

## Rural tourism in the Twente Region, The Netherlands



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## **General introduction to the Twente-region**

Twente is a non-administrative region in the Eastern Netherlands. It is the most Eastern and most urbanised part of the Dutch province of Overijssel. Although not being an administrative region, Twente is a clearly distinctive functional and territorial entity from the rest of the Overijssel province, when using the different shapes of Paasi on the region [Paasi, 1996].

The region's borders are defined by the Overijssel region of Salland in the northwest and west (the river Regge roughly defines the western border), the German Grafschaft Bentheim in the northeast and east (the river Dinkel roughly defines the eastern border) and the Gelderland region of the Achterhoek in the south.

Twente has approximately 620,000 inhabitants, most of which live in the three largest cities: Almelo, Hengelo and Enschede, the latter one being the largest city and economic centre of the region with 157,587 inhabitants [CBS, 2012; Bijleveld 2011].

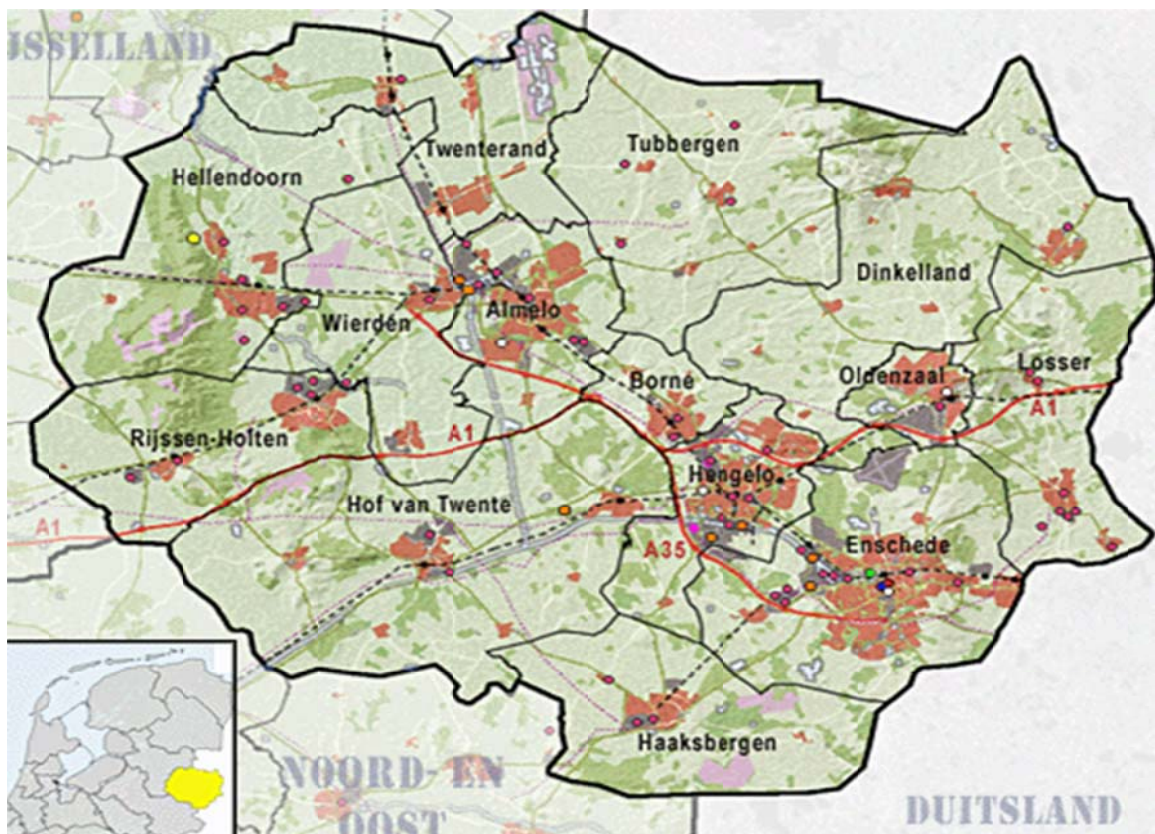
When looking at the region, there is a big difference between the cities and the countryside. The countryside is for Dutch standards sparsely populated, closed and conservative [Hospers, 2010]. In the three main cities on the other hand, there is a well-developed industry and a large creative sector (especially in Hengelo and Enschede). The cities are home to several major international operating companies (among which Ten Cate, Thales Netherlands, Grolsch and Vredenstein).



