

## LOWITA COASTAL COMMUNITIES: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MARINE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL ECONOMY IMPROVEMENT

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### Abstract

The community participation in developing marine tourism industry in turtle conservation areas is important. However, in fact, that turtles are caught and traded for human consumption. The research aims are to analyze the forms of community participation in developing marine tourism in the turtle conservation areas and what are the factors hindering the participation of Lowita communities in Suppa, Pinrang Regency. This research applies descriptive qualitative used a phenomenological approach. The data collection techniques were observation, interviews and documentation. The research findings shown that local community participation in the Lowita Beach turtle conservation area is included in the interactive participation category, prevented by the community in direct turtle conservation area, in such participating in outreach activities and building facilities in the turtle conservation area. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factor faced by the Lowita people, specifically of Wiringtasi Village was cultural barriers, which can be seen from the lack of quality human resources regarding the tourism business industry. In addition, differences in views and habits of local residents tend to hinder turtle conservation. Local residents have long viewed turtles as a resource to be consumed as a substitute for the family economy; this does not support the turtle conservation that is being promoted.

**Keywords:** Marine Tourist, Tourist Development, Community Participation, Turtle Conservation

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the main drivers of Indonesia's economic development. This is because the tourism sector plays a major role in a country's economic growth. Tourism development goals will be achieved effectively if the potential for tourist attractions, both man-made and natural, in an area is encouraged. One area of Indonesian tourism that could possibly get more attention is marine tourism. In fact, Indonesia, an archipelagic country stretching for approximately 100,000 kilometers of coastline, is supported by a stunning natural landscape that offers views of both sea and land, which offers enormous potential for the growth of marine tourism. Marine tourism, which is more than just beach tourism, is a reflection of a location's ability to protect the ecology of the earth and its natural surroundings, both of which impact the general quality of the ocean.

The coastal area of South Sulawesi, which stretches for around 2,000 km and is supported by extensive waters, has very promising maritime potential to be developed into a tourist destination. The region offers a variety of natural and cultural tourism opportunities, a well-developed and naturally protected ecosystem (Sero, 2012). The Lowita Turtle House is a form of marine tourism that applies a community participation approach in its management. This turtle conservation area is located in the coastal area of Wiringtasi Village, Suppa District, Pinrang Regency, South Sulawesi.

This turtle conservation was established in 2018 as a result of several young people's concerns about the poaching of turtles and their eggs by homeowners. The turtle population on the Lowita coast was heavily hunted by local residents before the turtle conservation area was

established. There is an urgent need to take measures that can maintain the fertility and survival of sea turtles to increase sea turtle populations. As part of turtle conservation efforts, we can observe, handle and feed turtles; releasing hatchlings into the sea; monitor turtle nesting activities; and move turtle eggs to a safer place (Nilasari, 2022).

Several species of turtles that are often found at Lowita Beach are Green Turtles, Hawksbill Turtles and Olive Ridley Turtles. Green turtles are one of six types of turtles in Indonesia that are protected under Government Regulation no. 7 of 1999 concerning Preservation of Plant and Animal Species, while hawksbill and olive ridley turtles are protected based on Minister of Agriculture Decree No. 882/Kpts-II/1992. Minister of Agriculture Decree No. 327/Kpts/Um/5/1978 also provides protection for leatherback turtles, loggerhead turtles and olive ridley turtles (Ario et al., 2016).

As a location that has extraordinary marine tourism potential, the Lowita Turtle House still requires more serious and focused attention so that it can provide greater benefits. Every member of society has the same rights and opportunities to actively participate in environmental protection and management, as stated in Law no. 32 of 2009, which regulates community involvement in these efforts (Indonesia, 2009). Therefore, significant community involvement in the conservation of the coastal environment of Lowita Beach is needed in an effort to stop the physical and biological damage that occurs in coastal areas from the threat of turtle extinction.

