative industries in the Economic Development of Culture and Art*", Sadat Mousavi Lor (2018) explained hard industries and cultural industries and messages and introduced creative industries. Then, by introducing the cultural economy and the creative city, he discussed the variety of products and services and listed the ways to create them through cultural activities. By mentioning the reasons in the conclusion part, he has listed three reasons for turning Iran into a hub of cultural and artistic industries. In the article *analyzing the function of the social and cultural structures stimulating and developing the creative city of music, a case study of Sanandaj*, by finding commonalities between music and the creative city and enumerating the views of the theory of the creative city, Mirzaei (2013) discusses music tourism and the function of music in the programs of the creative city.

In an article titled "*Cultural Value and Cultural Policy, Evidence from the World of Live Music*," Adam Behr and Matt Brennan (2016) dealt with cultural values and cultural policies. This research has discussed the value of live music festivals with a case study of the Queen's Hall in Edinburgh. Regarding the policymakers in culture and art, it has addressed issues such as the value of participating in live music programs and the development of research on the non-economic value of live music by policymakers and stakeholders. It has discussed the intrinsic value versus instrumental value in the section on art and the creation of cultural values.

In an article titled "*Impact of Festivals on Live Music in the Netherlands: A Thematic Analysis*," Martijn Mulder, Erik Hitters & and Paul Rutten (2020) concluded that creating festivals in pop music can compensate for the economic effects of the decrease in economic income in the music



resulting from the decrease in the sale of digital works because of the growth of downloads instead of purchasing CDs and products. An article entitled "*Untangling Creativity and Art for Policy: Ethnographic Insights into the Manchester International Festival*" (Jessica Symons, 2015) concludes that the value of artists to civic authorities is not necessarily in the ultimate product or the industry in which they work, but in their adaptive and responsive approach to realize ideas. This distinction should be more explicit both to honor the contributions of artists and to support other artists in their creative development.

An article entitled "Understanding the Impact of Place on Festival-making and Art Production in a Local Urban Festival Context" (Danielle Lynch, 2022) provides a deeper insight into the complexities of festival-making and art production in a local urban context. It shows how these practices take shape through ongoing interactions between the festival, the festival makers, and the social, cultural, and physical dimensions of the place.

An article titled "Festival Cities and Tourism: Challenges and Prospects" (Richards, 2022) concludes that the overall picture emerging from these partnerships is complexity: the festival city is composed of multiple stakeholders, with complicated and sometimes conflicting relationships with several cultural and creative expressions. However, what unites these various cases is the strong relationship between festivals and the city as a place that drives and inspires events that support the city.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research was of a fundamental nature with a descriptive-analytical method. This research studies the Tar Ava Folk Music Festival in Shirvan and its performance and that of similar cultural and artistic festivals in the cultural evolution of societies. This festival was held in 2023 in this city with the presence of provincial and national officials and many participants in different age groups. By using the questionnaire that was completed by the participants and the public, the researcher analyzed the data and information in the library and field. Some tables show the findings of the research.

### *Theoretical literature and definitions*

#### Culture

Culture is a broad concept, including beliefs, values, and behaviors under social values and existing norms in human societies. Culture also includes a set of knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, social customs, and habits of people in a group or in a society.

Taylo considers culture to be an interwoven whole of knowledge, religion, art, law, ethics, and customs of a society. White also emphasizes the symbolic nature of culture (Taji, 2010; 2). There are many definitions of culture, but culture is not a single object. A concrete and understandable answer is achievable by analyzing the behaviors, actions, and reactions of the people of a society. Older social theorists considered culture as a by-product of the structural forces underpinning society (Bennett, 2004).

According to this theory, one product is art, which has many effects on the culture of a society, so if a society is based on folk culture, its prevailing art can also be local and folk art. Therefore,



for people who live in today's era of modernity, identity is built through different references, some of which are rooted in local cultural contexts, and some are taken from cultural industries and global media (Bennet, 2004).

### *Indigenous culture*

Native culture refers to the set of values, beliefs, behaviors, and material and spiritual culture of a local society. This culture takes shape based on the experiences of several generations living in a certain area and preserves the cultural identity of that local society. Indigenous culture comprises concepts, beliefs, customs and rituals, language, art, architecture, music, and other local cultural elements that have been formed over time and form the cultural heritage of a local society.

Indigenous culture, like many cultures in the world, is a regional local culture through which indigenous people distinguish themselves from non-indigenous others. For this distinction, they create cultural, social, and environmental characteristics, a certain culture that we call indigenous culture (Taheri, 2016, p. 1).