Map of the Netherlands with location of the region Twente

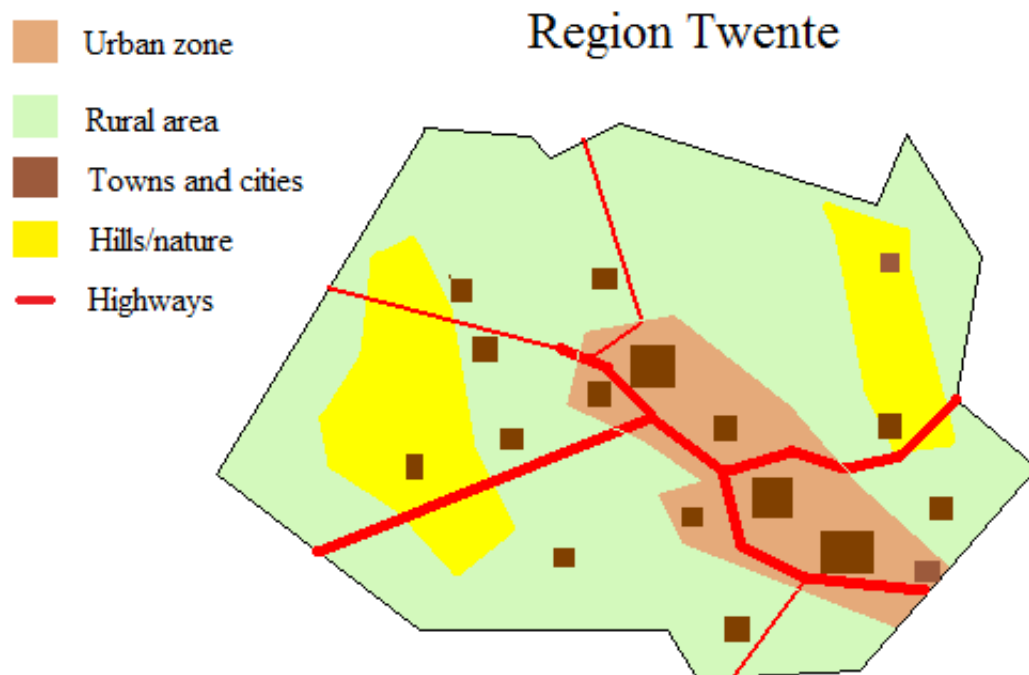
Despite the long history of the region, well back into the Early Middle Ages, Twente's image is dominated by the massive influence of the textile industry on

the region. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the small historical cities Almelo and Enschede and the village of Hengelo were rapidly industrializing, creating a mono-industrial textile production complex. In 1900 the Twente region was the second largest textile producing region in the world, after Lancashire in the UK. The three bigger cities in Twente are still struggling with their mono-industrial past and subsequent loss of employment, and qualitative mismatch of the labour market force after the de-industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s [De Pater, 1989; Bijleveld, 2011]. De-industrialization hit especially hard in Almelo and Enschede. The effects on Hengelo were relatively mild, because the town was specialised in metalworking and machine production and most of the companies could survive by supplying for new markets [De Pater, 1989]. The larger cities in Twente consist mainly of large late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century residential neighbourhoods, which are seen by most people as rather dull and unattractive for visitors. There are still quite a few open spaces in the cities, where factory building used to be. On top of that, most of the larger settlements in Twente, (especially Hengelo and Enschede) suffered from air raids in the Second World War, which severely damaged the old historical city centres [Wiegman, 1989].



