THE RESEARCH OF ETHNIC PREJUDICE IN SMALL GROUPS

by Toni Petković (Novi Sad)

Introduction

In this article I will present one of the psychological workshops developed during the 1990 in Serbia with the aim to reverse the consequences of the spread of ethnic hatred and nationalistic euphoria by public media in warring Yugoslav republics. It was an attempt to counter these effects at least on an individual and micro- community level, among small groups of adolescents and students. These kinds of workshops can by no means create a change on a large political and national scale, especially if they are performed in isolation from other means of socialization. Still, they provide an example how it is possible to develop independent thinking and fight against ethnic stereotypes, at least on the level of small adolescent groups.

In the first chapter I will present some basic facts about the psychological workshops designed to deal with the conflict resolution problems. I will explain what is considered to be a constructive resolution of the conflict in psychological context, what is the difference between psychotherapy and psychological workshops, and how psychological workshops can be evaluated and what kind of effect they do have. In the second chapter I will first explain the method of completing the workshop, including the conditions for completing the workshop, the detailed procedure that should be performed and the conditions for evaluation. In the second part of the chapter two I will present and discuss the results of workshops implementation obtained on the sociotherapeutic club of juvenile delinquents (Novi Sad, Serbia), the results from the sample of third year students of psychology (Novi Sad, Serbia), and the results obtained on students of Trefort Bilingual School (Budapest, Hungary). The results were obtained in 1998, 1999 and 2001 respectively.

1. Some Facts about Psychological Workshops Designed to Deal with Conflict Resolution

Observed from the psychological angle, the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia has left a great number of questions which probably won't find a definite answer for a long time. One of these questions, which are subject of different debates and disagreements that are much wider than just the psychological aspects, is whether there is a way to objectively confirm that a certain kind of people has a group of distinct characteristics of increased ethnic distance, intolerance towards minorities, to neighboring or simply other nationalities. In other words, whether those individuals (for any reason) have a significantly higher level of nationalistic feelings and ethnic prejudices.

Although there are a large number of instruments like questionnaires, scales of evaluation and even parts of personality inventories dealing with this subject, they all in my opinion have some shortcomings. Firstly, the results can be manipulated by the test-takers because they are dependent on the wish of participants to take part in the research. This always creates certain motives to falsify the results, whenever there is awareness of the difference between one's own and generally accepted beliefs. Secondly, there is the question of reality of the people's image of their own attitude. It is beyond doubt that in similar cases (e.g. attitudes towards democracy) there are differences between proclaimed values and practical, manifest behavior.

When examining a large number of people, statistically significant samples as well as short individual examinations, there is probably no other way and it all depends on the skill of the author to make questions as neutral and apparently harmless as possible. Despite all the virtuosity achieved in this field, two facts remain: examinees who are of only a little bit higher intelligence understand very well what it is that you are trying to find about them and their answers depend almost exclusively on their readiness to communicate the conscious component of their attitudes to the examiner.

I wish to show how it is, at least in small groups and in the atmosphere characteristic for psychological workshops for the young and the adults, possible to achieve more on checking the conscious, as well as provoking more or less unconscious components on nationalistic

feelings and prejudices, which should (when made obvious) have a sobering effect and perhaps lead to a change in attitude.

1.1 What is Considered to be a Constructive Resolution of Conflict in this Context?

1 Plut, Dijana/Roksandić , Ružica/ Korač, Nada: Osnovne postavke interventnih programa za rešavanje konflikata [Grundlegende Prinzipien von Programmen zur Konfliktlösung]. In: Ilić, D. et al. (Eds.): Učionice dobre volje, školski program za konstruktivno rešavanje sukoba [*The Classrooms of Good Will*. Ein Schulprogramm zur konstruktiven Konfliktlösung]. Beograd: Grupa Most 1995, pp. 21-34.

Social conflict can be resolved by some usual means: victory, defeat, or compromise. The basic idea behind psychological programs dealing with conflict resolution is that none of these outcomes can achieve stable and satisfactory results in the long run for either side. Described outcomes of the conflict are unavoidable if we try to confront final positions (»I want this toy!«) instead of needs behind them (»I would like to play and have fun«). The point of conflict resolution programs is to show how problems can be solved by cooperation, by expressing the needs and not demands, and by constructive means that can find new solutions by which all parties will be satisfied. This is the preventive role of the programs. They can, through offering new knowledge and skills, also be useful in helping the person to find the way out of an already existing conflict that is chousing problems in their social interaction.

