

Policy & Practice

St Chad's College, Durham University

Annual Report: 2014-15



Policy&Practice

St Chad's College, Durham University

Our full time academics, associates and fellows at St Chad's College, Durham University are committed to the promotion of social justice in the United Kingdom and beyond.

Policy&Practice is the banner under which this work is communicated to a wider community of interest. The College is committed to undertaking research, policy analysis and evaluation that makes a difference to the way policy makers and practitioners carry out their work, aimed ultimately at increasing the benefit gained by the people for whom they work. We do this through applied research and evaluation for a wide range of private sector organisations, independent charitable foundations, national and local government, charities and other non-profit organisations.

Our work is heavily embedded in the North of England, but we do not confine our work to this area. Several national and international studies have been undertaken over the years in continental Europe, the United States, South Africa and Japan. What we hope to do is to use our learning to help increase our scope for understanding complex social, economic and political issues and our ability to help people tackle challenges in a positive, pragmatic and effective way in new contexts.

Our current areas of interest in **Policy&Practice** include:

- *The role of voluntary and community organisations and social enterprises in making a contribution to social wellbeing.*
- *The promotion and evaluation of positive action programmes to increase hope, confidence and capability of young people.*
- *Working with practitioners who are committed to improving wellbeing in less advantaged communities and regeneration areas.*
- *The impact of private sector businesses on community well-being and local economic growth.*
- *Collaborative governance in public sector and voluntary sector partnerships.*
- *Labour market transitions and the impact on employment opportunities, social inequalities and social mobility.*

Policy&Practice research expertise includes:

- *Large scale quantitative online and postal surveys.*
- *Participatory research and action research.*
- *In depth qualitative interviewing, observation and focus groups.*
- *Academic and practice literature reviews.*
- *Policy analysis and development.*
- *Facilitation of partnership and brokerage projects.*

Policy&Practice has had a particularly good year in winning commissions for new research from, amongst others, Durham County Council, Telefónica UK, Northern Rock Foundation, Community Foundation for Tyne and Wear & Northumberland, Charity Bank, Department for Business Innovation and Skills, New Anglia Local Enterprise, Aston University and the Institute for Local Governance. The value of new work has exceeded £350,000.

The Policy Research Group

Under the **Policy&Practice** umbrella we have a specialist group of researchers at St Chad's, comprising Gordon Allinson, Paul Braidford and Maxine Houston, who have worked together as the Policy Research Group (PRG) for over 15 years. PRG produces high quality, independent research to support public policy development and implementation. PRG has a strong interest in the development of policies to combat disadvantage and exclusion, and has been involved in the development and evaluation of a wide range of initiatives connected with regeneration, business support and access to the labour market.

The team of social scientists and economists focus on three principal research areas: employment, skills and enterprise; economic and social regeneration; and regional development. The Group has completed studies for a wide range of organisations, including the Department of Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS); the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP); the British Business Bank; the European Commission; the Low Pay Commission; the Institute for Local Governance based at Durham's Business School, as well as numerous local authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships, sector skills organisations and social enterprise groups both within and beyond the North East.

Young People & Society Study Group

Academics at Durham University, from across a wide range of departments, institutes and colleges, have established a strong reputation for the study of young people and society. St Chad's College hosts an interdisciplinary study group of academics and post-graduate students who have shared interests in this field of work. The study group meets three times a year to discuss current issues concerning young people and society.

The study of young people at Durham is approached from many disciplinary and inter-disciplinary perspectives including: anthropology, business studies, cultural studies, geography, health, history, politics, psychology, religion, social policy, sociology, and youth & social work.

The following key areas of interest show the range and depth of study which is currently being undertaken.

- **Equalities:** deprivation, social exclusion & marginalisation, ethnic diversity, gender & sexualities, disabilities.
- **Environment and spatiality:** migration, urban & rural society, conflict and disasters.
- **Health and wellbeing:** physicality, resilience & mental health, happiness & pro-sociality.
- **Everyday life:** culture & identity, consumption, leisure & sport, arts and culture, social media.
- **Civil society:** voluntary social action, civic engagement, politics & social movements, third sector interventions
- **Social mobility:** education & employability, paid work, virtual mobilities.
- **Relationships:** families & households, friendship & loneliness, domestic violence, life transitions & critical incidents.
- **Research methodologies:** comparative methods, visual sociology, autobiography, narratives, observation, quantitative data and analysis.
- **Social policy:** youth work, crime & antisocial behaviour, penalty, unemployment, health, housing and homelessness, welfare benefits.

