

# The Yunus Centre at 15

Researching social, economic and  
community approaches to health  
and wellbeing

December 2025



15 year anniversary

**Yunus Centre  
for Social Business  
and Health**

Glasgow Caledonian University

# A note from the Director

**The Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health is an interdisciplinary research centre with a national and international reputation for excellent and impactful research. More than that, from my perspective, it is a fantastic team of people working in innovative ways, and in real partnerships across boundaries.**

Anniversaries are a great time for reflection and celebration. Fifteen years since the Yunus Centre was established, as Yunus Chair and Director I welcome the opportunity to highlight some of our research achievements, to reflect on the importance of interdisciplinarity and research culture, and to signpost some of our ongoing and future work.

I hope this gives a real sense of how we work and the elements of research environment and culture that I believe underpin our successes. I would encourage you to read some of the excellent journal articles listed and find out more about our themes of work from our thematic leads.

## **A genuinely interdisciplinary research centre**

Interdisciplinarity is a word that is used often in universities and in research funding applications. For any research question, the idea is that a team of diverse researchers, with different learning and skills, working together, will be better able to find novel solutions than a single subject team trying to tackle it alone. This is something we are committed to doing well in the Yunus Centre and at GCU.

There are many examples of multidisciplinary projects – usually a group of people from different disciplines who have agreed to work together – each prepared to deliver their piece of the project. There are fewer examples of real interdisciplinarity, which is a more substantial coming together, speaking and working across disciplines by learning other’s languages. In the Yunus Centre this has been at the heart of what we do – we do *better quality* research when we are open, listening and learning from one another. Interdisciplinarity means bringing down some of the protective walls that our disciplines provide; it is in the ‘spaces between’ that innovation happens.

## **Research**

There are exciting new projects kicking off in our 15th year and a new energy and enthusiasm among researchers working with partners across sectors. I am delighted to see researchers in the Yunus Centre leading the way in areas of important societal challenges. The Community Wealth Building Evaluation: Learning Lessons from Scotland and ENGAGED Youth Projects, funded by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) and the European Commission respectively, lead us into our 15th year. These projects highlight the ambition of the Yunus Centre to deliver high quality, interdisciplinary research working across academic, community and policy communities.

This new research builds on our track record of success: the Yunus Centre has attracted research grants worth £11.5m to the Centre and overall grant award of £48.6m from prestigious funders such as UKRI, NIHR, Wellcome Trust and the Chief Scientist Office Scotland. As new projects take forward the findings and questions emerging from earlier work, longer term programmes of research led by the Yunus Centre, such as our CommonHealth and FinWell suites of projects, have shifted the dial through methodological innovation and shifted the dialogue in policy and practice.

## **Knowledge exchange and impact**

Research projects that are recently completed take on a different lease of life; there is a buzz around knowledge exchange and the potential for impact from large projects that are in the throes of publications and presentations. Good knowledge exchange means working with partners from the beginning, throughout all stages of research and establishing good relationships outside of academia. We are grateful for excellent partnerships in the health sector, at different levels of government and especially in the voluntary community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector through organisations like Social Enterprise Scotland, Health Creation Alliance, Scottish Community Development Centre and their Community Health Exchange (CHEX), and over the years with SENScot, Social Firms Scotland and Social Business Academia – as well as individual place-based community led organisations across the UK.

The **CommonHealth Assets project** is a good example of our work with partners and the cross sectoral work involved to help generate impact from research. At the same time as rigorous analysis, writing and synthesis of findings we have been working with partners in the VCSE sector, in policy circles and across network organisations, to disseminate, interpret and apply our findings. This has involved a whirlwind of workshops, webinars, briefings and blogs, in person across the UK and online – our relationships with research partners have been at the heart of everything we have done. We have plans to disseminate this substantial research internationally next!

## **Developing researcher careers**

Over the last 15 years our teams of staff and students have forged their careers in research – many have gone on to great things elsewhere and some have developed into amazing research leaders in the Yunus Centre.

Research careers take a good deal of patience and application – and I believe great researchers and great careers are grown in supportive and stimulating environments. In the Yunus Centre we strive for excellence, our standards are high, and we manage that high standard with high levels of peer support. We support early career researchers to publish as first author and develop new ideas. We view research as a team sport, and – although working on analysis and writing can look lonely – we rarely work in isolation.