The theoretical background of these programs is *social psychology*, which deals with the concept of conflict and its attributes; *educational psychology*, since the goal is acquiring new social skills and knowledge; *clinical psychology*, which can provide skills of communication and emotion control techniques; and *psychology of personality*, which provides information about human needs and personality traits which can influence behavior. There are two basic assumptions at the core of such psychological intervention: work on self-understanding and self development, and developing the skills in communicating with others. Out of these assumptions, eight basic principles of work can be developed:[1]

1. Abolishing of egocentric views,
2. Understanding our own needs,
3. Accepting the needs of others,
4. Dealing with aggression,
5. Developing non-violent communication techniques,
6. Supporting self-respect and assertiveness,
7. Supporting tolerance and open mindedness,
8. Learning the procedure for constructive conflict resolution.

All of these measures require detailed explanation. Their understanding and full explanation shall be the task to fulfill when the results of the research by the author have been completed, and connected to the experience of previous researchers in the field. Just now, it will be only suggested that final success in achieving these goals depend on firstly, the natural limits that a person has for the development and tendency towards expressing certain abilities and traits, and secondly, the educational and social influences that can provide skills and mechanisms by which certain problems, which naturally occur during particular phases of child development, can be successfully solved.

What is the Difference between Psychotherapy and Psychological Workshops?

2 Janković, Slobodanka/Kovač-Čerović, Tinde: Osnovne pretpostavke radioničarskog postupka [Die Grundprinzipien der Workshoparbeit]. In: Ilić, D. et al. 1995, pp. 50-68.

It is believed that psychological workshops, at least those that aim at the constructive resolution of conflicts, have originated from training groups – groups that seek to educate their members in social skills of managing group relations.[2] Although it is true that some basic activities and techniques of psychotherapy (for example *gestalt* therapy) and psychological workshops are very similar, there are also important differences. Workshops aim at helping those who seek new knowledge and skills and are curious to explore their abilities, while psychotherapy helps those who want to resolve concrete problems. Moreover, workshops can be very successfully implemented by any trained psychologist, or sometimes even a talented and trained poet or painter, while psychotherapy can only be conducted by a specially educated psychotherapist. Workshops can deal with very different areas of human problems, but they never go beyond the »light psychology approach« into the real personality disorders and basic structures of personality. They are restrictive in allowing the expression of very strong negative emotions. Finally, psychological workshops have a much more structured framework and strict topics and concrete methods of achieving goals.

1.3 How Can Psychological Workshops be Evaluated and What Kind of Effect Do They Have?

3 Dragan Popadić: Efekti radionica i njihova evaluacija [Auswirkungen der Workshops und ihre Auswertung]. In: Ilić D. et al. 1995, pp. 69-84.

Psychological workshops are supposed to have a positive effect not only on participants, but also on the persons in their social surrounding: family, friends, school mates and others. They are also supposed to influence the coordinators, as well as some of their colleagues at work. Through all these factors, some influence can, in proportion to the number of participants involved, be expected on the community level in the region where they are conducted. Whether this kind of influence can really be achieved, can be answered only by taking into consideration several factors: the quality of the program, the training of the coordinators, the motivation of participants, the support for the program from the relevant persons and communities, the global atmosphere in the community.[3]

The object of evaluation can be either *strategy* – the idea about the goals and possibility for achieving these goals by the program in question (can we change intelligence, or affect the expression of aggressive behavior, for example) –, the *program* – which of the different programs aimed at achieving the same goal is the most efficient – or its *realization* – was the program realized according to expected standards and instructions?

The object of evaluation depends on the purpose of evaluation and who is evaluating the program. In all cases, the evaluation can be measured by the results of the program in practice. If the results are good, then it follows that strategy, program and practice were adequate. On the other hand, if the results are negative, the problem can lie in one or more of these factors. The examination of repeated practices can explain which one of these factors is the reason for the ineffectiveness.

There are, according to Dragan Popadić, several kinds of evaluation depending on the purpose of evaluation: evaluation of *effects*, *influence* and *process*.