Leading to the diversity of artistic expressions, cultural plurality can cause the growth and prosperity of culture and other elements in a society, and if it is not properly analyzed and planned, it cannot actually occur in a positive direction. Massey says that multiple identities can be a source of richness, conflict, or both (Bennet 2004).

### *Cultural value*

Cultural values are values that have application in a society as criteria for people's behaviors, decisions, and choices. These values include religious, social, cultural, and political values. With different methods, such as historical study, literature, art study, scientific research, and documents, we can get to know the cultural values of a society. The cultural values of societies can include spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional characteristics that distinguish societies and comprise art and literature, way of life, basic human rights, value systems, traditions, and beliefs (Ahangaran, 2021, 1). The real value of a work of art is associated with its aesthetic qualities and cultural value. Indeed, these goods and services affect cultural differences with messages, symbols, information, and values. The cultural value of an art object can be analyzed into its components, including aesthetic, spiritual, social, historical, cultural, symbolic, and original value (Taji, 2010; 4).

### *Creative cultural industries*

Creative industries refer to a wide range of economic activities that produce and exploit knowledge and information through creativity and innovation (Landry and Bianchini 1995, p. 4). Creative cultural industries are a kind of system converter that can prepare the taste of the audience for consuming the products (Hawkins, 2001, p. 88). If we can estimate correctly the cultural consumption of people in a society, we can identify its cultural value needs and plan for it. Identifying different cultural interests and tastes and their accumulation can lead to the improvement of cultural capital in society.



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### *Cultural and artistic festivals*

According to Janiski's definition of festival and event, festivals and events can be official programs or periods of pleasant activities, entertainment, or events that have a joyful feature and are openly celebration of some concepts (Tajzadeh Namin, 2013: 30).

The researchers point out that consumer and media products are today necessary as consumer goods. Now, the question is: how can we analyze the cultural developments and examine the values under these developments with aesthetical and taste-oriented goods, such as music and related cultural and artistic festivals?

Music shapes daily life in several ways. Participation in music occurs through active involvement in the process of music production and mechanisms of music consumption (Bennet 2004).

Undoubtedly, music is the best tool for understanding the culture of a society, especially ethnic and local cultures. Indeed, music has played an important role in building and expressing ethnic identities (Stokes, 1997).

As Frith says, what makes music special is that, apparently, music can enable new self-knowledge and emancipate us from the repetitions and monotonies of everyday life and the expectations that weigh down our social identities (Frith 2004).

Music, as Denora found out, is a tool or source that people turn to in order to organize themselves as aesthetic subjects and as beings who can think and act in their daily lives (Denora 2000).

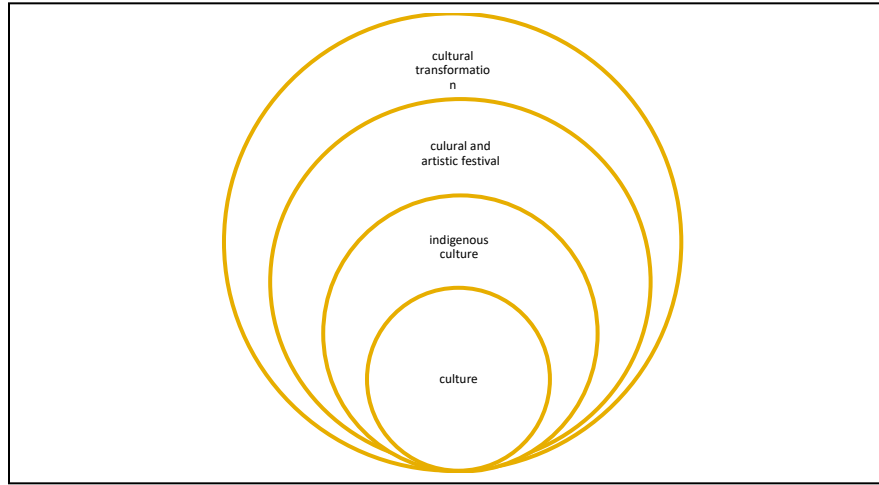
Cultural and artistic festivals are a stage for performing and expressing popular music. Straw believes that a special state of relations between populations and social groups is realized in music stages because these populations and groups are united around certain coalitions for music style (Straw 1991).