I have found that high levels of support and a positive environment create excellence in research, not only because it creates job satisfaction and wellbeing, but because it provides a safe space to try things out, to innovate. Experimenting with new ideas, techniques and arguments is risky, but it can lead in exciting new directions.

### Social Innovation

Social innovation has been a key focus of research in the Yunus Centre and continues to drive the way we work, as well as the research we do. Our research mission is about improving lives, reducing inequalities and working upstream on the social determinants of health and wellbeing. Social innovation means working in more participatory ways, in partnerships, to find ground up, community-driven solutions to social problems.

I am looking forward to the future and working with our partners to face global and local challenges in the spirit of social innovation and inspired by the work of Prof Muhammad Yunus. We can only do that with a great team working together across GCU, with leading academic researchers and in partnership across sectors.

#### Rachel Baker PhD

Yunus Chair and Director



# History

The Yunus Centre was established in 2010. Our founding Director and now Emeritus Yunus Chair, Prof Cam Donaldson began with a big idea - about bringing together areas of research that had rarely connected before to do something exciting and ambitious. Inspired by the work of Nobel Laureate (and Emeritus GCU Chancellor) Prof Muhammad Yunus and drawing on his own background as an internationally renowned health economist, Cam set up the Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health.



We started small and early grant successes were in health economics and areas of existing track record, but in 2013 a programme of work called 'CommonHealth' was funded by MRC / ESRC exploring ways to evaluate social enterprise as a public health intervention and transformed the Centre. Over this 5-year programme, our research conceptualised and evidenced social enterprise and the health and wellbeing effects, and shifted the dialogue in research, practice and policy.

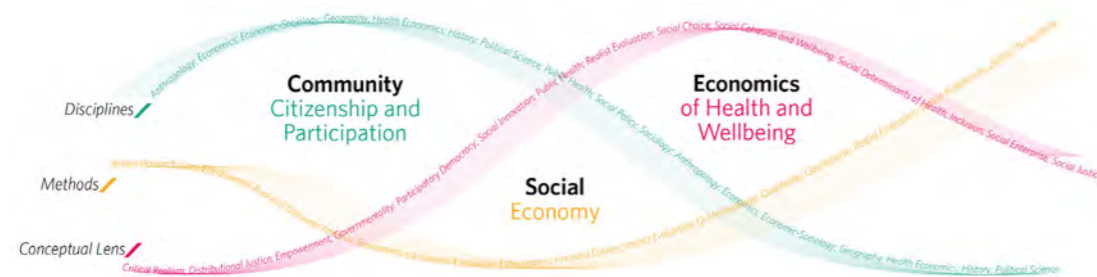
In 2010 we were 3 staff working across 2 themes of research! Fifteen years later we are 15 staff and 10 PhD students, with wider membership of the Centre reaching across the university and externally to include visiting fellows across sectors and internationally. Our research spans three themes; Social Economy, Economics of Health and Wellbeing, and Community, Citizenship and Participation, details of the themes and the recent projects and publications can be found on the following pages.

## Vision, mission and research themes

The work of the Centre cuts across the three main societal challenges of Glasgow Caledonian University's Research Strategy: inclusive societies, healthy lives and sustainable environments.

### Vision

A world-leading interdisciplinary research centre in social, economic and community approaches to health and wellbeing.



### Mission

Conduct world-leading, impactful, applied research that advances methodological developments and interdisciplinary collaborations, to understand:

- The impact of acting on social determinants of health in communities and intervening in care pathways to improve the lives of the population through prevention and management of long-term conditions.
- The role of the social economy in tackling social, economic and health disadvantages, and collaborations between the public, private and community sectors.
- The function of citizens' participation and community involvement in innovative, sustainable and efficient service co-production to enhance equality and fairness.





# Social Economy

## Lead Dr Micaela Mazzei

Our research interrogates the role of inclusive and democratic business models and the wider social economy in shaping more equitable and democratic forms of economic organisation. We engage critically with the social economy both as a sector encompassing value-driven organisations such as co-operatives, mutuals, voluntary associations, and social enterprises and as a conceptual framework that reimagines the economy as a relational and socially embedded system.

