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Social representations of wine and culture: A comparison between France and New Zealand



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate social representations of wine as a function of wine expertise and culture. Wine expertise has been studied extensively in the field of psychology and sensory analysis highlighting perceptual, verbal or memory skills. Wine is at the heart of French customs and eating traditions, and meanings developed about it are the subject of a real social construction and thus of social representations. But what about countries where the culture of wine is not historical? The objective of this research was to study the influence of expertise on social representations of wine from French and New Zealanders. Three hundred and ninety French and 177 New Zealanders, experts and non-experts in wine, participated in the study. To examine the social representation of wine, we used verbal association tasks designed to lead participants to associate the first four words that came to mind at the mention of the word “wine”. Data collected in the association tasks were submitted to a correspondence analysis. Results showed that New Zealanders considered wine with different flavours as a subject of relaxation and fun, but also linked to food. French associated wine with friendship, red wine, and cheese. The results also revealed differences between experts and novices. Novices evoked time of consumption including dinner and party whereas experts referred to sharing, heritage, and conviviality. The results are discussed in terms of theory of social representations.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Representation and culture

From a psychosocial perspective, the concept of representation has been defined by Jodelet (1989, p. 36) as “a form of knowledge socially developed and shared with practical designs and contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group”. According to this definition, representations are interpretation systems that organise the world and our relationships with others. Representations operate as reading grids of reality (see Rateau, Moliner, Guimelli, & Abric, 2011, for a review) which guide and organise behaviour and social communication among individuals and groups. In the same vein, a social representation must be viewed as a system of interpretation of reality that governs relations among individuals and groups in their physical and social environments and determines their behaviours and practices (Abric, 1993, 2001a; Rateau et al., 2011).

As a process, the activity of representation seems to be universal; as a product, it is subject to cultural variations. Indeed, the activity of representation is the same for all individuals; they construct in the same way their representation of the object. However, the product of representation varies from one individual to another depending on their culture; the content of their representation of the object is not the same as their culture.

Many studies, covering different fields of application, have been conducted taking into account the influence of culture on the representations of various objects: in the field of health (Goodwin et al., 2003), of human rights (Passini & Emiliani, 2009), of sensory analysis (Chr ea, Valentin, Sulmont-Ross e, Hoang Nguyen, & Abdi, 2005; Chr ea et al., 2004; Prescott, 1998) and in the field of food choices and representations (Bartels & Reinders, 2010; Blancher et al., 2007; Cervellon & Dub e, 2005; Guerrero et al., 2012; M akiniemi, Pirttil a-Backman, & Pieri, 2011; Penz, 2006; Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarrubin, & Wrzesniewski, 1999; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). All these studies aim to understand choices, behaviours, and beliefs in relation to culture.

With respect to the field of sensory analysis, work has been conducted on the influence of culture on the representations of odours (Chr ea et al., 2004, 2005; Prescott, 1998). Chr ea and colleagues (2004) showed that odour categorization depends on the familiarity

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and frequency of exposure to odours, and on the culture. Concerning food representations, with regard to the social construction of organic food products, Bartels and Reinders (2010) have shown that this representation differs according to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and that their culture has an influence on their consumption behaviour of organic food products. In the same vein, Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) comment that to better understand consumer behaviour in its entirety, it is essential to validate various studies on this theme in different countries.

Taken together, these studies show that consideration of culture allows us to better understand how individuals perceive their environment regardless of the field of application.

1.2. Wine and culture

Wine is at the heart of French customs and culinary traditions and can be studied as a social representation (Lo Monaco, 2008; Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008, 2011; Simonnet-Toussaint, Lecigne & Keller, 2005). The current research examined the influence of expertise on social representations of wine across France and New Zealand. As emphasised by many authors (e.g. Caillaud, 2010; Jodelet, 2002, 2006, 2008; Wachelke & Contarello, 2010), social representations are embedded in an existing socio-cultural and historical context. Thus, the fact that the socio-cultural history of wine varies between France and New Zealand is likely to have an impact on the representational content associated with wine insofar as culture is used as a framework for the interpretation of representations of objects (Jodelet, 2002, 2006). Thus, as France and New Zealand do not have the same wine culture, because of their history and their practices associated with this beverage, we assume that their representations of this object will be different (see Demossier, 2005, 2011; Wilson, 2004).