We welcome members of academic staff and post-graduate students who are interested in the study of young people from any disciplinary or thematic perspective.

Events

Shaping a socially just society: the role of academia and the university

This conference was organised by St Chad's College Middle Common Room and took place on 3rd July, 2015. The conference addressed the question of what university researchers and activists think are the most pressing social concerns of the next five years?

Speakers included:

- *Ruth Raynor on austerity and single mothers in Gateshead;*
- *Ruth Patrick on the 'dole animators', challenging perceptions of people on benefits*
- *Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite on the proliferation of foodbanks*
- *Prof. Fred Robinson on the role of the university in promoting social justice.*

The conference was attended by over 50 academics and postgraduates from across the University.

Inaugural meeting of the Young People & Society Study Group

The first event this academic year will take place on Thursday 10th December 2015 in St Chad's College and will tackle controversies surrounding the social mobility agenda.

The debate will be led by Dr Vikki Boliver of the School of Applied Social Sciences who will talk about equal access to elite universities. Professor Stephen Gorard from the School of Education will talk about the resurgence of political support for grammar schools and will assess its likely impact on social mobility. Professor Tony Chapman of St Chad's College will talk about what counts as social mobility for many young people from deprived and marginalised communities and how such achievements are generally dismissed by politicians.

We then have a presentation by Professor Gina Porter and Dr Kate Hampshire of the Department of Anthropology to report on research they have recently completed. The title of their talk is: Exploring young people's mobile phone usage in sub-Saharan Africa.

Institute for Local Governance Seminar Series

Policy&Practice has organised a series of seminars over the last year for the Institute for Local Governance. The seminar series focuses on the role of local government in an age of austerity. The seminars have included the following topics.

- *Keeping it simple: how to work effectively with the third sector, Teesside University Darlington Campus, October 2014.*
- *The transfer of local authority assets: held at Framwellgate Moor Community Centre, Durham in May 2015.*
- *Young people and skills in Tees Valley, Redcar and Cleveland College, May 2015.*



- *Living better for longer: tackling the challenges of demographic ageing, Newcastle University, June 2015 (organised with the Newcastle University Institute for Ageing).*
- *Japanese Inward Investment Journeys to North East England, Teikyo University, Durham, July 2015 (organised with the Japan Centre for Local Government).*
- *On the fringes of the "Northern Powerhouse"? Tackling the challenges facing rural areas in Northern England, Kirkley Hall, Ponteland, October 2015 .*
- *Who cares for the carers? Tackling the challenges facing carers in Northern England, Middlesbrough Football Club, November 2015.*

These well attended seminars have included over 30 speakers from across the region from local authorities, universities, charities and other regional and national research agencies. Next year, seminars are planned on the challenges of welfare reform, on building the civic core through volunteering and on the cost-benefit of prevention strategies.

Research projects: 2014-15

In search of Middlesex



Photo: Richard Else 2015

Professorial Fellows Fred Robinson and Richard Else are undertaking an intriguing collaborative project about Middlesex. They've worked together on all kinds of things in the past, but nothing quite like this. They wanted to explore a place that's important but usually ignored – and decided they would focus attention on the North West London suburbs, the area covered by the old County of Middlesex.

Many people think of this area as a boring, monocultural suburbia: Metroland. But actually it's a complex set of communities. It is home to more than two million people and is, in many ways, a successful part of London. It is multi-cultural' and economically vibrant; it includes Heathrow and Wembley, and also Southall and Enfield. Middlesex may not feature in travellers' tales, but it actually has a lot going for it.

Fred and Richard want to celebrate the vitality, diversity and importance of this area in a book of photographs (by Richard) and accompanying text (by Fred). They've tramped around the area a good deal and gathered a lot of material.