We adopt a critical, interdisciplinary approach to explore the conditions under which socially oriented organisations can challenge dominant market logics and contribute to more inclusive and democratic forms of economic development. Our work pays particular attention to how policy agendas (such as Community Wealth Building) are mobilised and enacted—often in contested ways—across different institutional and geographical contexts. We work closely with a range of stakeholders, including policy actors, practitioners, and sector intermediaries, acting both as collaborators and critical friends in the co-production of knowledge that can inform policy and practice across the social economy.

Our methodological approach is grounded in constructivist epistemology, enabling us to navigate the complexity of multi-level systems and the lived realities of actors within them. We have expertise in qualitative and participatory methods, including ethnography and digital ethnography; in-depth interviews and oral histories; participant observation. These methods allow us to surface the mechanisms and contexts that shape outcomes, and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of social economy practices as part of broader processes of economic transformation.

### Selected research projects

- [Craig N \(PI\), Mazzei M \(PI\), Baker R, Hutcheon D](#), Ahmed M, Brown H, Elsenbroich C, Lewsey J, Mason T, McCartney G, Mclean J. Community Wealth Building Evaluation: Learning Lesson from Scotland (CoWBELLS) (2025-2028) (NIHR £1.6m).
- [Mazzei M \(PI\)](#), Badan A, [Crome S](#), Gaspar M, Moreno C, Morgan A, Oddrun S, Sigodo K. The interrelation between social, cultural and political identities, as well as the sense of belonging, and democracies. (2025-2028) (European Commission £503k).
- [Roy M \(PI\)](#), Ahmed M, [Baker, R](#), Cassidy J, [Collins M, Donaldson C](#), Gibbs E, Greenlees J, McLean J, [Murray G](#), Todd K, Walsh D. CommonHealth Catalyst: Developing a Community Research Consortium to Address Health Disparities (2022-2023) (UKRI £185k).
- [Roy M \(PI\), Teasdale S](#). The role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic Scottish Government (2020) (CSO £56k).
- [Murray G \(PI\)](#), Donaldson C, McCallum C, Menzies K. Future Development of the Social Enterprise Collection (Scotland): Collecting, preserving and interpreting the legacy of social enterprise in Scotland. (2018-2022) (Scottish Government £90k).
- [Mazzei M \(PI\), Roy M, Teasdale S](#). Explain the progress to date of the Strategic Public Social Partnership (PSP) model in Scotland. (2017) (Scottish Government £38k).
- [Baglioni S, Roy M](#). Enabling the Flourishing and Evolution of Social Entrepreneurship for Innovative and Inclusive Societies (European Commission 7th Framework Programme for Research (2014-2016) (European Commission £2.5m).

### Selected recent publications

- Mazzei, M., Bellazzecca, E., Montgomery, T. and Calo, F. (2025). [Social Bridging Finance: a new Scottish model for financing public service design and delivery?](#) Journal of Social Policy, published online 2025, 1-18.
- Gibbs, E., Murray, G. & Greenlees, J. (2025). [Getting by or getting on: gender, intergenerational earning and caring in deindustrializing localities in Lanarkshire](#), Scotland. Social History, 51(3).
- Roy, M. J., Spiesova, A., Curtin, M., Suchowerska, R., Rendall, J., Strokosch, K., ... Barraket, J. (2025). [Exploring value creation from an ecosystem perspective: A critical examination of social procurement policy](#). Public Money & Management, 45(4), 304-313.
- Mazzei, M., Murray, G. and Hutcheon, D. (2024). [Prospects for municipal stewardship as a national policy: a scoping review and thematic synthesis](#). Local Economy, 38(5), 460-483.
- Rendall, J., Curtin, M., Roy, M. J., & Teasdale, S. (2024). [Relationships between community-led mutual aid groups and the state during the COVID-19 pandemic: complementary, supplementary, or adversarial?](#) Public Management Review, 26(2), 313-333.
- Calò, F., Teasdale, S., Roy, M. J., Bellazzecca, E. and Mazzei, M. (2023). [Exploring collaborative governance processes involving nonprofits](#). Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 53(1), 5-78.
- Murray, G. (2023). [Beyond the 'Invergordon approach': community cooperatives and economic security in the Scottish Highlands and Islands \(1977-1991\)](#). Scottish Labour History, 58, 142-165.
- Murray, G. (2022). [Working through industrial absence: Scotland's community business movement and the moral economies of deindustrialisation](#). Contemporary British History, 36(3), 380-402.
- Mazzei, M. and Steiner, A. (2021). [What about efficiency? Exploring perceptions of current social enterprise support provision in Scotland](#). Geoforum, 118, 38-46.
- Murray, G., Roy, M. J., Baker, R. and Donaldson, C. (2021). [How do social enterprises impact upon health and wellbeing? Some lessons from CommonHealth](#). In Roy, M. and Farmer, J. (eds), Social enterprise, health and wellbeing (Routledge), 191-209.
- Mazzei, M., Montgomery, T. & Dey, P., (2021), ['Utopia' failed? Social enterprise, everyday practices and the closure of neoliberalism](#). Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space. 39, 7, p. 1625-.