A few studies only have investigated wine across cultures, with most of them focusing on a comparison of Western and Eastern cultures. Jiang (2011) wrote a review of the literature to point out differences in the culture of wine consumption between China and Western countries. According to the author, the consumption of wine has a special status in traditional Chinese culture. The author also stresses that nowadays the Western culture of wine consumption has, to a large extent, had a significant impact on the Chinese culture of wine consumption since wine was introduced into China by the West. However, in China, the culture of wine consumption shows essentially a humanistic dimension in poetry, literature, and so forth, whereas the Western culture of wine consumption is related to respect for and appreciation of the wine itself. In the West, wine is subjected to analytical tasting, observation of colour, inhalation of its aroma, and other evaluative practices. The aim is mainly to enjoy wine, to take pleasure in tasting it. In China, wine is rather seen as a tool of communication but also a tool of creativity.

Other studies have compared Western and Eastern cultures. Do, Patris, and Valentin (2009) compared the beliefs and motivations related to wine consumption in Vietnam and France. Thus, while in Vietnam, wine is a product of modernity, which is consumed as a cultural change to be accepted, in France, it is a traditional product that is consumed by habit. These two cultures were also distinguished by the fact that in Vietnam wine is a marker of personal distinction, and a symbol of social success, while in France it is a marker of national identity. Wine is also considered as a good therapeutic health drink in Vietnam. Nowadays, in France the common perception does not include the health dimension; wine consumers primarily associate wine with pleasure, friendship or conviviality (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008; Lo Monaco, Guimelli, & Rouquette, 2009). Other authors have noted that alcohol-related behaviour needs to be studied according to the socio-cultural

context of consumers. Drinking alcohol is an act that reflects an individual or group identity with consumers perceiving themselves through what they consume and how they consume (Douglas, 1987). Alcohol consumption is also subject to social meanings in many cultures, for example, drinking to celebrate an event (Demossier, 2004, 2005; Fournier, 2003).

In France, wine has a special place among alcohols consumed. According to the latest report submitted by ONIVINS (Office National de l'Interprofession des Vins, 2005), wine consumption in France is decreasing. According to Garrier (2005), the French consume less but better quality wine, and the "wine as food" has become "wine for pleasure", synonymous with quality and moderate consumption. In New Zealand, wine is not the most popular alcoholic beverage. While the sale of beer accounts for two thirds of the market, its consumption has recently experienced a slight decline, to the benefit of wine sales. Although New Zealand is a small market, it is no less dynamic with a real passion for wine culture (Barker, 2004). Consumers determine the choice of wine by its grape variety, brand, by recommendations or personal experience, and frequently consume wine during meals. Wine consumption during meals is a recent development that can have a high social connotation in some cultures (Do, 2010). Culture influences how people think about wine; however culture is not the only factor involved in how to represent the wine. Indeed, some authors have shown that the level of expertise in wine plays a role in how wine is represented (Urdapilleta, Parr, Dacremont, & Green, 2011).

1.3. Representation and expertise

Expertise in wine has been little studied in social psychology, yet it seems a determinant in organising the content of the representation. Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) showed that the degree of expertise in wine shapes the degree of knowledge, a critical dimension for the construction of social representations. Similarly, in their work, Simonnet-Toussaint, Lecigne, and Keller (2005) concluded that the positions taken by the subjects are under control of their relationship with wine and therefore their level of knowledge. Thus, they found that negative aspects related to wine are absent among experts, while novices express more sensitivity to the damaging effects of this drink. Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) also emphasised this aspect. The results of their research showed that students, trained in different knowledge about wine, make less prominent negative aspects related to the controversy and social debate on wine. Thus, the authors emphasise that the acquisition of a significant level of knowledge on wine participates in the proximity with wine and thus its evaluation.

However, these studies have limitations insofar as the participants are experts in training, not experts confirmed. The level of expertise seems essential in understanding wine representations. In the present study we work with wine professionals with both technical and theoretical knowledge in the field of wine.