Fred says: *'We want to show people what the area is really like and why it is worth looking at and thinking about. We hope that the book, and perhaps an exhibition too, will appeal to a wide audience. We want people to think about changing cities and suburbs, geographies and cultures. And we'd like people to find Middlesex as interesting as we do.'*

Northern Rock Foundation Third Sector Trends study finds that charities in poorer areas are struggling more than in rich areas

The final reports from the Third Sector Trends Study have now been published. This longitudinal study provides a unique insight into the state of the voluntary and community sector in the North East over five years from 2008/09 to 2014. The report, funded jointly by Northern Rock Foundation and the Community Foundation, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland shows that the voluntary sector has in large part managed to



sustain its work, despite enormous challenges and funding pressures over the last five years.

However, a key finding, which has significance for all public and charitable

funders of the sector, is that although the majority of voluntary organisations are keeping income levels stable and in some cases seeing some rises in income, this isn't an even picture across the region. Voluntary organisations located in the poorest areas are 4 times more likely to have lost significant levels of income in the last two years when compared with the richest areas – 30% compared to 7%. Medium sized organisations (those with an income of £50,000 – £250,000) are the hardest hit.

These findings highlight serious pressures on voluntary organisations working in the most deprived parts of the region and the danger of major contraction and closure of services for vulnerable people. Penny Wilkinson, Chief Executive of Northern Rock Foundation said:

“The Third Sector Trends Study is a major part of the legacy of Northern Rock Foundation. Our investment in this study provides the evidence to help policy makers and funders make informed decisions about where and how to fund and support voluntary organisations in the future.”

Tony Chapman, author of the report said:

“Charities have borne the pressures of austerity better than many expected over the last five years, but those which are based in the poorest areas are definitely struggling more to maintain funding than charities in rich areas: this is a matter of real concern as they generally deliver to the most needy.”

Rob Williamson, Chief Executive of the Community Foundation said:

“Over seven years, the Third Sector Trends Study has provided invaluable data, and the Community Foundation was pleased to co-finance this last research round. Its findings present challenges for funders, policy-makers and voluntary organisations themselves. With Northern Rock Foundation’s expected closure, the Community Foundation is working with it and others on ways of addressing the sector’s needs. One area of particular focus, especially in the light of these findings, will be continuing to build funder relationships that may result in more resources coming to the region from London and elsewhere. We also hope to be able to enable research on the sector to be maintained in the future.”

Developing digital capability in small and medium sized businesses



Policy Research Group and BMG recently published research on Digital Capabilities in small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). The digital economy is increasingly important to the UK; that means that all UK businesses, particularly small ones, should be able to use technology confidently, and trade online in the modern interconnected world. But a lot of small businesses are not making the most of the opportunities that are open to them, and the UK risks falling behind in the global marketplace.

BIS

Department for Business
Innovation & Skills

The research found that a quarter of SMEs do not possess basic digital skills; and there is a clear, positive link between digital skill levels and growth in sales. Not only do many lack the skills, however, but there is an attitudinal barrier

amongst a large minority of SMEs towards developing an online presence; a lack of awareness about the benefits and opportunities available; and a lack of understanding about online security threats.

The rollout of superfast broadband is helping things, as long as small businesses get the training and skills they need to get the most out of it. That means delivering courses locally through existing networks, and finding out what works well – to date, there has been a lot of activity in developing digital skills but very little evaluation of the impacts in business, or which delivery methods work best.

Community Development Projects: 40 years on

Over the past two years, Professor Fred Robinson has been working with colleagues on a major national research project called *'Imagine'*. This practice-based project is concerned with using research to help imagine and develop communities. It is about the 'social, historical, cultural and democratic context of civic engagement'. *Imagine* is supported by the Economic and Social Research Council under the Connected Communities programme.



The whole *Imagine* project comprises four parts, one of which focuses on the historical context of civic engagement. This part

involves revisiting the sites of three Community Development Projects (CDPs) which were implemented during the 1970s. Two of these were in Tyneside (Benwell and North Shields) and

one in the West Midlands (Hillfields, Coventry). In each of these places, researchers from local universities (Durham and Warwick Universities) and community organisations are exploring the imagining, planning and impact of the CDP and are tracking subsequent regeneration programmes in those areas.

Fred's role has been to look at the history of regeneration in Benwell and North Shields. He has been developing accounts of the implementation and impact of regeneration policies, drawing on both documentary material and interviews. He says:

“As you look at these policies over a period of 40 years, you can feel a sense of frustration that lessons often aren't learnt and problems aren't solved. But there has actually been some real progress in terms of health and housing, for instance, and a better understanding of the need for active community engagement in the regeneration process”.