# Community Citizenship and Participation

## Lead Prof Artur Steiner

Our research focuses on understanding and strengthening the relationships between community, citizenship and participation. We explore how active engagement in civic life contributes not only to healthy, resilient communities but also to functioning democracies and effective, high-quality research. Central to our work is a commitment to community empowerment and civic involvement as drivers of positive change. We investigate how local assets, capacities and resources can be mobilised to meet citizens' needs, support social innovation, and enable people to live well and thrive. Our research addresses both communities of place and communities of interest, with particular attention to the contextual significance of geography, policy and culture.

To co-create solutions to social challenges, we work collaboratively with a diverse range of stakeholders, including community groups, social enterprises and policymakers. By grounding our work in the lived experiences of communities, we seek to understand and respond to social vulnerabilities through practical and inclusive approaches. Our research examines how the concept of citizenship is interpreted and enacted in different settings and at varying scales, from local neighbourhoods and workplaces to regional and national institutions. A strong emphasis is placed on co-production, with participants actively shaping research agendas, processes and outcomes.

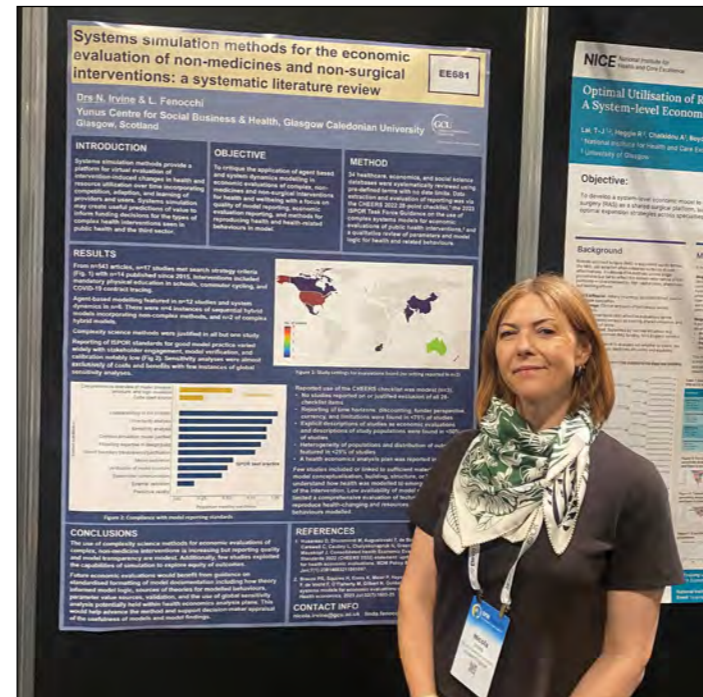
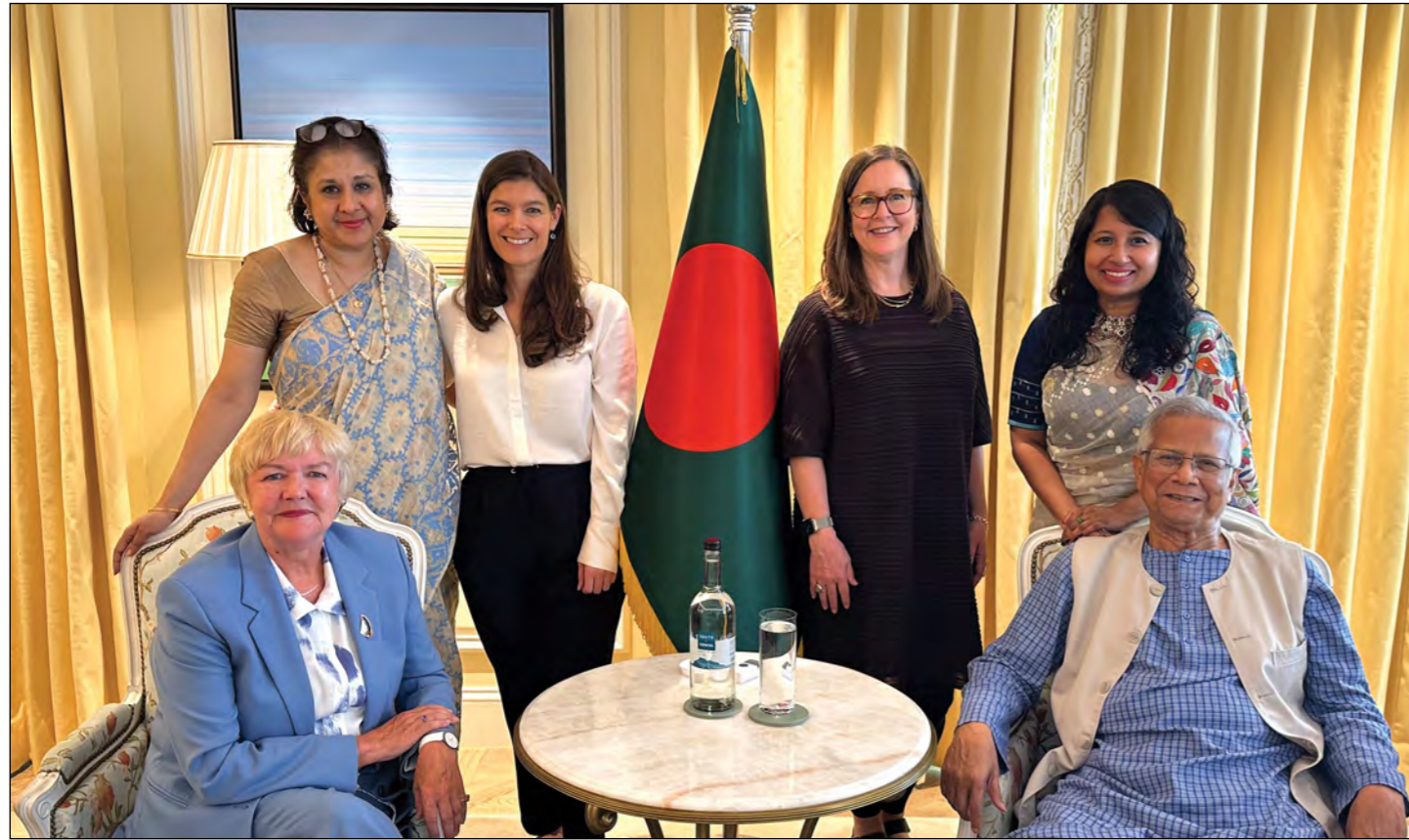
We employ a range of participatory and mixed method approaches to investigate and evaluate processes of community engagement and empowerment. These include action research, participatory evaluation, realist evaluation, implementation science, and outcome measurement. Our methodological frameworks are designed to be responsive and inclusive, enabling us to test new ideas in real-world settings and generate both theoretical and applied knowledge. The research methods we use aim to contribute to academic debate as well as to produce insights that inform community development practices and public policy on participation and co-production.