The evaluation of *effects* of the program can be achieved by using an experimental and a control group. The differences between initially balanced, experimental and controlled groups can be attributed to the influence the program had on its participants, after the program has been fulfilled with the members of the experimental group. Evaluation can be achieved by means of psychological tests, scales of self-assessment or the exact observation of the behavior of the participants. All these solutions have certain disadvantages: psychological tests are not always available for the particular subject and are often not sensitive enough to measure fine differences. Scales of self-assessment, on the other hand, bear the danger of insufficient validity and objectiveness and are not discriminative enough. The behavior of the participants is very difficult to observe objectively in the long term. Another more subjective way to evaluate the results of the program is to ask the participants for statements about the effects. This should be a usual part of every workshop. The survey can be done through group discussions or questionnaires. The obvious problem of this kind of assessment is its possible unreliability. Participants can either overestimate positive effects, since they need to justify the effort they put in the realization of the program, or since they want to please the coordinator whom they like. They might also be unaware of the positive influences that have been achieved. Despite all the potential problems, statements from the participants about their perception of program results is valuable information that should always be collected.

Secondly, evaluation of a program's *influence* on participants and especially the wider community is more concerned with the overall strategy of the program. Therefore, the evaluation cannot be the subject of the program coordinators in the field, but rather of the authors and the specified institutions of society.

The third kind of evaluation of the *process* includes the description of the program's realization. It should involve a daily log-list of participants and events, as well as any deviation from the program for each class, impressions and suggestions of the coordinator, and the estimation of the group atmosphere that can be done by the impartial observer from outside. It should also involve feedback from the participants, through either statements or some kind of imaginative comments through play. The means of collecting this information depends on the age and specific structure of the group, time and atmosphere in the group and other factors. Nevertheless, it is important to collect this data from participants after each workshop and after the completion of the program.

Popadić summarizes the effective process of evaluation of psychological workshops with the following recommendations:

Basic and mandatory recommendations:

1) Make a record of events in the form of a daily log.
2) Ask the participants after each workshop for their evaluation.
3) After completion of the program, ask the participants for their overall impressions, their comments and recommendations.

Recommendations for further more detailed evaluation:

4) Find the indicators of behavioral change and record them before and after the workshops.
5) Find the control group with similar traits as the experimental group and measure the desired traits before and after the workshops.
6) After the completion of the program, give the participants a detailed questionnaire about their evaluation of the process and the effects of the workshops.
7) Collect the impressions not only from participants but also from their social surrounding and wider community.

In conclusion, the optimal result with this kind of psychological program can be achieved only if all the factors of society like the family, mass media, school and overall socio-political climate act in the same direction. It is unrealistic to expect that they can reverse the effect of all other factors if they are negative and contrary to the purpose of the conflict resolution programs. Rather than working against the socio-political climate, real positive influence of this program can be achieved only through working along with all other agents of the society.

2 The Example of the Workshop Designed to Counter Ethnic Prejudices and the Results of its Implementation

In this chapter I will present first the method of the implementation of the workshop designed to deal with the problem of ethnic stereotyping and prejudices, including the possibility of implementation, conditions for completing the workshop, the detailed procedure that should be performed and the conditions for evaluation. Secondly, I will present and discuss the results of workshops implementation obtained on the sociotherapeutic club of juvenile delinquents (Novi Sad, Serbia), the results from the sample of third year students of psychology (Novi Sad, Serbia), as well as the results obtained on students of Trefort Bilingual School (Budapest, Hungary). The results were obtained in 1998, 1999 and 2001 respectively.

2.1 The Method of Performing the Workshop
2.1.1 The Possibility for Implementation

The workshop can be preformed with individuals of average and above average intelligence of both sexes. Ideally, all participants are adolescents, but there is no reason why we should not work with adults. There are no special conditions concerning education, but it is necessary that every member has the elementary ability to read and to write.

2.1.2 Conditions for Completing the Workshop

The workshop can be performed with a limited number of people, ideally 10-14 participants. With the help from an associate it is possible to increase the number to 20, or even 30 (with the increase of the number of participants the possibility of a quick evaluation drops, as does the possibility of immediate feedback). It is advisable that there are at least two, and some-times even three coordinators where necessary. Two physically separated rooms within the same building are also necessary.