1.4. Summary & hypotheses

The overall objective of the present study was to investigate the influence of culture and expertise on representations of the object of wine. The study is innovative in that the cross-cultural studies cited above do not address the social representations of wine but the consumption patterns within Eastern and Western populations. Further, previous cross-cultural studies on representations in the areas of sensory analysis and food do not include wine. Finally, studies on social representations of wine that we cited in the introduction were conducted with French participants only. The originality of our present work is based on the study of the influence of expertise level on social representations of wine with

two “Western” countries whose cultural history of wine is different, France and New Zealand.

Based on the results obtained by Do (2010), our first hypothesis was as follows: French participants’ social representation of wine is associated with national identity while New Zealand participants’ social representation of wine is associated with a social act of consumption. Based on the results obtained by Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) and Simonnet-Toussaint et al. (2005), our second hypothesis was as follows: Experts’ social representation of wine is associated with positive aspects of wine while novices’ social representation of wine is associated with some negative aspects of wine.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Three hundred and ninety French and 177 New Zealanders participated in the study (see Table 1). Among French participants there were 288 wine consumers (164 females and 124 males) and 102 wine professionals (46 females and 56 males). The French wine professionals, who were currently part of wine cooperatives, were recruited by invitations. Among New Zealand participants, there were 103 wine consumers (61 females and 42 males) and 74 wine professionals (30 females and 44 males). New Zealand wine professionals currently working in the New Zealand wine industry were recruited by invitations. Wine professionals included oenologists, wine-makers, wine writers/critics and viticulturists (see Parr, Heatherbell, & White, 2002, for precise criteria). French and New Zealand wine consumers were defined as those people who consumed wine, but who were not currently employed in the wine industry. They were recruited by invitations to individuals known to consume wine. Participants were asked to provide wine consumption and socio-demographic information: Age (four age groups: 20–29, 30–39, 40–49 and 50+), gender, and occupational status (SPC) were recorded. Frequency of wine consumption was assessed on a 5-point scale (0 = non-consumer (never), 1 = very occasional (only at weddings and other parties), 2 = occasional (occasionally, other than at parties), 3 = regular (one to two times per week), 4 = daily (every day). The “non consumer” level of frequency automatically disqualified participants from the study.

2.2. Procedure

Participants were contacted by E-mail using snowball sampling for both groups. Participants were provided with an Internet link to an online questionnaire. Each session proceeded as follows. The participants first read the Information Sheet and accepted the Consent Form (required by the university’s Human Ethics Committee). The participants were advised that the study involved some questions about wine and were invited to begin the questionnaire. The questionnaire began with the presentation of the word “WINE” as a stimulus word and asked the participant to produce words or expressions that immediately came to mind (called induced words or expressions), advising that there were no right or wrong answers. This involved a free-association procedure (Vergès, 1992; Abric, 2003). Participants were instructed to answer the questions

in the order in which they appeared. The associations, called first-degree associations or induced words, were directly collected on a server. Finally, participants completed a demographics questionnaire to confirm their appropriate classification as “wine professional” or “wine consumer”.

3. Data analysis

3.1. Formatting of the induced words

Each induced word or expression cited by participants was directly collected on a server. The collected words’ list was lemmatized. Lemmatization is to identify root words and to reduce all words to their root. For example, terms “colour”, “colours”, “coloured” were grouped under the same root word “colour”.

To select the words to be submitted for analysis, we applied the binomial distribution (Lacassagne, Salès-Wuillemin, Castel, & Jébrane, 2001; Morlot & Salès-Wuillemin, 2008; Salès-Wuillemin, Castel, & Lacassagne, 2002). The binomial distribution takes into account the different information that the experimenter has: the number of participants, the maximum number of words that can be addressed in the task, and the number of different words cited by the sample. The objective of this procedure is to associate the citation threshold observed in natural probability that a word is randomly cited in the relevant protocol. The induced words selected are those that are not quoted by chance by the participants. This procedure increases the relevance of the words selected for the Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA).