People who take part in these music festivals, especially in the local music festivals, actually witness something of their cultural roots. As Lewis says, people consider any special music as symbolic anchors that are cast in certain areas and are a sign of belonging to a common past (Lewis 2002).

But can music also help identity, and what effect does it have on identity itself? According to Bennett, music is a tool with the help of which societies can know their identity and show it to others (Bennet 2002).

But in societies based on ethnic identities, as an important point in this research, how can music be applied as a tool to analyze different cultural values? As for the multiple ethnic identities, especially in North Khorasan, the music of this region certainly has the color and tone of the ethnic groups living in this region. **Figure 1** shows a general impression of the relationship between culture, indigenous culture, cultural and artistic festivals, and the transformation in society. Cultural transformation can be achieved by hosting cultural and artistic festivals derived from local culture. By doing so, the central core of culture can be stimulated, leading to sustainable transformation.





**Figure 1.** Relationship between culture and transformation

Ethnic groups such as Kormanj, Turks, Fars Turkmen, etc., have their own methods and tones of expressing music.

Of course, the coexistence of these ethnic groups for many years caused the different music to become intertwined. Certainly, music in North Khorasan is associated directly with cultural and ethnic identity, and this is important in analyzing the culture and cultural values of this region. The patterns of migration and socio-cultural communication associated with it have driven ethnic minority groups to search for methods for cultural resettlement in new environments, and music has been a very important cultural source for this.

#### *Music and its role in cultural evolution*

The North Khorasan, with its ethnic and local culture, has a very suitable background for holding cultural and artistic festivals in local music. This capacity for cultural transformation through music makes it possible to introduce tourism capacities in places and spaces with identity, which can include closed spaces and open spaces. Music can also establish communication, guide society toward the unification of social norms, and contribute to cultural stability and continuity, all of which are under cultural value (Mirzaei, 2:2023).

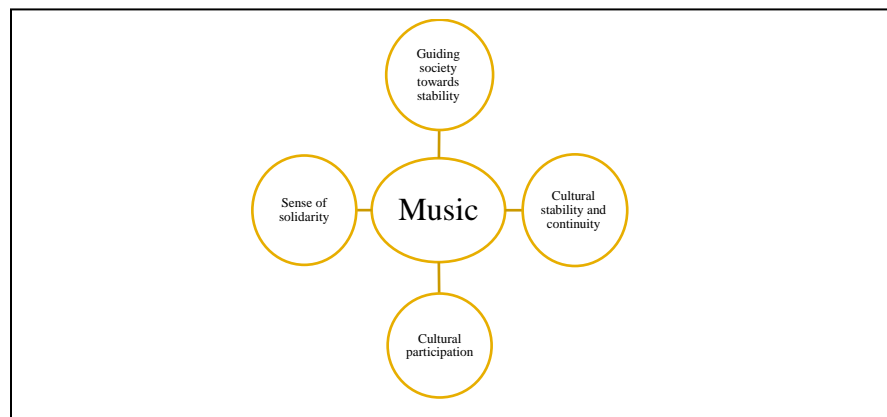
Music is a cultural factor that plays an important role in cultural values. As a study conducted in Khuzestan province shows, cultural values, including distribution of power, acceptance of ambiguity, masculinity, and individualism, have a positive effect on the entrepreneurial spirit (Bagheri, 2019).

Another study conducted in Tehran has shown that individual values, including strength, progress, hedonism, stimulation, self-guidance, universalism, benevolence, traditionalism, conformity, and safety, have a meaningful relationship with dimensions of cultural participation, including voice and images, books and publications, cultural heritage, language,

ritual and performing arts, sports activities, traditionalist activities, visual arts and library (Qaed Amini Harouni, 2023: 1).

Listening to music, according to research, can discover the type and amount of cultural capital of the listeners and their classification and evaluation (Sepehrnia, 2011: 7).

Music and other cultural factors can play an important role in the formation of cultural developments and their impact on human behavior and relationships. **Figure 2** shows the relationship between music and the relevant factors. The use of music has the capacity to achieve transformation indicators, such as guiding society toward stability and creating a sense of solidarity, cultural participation, stability, and cultural continuity.