2.1.3 The implementation of the Workshop

Examinees are split into two groups (by random choice, taking sex and age into consideration) Though physically separated, they get the same instruction: »You will now hear a story

about one tragic event which involves a group of young people. This event is categorized as juvenile delinquency. We expect you to listen to the story carefully. After the coordinator has read the text, we expect two things from everyone: to judge the right percentage of the guilt of every character in the story for the final result, (so that total ›guilt‹ is 100%), and to make a suggestion of an educational measure for every character from the story that you find necessary. The coordinator of the group (or an associate) will be with you all the time to read you the story again, and to help you to understand the concept and the standard use of educational measure. The coordinator can give you every explanation about what to consider before pronouncing an educational measure, but he cannot suggest the measure concerning characters from the story. Try to judge the responsibility well and choose the measure appropriately. After you've finished, everybody should individually submit on a piece of paper a proposal with the percentage of the guilt of the story characters and the proposal of the necessary measure. Make sure that percentages add up to 100%. Then we shall find out what the whole group proposes as a measure, and compare your results with the results from the other group.« If there are no questions, the coordinator reads the text, which is different for two groups only in one aspect: the perpetrators and the victims roles in the two stories are reversed.

2.1.4 Where can the workshop be used and with what value?

The primary value of these kinds of workshops is that they show the depth and roots of some ethnic prejudices in a relatively independent and indirect way (compared to questionnaires and scales of attitudes), in a way so obvious that participants cannot deny or minimize. The assumption is that direct confrontation with the bare fact that a person has certain attitudes will effectively lead to real correction or at least thinking about correcting some parts of their prejudice. The value of the workshop is, according to this assumption, in its preventive, both diagnostic and therapeutic effect.

2.2 Discussion of results of the workshop
2.2.1 The results obtained on the sociotherapeutic club of juvenile delinquents (Novi Sad, Serbia)

The research was completed in June 1998 on a sample of 9 male examinees aging from 16 to 18. The results achieved in this group show the absolute predominance of the nationality of the main characters in the story (Marko – Serbian and Ramiz- Roma character in the story) during the judgment of »guilt«, and also during the assessment of adequate educational measures. The Roma character was in both variants of the story treated as the guilty one for the story event, and Serb characters were treated dominantly as victims. The percentages of "guilt" for the event are shown in chart 1.
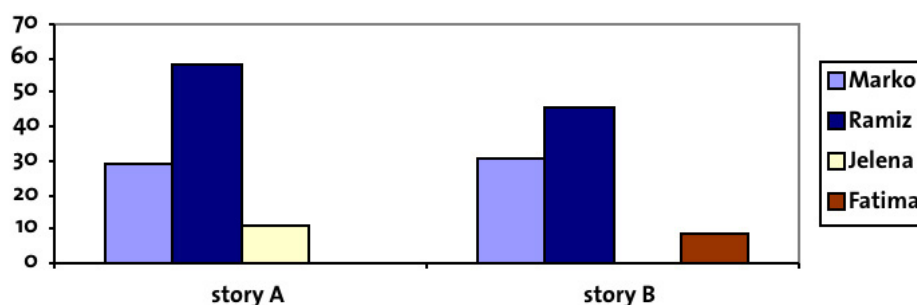

Chart 1: Sociotherapeutic club (Novi Sad)

The proposals for the educational measure for the story characters were made according to their perceived »guilt«. The suggestions on educational measures for Marko (Serb) were divided between those advocating increased care of the Center for Social Work (»light« measure), and those advocating time in a correctional facility. Regarding Ramiz (Roma) the »dilemma« was between correctional facility and juvenal prison, which is the hardest punishment possible for an adolescent in Serbia.