3.2. Correspondence factor analysis

Data analysis focusing on verbal associations was conducted to determine the various elements forming participants’ representation fields based on the two factors of nationality and expertise. CFA was carried out on the lexical material collected using free association to identify the most significant factorial axes. According to Deschamps (2003), CFA can be used to carry out a simultaneous analysis of independent variables and the verbal productions of participants. CFA enables the study of consensus and divergences (Deschamps, 2003; Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Lo Monaco, Piermattéo, Guimelli, & Abric, 2012). CFA also highlights correspondences among the modalities of expertise (expert vs. non-expert) and nationality (French vs. New Zealander).

4. Results

CFA shows two factors containing the two variables (i.e., Expertise: expert vs. non-expert; Culture: French vs. New Zealander) submitted to analysis. To decide whether a term defines one or more factors, we used the approach suggested by Deschamps (2003) and used in recent works (see Lo Monaco et al., 2012) in terms of contributions by factor (CF). Factor 1 receives a contribution from the terms of the variable ‘culture’: $CF(\text{French}) = .28 + CF(\text{New Zealander}) = .64$, i.e., a contribution of 92%, to the formation of the factor. Factor 2 opposes two groups of modalities of the variables ‘status’. Regarding the contribution of these

Table 1
Participants’ age distribution across culture and level of expertise.

Level of expertise	Experts				Non-experts			
	20–29	30–39	40–49	50 and over	20–29	30–39	40–49	50 and over
French	15	32	31	24	123	32	31	24
New Zealander	2	28	25	19	16	20	23	44

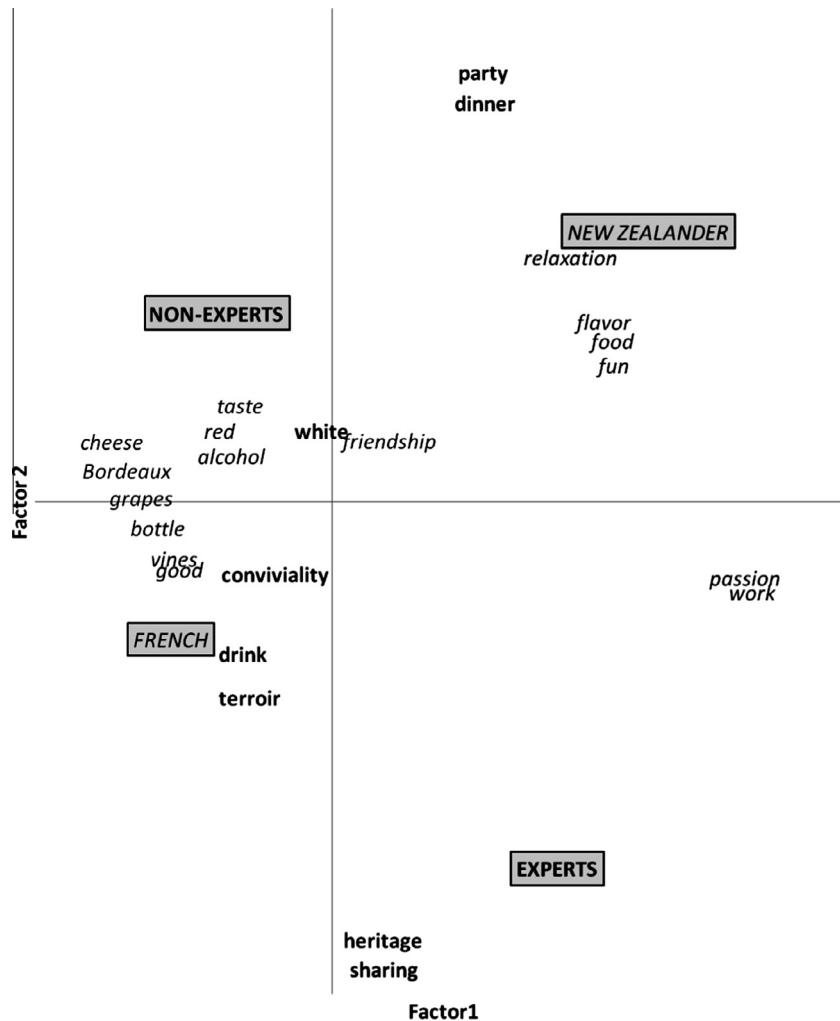


Fig. 1. Graphic representation of results provided by correspondence factor analysis taking into account Factor 1 and Factor 2.

modalities to the formation of the factor, the CFs are as follows: $CF(\text{expert}) = .28 + CF(\text{non-expert}) = .63$, i.e., a contribution of 91%, to the constitution of this factor. Fig. 1 shows this organisation.