It cannot be denied that environmental stability is very important for the survival of life. In Wiringtasi Village, Suppa District, in particular, the establishment of a turtle conservation area seems to offer a platform for the community to get involved in maintaining the ecosystem. Apart from that, if the turtle conservation area is developed optimally economically, the community will also feel the impact because tourism will encourage the expansion of other businesses.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The tourist attraction itself, which may be a stunning view, an important historical building, a distinctive cultural custom, or a religious ceremony, determines how quickly a place can develop and develop into a popular tourist destination. (Alim et al., 2015). The approach that is often used to improve the tourism sector today is community-based tourism. There is a relationship between sustainability and community involvement in the idea of sustainable tourism development (Rusata, 2019). Sustainable tourism can be produced by using the concept of community-based tourism by minimizing negative impacts on the environment, society and economy. However, considering the enormous potential of its natural and cultural resources, it can be said that Indonesia has still not achieved its tourism goals (Utami & Hartono, 2016). Community-based tourism systems outline opportunities for local communities around famous tourist destinations to get involved and contribute to realizing their full potential.

The government, society and certain organizations must encourage the development of marine tourism in Indonesia in a sustainable manner to preserve marine ecology. The growth of the tourism sector has the power to bridge socio-cultural and economic gaps in society and support the preservation of local customs and traditions (Purnama, 2021). Communities especially local communities are critical to the expansion and progress of tourism, which is the main driver of the travel and tourism sector (Kurniawati, 2022).

The definition of participation is an effort to get involved in an activity, either verbally or in action. Therefore, the theory of forms of community participation known as "Pretty's typology of participation" is applied in this research. The typology introduced by Jules Pretty consists of seven types of community involvement which are classified as follows: (1) Manipulative Participation, namely the most ineffective type of participation, is this. The community seems to be included and given a position in the organization, but they have absolutely no influence on the final decision. (2) Passive Participation is a type of participation where local people are informed about what is happening and what has happened. This announcement was biased, only aimed at a certain group of people, and ignored the public's reaction. (3) Consultative Participation, where the community is not involved in joint decision making. (4) Material Incentive Participation, where the community takes part by providing labor and services in exchange for cash or other goods. (5) Functional Participation, namely participation aimed at serving the interests of outsiders. Community participation in this participation can be involved in decision making, although this usually occurs after important decisions have been made by other parties. (6) Interactive Participation, where the community is involved in designing, building and improving local institutions through analysis. Participation is valued not as a means to an end, but as a right. (7) Independent Participation, namely the community takes part by voluntarily changing their own system. They build relationships with other groups to get the resources they need as well as technical assistance and mentoring (Pretty et al., 2013).

This is in line with the research "The Role of the Community in Supporting Turtle Conservation in the Goa Cemara Beach Nature Tourism, Bantul DIY" written by Abdul Hafiz Zailani. The results of his research show that the people of Patihan Hamlet - especially those who are members of the Mino Raharjot Turtle Conservation Group - play an active role as initiators, implementers, observers and beneficiaries in turtle conservation efforts at Goa Cemara Beach (Zailani, 2022).

Based on the results of the researchers' initial observations, the development and maintenance of turtle conservation areas is becoming increasingly difficult due to the increasing capture and trade of turtles for human consumption. The management has tried to create a turtle conservation zone by offering early education to children and guests and inviting the wider community to take part in activities to release turtles into the sea. The aim of establishing the turtle conservation is to preserve the maritime environment, including the turtle population on Lowita Beach. Apart from that, turtle conservation is expected to improve the marine tourism sector and make Lowita Beach a more popular tourist destination. Without community involvement, the great maritime potential of Lowita Beach will not be realized. We often see tourist destinations being built but not developing because local residents are not involved with these destinations. To make maximum use of marine tourism potential, community involvement is very important in developing turtle conservation areas.

## **METHODS**

This research uses descriptive qualitative research techniques based on a phenomenological study approach, to understand phenomena by examining the observable reality of human existence and providing explanations or descriptions. (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). The application of qualitative research methods will allow researchers to see events in the field from a structural and functional perspective. Structural research requires researchers to be able to recognize social phenomena by relating them to the structure they are studying, functional

research indicates that researchers must be able to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of how the phenomenon functions with other phenomena or informants (Rukajat, 2018).

The data were collected from systematic observations with a focus on visible phenomena, then face-to-face interviews are conducted between one or several informants using a verbal question and answer format. Including information obtained from the Lima Putra Pesisir Community document. The data or information obtained is then collected and reduced, which is then presented and concluded further (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015).