2.2.2 Results from the Sample of Third Year Students of Psychology (Novi Sad, Serbia)

The research was conducted in October 1999 on a sample of 28 female and 5 male examinees divided into two groups. The results show an extraodinary, almost »surgical« precision when judging the »guilt« of Marko and Ramiz. The results, showing the average percentages for event, is shown in chart 2.
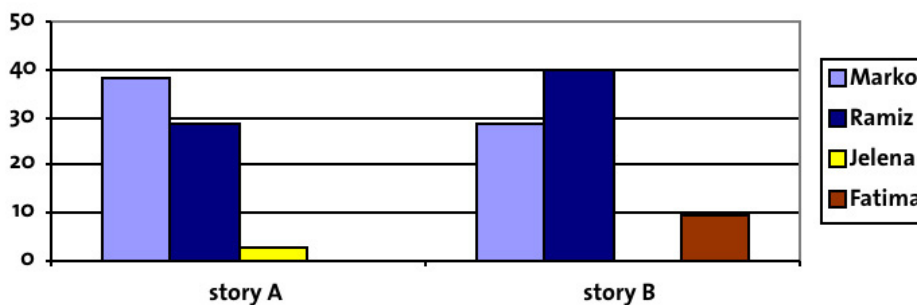

Chart 2: Students of Psychology (Novi Sad)

Here, at first glance, it is obvious that percentages of »guilt« given to Marko and Ramiz are practically a »mirror image«, which was the idea during the creation of the story (28,75 for Ramiz in story A, and eqvivalent to that 28,82 for Marko in story B; 38 for Marko in story A, and eqvivalent to that of 39,88 for Ramiz in story B) There is a greater difference between the two secondary characters Jelena (3) and Fatima (9,29)

However, the most interesting result (completely beyond the expectations of the author, who thought of the percentages to correspond to measures) came only after comparing these »precise and objective« results with the proposed adequate educational measure. These results are shown in **chart 3**:
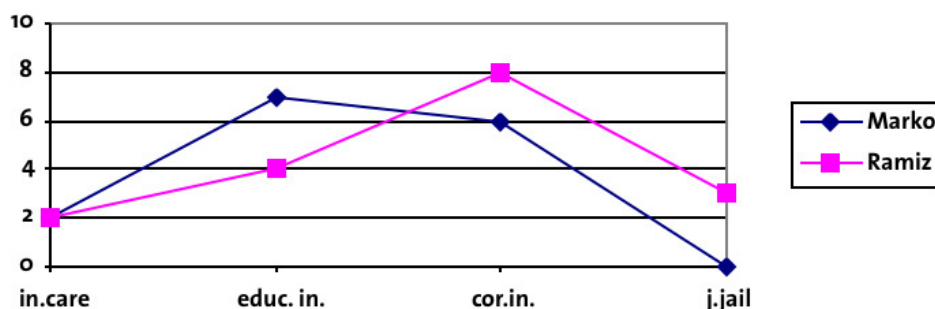

As can be seen, despite complete awarenees by the students that an identical criminal act was comitted in two stories and equal »guilt« was assigned to the Serb and Roma characters commiting it, the adequate educational measure for Marko (Serb) was determined to be an educational facility (an open institution), and for Ramiz (Roma) a correctional facility (closed institution and far more serious punishment, which was made clear to the students during the implementation of the workshop). Three students were ready to send Ramiz (Roma) to juvenile jail, but none of them would do the same with Marko (Serb). Also, a similar result is obtained for secondary characters Jelena and Fatima (**chart 4**)
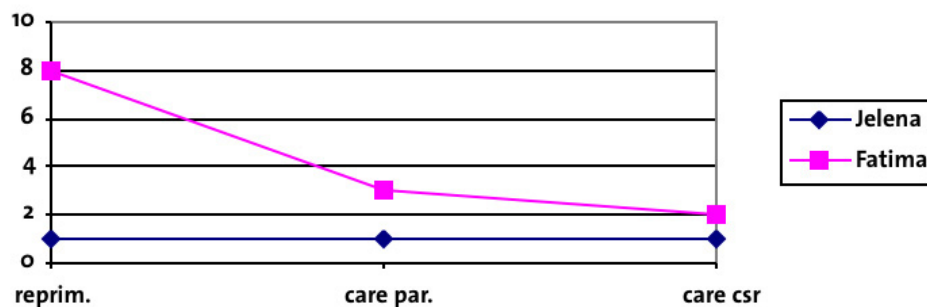
2.2.3 The results obtained on students of Trefort Bilingual School (Budapest, Hungary)