Factor 1 shows French participants opposing New Zealanders. For the French, wine was associated with *vines* and *terroir*. *Vines* and *terroir* refers to the wine's origin, identity. The French also associated wine with *cheese* and *red* wine. In France, a *red* wine and *cheese* combination is very representative of the patterns of wine consumption. Finally, French participants also shared a social representation of wine in terms of time of consumption. Wine is consumed during the *meal*, synonymous with *conviviality*, sharing with *friends*.

The New Zealanders characterised wine in terms of *work* and *passion*. *Passion* for wine indicates that these participants are interested in wine. The *work* of the wine suggests that these participants are aware of the processes that lead to obtaining this product. The New Zealanders shared a social representation of wine in terms of leisure, that drinking wine provides *enjoyment*, *fun* and *relaxation*. Wine was also associated with *social* act of consumption, and that it is shared with *friend*. Finally, these participants suggested that wine is consumed with *food*, but no time of consumption was discussed.

On Factor 2, experts opposed novices. Remember that all novice participants consume wine at least once a month. Novices associated wine with aspects that may appear negative: *alcohol* and

drunkenness. They also associated wine with the *glass* of wine, this association could refer to “have a drink” at a time of consumption as an aperitif or simply to the container or to the amount consumed. Moreover, novices clearly associated other times of consumption related to wine: *meals*, especially *dinner*, but also *parties*, suggesting that wine is a recreational drink. Another representational element appears: *appellation*. *Appellation* can refer to a geographically designated region from which a wine's grapes originate. However, the task proposed to participants does not suggest a clear interpretation of the presence of this representational element *appellation* in the wine representation of novices. As we did not ask for a definition of the terms mentioned by the participants, we are not certain that participants referred to the exact definition of the term *appellation*.

Expert participants were wine professionals with knowledge and expertise in the field of wine. Experts shared a social representation of wine referring to the *work*, the *terroir*, the *tradition* and *heritage* involved in viticulture and wine production. These elements suggest that the experts have knowledge about processes involved in the production of wine and that their knowledge structures their wine representation. These results are in agreement with the work of Salesses (2005), Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) and Simonnet-Toussaint et al. (2005), which showed that the meanings attributed to an object are dependent on the level of knowledge of this object and its role in structuring social

representations. Experts also associated wine with *pleasure* and *quality*, referring to the hedonic aspects of wine consumption. Finally, for the experts, wine refers to a time of *sharing* and *conviviality*. The representational elements indicate that wine is not consumed alone but with others, which gives an indication of consumption practices.

Of particular importance, the data show that despite wine's status as an alcohol, neither French nor New Zealand consumers overly associated wine with negative aspects, confirming the results obtained by Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008, 2011). This may signify a desire to preserve a positive consumer identity.

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the relationships that exist between culture and social representations of wine, taking into account the level of expertise of participants. We employed CFA (Deschamps, 2003) to organise the data produced by participants during their online questionnaire to allow us to consider whether the representational field related to wine differed according to culture (French vs. New Zealander). In relation to our first hypothesis, we observed that the culture of the participants influenced the representational field related to wine. In relation to our second hypothesis, we observed that the level of domain-specific expertise determined by status (experts vs. novices) of the participants influenced the representational field related to wine.

According to Lo Monaco (2008), the product of social representation is subject to cultural variation. Social representation is both a socio-cognitive process considered universal but also a product established as an organised system of beliefs and meanings that depend on social and cultural integration.