**Figure 2.** Music's capacity for transformation indicators



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The performance of cultural and artistic festivals in the cultural developments of Shirvan

#### Music in Shirvan

Folk music in North Khorasan Province has a unique place in the indigenous art of the people; the child, and adult musicians, along with the veterans, play on different instruments such as DOTAR, KAMANCHEH, DAYEREH, DOHOL, SORNA, QOSHMEH, and NEY and have the role of preserving and perpetuating the sounds and melodies of this region. Shirvan, as the second city of North Khorasan Province after the capital of the province in the matter of music, is of clear importance because there is one of the Dotar playing schools in the Golian district in the suburbs of this city. The teachers of "Bakhshi" as narrators of the oral culture of music have lived in this region and spread this culture. It is noteworthy that "Bakhshi" has been registered as a World Heritage by UNESCO.

The fusion of folk dance and music of North Khorasan, along with the inclusion of Persian, Kormanji, Turkish, and Turkmen poems and songs, has created a complex art form of music, folk dance, and literature in North Khorasan Province. This can be a basis for the country's cultural management to pay more attention to value and development fields for the society.

Research in New York on the creative industries conducted by McKinsey (2002) found that investing in culture and cultural industries can provide us with important achievements in four dimensions of the economic field by creating new sources of income, increasing the efficiency of the tax system, attracting tourists and cultural ancillary services. As for career and professional marketing, creating culturally relevant jobs in the organization and attracting skilled and creative personnel make it possible to help create cultural capital. In the social sphere, using diplomatic relations, cultural revival, and IT infrastructures can solidify society. Finally, in the economic dimension, attracting floating cultural capital in investment and benefiting from the profit in the next projects makes it possible for us to reach the cycle of profitability (Sepehrnia 2012: 7)

### *Tar Ava Festival*

North Khorasan Province and North Khorasan region include the cities of Bojnourd, Shirvan, Esfrain, Maneh, and Samalghan, as well as hundreds of villages inhabited by different ethnic groups, such as Fars, Tat, Kormanj, Turks, and Turkmen. Considering this cultural pluralism, it will be understandable that the arts emerging from this pluralistic culture have different manifestations. The music of North Khorasan, as the main artistic pillar of this region, has many capacities for different effects on culture and so on.

North Khorasan Department of Culture and Guidance, as the guardian of culture and art in the region, has an executive arm called the Music Association. The members of this association, who are selected by the office of the Iranian association, are responsible for deciding to hold music festivals. The board of directors, with the approval of the General Department of Culture and Guidance, decided to hold the Tarawa local music festival with a focus on regional music of North Khorasan. In this festival, people from the North of Khorasan could take part in the musical branches of men and women as solo performances and group music. The number of participants in the first call was 190 people. Because of this high number, the province's music association conducted a preliminary arbitration to filtrate the best people. The winners of this arbitration, along with eight groups, got permission to take part in the final stage, and finally, the winners were selected from among them.

Ninety million Tomans were the considered cost for the festival. Thirty million Tomans of this cost were borne by the sponsor. This cost included reception and accommodation of participants and guests, sound recording, filming, and city-level advertising. Prizes were also the purchase of musical goods for the winners, which increased economic prosperity in the sales of musical instruments, music books, and music stores. However, the third period of this festival was held with the participation of musicians under the age of 18, 18 to 30, and 30 years and older in the women's and men's sections, as well as the Bakhshi job that is part of UNESCO's registered heritage. In the initial call, about 400 works in the aforementioned formats were received by the secretariat of this festival for preliminary arbitration. In the next stage, about 100 works were selected for the last part, and ultimately, the final winners were honored. The government budget financed the entire cost of this program, and the ethnic groups of North Khorasan, including Turkmen, Kormanj, Turks, and Fars, performed at this festival (personal interview, 2023).



**Figure 3** represents parts of the musicians and the performance hall. The image displays the facilities of the Tar Ava festival venue, performances by different ethnic groups, and the audience's reception. It is a testament to the program's potential to create sublime feelings in society.



**Figure 3.** Performance hall of different ethnic groups

This program was held in Ghadir Hall in Shirvan and was well received by the people. Television and news agencies covered this event, and senior government officials such as the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the governor, and directors of the General Department of Culture and Guidance were also present at the opening of this festival. Holding a music workshop on the sidelines of this festival was also another useful measure for this event.

Some achievements of holding these programs were people's familiarity with local music teachers, the growth of educational classes, and instrument sales. According to the instrument price (3 to 10 million tomans), - it is about the Dotar is the most important and popular instrument in this region - we can mention the music-oriented prosperity of the side sectors, wood, and cutting industries. The coexistence of different ethnic groups in North Khorasan, such as Kormanj, Turks, Fars, Turkmen, etc., showed in these nights a manifestation of cultural solidarity, which ultimately leads to social solidarity. **Figure 4** represents a part of the artist's workshop (Personal interview, 2023). Economic capacity is seen as an indicator of transformation in creating art and related jobs in the field of culture and art.