The research was completed on March 7, 2001 on a sample of 17 examinees of the Hungarian bilingual high school in Hungary. The results achieved in this group are close to those achieved on the sample of juvenile delinquents in Novi Sad. They show the relative predominance of the nationality of the main characters in the story (Hungarian characters and names replaced Serb; Janos/Marko and Jorsi/Ramiz) during the judgment of »guilt«, and also during the assessment of adequate educational measures, as shown in chart 5 and 6.
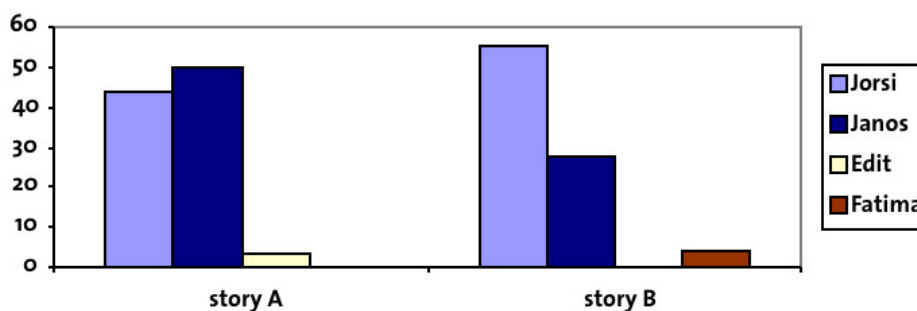
In story A Jorsi (Roma) is killed, Janos (Hungarian) is to blame. However, the difference between the two percentages is only 6%. When Janos (Hungarian) is killed in story B, Jorsi (Roma) is to blame and the difference between the percentages is 27,25%! We can draw the conclusion that even on the level of perception there is an obvious influence of ethnic prejudice for Hungarian high school students, less evident but close to the results of the young delinquents in Novi Sad. When judging the correct educational measure, the students decided to put Janos in a correctional facility and Jorsi in a juvenile prison – similar to the decision of the students and delinquents in Novi Sad (**chart 6**).
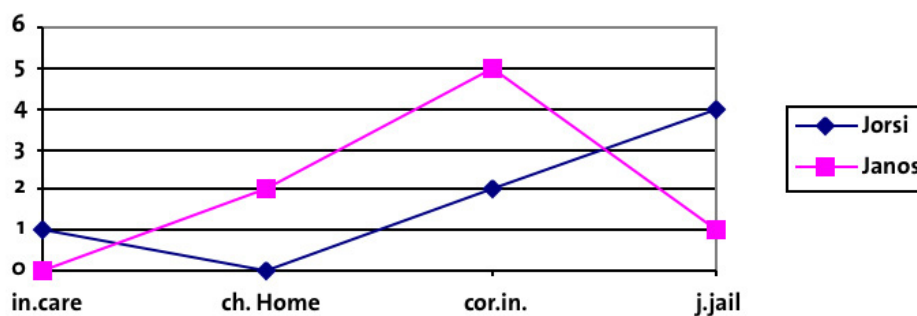
One comment made on the paper is very illustrative by itself: near Jorsi's name, in the place for the assessment of punishment, was written »execution«, and in the spot for guilt someone else had written »Turkish for bringing Gypsies to our beloved country 1000%.«

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In conclusion, during the implementation of the workshop on the samples of juvenile delinquents and on the sample of students of psychology in Novi Sad, as well as on the sample of students in Budapest, there was an obvious difference in evaluation of guilt or judging the punishment for the story characters based exclusively on their nationality. Since ethnic stereotypes evidently influenced even the level of perception of the event in the story by juvenile delinquents and students in Hungary, we cannot talk about conscious falsification of attitudes for them. We have another very interesting result, which shows that the students of psychology in Novi Sad had an extremely precise perception of »guilt« for the story event on an intellectual level, regardless of the characters' nationality, but that they were guided mostly by their ethnic preference when judging the punishment for the story characters, and not by

»objective« circumstances that they established themselves.

Of course, I am aware of the danger of an attempt to produce any definite conclusions based on these three sets of results. A number of arguments preclude any attempts of generalizing from them: small and not representative enough samples, the absence of repeated examinations, the impossibility for using any serious statistical methods, specific social and economic environment and others. However, this was not the priority of this research. The point was to check if this workshop can successfully provoke and »bring to light« those components of the ethnic prejudices and attitudes which the examinees would be less willing to express in a scale of attitudes. Also, it should try to make a good introduction to a serious debate about these questions. With the above-mentioned reservations in mind, it seems that the research presented gave a positive answer to this question.

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