In the present study, the French social representation of wine was associated with aspects of national identity, this result confirming previous conclusions (see Do et al., 2009). In fact, the combination of red wine and cheese seems to refer to the traditional cultural aspect of wine in France. The French social representation of wine was also related to the origin of wine. According to Douglas (1987), consumers perceive themselves through how they consume and French social representation of wine was associated to time of consumption (meal) and with whom we consume wine (friend, conviviality).

From the perspective of New Zealanders, wine was a story of work and passion. According to Charters (2006), the fact that participants express their passion for wine underlines their desire to learn more about the product (process of wine tasting, to put into words wine perceptions, to match food and wine). These results are consistent with the general idea that countries that do not have a "wine culture" historically see their wine consumer as eager to learn about wine and thus develop their practices around this product.

Wine was also considered as a part of leisure (fun, relaxation, enjoyment). In New Zealand, alcohol is the most recreational substance used; presumably wine as with other alcohols is considered a recreational beverage. As has been reported by Douglas (1987), drinking alcohol is an act that reflects an individual or group identity. In New Zealand, drinking wine seems to be a social act, where it is consumed with friends. New Zealanders also referred to wine in terms of food. This element is revelatory about practices such as looking for food matches, and practices associated with seeking pleasure.

Thus, a representation is not social only because it deals with social elements, it is social also because it is shared within a group, and it is one of its characteristics (Vinsonneau, 1997). Representation is a construction of reality by the individual, and a characteristic attribute of group membership. Representation mediates the

relationship between the individual and their environment. Thus, group members share both the same interpretation of reality and the same mode of response to the current situation.

According to Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008), the representational field associated with wine differs depending on whether participants are experts or novices. In the present study, the experts described wine as a drink of conviviality and sharing. They also referred to the heritage, work, terroir, tradition conveyed by the wine. These representational elements refer to knowledge about wine. Finally, experts' social representation of wine was associated with hedonic elements (pleasure, quality). On the other hand, novices mentioned wine as an alcohol which can lead to drunkenness. According to Lo Monaco and Guimelli (2008) and Simonnet-Toussaint et al. (2005), it shows that novices are sensitive to the existing controversy around wine consumption. Novices also referred to their practices of wine consumption because they evoked time of consumption (meal, dinner, party). It can be concluded, referring to the work of Do (2010), that experts rely on symbolic motives in the act of drinking wine. In this regard, Darke and Richie (2007) explain that wine tasting is considered as the sharing of a common experience which encourages socialization. We note that for all participants, experts and novices, French and New Zealanders, drinking wine is not a solo act but a shared act. As researchers on food choice and representations (Bartels & Reinders, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998) have suggested, the interest paid to representations based on the expertise level and culture allows understanding of the behaviours and choice of individuals toward wine.

6. Conclusion and limitations

The current study has demonstrated the influence of cultural environment and level of domain-specific expertise on the social representation of wine. These original results confirm prior findings regarding the importance of culture; demonstrating specific ways in which participants from France (an Old World wine country) and New Zealand (a New World wine country) differed in their thinking about wine. These results contribute information relevant to the perception of wine with possible application in the field of wine marketing. The research also has some limitations, one being lack of detailed measurement of participants' consumption habits. To better understand the relationship between the representational object and population studied, Abric (2001b) suggested studying the distance from the object produced by the level of practices, involvement and knowledge (see also Dany & Abric, 2007). Future research could include such measurements. A second limitation concerns age distribution of participants in the study. The online methodology we employed did not control for age within the various categories of culture and expertise. It is conceivable the age distributions do actually represent different drinking patterns amongst French and New Zealand youth; that is, more young French people may drink wine relative to young New Zealanders, the latter having a preference for beer over wine. None-the-less, it is possible that the higher proportion of young French wine consumers relative to the New Zealand wine consumers has influenced the data, although this is unlikely to have influenced the major results of the study.

Finally, social psychology has only recently addressed the topic of wine. Further work is required to understand this complex object and its special status in society. One major issue worthy of exploration is the link between wine and health, including the 'French paradox'. According to Latruffe (2008), the therapeutic aspects of wine consumption are still relevant, an aspect not expressed by the participants of our research while symbolic and hedonic aspects related to wine have been widely demonstrated.

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