## RESULTS

### **The Community Participation Forms in the Lowita Beach Turtle Conservation Area**

The Lowita Beach turtle conservation area is categorized as a special type of tourism that uses the idea of community-based tourism. Participation can be defined as a process by which society as individuals, social groups, and organizations gather, participate, and get involved, depending on the level of understanding of citizens, both directly and indirectly, and without coercion (Tawai dan Muh yusuf, 2017). One of the most important factors in turtle conservation in Indonesia is increasing public awareness and participation (Hamino E. et al., 2021) Active participation from local communities not only helps increase awareness of the importance of environmental conservation and turtle conservation, but also encourages local economic development.

Community support is needed to encourage the growth of turtle conservation. As one of the pillars that can support the growth of marine tourism, the community has a role in preserving turtle habitats and species. That way, more people will understand the importance of protecting the marine environment, and they will be inspired to get involved in efforts to save sea turtles and their habitat (Farid & Arianti, 2024). The forms of participation carried out by the community in the turtle conservation area located in Wiringtasi Village are:

#### ***Participating in turtle conservation directly***

A conservation technique that recognizes and utilizes the important role of local communities in preserving turtle species and their habitats is direct community action to protect turtle habitats. This strategy is based on the knowledge that the support, involvement and active participation of local communities is an important component in the long-term success of conservation efforts. Forming community conservation groups is another successful tactic (Sianipar et al., 2022) Forms of participation that involve the community in carrying out direct actions, such as creating night patrol groups to develop turtle conservation, are carried out by the community.

As stated by Jamil, one of the local people involved in turtle conservation in his interview.

*Several times the community participated in several activities, such as night patrols to protect turtle eggs, moving found eggs to safe hatching centers, releasing baby turtles into the sea, we also learned about how to care for turtles and manage their coastal habitat by keeping the beach clean. (Interview, March 10, 2024)*

Apart from helping to preserve the species, community involvement also increases the local community's sense of concern and responsibility for the natural ecosystem and the survival of sea turtles. This hands-on learning opportunity provides a closer look at the amazing life cycle of sea turtles and broadens the public's understanding of the need to protect sea turtles.



**Figure 1. Community Participation in Night Patrols**

**Source: Documentation of the Lima Putra Pesisir Community (2024)**



**Figure 2. Community Participation in Turtle Release**

**Source: Documentation of the Lima Putra Pesisir Community (2024)**

Night patrols and baby turtle release activities are forms of community participation in contributing to the development of turtle conservation. By participating in this activity, the community directly contributes to preventing hunters and natural predators from endangering turtles during the turtle nesting season on the beach. Involving communities in this way can increase their awareness and support for conservation activities, and the ability of local communities to manage and save endangered species increases.

Involving the community in turtle protection areas is one way to reduce illegal activities carried out by local communities. Taking on the task of protecting nature, especially turtle populations, will make people more aware of the importance of protecting the environment for their well-being.

#### ***Participating in outreach activities and sharing ideas***

Conservation is the main basis for preserving turtles, which includes outreach to the community, environmental awareness, efforts to stop the practice of killing or hunting turtles, and educating the public about the status of turtles as protected animals. Outreach activities have been organized to attract visitors and encourage the general public to engage with the Lima Putra Pesisir community. The Lima Putra Pesisir Community not only targets local

communities, but also a number of institutions in an effort to increase awareness of the importance of turtle conservation efforts for the survival of this species (Nuraeni, 2022).

As expressed by Sulaiman, one of the local communities involved in socialization activities in his interview:

*I personally have participated in open outreach at turtle conservation twice, coincidentally the outreach activities were aimed at the local community, especially the Wiringtasi Village community. The public also sometimes contributes during outreach events by offering creative ideas for creating conservation tactics. That way, we, the community, also feel more involved and responsible for the success of conservation efforts. Apart from that, with this kind of communication, the relationship between the community and the management here is quite good."* (Interview, March 10, 2024)

Participating in outreach activities and providing advice is an important step in increasing public awareness of the importance of turtle conservation in areas such as Lowita Beach. Through outreach programs, local communities can learn about the dangers sea turtles face, the life cycle of sea turtles, and the important role sea turtles play in conservation efforts. In addition, by actively participating in outreach activities, they can share knowledge, insights and strategies for protecting and preserving turtle habitats.