Municipalities in the region Twente

Although Twente is the most urbanised part of the province of Overijssel, it is renowned in The Netherlands for its scenic countryside. The rural area of Twente is a halfopen bocage landscape, attracting many tourists from other parts of the country, with popular sites such as the Lutterzand on the meandering Dinkel river, or the forests and historical farms in the surroundings of Ootmarsum. Western Twente consists of a north-south range of low hills (Holterberg, Rijsserberg, Friezenberg, Nijverdalse Berg, Hellendoornse Berg), and northeastern Twente as well, with the Tankenberg near Oldenzaal being the highest point. The small towns of Ootmarsum, and Oldenzaal, are known for their scenic historical buildings in the centre. Oldenzaal has a noteworthy Norman-style church called 'Oale Grieze' (Old Grey one), which is the oldest Norman-style church in the Netherlands, and used to be a place of pilgrimage for the whole region. Oldenzaal was the largest city of Twente until the rapid industrialization in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Eight towns in Twente have obtained historical city rights during the Middle Ages: Almelo, Delden, Diepenheim, Enschede, Goor, Oldenzaal, Ootmarsum, and Rijssen [Twents Bureau Toerisme, 2012]. Before the industrialization, Twente was almost entirely an isolated peasant-based agricultural region, with people producing textiles at home to generate additional income [De Pater, 1989]. An exception to this was the village of Vriezenveen, which was trading textiles with the Baltic States and especially St.Petersburg [Boes, 2011].



## **Economic performance of Twente in Tourism**

Twente attracts many tourists from all over the Netherlands, but has relatively few foreign visitors. An exception to this is the city of Enschede, which attracts many German tourists on day trips, mainly for shopping purposes, 22 percent of all visitors to the city centre are from Germany [I&O Research, 2008]. These large numbers of visitors do not directly reflect in the employment figures for tourism in Enschede, but is a main source of income for the city nonetheless. When looking at the percentage of jobs in tourism in Twente in table 1, it is clearly visible that rural tourism is very important for the region, with up to 15.41% of all jobs in tourism in the rural Dinkelland municipality in the North-East Twente region. All the major population centres have significantly below average employment in tourism.

**Table 1: Employment in recreation & tourism in region Twente**  
(% of total jobs in 2010)

### **Urban region Twente**

Almelo	5,24
Borne	5,93
Hengelo (O.)	4,76
Enschede	6,35
Oldenzaal	6,23

### **South-West Twente**

Haaksbergen	6,26
Hellendoorn	9,69
Hof van Twente	11,74
Rijssen-Holten	7,35
Twenterand	7,14
Wierden	8,80

### **North-East Twente**

Dinkelland	15,41
Losser	10,30
Tubbergen	11,50

Average Twente region	6,89
Average The Netherlands	7,75

Source: CBS, 2012



Better mobility has caused the last decennia an increase in numbers of day trips to Twente at the cost of the amount of overnight stays, a pattern observed in the entire country. However, when looking at total amount of money spent in tourism, not just the total amount has fallen, also the market share of Twente as a touristic destination in The Netherlands in general has decreased [MITO, 2010]. The region is well known, and familiar to 88% of the Dutch, and around 50% indicate that they have been there for a day trip or holiday [NBTC-NIPO, 2012]. The same survey shows also that the percentage of young people that know Twente as a tourism destination is a little lower. In a survey done by Invisor research institute [2010] into the touristic profile of Twente, no unique points in the touristic services could be found, in other words, the touristic profile and image of the region was underdeveloped.

The region Twente responded to these challenges by deliberately creating an image of the region as the “Estate of Holland”, a reference to the many castles and estates from the region, surrounded by the typical half-open bocage/park style landscape. All touristic messages and promotions are telling the story about a sort of dream landscape where one should go and get rest and a break from the busy city life. The advertisement aims to reach the market segment of middle-aged and elderly people and promotes a lifestyle of active aging (walking, cycling, horse riding) [Twents Bureau voor Toerisme, 2011]. At the same time, a lot of effort is made to picture Twente as a region of myth and mystery, because of the many age old habits that still exists and many of which can be traced back to pre-Christian Germanic tribe rituals. Figures 1 and 2 show some examples of this marketing strategy.



Figure 1: Advertisement showing a “Rural Idyll” of Twente



Figure 2: Banners of Twente as “Estate of the Netherlands”, as a dream landscape  
 Source: Twents Bureau voor Toerisme, 2011

Preliminary results of the new regional marketing strategy are that the number of people visiting Twente has slightly fallen, but that the people who come to Twente stay longer and spend more money per day as they did before. In general, income generated by tourism has risen by 9.3 percent in 2011 compared to 2010, which relates to a total increase of 7 million euro [CVO, 2011].