At the sharp end of small business growth



Paul Braidford, speaking at the Shard

A buoyant small business sector is vital to the success of the UK economy, but most small businesses never grow or, at best, achieve only modest growth. So, understanding the factors that drive and shape small business performance is a key concern for policymakers, helping them to devise more effective ways to overcome barriers to growth.

The Policy Research Group recently presented research findings on the growth dispositions of small business owners at a mini-conference organised by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills at the Shard in London. The research, conducted in conjunction with the Enterprise Research Centre at Aston University, analyses why some owners want to grow their business while others do not – ‘why many businesses fail to become more productive and fail to grow despite having the potential to do so’, as outlined by the research brief.

The work of PRG researchers, Paul Braidford, Gordon Allinson and Maxine Houston focused on the ways in which business owners construct and present narratives about themselves, their backgrounds and important life events, providing insights into the sociological reasons behind differing attitudes and behaviours – including those related to business growth, ambition and risk taking.

The research suggests ways to try and shape and influence more positive attitudes towards business growth – for example, by better informing the way in which business support is targeted and delivered, or developing ‘social spaces’ to promote networking between growth-inclined owners and those less likely to pursue growth.

National Youth Agency's Social Action Journey Fund brings benefits to disadvantaged young people

Young people who completed the National Youth Agency's Social Action Journey Fund programme reported improved attitude and ability as a result of their involvement in the volunteering programme, a new evaluation has found. The programme which ran from January 2014 to March 2015, was



funded by the Cabinet Office to increase the level of social action amongst young people. NYA's project was delivered in partnership with O2 Think Big, who provided support for young people's social action ideas.

By the end of the programme young people indicated they had benefitted from their involvement – demonstrating improved levels of cooperation, empathy and problem solving and also wellbeing, educational attainment and grit. The findings, from research carried out by Professor Tony Chapman at Durham University, are significant given the focus of NYA's SAJF project was young people from deprived or socially marginalised backgrounds who do not often engage in voluntary social action.

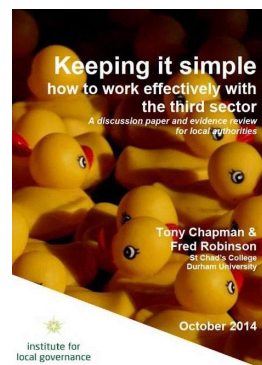
The challenge is that young people from marginalised backgrounds often need more assistance, the report's author states.

“These young people often require more intensive intervention from youth work professionals, who need to compensate for the lack of support young people may receive from families, friends or school. The greater the support required, the more expensive the programme is to resource – but this must not be allowed to mean disadvantaged young people are overlooked in favour of young people who require less help.”

Amanda Fearn, Think Big programme manager at the National Youth Agency, said:

“Social Action Journey Fund was a great programme because it allowed us to work with the young people who often get overlooked in social action. With government targets to increase the number of young people who regularly volunteer it's important we continue to support social action for all young people not just a privileged few. Otherwise the benefits will only be felt by a small minority and not society-wide as they should be.”

Keeping things simple: working effectively with the third sector in North East England



In recent decades, financial pressures on local authorities have resulted in significant changes in the ways their services are provided through, for example, contracting out services, co-production, asset transfer, the use of volunteers, and establishing new types of organisation (such as social enterprises and mutuals).

Such developments have presented internal and external organisational, cultural and operational challenges for local authorities when forging new relationships between commissioner, producer, and customer/citizen. Building on evidence-based hypotheses from

previous academic and action research, this project will help councils produce new solutions to increase the impact of social policy interventions.

The new two-year project, beginning in September 2015, will work with six local authorities in North East England to do this work, including: Darlington Borough Council, Durham County Council, Gateshead Council, Northumberland County Council, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and Sunderland City Council.



The project, jointly funded by the ESRC and Institute for Local Governance will be undertaken by Professors John Mawson (ILG), Tony Chapman and Fred Robinson of St Chad's College, Durham University and Dr Jonathan Wistow from the School of Applied Social

Sciences. The aim of the programme is to assist councils in navigating change in a complex political, social and economic environment which may demand fundamental change in the way that service delivery is conceptualised and effected.