**Figure 3. Lowita Coastal Community Socialization Activities**  
**Source: Documentation of the Lima Putra Pesisir Community (2024)**

As part of the Five Coastal Sons Community, Kampung Kreasi Lowita hosts every socialization activity, such as "Socialization of Turtle Conservation and Coastal Ecotourism Development in Pinrang Regency in Collaboration with the Environmental Care Youth Circle (LPPLH) Pertamina BBM Terminal Pare-Pare and Pinrang Regency Government ". Academics and environmentalists attended this event aimed at Wiringtasi Village residents. Apart from that, representatives from the Pinrang Regent's Office, Head of the Pinrang Regency Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Service, BPSPL Makassar, Head of the Tourism Office, and TBBM Pertamina Pare-pare were also present. Next, there were socialization activities aimed at students of SMKN 1 Pinrang with the theme "Socialization Activities and Coastal Environmental Conservation and Beach Cleaning". The socialization process includes information about the importance of protecting turtles, and the third action is an appeal to the public to participate in turtle conservation.

The outreach activities carried out by the Lima Putra Pesisir Community aim to increase environmental awareness among the community. To involve the local community, especially the residents of Wiringtasi Village. Apart from trying to promote marine tourism in the coastal area of Suppa District, this activity also tries to attract visitors or residents to get involved in the struggle to preserve sea turtles so they don't become extinct.

Visits to various organizations, educational institutions, and social media platforms such as Instagram are used to introduce and educate the general public about turtle protection. Meanwhile, the Lima Putra Pesisir community held an outreach event for the community to get involved in turtle protection to attract their interest. The goal of conservation is for humans to protect their environment. Ecological anthropology conservation studies focus on patterns of interaction between humans and their environment because both are ecosystems that influence each other. Humans can maintain and exploit nature, but they can also be impacted by environmental changes and how these changes affect human lifestyles (Luthfi & Wijaya, 2011).

#### ***Participating in establishing tourism facilities and maintaining beach cleanliness***

Community participation in beach cleanliness helps maintain beach cleanliness so that visitors feel comfortable and the area looks cleaner. In this case, community involvement in maintaining the physical cleanliness of the beach is very important to maintain the condition of the beach (Lengkong & Londa, 2017). In addition, the definition of community involvement in development is community involvement in development activities and in using and appreciating development results (Riskayanti et al., 2022).

A kind of labor contribution during the construction of facilities so that visitors can enjoy the facilities they need, this is participation where local communities provide labor for the construction of facilities at tourist locations. where many local workers are utilized in the construction of coastal tourist locations. Because with more involvement from the community, the development of turtle conservation will be realized more quickly and have a significant impact on the development of marine tourism.



**Figure 4. Turtle Conservation Coastal Center facilities**  
Source: Field Observations (2024)



**Figure 5. Turtle Egg Hatching Area Facilities**  
**Source: Field Observations (2024)**

Engaging labor for tasks such as building infrastructure and keeping beaches clean has a major effect on the environment. Communities can feel and carry out responsibility for their beach environment by actively participating in the construction of facilities such as paths, rest areas and rubbish bins, as well as holding regular beach clean-up events. This procedure increases local people's knowledge of environmental issues and contributes to environmental education in addition to helping keep beaches clean and beautiful.

As expressed by Rahmat, a member of the Lima Putra Pesisir community, in his interview:

*Being able to share makes us happy. Many initiatives at Lowita Beach aim to protect turtles and their natural habitat. We rely heavily on labor donations from the local community to achieve this goal. At the beginning of the establishment of this conservation area, we received a lot of support from the community, especially in the early stages of building several facilities such as a coastal hall, to creating a turtle egg hatching area. They realized the value of the education center for the future of turtle conservation and felt responsible for this initiative. .And this, in my opinion, has a big effect. (Interview, March 9 2024)*

Community involvement in peyu conservation at Lowita Beach instills the principles of environmental conservation. For example, teaching the value of preserving the environment and habitat of turtle species and minimizing the detrimental impacts of human activities on beaches can be done. As a result, environmental conservation can work and has the potential to spread throughout society through education and example. Community involvement not only offers tangible direct benefits through development and maintenance, but also contributes to laying the foundations for future turtle conservation measures that will be more successful.