## Selected research projects

- **Cowie J (PI)**, Currie S, **Hutcheon S**, **Steiner A**. A co-design community project to develop realist programme theories around the impact of Men's Sheds on the positive health and wellbeing of socially disadvantaged, working-age men (2024-2025) (CSO £165k)
- **Hutcheon D (PI)**, Currie M, Hallett J, Macaulay B, Nason S, Natalini D. Policy and practice insights from the devolved nations (2023-2024) (Nuffield Foundation £200k)
- Dall P, Morrison-Glancy S, Nugent E (PI), **Steiner A**. Implementation and evaluation of an accredited vocational trainer within Scotland's Bravest Manufacturing Company's progressive employment training programme for veterans. (2021-2023) (Forces in Mind Trust £299k)
- **Cowie J (PI)**, Archibald R, Campbell P, Currie S, Hoddinott P, MacLennan G, van der Pol M. Partnership Project With Disadvantaged Communities To Design And Test A Novel Evidence-Informed And Community-Based Intervention To Address And Promote Healthy Weight And Wellbeing (2022-2024) (CSO £300k)
- TodHunter-Brown A (PI), Campbell P, **Cowie J**, France E, Keerie C, Matthews P, Mead G, Neilson A, Price J, Stewart M, Stansby G, Theodoratou E. Expansion - Production of Evidence Syntheses for the Evidence Synthesis Programme (2023-2028) (NIHR £182k)
- **Baglioni S (PI)**, Bonvin JM, Lahusen C. The Gig Economy and its Implications for Social Dialogue and Workers' Protection, Swiss Network for International Studies, (2018-2021) (Swiss Network for International Studies £233k)
- **Steiner A (PI)**, **Baker R**, **Donaldson C**, **Hill O'Connor C**, O'Hagan A. Evaluation of Community (Scotland) Act (2018-2020) (Scottish Government £30k)
- **Steiner A (PI)**, Munoz SA. Sheds for Sustainable Development (2017-2021) (Big Lottery £208k).

## Selected recent publications

- Steiner, A., Mazzei, M., Caló, F., Liu, G. (2025) [How and Why Social Enterprises Adopt Artificial Intelligence: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Implications for Research and Practice](#). Journal of Social Entrepreneurship, 1-18.
- Morrison, C., Steiner, A., Hutcheon, D., Kocaman, K. (2025) [Co-producing With Young People in the Third Sector: A Scoping Review and Future Research Agenda](#). Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, p.08997640251397657.
- Cowie, J., Findlay, S., Archibald, R., Currie, S., Campbell, P., Hutcheon, D., van der Pol, M., MacLennan, G., Cook, E., Lock, B. and Hoddinott, P., 2025. [Feasibility study of a co-designed, evidence-informed and community-based incentive intervention to promote healthy weight and well-being in disadvantaged communities in Scotland](#). BMJ open, 15(2), p.e092908
- Hutcheon, D., Rendall, J., McMillan, C., Dall, P., Morrison-Glancy, S., Steiner, A. (2025). [The health and wellbeing outcomes of employment and vocational-based interventions for veterans: a scoping review](#). Journal of Veteran Studies, 11(1), 95-111.
- Cowie, J., Archibald, R., Currie, S., Findlay, S., van der Pol, M., MacLennan, G., Hoddinott, P. (2024) [Enjoy Life Locally \(ELLY\): feasibility study of a community co-designed incentive intervention to support healthy weight and wellbeing](#). The Lancet, 404, S7).
- Steiner, A., Farmer, J., Yates, S., Moran, M., Carlisle, K. (2023) [How to systematically analyze co-production to inform future policies? Introducing 5Ws of co-production](#). Public Administration Review. 83(3), 503-21.
- Steiner, A., McMillan, C., Hill O'Connor, C. (2023) [Investigating the contribution of community empowerment policies to successful co-production-evidence from Scotland](#). Public Management Review, 25(8), 1587-1609.
- Steiner, A., Calò, F., Shucksmith, M. (2023) [Rurality and social innovation processes and outcomes: A realist evaluation of rural social enterprise activities](#). Journal of Rural Studies, 99, 284-292.
- Steiner, A., Jack, S., Farmer, J., Steinerowska-Streb, I. (2022) [Are they really a new species? Exploring the emergence of social entrepreneurs through Giddens's structuration theory](#). Business & Society, 61(7), 1919-1961
- Kelly, D., Steiner, A., Mason, H., Teasdale, S. (2021) [Men's sheds as an alternative healthcare route? A qualitative study of the impact of Men's sheds on user's health improvement behaviours](#). BMC Public Health, 21(1), 553.





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