The work will address six areas of policy and service delivery where impact can be achieved by 2019:

- Outsourcing of local authority service.
- Growing the 'civic core' through volunteering.
- Partnership working and co-production.
- The impact of interventions.
- Hearing the 'voices' of the Third Sector.
- Strengthening the capability of the Third Sector.

A key priority is maintaining good intelligence on sector structure, dynamics and strengths so that realistic decisions about investment can be made.

Charity Bank commissions study on borrowing in Cumbria

Professor Tony Chapman, St Chad's College and Professor Peter Wells, Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned by Charity Bank and Northern Rock Foundation to undertake a study in Cumbria on the interest charities and social enterprises have in borrowing money.



The purpose of loans may include mortgages, investment in upgrading property, buying equipment, or for working capital. Professor Chapman has undertaken a quantitative study in Cumbria which has produced comparable data for charities in North East England and Yorkshire.

Statistics were produced on the size of the marketplace for loans in Cumbria for different purposes, and the characteristics of organisations which are prepared to take loans.

The transfer of local authority assets

Local councils, especially in the North East, are having a tough time. Funding from central government has been cut—and there are more cuts to come—and demand for services keeps rising. As a result, they have had to find ways to keep services going by being creative and doing things differently.



Over the past three years Professor Fred Robinson

and Ian Zass-Ogilvie of **Policy&Practice** have been working closely with Durham County Council on their asset transfer programme. The council has many community buildings, such as community centres, that it has been struggling to maintain.

The council felt that the only way to ensure that they have a long term future is to encourage local groups to take on full responsibility for repairs and maintenance as well as management. These groups are able to access funding that the council can't—and they are best placed to respond to local needs. But it is asking a lot of them.



Gordon Elliott of Durham County Council hands over responsibility for Framwellgate Moor Community Centre to Colin Hillary, the Centre's Chair, Photo: Northern Echo 2015

"Our job has been to work with council officers and other agencies to strengthen these local groups, help them think through what asset transfer would mean, and find ways of generating more income. Actually, our role has been to serve as go-betweens, building trust between these organisations and the council. It's been fascinating and it's worked well" says Professor Robinson.

A report was published with local authority colleagues on the whole experience which concluded that:

"Asset transfer has really been about relationships, not just buildings. Building confidence and capacity takes a lot of time and careful negotiation. But we got there and we are hopeful that these centres will now have a long term future as a key local resource."

Durham County Council is now developing this approach further. Local communities are being asked to take on the running of other services. **Policy&Practice** continues to work with the council and will be evaluating the process and the results over the next two years.

Japanese Inward Investment in North East England

This new study, funded by the Institute for Local Governance, led to a regional seminar on Japanese inward investment in June 2015 at Teikyo University Durham. The study aimed to get a better understanding of the 'journeys' Japanese companies have made in establishing themselves in the North East. In so doing, the intention was to examine:

- Perceptions of the initial impetus to established plants in the North East.
- Perceptions about the relationships with other Japanese companies in the region and indigenous UK firms inside and outside of the supply chain.
- The contribution Japanese inward investment has made to strengthening social growth in North East England.

The next stage of the work is to undertake interviews with Japanese firms which are well established in the region, together with Hitachi which has built a major new plant in Newton Aycliffe.

As the study is interested in cultural and political factors, it will also examine the extent of social assimilation of Japanese firms into North East England and consider the extent to which the indigenous UK population have capitalised on new opportunities (as partners, sub-contractors, local politicians and economic development strategists, employees and families, friends and neighbours).

A PhD student will join **Policy&Practice** in 2015 to take forward work on the impact of Japanese inward investment on the local business supply chain and assess the social and economic impact of such development.

Northern Rock Foundation: history and achievements

In July 2015, the Northern Rock Foundation published a history of its work and the impacts it has had during 17 years of grant making. Researched and written by Professor Fred Robinson, this independent assessment, whilst sympathetic to the mission of the Foundation, takes an objective view of its history and achievements.