Figure 4. Construction workshop

Holding relevant exhibitions next to this festival makes it possible to boost the attendance of as many people as possible. Exhibitions such as indigenous and local food industries, music books, as well as the folk dance art of North Khorasan, are among the potential opportunities to promote this program. **Figure 5** shows transformation through the concrete functions of festival elements. The figure illustrates the path leading to the creation of the concept of transformation through a native cultural and artistic festival.



Figure 5. The path to creating the concept of transformation

#### *Analyzing questionnaires completed by some people*

We distributed during this festival 23 questionnaires among people in the age range of 16 to 60 years. The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine people's views about this event and study concepts such as emotions, musical awareness, tastes, and other available capacities that are appropriate for Shirvan (see table). The main goal of this research is to analyze the function of the festival in the transformation of the society. **Figure 6** shows a sample questionnaire and an extracted table. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to festival-goers to analyze their opinions and feelings about participating in the event.



**Table 1.** Percentage of answers to questions asked

Questions	Answer 1	Answer 2	Response percentage 1 (%)	Response percentage 2 (%)
1	7	16	30.5	69.5
2	12	11	52.2	47.8
3	17	6	73.9	26.1
4	18	5	78.2	21.8
5	13	10	56.5	43.5
6	16	7	69.5	30.5
7	12	11	52.2	47.8
8	8	15	34.8	65.2
9	15	8	65.2	34.8
10	16	7	69.5	30.5
11	9	14	39.2	60.8

By analyzing the responses given by the people and the interviewed musicians' opinions, it becomes clear that the holding of the Tar Ava cultural and artistic festival met the satisfaction of the people and their favorable opinion.



### *Opinions of government officials*

The political and government officials mentioned in their speeches the importance of local music and culture and considered these programs useful for society and supported them. The **Figure 7** is an example of news coverage and reflects the opinions of government officials about the event.



**Figure 7.** Reflection of officials' opinions in the news agency

The political and government officials spoke during their speeches about the importance of local music and culture, considered these programs useful for society, and declared their support for such programs. The meetings of the provincial directors of the General Department of Culture and Guidance with veteran local music teachers of North Khorasan were among the programs of this event, which can lead to the growth of the motivation of the younger generation to continue their teachers' path. Research about the important music festival of Edinburgh, during a poll, found that holding these festivals causes a kind of lasting affection among people, especially in genres such as classical music or folk music (Adam Behr Matt Brennan, 2014).

The statements of senior government officials about the unique music and instruments and the high cultural and artistic capacity of this region show that these festivals can promote fundamental human concepts such as emotions, love, and friendship and cause changes in society. If these artists receive respect, our youth will definitely go towards music that does not conflict with nature and original music and will help the culture of this region.

## CONCLUSION

If culture is a set of beliefs and ideas of a society, then art is the representative of these thoughts and beliefs; they are manifested through aesthetical activities. Holding cultural and artistic festivals is the best way to introduce the culture of a society. These festivals can include different branches that originate from artistic expressions.

Holding cultural festivals focusing on indigenous culture can have an important impact on society's economic, cultural, and political developments. Because of the large presence of local and regional musicians in North Khorasan, especially in Shirvan as a local and regional music



center, its importance has been increasing. Through analyzing documents and interviewing different groups, including musicians and local and government officials, we have dealt with several analyses of the effects of holding this event and have finally investigated the changes in society as the focus of this research. This study investigated the role of cultural and artistic festivals in the evolution of societies. The main question of the research is: What is the role of cultural and artistic festivals in the evolution of societies?

Using the findings of this research and summarizing the statements of the organizers, including government officials and members of the music community, we can answer the research question: Cultural and artistic festivals play an important role in the evolution of societies in such a way that by introducing art and artists to the society, they lead to achievements such as economic growth through related and side activities, strengthening indigenous and traditional arts through creating spiritual and material motivation for artists, creating positive feelings in the participants, and create social emotions. This method makes it possible to advance developments in societies.

By analyzing the answers the people give and the opinions of the government officials and music experts, we can conclude that the holding of the Tar Ava cultural and artistic festival is compatible with the positive reception of the people and the opinion of the government supporters. Cultural and economic achievements and the program's other hidden capabilities can lead to its further expansion in the future and create sustainable changes in this region.

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