Through their participation, this activity hopes to increase understanding of the importance of maintaining a clean and safe environment to achieve turtle preservation and conservation (Setyaningrum et al., 2023). Through cooperative efforts, the community can help preserve and maintain the cleanliness of turtle conservation areas, which ultimately helps create an environment that supports the survival of turtle eggs and hatchlings. The community also participates in maintaining cleanliness. "Cleanliness maintenance" is a deliberate action to maintain an environment free from pollution. This beach is kept clean as a marine tourism

attraction by the community, and visitors feel comfortable because there is no rubbish around it. Parts of the beach and road are clearly visible.

The following are the results of an interview with Renaldi, a member of the Lima Putra Pesisir community, who said:

*Community participation is very important to keep the beach clean. We welcome anyone who wants to participate in the beach cleanup event here. Apart from providing an opportunity to clean up rubbish washed up on the beach, this beach clean-up event also aims to increase public awareness of the importance of keeping beaches clean. We use a number of strategies, such as social media announcements, banners in public places and word of mouth marketing. Many people believe they have a duty to protect the environment. For the benefit of future generations and the turtles protected here, they want Lowita Beach to remain sustainable. (Interview, March 9, 2024)*

Based on interviews conducted, it is known that this conservation effort is beneficial in terms of keeping the beach clean and teaching local residents about the importance of environmental conservation. Wiringtasi Village residents can contribute significantly to the development and maintenance of infrastructure within the conservation area in addition to actively participating in conservation activities. This includes the construction of facilities such as turtle hatcheries and activity centers on beaches, and coastal halls.

When residents take part in beach clean-up activities, strong social bonds are also formed. Communities can improve healthy relationships and a sense of mutual support by working together to keep beaches clean. Therefore, participation in beach clean-up events by the community can directly improve environmental outcomes as well as increase unity and raise awareness of the need to protect the coastal environment. The tourism sector will continue to grow as more people participate in these events and make efforts to live clean.

### ***The Inhibiting Factors of Lowita Communities Participation in Developing Marine Tourist***

Structural and cultural operational barriers are three forms of barriers that Cevat Tosun applied to divide the barriers that hinder community participation in tourism development. This analysis can be used to see things that prevent local communities from being involved in developing marine tourist in the Lowita Beach Turtle Conservation Area.(1) Operational Barriers, namely the centralization of government administration in the tourism industry, lack of coordination, lack of information, and lack of technical and financial support to mobilize the required resources. (2) Structural barriers, namely the existence of a dominant ownership structure by outside parties or local elites. These barriers often manifest in the form of unsupportive policies and regulations, as well as in economic practices that marginalize local communities from the benefits of tourism development. (3) Cultural Barriers, which are obstacles due to limited resources owned by disadvantaged communities, and a lack of understanding from local communities, as well as differences in views, perceptions and attitudes of communities towards tourism and participation (Tosun, 2000).

To develop marine tourism, the Lima Putra Pesisir community must overcome several obstacles, one of which is obstacles related to community participation in the Lowita Beach Turtle Conservation Area. Communities are often prevented from participating in turtle conservation efforts by a variety of issues, and the effectiveness of turtle conservation

programs will be reduced if these obstacles are not removed. The following are several obstacles to community participation in the Lowita Beach Turtle Conservation Area:

### ***The limited Human Resources and Community Understanding in the Tourism Sector***

The foundation of any conservation effort is awareness and education (Nguyen et al., 2022). The need to maintain ecosystem balance is not well understood in the Lowita Beach region as there are few resources available for information regarding the tourism sector. If this continues, Lowita Beach's appeal to tourists may gradually diminish and visitors may decide not to visit. The residents of Wiringtasi Village are very diverse in educational background, occupation and mindset. Some people already have a high level of environmental awareness, but there are also those who still lack it.

Another reason that causes limited human resources is the unavailability of training and education about tourism for local communities around turtle conservation areas. A lack of expertise in managing turtle conservation can make it difficult for local communities to understand sustainable practices, protect the environment, and offer high-quality tourism experiences to tourists. So that communities around turtle conservation areas can actively participate in the maintenance and growth of sustainable marine tourism, more needs to be done to increase their knowledge and skills in this field.