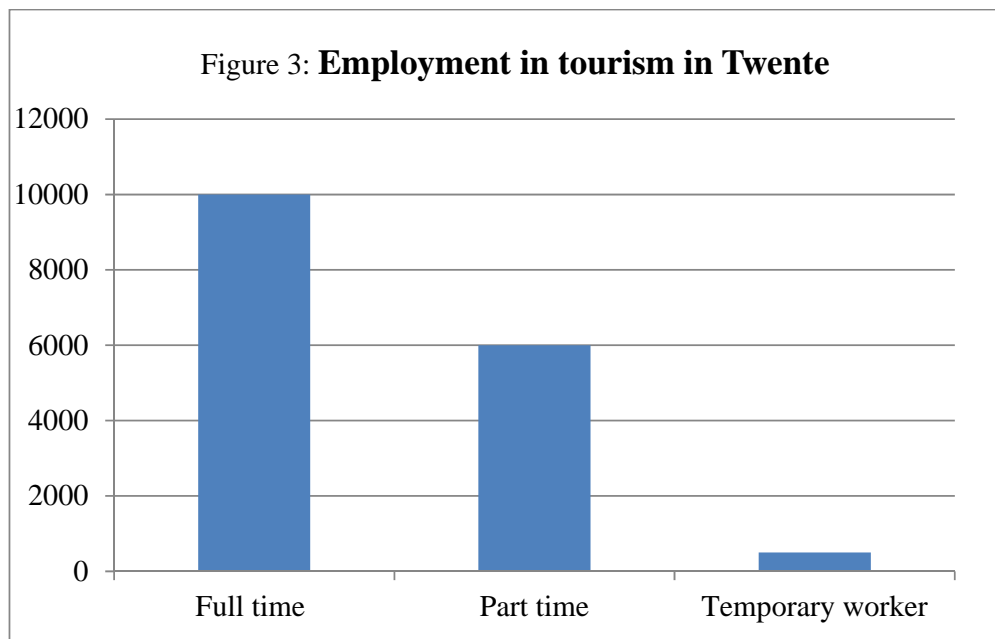
Of course these results are still quite fresh, the strategy of focussing the regional marketing on one target group and doing so consistently seems to work. Moreover, the image created of Twente as an Estate, allows for many activities in the sphere of educational tourism, with projects about local customs, local myths and folklore, bicycle routes along religious heritage, geological excursions and agro-tourism, with accommodation at farms or places that were farms in the past. On the website of the tourism board, a lot of effort is made to make all the information freely available and downloadable for GPS smart-phones, so that visitors can check on the spot during their visit to Twente, the information about the place that is available [Twents Bureau voor Toerisme, 2011].

The second pillar of tourism in Twente is the major festivals and events that take place throughout the year, and are also organized with the idea of “Estate Twente” in mind. The largest event is the “Military Boekelo”, which is an international cross-country horse race [RTV Oost, 2011]. The second major event is the Fanny

Blankers-Koen games in Hengelo, the Dutch National Championship in Athletics, named after Fanny Blankers-Koen, who won 4 gold medals in Athletics in the Olympic Games of 1948 [FBK Games, 2012]. Besides these two major festivals, there are a lot of minor festivals organized in the different towns and cities, each attracting several hundreds to thousands of visitors.

### **Developments in employment in the tourism and recreation sector in Twente**

In total in 2011, Twente had 16.591 persons employed in the tourism and recreation sector. The majority of these workers, 60%, were working full time (by definition: 12 hours per week or more). Only a small percentage consisted of temporary workers, which were hired from temporary work agencies (Figure 3). Compared to 2010, employment in the tourism and recreation sector decreased by 1% in 2011. The trend over the past five years shows an increase of 1% however [LISA, 2012].