Funded by Northern Rock bank, the Foundation spent over £225 million on community projects and initiatives in the North East and Cumbria. Its work has ranged over many different areas of social need including support for older people, homeless young people, refugees and asylum seekers and those with mental health problems. It sought to tackle issues like financial inclusion, penal reform and domestic abuse but also invested in the development of the arts and cultural infrastructure of the region.



Key achievements identified in the report include:

- Focusing attention on disadvantaged people and communities, including difficult and unpopular causes, like child sexual exploitation.
- Using research to influence national and regional policy in areas such as dementia and domestic and sexual violence.
- Helping the voluntary and community sector to develop their skills and capacity and fostering collaboration and enterprise.

Important lessons from the history and work of the Foundation are:

- A regionally based foundation can know its area in a way that a nationally based foundation, based elsewhere, almost certainly cannot.
- There is a value in concentrating some grant making on particular organisations that will develop and grow through long term support.
- Expert and dedicated Trustees and staff help to ensure good and effective grant-making
- Reliance on one corporate benefactor has both strengths and weaknesses.

The financial crisis that hit the Northern Rock bank had a profound impact on the Foundation, which is now expected to close down in 2016. Professor Robinson said:

“The Foundation made an important contribution to the well-being of the North East and Cumbria. It helped to enrich the lives of many people. For some organisations its funding has been beneficial, but not crucial; for others it may have been transformative, a really important input that helped them to survive or grow or become what they are today. It was very much an organisation rooted in the region which was prepared to fund unpopular things at times, but things which made a real difference”.

Arts & Culture in County Durham

Given the ‘cooler climate’ in public funding, demonstrating the economic impact of the arts, culture and sports is more important than ever. Nationally the arts and culture sector pays its way, recent figures show an annual return of £2.35 billion to the Treasury - and the contribution to local economies is growing faster in the parts of the country worst affected by the recession like the North East. Employment in the sector is strong too, with the growth in jobs and skills feeding into an expanding knowledge and skills based economy - particularly important to young people entering the jobs market.

In 2015, Durham County Council commissioned PRG to develop an evaluation framework to measure the impact of the arts, cultural and sports events the Council supports. The overall aim is to establish an evaluation framework with flexible methodologies and KPIs which can be applied across all types of events and appropriate for use by different delivery organisations – large and small, public, private and third sector.

A single, standardised framework will allow meaningful comparisons, the aggregation of impacts and identification of savings; it will also produce a reliable evidence base for decision-making and strategy. And the more we understand what the sector does for us, in terms of the economy, education, health and wellbeing, and communities, the more we will be able to provide the evidence to give government and the taxpayer the confidence to invest.



Photo: Durham County Council 2015

During 2015 the events and festivals PRG has evaluated for County Durham have been very varied, including: Bishop Auckland Food Festival, the International Brass Festival, Durham Book Festival, culminating most recently with Lumiere Durham.

Each time we have revised and refined a range of evaluation tools, tailoring them to specific events and trying out innovative methods and approaches. For Lumiere, PRG also worked with Durham businesses to capture economic impact and help the businesses make the most of the festival's opportunities. We also helped recruit and train more than 20 Durham University students to carry out on-street evaluation of Lumiere, helping them acquire valuable employment experience and become more involved in the life of the city.

In the news

Professor Fred Robinson wrote an overview of research findings from a recent JRF project on universities' contribution to social and economic renewal for Parliament's **House Magazine**. In the article, he argues that a university can be a fantastic community resource. Through their educational



provision, universities can promote social mobility. They have a lot of expertise and some great facilities, and also provide many local job opportunities. And as universities are often located in areas of economic and social disadvantage, they should be well placed to support poorer communities.

Universities that provide students with community placements find that both students and local groups benefit from them.

Academics working with local groups find that their research is not only more realistic but also has a purpose. Universities need to be more aware of their corporate social responsibilities, and more responsive to local need. They have much to give – and also much to gain.

Published by *The House Magazine* 17th October 2014

The Northern Echo

Professor Tony Chapman writes regular leader articles for the Northern Echo on issues concerning Northern England. Recent articles have addressed a range of topics including, amongst others: young people and skills in Tees Valley, Japanese inward investment by Hitachi in Newton Aycliffe, the challenges of demographic change, the financial situation of charities and social enterprises in an age of austerity, and the impact of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 'Northern Powerhouse' strategy on rural and isolated areas.



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