The following are the results of an interview with Rahmatullah, a member of the Lima Putra Pesisir community who said that:

*Increasing public awareness and participation is our biggest challenge. Because tourism has developed into a source of income for several local communities here, they have some basic understanding of tourism. However, the majority still lack a comprehensive understanding of conservation and how to practice its management. Many people still don't realize how important it is to protect sea turtles and other natural resources to promote sustainable tourism. Because for a long time most of the local residents have made a living by catching turtles or collecting their eggs. It takes a lot of effort to break this habit, including providing sustainable livelihood options and socialization. (Interview, 9 March 2024)*

The interviews made it clear that there are still obstacles in sea turtle conservation management, preventing local communities and conservation managers from interacting and communicating with each other. Conservation activities are sometimes developed and implemented without adequate communication from the community. This can lead to conflict, especially if local communities feel that conservation activities ignore their needs or make it difficult for them to access traditional resources. Early planning and decision making at the community level is needed to ensure that the communities most affected by conservation efforts support and approve of the action.

### ***The Differences of Local Communities' Perceptions and Habits***

Because of the ingrained belief that turtle eggs have health benefits, some people choose to ignore regulations that prohibit hunting and eating turtles. (Poti et al., 2021). Some local community groups still have beliefs and practices that view turtles as a food source. There is a view from some people that turtle conservation efforts will not have much of an impact. Because of this behavior, some individuals have a tendency to oppose activities to save sea turtles. Because they feel it goes against their habits, they may be reluctant to participate in turtle conservation efforts or even oppose them.

The attitudes and habits of local communities who still consider turtles as a food source are a challenge in turtle conservation efforts. In addition to laws and regulations, conservation initiatives also need to prioritize policies that support cultural values, improve economic prosperity, and promote education. Programs designed to address these problems need to incorporate social and cultural context, in addition to offering solutions that can be implemented by society.

In the following interview, a member of the Lima Putra Pesisir community named Maman Suryamansaya stated:

*Hunting and then consuming turtle eggs has long been a habit of the people here, especially those who live on the coast. For daily food, they consider turtles as an important source of protein. Some people here have made this habit a hereditary habit because they consider turtle eggs to be a food source that is easy to obtain and rich in nutrients. (Interview, March 9 2024)*

Even though more and more people now understand the importance of turtle conservation, the views of some people have not changed. The difficulty of obtaining information about turtle conservation and environmental education is one of the factors that causes this mindset to remain strong. Apart from being part of customs or habits, turtles are also a source of livelihood for several residents. Legal or illegal turtle fishing is sometimes seen as a way to meet economic needs, especially in areas that have limited access to other sources of income.

As managers, the Lima Putra Pesisir Community uses various techniques to invite the community to work together. Respecting the traditions and culture of the surrounding community is very important, first and foremost. The best course of action is to communicate and listen to people to understand their point of view and develop ideas that satisfy everyone.

## CONCLUSION

The growth of marine tourism requires community participation. The Lima Putra Pesisir Community is working with the community to develop marine tourism in the turtle conservation area at Lowita Beach, Wirigtasi Village. The community participates directly as a night patrol group, participates in socialization activities and provides ideas, the community also participates in donating their energy in building facilities and maintaining beach cleanliness. The findings from this research show that in the context of managing turtle conservation areas, community participation is very helpful for the Lima Putra Pesisir community. Community participation can help achieve the management goals of turtle conservation areas, namely protecting turtle populations and reducing damage that impacts turtles and their habitat. It should be emphasized that optimizing community participation in turtle conservation areas is very necessary to achieve effective environmental management. The Wiringtasi Village residents actively participate in turtle protection through direct involvement, outreach activities and sharing ideas. They also provide labor for building construction and maintaining beach cleanliness. The researcher believes that direct-interactive participation is a type of community involvement that occurs in Wiringtasi Village. Finally, the cultural barriers in the form of a lack of knowledge and awareness of human resources regarding the environment, as well as customs and customs in society hinder community participation in developing marine tourism in the Lowita Beach as the turtle conservation area, Pinrang Regency, South Sulawesi. This work suggests for future study could be conduct in the kind of the sustainable model for the local economy growth relating to marine tourism development.

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