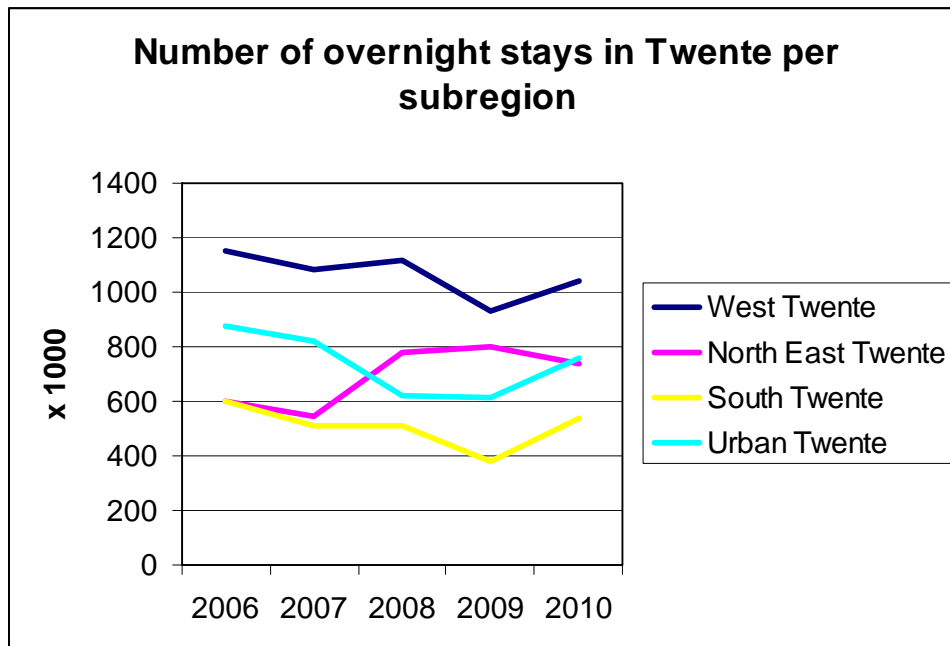


Source: LISA, 2012

In 2011 there were in total 2.970.000 overnight stays in Twente. Compared to 2010 the number of overnight stays in Twente has decreased with 3%. When looking at the longer term and comparing it over a period of 5 years, not much has changed. Most of the nights spent are in the Western part of Twente, however this area shows a small decrease in number of overnight stays. Northeast Twente however shows a clearly rising trend over the recent years [Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012].

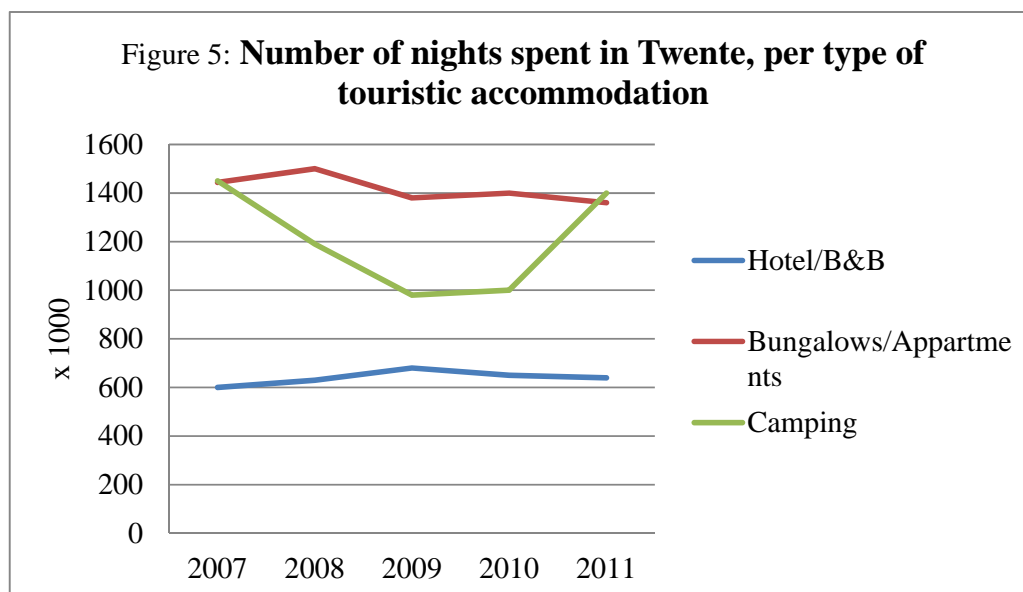


Figure 4:



Source: Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012

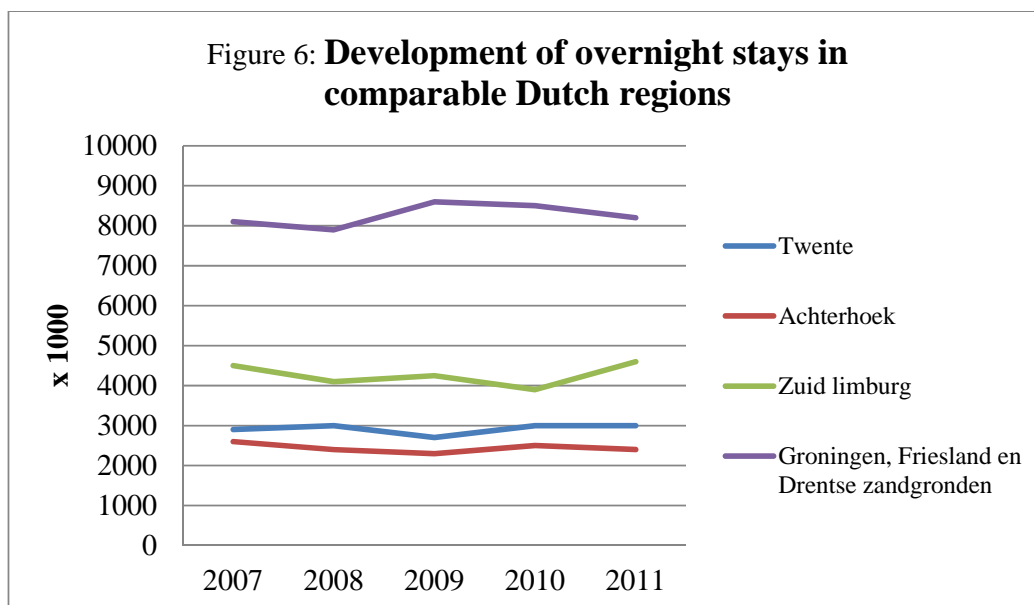
The graph Figure 5 is about the different types of accommodation in Twente, and the development of the number of overnight stays. Most visitors in Twente, enjoy their night in bungalow parks. In 2011 the bungalows accounted for almost half the nights that were spent in Twente. However, when comparing to 2010 the bungalow sector is declining. Over the last 5 years, spending of nights in hotels/ B&B has increased slightly [Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012].



Source: Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012

## Comparison of performance of Twente to other Dutch regions

The graph figure 6 shows the number of overnight stays compared to the number of overnight stays in other tourist areas in the Netherlands. In Twente there is a small decrease in 2011 compared to 2010 of about 0.5%. The decrease in the number of overnight stays in Twente compared to 2010 is larger than the national average. This trend in Twente is similar to the Achterhoek region (south of Twente) and the provinces of Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe. Over the past five years, figure 6 shows that the number of overnight stays remained virtually unchanged in Twente. This is a more positive picture than the national average and the region performs better than the neighboring Veluwe and Achterhoek regions [Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012]



Source: Twente Toerisme Monitor, 2012

Twente is not the only touristic region in the Netherlands that suffers from a decline when it comes to overnight touristic activities. Twente suffers from the same problem as other areas in the Netherlands. From figure 6 becomes clear that all other similar rural touristic areas in the Netherlands are in decline. The cause of this nationwide decline could very well be the economic crisis that currently holds the Netherlands in its grip.

When looking at the comparison between Twente and other rural tourism regions, Twente is doing not bad at all. The region succeeds more or less in keeping up with the other regions, in terms of employment and number of overnight stays, and is doing very well in terms of money spent per tourist. Whether these tendencies are sustainable for Twente in the long run is still too early to say, but the touristic

marketing strategy of Twente may very well turn out to work fine, but that will be more clear in the coming years.

### **Abstract:**

This paper deals with Rural Tourism in Twente. A comparison is made between Twente and several other regions in The Netherlands. Economic results like Employment and the development in Tourism over the last few years is taken into the comparison. It becomes clear that Twente is a region with a well-developed rural tourism infrastructure, supported by several tourism initiative boards and local communities, which a marketing strategy to attract middle aged and elderly persons, looking for an active and educational holiday. In region marketing, the focus is clearly on the rural tourism possibilities of Twente.

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